

CHAPTER I

ROMANS 1:1-7 - SALUTATION IN THE GOSPEL

NOT only is this salutation the longest in Paul's epistles, but also it is the most evangelistic, that is gospel-focused, and considerably more so than Galatians. There is good reason for this emphasis since it is immediately evident that the Apostle's passion is for the Christians at Rome to be edified by the gospel. It is for this reason that Luther was so insistent that Christians should be constantly immersed in this peerless, heartfelt composition, since he himself had been so personally blessed by such saturation. Thus "[This] letter of Paul . . . is like a stream that flows from Paradise and is like the Nile, which inundates all of Egypt. But this inundation must have its source somewhere. Thus the flood which the Lord creates through the apostle Paul covers the whole world and all people."¹

Yet to take Luther's illustration further, it might be said that this gospel prologue is best represented by a gushing spring rather than a river. B. B. Warfield points out that here Paul's tangential style is plainly indicated.

[H]e no sooner mentions the Gospel than off he goes on a tangent to describe it. . . . No sooner does he mention Christ than off he goes again on a tangent to describe Christ. Thus it comes about that this passage, formally only the Address of the Epistle, becomes actually a great Christological deliverance, one of the chief sources of our knowledge of Paul's conception of Christ. It presents itself to our view like one of those nests of Chinese boxes; the outer encasement is the Address of the Epistle; within that fits neatly Paul's justification of his addressing the Romans as an authoritative teacher of the Gospel; within that a description of the Gospel committed to him; and within that a great declaration of who and what Jesus Christ is, as the contents of this Gospel.²

A. PAUL, THE APOSTLE OF GOD'S GOSPEL, V. 1

In all thirteen of the Apostle's epistles, the first word is "Paul," Παῦλος, Paulos, a Latin surname meaning "little," perhaps reflecting his conviction that he was "the least of the apostles" (I Cor. 15:9). In addition, this Gentile name may have replaced the Jewish "Saul," following conversion (Acts 13:9), for quite practical missionary reasons.

1. His commitment.

Paul perceives *himself* to be a "bond-servant of Christ Jesus." This is *his* estimate as a man who, having known the heights of scholastic achievement and religious sophistication, has been subdued even to the dust of the Damascus road. Here, says Luther,

[b]oth majesty and humility are comprehended in this word: Humility insofar as he does not appoint himself lord and founder, as is the way of tyrants and of the proud, who abuse their power in such a way that they think of nothing but that they have power, as if their power had its origin in themselves and as if they had not received it from someone

¹ Martin Luther, *Works*, 25, p. 156.

² Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ*, pp. 73-74.

else. Majesty, however, is implied when he rapturously boasts that he is the servant of such a great Lord.³

2. His calling.

In most of his epistles Paul is careful to qualify his apostleship using such terms as “through Jesus Christ,” or by means of the “will of God” or “commandment of God.” Here he is “called” as an apostle, ἀπόστολος, apostolos, simply meaning “sent one,” which term in 16:7 and Philippians 2:25 most likely refers to esteemed messengers. But for Paul, his calling has come directly from the Son of God (Gal. 1:1) and not mere men, and as such he is under constraint to authoritatively speak as pleasing God (II Cor. 2:17; I Thess. 2:4) because a sacred stewardship has been entrusted to him (Acts 9:15-16; I Cor. 9:15-16). Paul’s vocation is a “course” or “race” set before him (Acts 20:24; II Tim. 4:7). As a “called apostle,” he did not “prove disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). He belongs to that special band of foundational stones in the church of Jesus Christ that abutted, through personal contact (Gal. 1:11-12; I Cor. 11:23), next to the Chief Corner Stone (Eph. 2:20).

3. His commission.

With regard to the appointment of the great men of God in the Bible, such as with Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, etc., without exception they were subject to a sense of strong divine constraint, even coercion as in the case of Saul (Acts 26:14; Gal. 1:15), rather than mere solicitation as a volunteer. So Paul has an overwhelming sense of consecration, except that he constantly reminds us, as here, that it was God who did the setting apart, and not himself.

a. It is sacred.

He has been “set apart” or “separated” for a task that far transcends in importance the responsibilities of Roman senators and Caesars. The root of ἀφορίζω, aphorizō, means “to draw a line around,” so that Christians are to be separate from unbelievers and paganism (Acts 19:9; II Cor. 6:17). However, here Paul was circumscribed by the effectual call of God (Gal. 1:15) for a cause of unparalleled proportions. Specifically, it was not simply a summons to an office, but to a unique message ministry of universal importance (Gal. 1:8-9), the gospel, which is “the gospel of God” or “God’s gospel.”

b. It is evangelistic.

The expression “gospel of God” may more particularly be understood as (a) the gospel “belonging to God,” or (b) the gospel “about God,” or (c) the gospel “sourced in God,” or (d) the gospel “sent by God,” (cf. Mark 1:14; Rom. 15:16; II Cor. 11:7; I Thess. 2:2, 8, 9; I Tim. 1:11). Both (c) and (d) seem to incorporate the primary truth here, though the Gospel that comes from God is at the same time His treasure to impart and very much descriptive of His glorious Being.

³ Ibid., p. 140.

- (1) At the end of this twentieth century, when man in his technological and sophisticated arrogance has made subtle yet debilitating inroads into the Christian church and pervasively rendered it as man-centered, there is a critical need for the “gospel of God” to be proclaimed in all of its purity. Of course this presupposes that the “gospel of God in the name of man” must be demolished. After all, the Christian gospel is first and foremost about God, and this emphasis must be reinvested into faithful evangelistic ministry.
- (2) Robert Haldane comments:

It is the Gospel of God, inasmuch as God is its author, its interpreter, its subject: its author, as He has purposed it in His eternal decrees; its interpreter, as He himself hath declared it to men; its subject, because in the Gospel His sovereign perfections and purposes towards men are manifested. For the same reasons it is also called the Gospel of the grace of God, the Gospel of peace, the Gospel of the kingdom, the Gospel of salvation, the everlasting Gospel, the glorious gospel of the blessed God.⁴

- (3) Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments:

The gospel! Oh! How easily we use this term! How glibly we repeat it! I am as guilty as anybody else. It ought to be impossible for us to use the word ‘gospel’ without bursting forth, as it were, into a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. Good news from God, that is the gospel. And that brings me to the most important thing of all - it is the gospel of *God*. In other words, it is what God has done about man, and about his salvation. And that is why, of course, it is quite unique and quite new.⁵

B. GOD’S GOSPEL, THE GROUND OF FELLOWSHIP, VS. 2-6

The remainder of this salutation is concerned with the summary features of “the gospel of God,” such as “which” gospel, “who” is the chief gospel character, and “what” the gospel accomplishes. While Paul’s lack of personal familiarity with this church may have encouraged him to commence with this authoritative gospel detail,⁶ he is more likely driven by a sense of anticipation concerning the truth he is burdened to unfold in subsequent detail. Here is an encapsulation of the message of Romans.

1. It is one promised gospel, v. 2a.

To draw our focus toward the historic grandeur of the gospel, Paul helps us to appreciate the cumulative revelation of this message over past centuries. This only magnifies the recent dawning of the Savior in fulfillment of Scripture, who, in Titus 1:1-2, is the source of “the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ago.”

⁴ Robert Haldane, *Romans*, p. 26.

⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, 1:1-32*, p. 59.

⁶ John Murray suggests this intent of Paul since he had not founded or visited the church at Rome, *Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 1.

- a. In the light of human history since the fall of Adam, there has been only one gospel that has been designed by God as the remedy for man's hopeless predicament. This "gospel of God," explicitly promised in the Old Testament, was yet explicitly revealed in the New Testament. Thus it could be said that the New Testament gospel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament gospel promise. The gospel of the New Testament was not an afterthought, as if designed to be a substitute for a failed Old Testament gospel; it was not a superior gospel of "grace" designed to supplant an inferior gospel of "law," as Abraham will demonstrate in 4:1-5, 9-25. The only hope of salvation for Adam and Eve was by grace through faith in God's atoning provision, specifically the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gen. 3:15, 21).
 - b. In the Old Testament economy, amidst a world of pagan and false prophets, God appointed "My servants the prophets" (Jer. 7:25; Ezek. 38:17; Dan. 9:6, 10; Amos 3:7),⁷ a divinely ordained company originating from the time of Moses, as His spokesmen. Not only did they promise judgment, but also salvation through Messiah (Luke 1:67-72; Rom. 3:21; 16:26). And Isaiah is representative when he proclaims, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isa. 52:7; cf. 40:9; 61:1).
2. It is one inscripturated gospel, v. 2b.

The appointed vehicle of this promised "gospel of God" is the "Holy Scriptures," or "Sacred Writings," that is γραφαῖς ἁγίας, graphais hagiais, a collection of objective, concrete records, and not oral tradition.⁸ For Paul, the essential sacredness of these Scriptures is the fact that they have been exhaled from the truthful and unerring mouth of God (II Tim. 3:16) through the Spirit of God (II Pet. 1:20-21). As such, the Scriptures are unique in this world. And as a consequence, the message of the gospel is indivisibly related to the record of the Gospel, and thus they are identically sacred. In practical terms for today, only an infallible Word from God can reliably declare the "gospel of God."

3. It is one Christ-centered gospel, vs. 3-4

That "God's servants the prophets" specifically promised the Messiah as the coming Savior is abundantly declared throughout the Old Testament. However here this Savior is described as "His [God's] Son," that is the Son of He who has revealed "good news," v. 1. In other words, the gospel and the Son of God are intimately related. Haldane comments: "It is of Him [Jesus Christ] that the Gospel of God, promised by the prophets, treats; so that He is not simply a legislator or interpreter of the Divine will, like Moses, and the Prophets, and the Apostles. . . . But it is altogether different respecting Jesus Christ, who is exclusively the Alpha and Omega of the Gospel, its

⁷ Refer to Edward J. Young's classic study of this subject, *My Servants the Prophets*, 224 pp.

⁸ While Warfield describes, concerning this verse, "Paul's conception of Scripture as the crystallized voice of God," he further states that the Apostle, "explicitly declares, not of the writers of Scripture, but of the sacred writings themselves, that they are theopneustic—breathed out, or breathed into by God (II Tim. 3:16)." *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 317-8.

proper object, its beginning and its end.”⁹ However, more about the uniqueness of this Savior is now unfolded.

a. A fully human Christ, v. 3.

- (1) This Son of God, being preexistent,¹⁰ was born into carnal, fleshly, human existence by means of the seed of David. In other words, coming from the bosom of the Father (John 1:1, 18), Jesus Christ was born of Mary, while espoused to Joseph (Matt. 1:1-16), and as such is descended from King David to whom the promise of Messiah was confirmed (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; John 7:42; Acts 13:22-23).
- (2) More correctly, this Son of God was “made” (KJV) or “born” (NASB), aorist of γίνομαι, ginomai, to take on “flesh” (Gal. 4:4), and to Paul this is a significant and necessary characteristic. While in 7:5, 18, 25, the context indicates that “sinful flesh” is in mind, here the context of v. 4 indicates that “sinless flesh,” governed by “the Spirit of holiness,” rather than “the spirit of holiness,” is intended. Hence this Son qualifies as the “last Adam [who] became a life-giving spirit” (I Cor. 15:45). As Charles Wesley has written, this Christ is:

Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.

- (3) The incarnation is clearly taught here, namely that God in heaven, having a Son in heaven, has sent this Son from heaven to assume an earthly, human dress (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-8); He took on sinless humanity to save sinful humanity (Heb. 4:15; 10:19-20). Upon this momentous event in human history hangs the substance of the gospel; it was of such epochal significance that the prophets long ago gave preparatory announcements of this incomparable and wonderful event (Isa. 40:3-5).

b. A fully divine Christ, v. 4a.

- (1) But more than being “made” of human flesh, v. 3, he was “declared” or “designated” or “marked out,” aorist of ὀρίζω, orizō, as the Son of God (Ps. 2:7). This was the Father’s doing, His begetting of the eternal Son in human flesh, His attestation, though with certain accompanying characteristics of deity.
- (2) Consequently this “declared” Son of God was “with power,” though exactly in what way? Strictly, the order here does *not* say, “declared with power the Son of God” NIV. Rather, he was “declared the Son of God with power” KJV, NASB, as “raised up again, . . . having been exalted to the right hand of God, . . . therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has

⁹ Haldane, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 27.

¹⁰ John Murray writes: “There are good reasons for thinking that in this instance the title refers to a relation which the Son sustains to the Father antecedently to and independently of his manifestation in the flesh.” *Romans*, I, pp. 5-6.

made Him both Lord [sovereign] and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:32-33, 36). Therefore the resurrection is the justification, the grand vindication of Jesus Christ as the only demonstrably valid saving object for the believing sinner (Acts 2:22-24; 13:29-33; 17:30-31).

- (3) Further, in contrast with the “[sinless] flesh” of v. 3, the “Spirit [unlikely ‘spirit’] of holiness”¹¹ was powerfully operative in this incarnate Christ who was inevitably raised from the dead (Acts 13:32-33).

c. A fully human and divine Christ, v. 4b.

- (1) The KJV does not follow the Greek so accurately in vs. 3-4. The NASB and NIV are more accurate, especially as they rightly conclude this majestic doctrinal declaration with the encompassing declaration, “Jesus Christ our Lord.” Lloyd-Jones comments that this, “is undoubtedly the right way to consider it, because it forms a sort of natural climax. . . . In other words, it is a kind of summing up of everything the Apostle has been telling us about Him in these two great statements [vs. 3-4]; it is because they are true of Him that He is Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹²
- (2) This God-man then, truly perfect in humanity and fullness of deity, is “Jesus Christ our Lord” (Col. 1:22; 2:9). This is the totality of his being, this “theanthropic” person. In his commentary on Romans, James Montgomery Boice devotes one whole chapter to this climactic expression.¹³ He points out that it is akin to the early church confession that “Jesus is Lord,” which means that Jesus is both God and Savior; further it means that Jesus is Lord for the believers in Rome as a whole, and not simply a smaller and more spiritual group who have also accepted him as Savior (Matt. 22:41-46; Luke 2:11; I Cor. 8:4-6; Phil. 2:5-11).
- (3) The Athanasian Creed, c. 450 A.D., declares that, “the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.”¹⁴ In church history, there have been two doctrinal extremes that have frequently produced opposite heresies.

(a) Jesus Christ is more human than divine.

- 1) Arianism, Jehovah’s Witnesses = Jesus was a god.
- 2) Adoptionism = Jesus was a man adopted by the Father.

¹¹ Douglas Moo, *Romans 1-8*, pp. 49-43. Argument is here given that Paul has in mind the “Spirit of holiness” rather than the “spirit of holiness.” In agreement, Bruce comments that, “*The spirit of holiness* is the regular Hebrew way of saying ‘the Holy Spirit’; and Paul here reproduces the Hebrew idiom in Greek.” *Romans*, p. 73. For further support, refer to Calvin, Haldane, Morris, and Murray. Contra are Hodge and Lloyd-Jones.

¹² Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 1:1-32*, p. 128.

¹³ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, I, pp. 45-52.

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, II, p. 68.

- 3) Liberalism = Jesus was godly.
- (b) Jesus Christ is more divine than human.
 - 1) Gnosticism, Christian Science = Jesus was a phantom.
 - 2) Docetism = Jesus seemed to be a man.
 - 3) Marcionism = Jesus was chiefly revealed by Paul.
- (4) The danger here is that in the mysteries of the truth concerning the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ, we become more absorbed with cerebral challenge rather than heart encounter. Yet it is obvious that here Paul is moved in the depths of his soul at the contemplation of this Savior's glorious person. He parallels the Apostle John's initial exaltation of Christ in John 1:1-18. Matthew Henry captures this apostolic wonderment as follows: "When Paul mentions Christ, how he heaps up his names and titles, *his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*, as one that took a pleasure in speaking of him; and, having mentioned him, he cannot go on in his discourse without some expression of love and honor, as here, where in one person he shows us his two distinct natures."¹⁵

4. It is one universal gospel, v. 5.

It is a wondrous truth that Jesus Christ is both God and man, divine and human, and vindicated as such by his resurrection from the dead. Yet this is but glorious fact, and beyond such truth purpose must be discovered. So in v. 5 we have revealed the design of the incarnation as it relates to both man and God.

a. The universal proclaimer.

- (1) He, Paul, has been ordained by Christ, not men (Gal. 1:1, 15-16); but further, this divine vocation includes divine enabling. So Paul describes himself, using the plural of indirect identity, as "we [who] have received grace and apostleship." That is, he has received particular saving grace and particular apostolic calling, cf. v. 6.
- (2) In his commentary on Romans, John MacArthur mentions the experience of both Donald Grey Barnhouse and himself in their being ordained, with the laying on of hands, by certain men who later departed from the faith. He then comments, "Like Dr. Barnhouse, I give thanks to God that my ministry did not come from men but from Christ Himself."¹⁶

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, VI, p. 364.

¹⁶ John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, p. 23.

b. The universal purpose as it concerns man.

- (1) The ordained task is the obtaining of the “obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.” Note that this Epistle ends by describing this same purpose, 16:26. Specifically, Paul’s mission (Acts 9:15) is to have as its goal a definite quality of harvested faith which is to be distinguished from a more patronizing and casual faith that is representative of contemporary evangelism. Murray describes the nerve of Paul’s thought as follows: “Faith is regarded as an act of obedience, of commitment to the gospel of Christ. Hence the implications of this expression ‘obedience of faith’ are far-reaching. For the faith which the apostleship was intended to promote was not an evanescent [quickly fading] act of emotion but the commitment of wholehearted devotion to Christ and to the truth of his gospel. It is to such faith that all nations are called.”¹⁷
- (2) So Paul has a broad missionary vision. As in 16:26, so here this “obedience of faith” is to be solicited from among all the “Gentiles [nations],” ἔθνος, ethnos. Again in 15:18, Paul’s ministry has sought “the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,” through his preaching of “the gospel of Christ,” v. 19. By way of contrast, in 10:16, 21 Israel has responded with the “disobedience of faith.” In other words, Paul’s ministry is to seek out that promised “obedience of faith” from among the Gentiles which will in turn eventually provoke Israel to jealousy (9:30-33; 11:11, 15, 25).C

c. The universal purpose as it concerns God.

While God’s purposes have levels of intent, such as his will on earth, in heaven, and the building of His church, His ultimate purpose is His own glorification (Eph. 1:5-6, 12; I Pet. 4:11). Jesus Christ saves sinners and gives them glory so that they might return glory to Him (John 17:9-10, 22). So here, the saving of the Gentiles is to bring honor and glory to Christ (Rom. 11:33-36), that is “for His name’s sake,” or vindication. Haldane comments: “The world was created for God’s glory, and His glory is the chief end of the restoration of sinners. . . . Men are very unwilling to admit that God should have any end with respect to them greater than their happiness.”¹⁸

5. It is one sovereign gospel, v. 6.

The Christians at Rome are encouraged with the declaration that they are part of the calling of the Gentiles by Jesus Christ, even as Paul has received an apostolic calling, v. 1. Such a calling here is more than an invitation; it is a potent wooing, an effectual drawing with cords of sovereign grace (8:28; I Cor. 1:9; 26-29). All Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, should have a strong sense of spiritual vocation according to God’s particular summons. As James Grindlay Small has written:

¹⁷ Murray, I, *Romans*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸ Haldane, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 40.

I've found a Friend; O such a Friend!
 He loved me ere I knew Him:
 He drew me with the cords of love,
 And thus He bound me to Him;
 And round my heart still closely twine
 Those ties which nought can sever;
 For I am His, and He is mine,
 For ever and for ever.

C. GOD'S GOSPEL, THE GROUND OF BENEDICTION, V. 7

Here, for the Christian, both reclusiveness and worldliness are repudiated. Rather the believer is in the midst of pagan Rome and yet consecrated or set apart from it through divine calling as beloved by God. Such insulation without isolation qualifies for the outpouring of "grace and peace."

1. The objects of benediction, v. 7a.

In all that follows in Romans, that is the comprehensive doctrine of the gospel and consequent exhortation to gospel living, here Paul succinctly incorporates this body of truth within the terms of the benediction, "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

a. Beloved of God.

Paul's true ecumenism incorporates all Christians in Rome who are "beloved of God," not simply those who claim to love God. No distinction is made with regard to Jew or Gentile, patrician or plebeian or slave, as he will elaborate upon in greater detail, 3:9, 22-23.

b. Called as saints.

The previously mentioned "calling," v. 6, is now defined in terms of purpose, which is the "setting apart," the definitive sanctification or particular consecration of the sinner, by God. This common term of address emphasizes the believer's distinctiveness. All genuine Christians are "saints," and not some special, super-holy class.

2. The blessings of benediction, v. 7b.

"Grace and peace" here are not identical with initial saving grace (Eph. 2:8-9) and peace with (from) God resulting from justification (Rom. 5:1). Here Paul, as is customary in most of his epistles, prays for grace and peace, that is daily sanctifying grace and peace, to be bestowed upon those who have received grace and peace. For the progressing Christian there is an ongoing supply of "grace upon grace" (John 1:16).

3. The source of benediction, v. 7c.

The Father and the Son are linked here, according to an essential bosom and economic relationship (John 1:18), and thus together mediate “grace and peace.” The dignity of this relationship is but a further reflection of the exalted description of the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in v. 4.