

Paul's Greeting to the Christians at Rome

Romans 1:1-7

Romans 1:1-7 - *“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,⁴ and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Background Notes

Let's begin with some background notes for Romans 1:1-7, the "greeting" section of Paul's letter to the Romans. Exactly how and when the church at Rome was started, we can't be sure. We know that the apostle Paul didn't even visit Rome before this church was founded. Most likely, the church at Rome got its start soon after Pentecost, as new converts carried the gospel back to Rome. Acts 2:9-11 says, *“Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”* Most likely, these new converts returned from Jerusalem to Rome, where they started Bible studies and soon others were won to the Lord. And thus the church at Rome got its start.

Even though the apostle Paul had not visited Rome before this church was founded, we know that he knew a number of these Roman Christians personally by the time he wrote this letter. In chapter 16 we have a long list of names, and it is obvious that the apostle Paul knew these believers personally, even though he hadn't been to Rome yet. Paul had undoubtedly met many of these believers in his travels, and possibly he had led many of them to the Lord.

Paul wrote this letter to the church at Rome from Corinth. He was on his third missionary journey, and he was staying at the home at a brother named Gaius (16:23): *Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church greets you.* Gaius and his wife had the gift of hospitality. Not only was Paul staying with them, but they hosted the whole church!

The theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is "the righteousness of God and the gospel of God." In Romans, the gospel is not only proclaimed, it is **taught**. Romans teaches us how a holy and righteous God can save unholy and unrighteous people, so Romans is foundational for Christian doctrine. If you haven't studied Paul's letter to the Romans, you can hardly call yourself a student of God's Word!

Doctrinal Points

1. The gospel of God was promised in God's Word

"Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures..." (v1-2). The gospel of God, which is the good news of Jesus Christ was promised in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament. Where? We have two sub points:

a. In the **prophetic statements** of Old Testament Scripture.

The Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament certainly include the idea that the Messiah would be a Savior King. One of the most well-known gospel passages of the Old Testament is found in Isaiah 53:4-6, *"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."*

Here we have the gospel promise in the Old Testament prophetic scriptures. The Messiah would come and die as a substitute for us. He would take God's penalty for the sin and iniquity of us all. He would take it upon Himself! The gospel of God was promised in God's Word in the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament.

b. In the **prophetic pictures** of Old Testament Scripture.

Not only was the gospel of God promised in the prophetic **scriptures** of the Old Testament, it was also promised in the prophetic **pictures** of the Old Testament. We have many pictures or types of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. For example, all of the Old Testament sacrifices look forward to, and picture, the great Sacrifice to come. That's why, when he saw the Lord, John the Baptist said, *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

One of the best-known prophetic pictures of the gospel in the Old Testament is found in Numbers 21. There we read that the children of Israel were dying because of deadly snake bites, and the Lord told Moses to make a serpent of bronze and lift it up on a pole. Everyone who looked on that bronze serpent was healed. Now if it wasn't for the beautiful picture of the gospel here, we might tend to question God's ways of doing miracles. Why would God choose that method of bringing healing to the people -- having a bronze snake put up on a pole, and people looking on it would be healed? If it wasn't for the picture here, we might wonder, "What is going on here?" But we know that this is a picture of the gospel because our Lord said so in John 3:14-15, *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* What a beautiful picture of the gospel we have in Numbers 21!

So the gospel was promised in God's word in the **prophetic statements** or scriptures of the Old Testament, and in the **prophetic pictures** of the Old Testament.

2. The gospel of God is focused in God's Son

In Romans 1:3-4, we read that the gospel of God concerns "*His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power.*" Here again, we have two subpoints:

a. In His **incarnation**.

The Incarnation is the union of deity and humanity in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. The Second Person of the Trinity left heaven's glory and majesty to come to this earth. He took on humanity, and became true Man -- without giving up any part of His deity! (Read Philippians 2 in this connection.) The Lord Jesus was born of the seed of David according to the flesh (v3). In reference to His humanity, He was in the line of David. He was fully human, yet without sin, because of His deity. His deity is brought out in verse 4: "*and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*" Notice that He didn't **become** the Son of God; He **already was** the Son of God! He was born the Son of David. He was declared to be the Son of God.

We have the same thought in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:6, "*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*" "Unto us a Child is born" -- that's His humanity. "Unto us a Son is given" -- that's His deity. The incarnation was necessary for our salvation because the Redeemer had to be man in order to die. Death was the penalty for sin.

b. In His **resurrection**.

Verse 4 says that the Lord Jesus was "*declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead.*" The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is foundational to the gospel. If the resurrection of Christ is not a fact of history, the basis of the Christian faith doesn't exist, and there is no gospel! There is no good news of God!

But the resurrection is a fact of history -- and with power (follow it now), with **power** it validated our Lord's life of holiness and verified His claims to deity! As we see in verse 4 "*declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*" So the resurrection of Christ, with power, validated our Lord's life of holiness and **verified His claims to deity**. The Gospel of God is focused in God's Son -- in His **incarnation** and in His **resurrection**.

Practical Application

Remember that you, too, are called to be an apostle!

In verse 1, Paul says that he was "*called to be an apostle, separated to the Gospel of God.*" The word apostle means what? It means one who is **sent**. The apostle Paul had a specific call -- he was sent to bring the gospel to the Gentile

nations. Look at verses 5-6: *“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.”* Paul was sent to the nations with the gospel of God.

We, too, are called to be apostles. We're not one of the Twelve Apostles, but we are all "apostles" in that God has called us to salvation and sent us on a mission. The Great Commission, which applies to all Christians, is: *“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to everyone” (Mark 16:15).*

What are you doing about your apostleship? Paul had a mission strategy. Do we? Have you planned out how you're going to evangelize your neighbor, or your colleague at work, or your fellow students? Have you planned out how you're going to bring the gospel to them? Or do we just kind of drift along in life, not realizing that we are called to be apostles? Remember that we, too, are called to be apostles!