Introducing Paul to Rome
Romans 1:1-7
Pastor John Miller

Romans 1:1-7 says, “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God…” it doesn’t take Paul long to mention the theme of the book of Romans “… which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures…” the Old Testament prophets promised this good news “…concerning 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 according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name…” this is a universal Gospel; he wants all men from all nations to come to faith in Jesus Christ “… among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 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.”

No one who truly knows the Bible and the history of the church would dispute the claim that the book of Romans is one of the most powerful, influential books ever written. It has been used by God to bring about some of the most significant conversions and revivals in all of church history. The great, Swiss commentator Godet said, “In all probability, every great, spiritual revival in the church will be connected as effect and cause with a deeper understanding of this book.”

Many theologians go so far as to say there have been no significant revivals in the church in the last 2,000 years but that centered in that revival were the doctrines and themes and teaching of Paul’s epistle to the Romans. That is a powerful thought indeed.

To give you a couple of examples, the great St. Augustine from Hippo was converted hearing the Word of God from Romans 13. He became one of the leading theologians in the early church. Then his theology and teaching on the book of Romans influenced Martin Luther, the great, Protestant reformer, who, based on Romans 1:16-17, was converted when he read from Habakkuk 2:4 that “The just shall live by his faith.”

I think of John Wesley, who was influenced by Martin Luther’s commentary on Romans. Wesley returned to England from America where he went to convert the Indians, as he wrote in his journal, “Who will convert me?” So he was not sure of his salvation. One night he went to a meeting of Moravians. They were an evangelical, zealous, Christian group that were missionary- minded. The minister opened Martin Luther’s commentary on Romans, read the preface to Romans and quoted Romans 1:16-17, “The just shall live by faith.” John Wesley said, “I felt my heart strangely warm, I knew that my sins had been forgiven and I had trusted Christ.” Then John Wesley, who was the founder of the Methodist movement, went on to influence George Whitfield, who brought the great awakening to America.

I found it interesting that John Bunyan, who wrote Pilgrim’s Progress, based that writing on his study of the book of Romans. Pilgrim’s Progress has only been outsold by the Bible in 1,000 years. Only the Bible has sold more copies than Pilgrim’s Progress, which was based on the

study of Romans.

I believe the Bible where it says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16). All Scripture is equally inspired by God, but there are some portions that are more profitable or more valuable. If I was marooned on an island somewhere in the South Pacific and I could only have one book of the Bible, I would choose Romans—maybe the Gospel of John and Romans, and it would be nice to have the Psalms thrown in there. But if I could only have one book, give me Romans. It has been described as “the Constitution of Christianity.” Everything we need to know for “life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3) is found in the book of Romans.

Every Christian should study and understand and live out the great truths found in Paul’s letter to the Romans. It’s a book, a letter, a treatise and a theology. No other book of the Bible more completely sets forth the great doctrines of the Christian faith. It also has been called Paul’s “magnum opus.” It is the most systematic of all the epistles covering the doctrine of salvation from condemnation to justification to sanctification to glorification. You will become familiar with these terms and understand them as we go through Romans.

Some Christians say, “Doctrine is boring. Give me some practical, Christian living.” What you believe determines how you behave. You can’t be a Christian if you don’t know what a Christian is. You can’t be a Christian if you don’t know what Christianity is. Paul always starts with doctrine, which is the foundation for duty, principles and then practice.

Let me introduce the book of Romans to you. It is a book that has its own theme. Most Bible scholars agree that Romans 1:16-17 is the theme of Romans. Paul says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ…” verse 1 says “the Gospel of God,” which means that it comes from God; its source and origin is God “…for it is the power of God to salvation…” or “to bring salvation” “…for everyone who believes.” So the theme is that it is “the Gospel of Christ… salvation…who believes.” “…for the Jew first and also for the Greek” or “Gentile.” “For in it…” that is, “the Gospel of Christ” “…the righteousness of God is revealed…” how He saves sinners by imputing righteousness to them, and He does it righteously “…from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith,’” which is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4.

The sentence “The just shall live by faith” appears three times in the New Testament. It appears here in Romans 1:17, it appears in Galatians 3:11 and it appears in Hebrews 10:38. It’s interesting that it has three sections: “the just” “shall live” “by faith.” Very profound words. The focus of Romans 1:17 is “the just” or “the righteous”; the focus of Galatians 3:11 is “shall live” or how we live under grace; and the focus of Hebrews 10:38 is “by faith.” So Romans 1:17 is the key text of the book of Romans.

The book of Romans also has an outline. A very simple, two-part outline is that chapters 1-11 is doctrinal, and chapters 12-16 is duty. I gave you two outlines. One is by Alva McClain, who has written an amazing commentary on Romans called The Gospel of God’s Grace. The other outline is by Warren Wiersbe, who wrote the “Be” series. His commentary on Romans is called

“Be Right.” That’s the one I recommend you start with if you’re just beginning to study a commentary on the book of Romans. It’s an amazing book. It transformed my understanding of Christianity and the way I approach Scripture and preach the Word of God.

Now I’m just going to fly over the book of Romans at 30,000 feet, or it’s going to be very general. The Introduction is in Romans 1:1-17. We will take three weeks to study the Introduction. There are four sections in the book of Romans. The first section is Condemnation—before we hear the good news, we have to get the bad news. “The wrath of God is revealed” (Romans 1:18-3:20). You say, “Pastor, you’re going to be preaching on the wrath of God?!” I’m going through the book of Romans—what do you expect?! Before you can understand, appreciate or value the good news, you gotta have the bad news. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). God is going to save us by His grace, but we need to see our lost, sinful condition. So condemnation.

The second section is Salvation—the righteousness of God revealed, Romans 3:21-8:39. We see justification—declared righteous in Christ, sanctification—made holy in Christ, and preservation—kept securely in Christ.

The third section is Vindication—the wisdom of God revealed, Romans 9-11. This is an important section of Romans. What is God’s plan for Israel? Did God reject the nation of Israel, or are the Israelites set apart? Has the church taken its place? No, it has not. In chapter 9, we see Israel’s choice, sovereign election; in chapter 10, we see human responsibility; and in chapter 11, we see His merciful purpose. So we see Israel’s election, rejection and restoration.

And the fourth section of Romans is Exhortation—the will of God revealed, Romans 12-15. I like chapter 12 where Paul opens up with, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.”

So we have 11 chapters of doctrine, which are now to be put into shoe leather as you consecrate and dedicate your life to following God and not being “conformed to this world” but being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

Then Romans closes with the Conclusion, Romans 16.

So this was a fly-over of the book of Romans at 30,000 feet. You can go home today and say, “We studied the whole book of Romans today in one sermon!” So we saw the forest before we will examine the trees.

The author of the book of Romans was Paul, Romans 1:1. Paul is his Latin name, which means “little.” Maybe he was of short stature. His original name was Saul and known as Saul of Tarsus. He was a proud Pharisee, a religious Jew, and a persecutor of Christians. He put Christians in prison and he also killed Christians. On his way to Damascus, in Acts 9, he was saved by the grace of God and then turned the world upside down for Jesus Christ. Paul wrote Romans around 57AD from Corinth at the end of his second missionary journey.

The book of Romans has a purpose. I want to give you four bullet points regarding Paul's purpose in writing Romans. Number one was to prepare for his visit. He never went to Rome. He never met the Romans. The church in Rome was probably started by some who returned to Rome after the day of Pentecost and started to gather together as Christians.

Number two, Paul wrote Romans to explain the Gospel of grace. That's the primary reason Paul wrote Romans: to explain justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Number three, He wrote Romans to answer the question of God's plan for Israel. The topic today is, "Has the church replaced Israel or is the church spiritual Israel?" The answer is "No." I don't believe the Bible teaches replacement theology. God has a plan and purpose, dispensationally, for the nation of Israel. He chose them, they rejected their Messiah and they have been set aside temporarily and partially. But in Romans 11 we will see they will be restored, and "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

Number four, Paul wrote Romans to teach us our duty to other believers and to the state.

Now I want to unpack Paul's opening salutation, Romans 1:1-7. In the Greek, it is one, long sentence. In it we see Paul's view of five, important things. Number one is how Paul viewed himself. "Paul, a bondservant…" or "servant" "…of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the Gospel of God." Paul starts by calling himself in the English translation of our Bibles "a servant." In the Greek it is "doulos," which literally means "slave" or "bond slave."

You may be saying, "Pastor, you're telling us that Paul was a slave?!" At this time, the Roman world had over two million slaves. There were more slaves than free men. So they would understand the choice of Paul's word "doulos." Not only is a doulos a slave, but it means the doulos chose voluntarily, willingly to be its master's slave. Paul was the Lord's slave.

There is nobody I would rather be a slave to than Jesus Christ. To be His slave is to be set free. Jesus said, "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). You used to be a slave to your lusts, to your sinful nature, to alcohol or drugs or to your passions and possessions. Now you are free, because you are a slave of Jesus Christ.

One of the cool things about being His doulos is that I'm His property; I literally belong to Him. A doulos belonged to his master. That means the master has to take care of his doulos; I'm His problem. He has to feed me. But it also means that I'm not my own; I've been bought with a price. And I should glorify God with my body, which belongs to God (1Corinthians 6:20).

So where I go, what I do, what I say should glorify God. I like the idea of saying, "Lord, I'll do what You want me to do, I'll be what You want me to be, I'll say what You want me to say and I'll go where You want me to go." Paul was a slave, so we should be slaves of Christ as well.

If you're a Christian, you're not just saved from hell on your way to heaven; you are His property and you are His doulos. He owns you. Your whole life should be consecrated to serving Him and living for Him.

Paul also called himself “an apostle.” In the English Bible, the words “to be” are italicized. So it is just “called an apostle.” That means he was not self-appointed. He was “called to be an apostle” by God. An apostle had to see the risen Christ. That happened in Acts 9 and in other places in Paul’s ministry. And he was commissioned to be an apostle. “Apostle” means someone who represents Christ and speaks with the authority of Christ. So Paul’s calling was to be an apostle.

Paul also was “separated…” I like that “…to…” not from “…the Gospel of God,” verse 1. When you get saved—we’ll see it in a few verses—we are called by God to come out of the world, and we are also separated to God to live holy, godly, consecrated lives.

Too many Christians are known for what they don’t do rather than what they do. “I don’t smoke, I don’t chew, I don’t hang out with those who do.”

“Wow! You’re spiritual!”

People ask, “Can Christians dance?”

“Some can and some can’t.” The ones I’ve seen dance embarrass themselves; they shouldn’t be dancing.

You’re called out of the world to service to God. You are called to a life of obedience. You are called to a life of godliness and true holiness.

I like that Paul was “separated to the Gospel of God”; separated from and separated to. Are you living a godly life? Are you the Lord’s slave? What is God’s will for you? To be His representative. To live a holy life.

Number two is Paul’s view of the Gospel, verses 2-3. Speaking of the Gospel, Paul said, “… which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” In the King James translation, this phrase is in parenthesis. Again, verses 1-7 is one, long sentence. Paul makes a statement about the Gospel of God and then he does this “deep dive” in verse 2 by saying that it was promised by the Old Testament prophets “…concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.”

Let me give you some subpoints under Paul’s view of the Gospel. First, it’s “the gospel of God,” in verse 1; “the gospel of His Son,” in verse 9; and “the gospel of Christ,” in verse 16. What does he mean by “the gospel of God”? The word “Gospel” means “the good news.” It is the goods news that comes from God. The phrase “of God” means that its origin and source is God. This is a God-sent good news. It wasn’t invented by man. It’s not from man. It wasn’t concocted by man. It’s from God.

Only Christianity is a God-sent religion—and it’s not a religion but a relationship. But if you compare religions, only Biblical Christianity comes from God. It’s the good news from God. It’s not from some guy who received some golden tablets given to him by an angel called Moroni. It’s not from Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad or some other ascended master.

Christianity comes from God. He is the God who left heaven, was incarnated through the womb of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life for 33 years, died a substitutionary death on the Cross, was buried, three days later rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven. He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). This good news comes from God.

Second, it was promised in the Old Testament, verse 2: “…which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” So the good news that came from God was actually promised in the Old Testament by the prophets, as they spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It’s not new or novel. If it’s new it’s not true; if it’s true it’s not new.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ goes all the way back to eternity past. It first appears in Genesis 3:15. God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” Jesus Christ was prophesied. Jesus would die on the Cross to destroy and defeat the power of Satan. All of the prophecy, all of the picture-type prophecy—you could go all the way through the Bible to find this prophecy.

In Luke 24:12-35 when Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus, the two walked along sad and Jesus appeared to them in one of His post-Resurrection appearances. Jesus asked them why they were so upset. They looked at Jesus, not knowing He was Jesus, and in surprise asked, “Have You not known the things which happened [in Jerusalem] in these days?” Jesus answered, “What things?” They were telling Jesus what happened to Jesus! They thought Jesus was the Messiah, but when those things happened, they were saddened.

Then Jesus said, “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” And they said, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” So Jesus actually proved from the Bible that the Gospel from Luke 24 was prophesied many years before.

Third, Paul said that the Gospel was centered in Jesus. This excites me. If you take Jesus out of the Gospel, you have no Gospel. If you take Jesus Christ out of the message, there is no good news. Verse 3 says, “…concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” So without Jesus there is no Gospel. Jesus is the sum, the substance of the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul said that the Gospel is “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” Christ was buried according to the Scriptures. Christ rose from the dead according to the Scriptures. Paul preached Christ Jesus. So Christ is the center of the good news.

Number three is Paul’s view of Jesus. If the Gospel is centered on Jesus, we had better know who Jesus is. We had better be right about Jesus. Verses 3-4 is one of the great Christological passages on the Person of Jesus Christ. “…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 according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

First, we have His names or titles. Paul uses the titles "Son Jesus Christ" and "Lord." "Son" means that He is the eternal Son of God. "Jesus" means "Jehovah saves." Before Jesus was born, the angel told Mary and Joseph to name Him Jesus at His birth. "Christ" is not Jesus' last name; it is Greek for the Hebrew "Messiah" or "the Anointed One." "Christ" is a title; He is the Messiah. By the way, "Messiah" is not a spirit that came on the man Jesus; He is the Christ.

Second in Paul's view of Jesus, in His humanity, Jesus "was born of the seed of David according to the flesh." This is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. David wanted to build God a house, but God said "No, but I will build you a house. Through your lineage, your seed, the Messiah will come. He will sit on your throne, and He will reign forever and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). This is why Jesus was often called "Son of David," because He was the Messiah through the lineage of David. This is Jesus' humanity.

It is just as heretical to deny the humanity of Jesus as it is to deny His deity. Jesus was every bit a true man. He was sinless and virgin-born. He didn't inherit sin and He didn't acquire sin. He was fully human.

Third, Paul mentions His deity, verse 4. He was "declared…" which means "horizon." The horizon sets apart the sky from the land or sea. So the Resurrection set Him apart as the Son of God. He was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." The Resurrection proved that Jesus Christ is God.

So you have His humanity—"seed of David"; His deity—He was risen from the dead; and He is set apart "to be the Son of God." He has divine names, He is humble and human and He is divine, He is God. He is the God-Man. Notice that He is "declared" to be the Son of God; He's not made the Son of God.

Number four, we see Paul's view of his commission, verse 5. We see his calling as an apostle and its purpose. He said, "…through Him we have received grace and apostleship." So not only are we called by grace and saved by grace; we are commissioned to serve God and given gifts, abilities and opportunities by God's grace. Why? "…for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name." God called Paul to preach the Gospel to all nations, that they would repent and turn to Him, so many people would come to faith in Jesus Christ and be saved. Paul viewed his commission as a matter of God's grace.

I like to think about the fact that God calls us by grace, saves us by grace, calls us to serve Him by grace and God enables us to be able to serve Him by His amazing grace.

Number five, we see Paul's view of his readers, verses 6-7. "…among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome…" Paul had not been there at this time "… beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace…" God's grace leads to God's peace in your soul "…from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Notice that they are “called of Jesus Christ.” So are we. If you are a Christian, it’s because God called you by His grace. He called you out of the world, He called you to follow Jesus, He called you to fellowship with other believers, He called you to preach the Gospel and one day He’ll call us home to heaven.

As a Christian, you also are “beloved of God,” as Paul called the believers in Rome. You are “beloved of God.” As God’s people, you are loved by God.

You also are saints, verse 7. Every Christian, in spite of how consecrated or how holy they live, is a saint. You say, “No, I ain’t!” You’re either a saint or you ain’t. If you’re born again, you’re a saint. You don’t need to die and get canonized by the church to be a saint. All Christians are saints!

This is called “positional righteousness.” It is your standing in Christ. All Christians equally stand righteous before God and are considered saints. The word “saint” is the Greek word “hagios.” It is where we get our words “holy” and “sanctify.” It means “to be set apart.” So it doesn’t mean that you live like a saint; it means that you are a saint positionally before God.

But here’s the goal of the Christian life—and where the book of Romans will take us: those who God justifies are made saints or righteous before God. The goal of your Christian life is to bring your practice, how you live, up to your position of being a saint. That is called “sanctification.”

We are justified positionally, righteous in God. We are being sanctified or being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. And then some day we will be glorified when we die and go to heaven or when the church is raptured.

So we are called, we are loved, we are saints and Paul closes by saying, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” is doulos.