

Romans
Called by God

Romans 1:6

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Turn with me to Romans 1. We're studying Paul's letter to the Romans, and it's so important, by the way, to keep in mind that it is, after all, a letter. We call it a book, and that's right because it's part of the canon of Scripture, but it is and was a letter from the apostle Paul to a real group of believers, little house churches scattered across the city of Rome.

We write letters, not many still, most of them tend to be texts or e-mails, but we write letters and we have the availability to write letters. If your computer is like mine, you have, connected to your word processing program, a number of templates that you can personalize and use in writing letters. There's the informal letter to family and friends, and the elegant letter, and the business letter, and so forth. There are a number of other styles, but although the font and the styles of our letters may vary, ultimately, twenty-first century letter writing follows essentially the same basic format. It begins, typically, with the date and then with the address of the recipient, and then a greeting to the recipient, then the body of the letter followed by a salutation, and then finally the name of the person who's writing the letter.

Now honestly, that is a very inconvenient form. How many times have you found yourself receiving a multipage letter and you start reading the letter and you're shocked by what you're reading and so you have to go rifling to the end to find out who it is that has said these things to you. Letters in the first century followed a predictable, but frankly, far more helpful pattern. Most of the first century letters were written on scrolls made of parchment or papyrus. Those scrolls were then rolled up when the letter was completed, sealed, and delivered in that rolled form. So as you began to unroll the letter, in the first century, the first thing you saw was the writer, then the recipient, those to whom the letter was addressed, then the greeting, and then came the body of the letter. In fact, keep your finger here in Romans 1 and just turn back a few pages to Acts 23. Let me show you a letter that wasn't written by the apostles that's an example of a first century letter. Acts 23:26, "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings." That's the opening to the letter and then verse 27 and following is the body of the letter. You see the elements there, the writer, Claudius Lysias, the recipient, the most excellent governor Felix, and then the greeting, just simply the word greetings.

Now go back to Romans 1. Compare what we just saw there to the first seven verses of Romans. Paul obviously follows the standard form of first century letters, but under inspiration he intentionally filled out that first century form with rich spiritual significance. Romans contains Paul's longest greeting because he wrote it to a church that he had not founded and had never

visited. But the flow of his greeting is an easy one to follow, notice in verse 1, you have the writer, then in verses 6 and 7 you have the recipients of the letter identified, and the end of verse 7 is the greeting. Instead of the simple word greetings, it's obviously elongated and made much more rich and profound. In verses 2 through 5, Paul adds his own element to first century letter writing, and that is, he introduces in those verses the theme of this letter, which is the gospel.

So with that in mind, let's read it together. You follow along as I read Romans 1:1-7.

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendent of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we have discovered that in these seven verses Paul provides us with three reasons why Romans matters, why it should matter to the first century Christians in Rome who received this letter and why it should matter to us as well. We've already talked about two of those reasons. First of all, because Paul wrote it. He begins simply by identifying himself as Paul. That word alone would have drawn the first century believers into this letter because they knew who he was, they knew what God done in his life; they knew he was a handpicked apostle. But then he goes on in verse 1 to describe his credentials, he gives us three of them, and he adds weight to why we should read this letter because of who wrote it.

But there's a second reason that this letter matters, not only because Paul wrote it, but secondly because it's about the gospel. And in verses 2 through 5, as I said, Paul sort of adds his own element to this letter by introducing the theme, which is the gospel. And he introduces in verses 2 through 5 several foundational truths about the gospel that he preached, and he'll fill these truths out as the book unfolds, the letter unfolds, but we noted these foundational truths about the gospel. Let me just remind you of them.

First of all, the gospel comes from God. Verse 1 ends, it is "the gospel of God." Its source is God. God is the one who gives this announcement of good news. He is the one who extends this invitation. He is the one who commands people to repent and believe. It comes from God. Secondly, the gospel is confirmed by the Old Testament Scripture. This is not something that Paul and the apostles invented. Instead, it's exactly what the Old Testament said would happen. Notice verse 2, it's "the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures." This matters to Paul, and again and again he's going to make this point in

his letter to the Romans. He's not preaching something entirely new, it was promised beforehand.

Thirdly, he tells us the gospel is about God's Son. The gospel isn't primarily about you and your forgiveness and your relationship to God. The gospel is about God's Son. Notice verse 3, it is the gospel of God "concerning His Son." That's a description of His eternal nature. He is equal with God. To be God's Son is to be God the Son, eternally God. But notice, he took on a human nature, that eternal Son "was born of a descendent of David according to the flesh." He was, as the Messiah was supposed to be, He was born into the human line of David, both through Mary, physically He came from David, and legally He came from David through his adoptive father, Joseph. He was declared, notice verse 4, to be "the Son of God." In other words, it was made clear that He was, in fact, all that He claimed to be, "by the resurrection from the dead, through the work of the Spirit." This was His ultimate vindication. The resurrection showed Jesus was everything He claimed to be. And then Paul ends that portion at verse 4, the very end of verse 4, by identifying who this person is he's been talking about, in whom the gospel is centered. It is, in fact, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, who has become our *Kurios*, our Lord, our Master.

Now, last week we discovered in verse 5 several other important truths about the gospel Paul preached. The fourth truth we discovered is the gospel demands a response. Notice verse 5, he first of all recounts his apostolic credentials, "through Christ we have received grace to minister," and specifically, "to minister as an apostle," but here's what Christ wants and what I want, "to bring about the obedience of faith." That's the response to the gospel Paul wanted to see, "the obedience of faith." As we discovered last time, that really means two things. First of all, it means that you respond in faith, which is obedience. The gospel says repent and believe. So to believe is to obey that command, but it's more than that because the person who really believes, the person who has genuine faith, goes on into a life pattern of obedience, not perfect obedience, but obedience nonetheless. It is the obedience of faith. That's the response the gospel demands.

Fifthly, we saw that the gospel is God's universal message. Notice verse 5 says the goal is, "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles," among all the non-Jewish nations of the world who are pagan idolaters. This message is for the entire planet. It is God's universal message. And then, finally, we discovered last time the gospel is for the sake of His name. Notice how verse 5 ends, the ultimate goal of the gospel, listen carefully, is not your salvation. It is a goal of the gospel, but it's not the ultimate goal of the gospel. The ultimate goal of the gospel is for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ, for His glory, for His honor, for His reputation.

So, we should care about this letter that we're studying together because Paul wrote it, and because it's about the gospel, but there's a third and final reason why Romans matters, and we come to that reason today. It's because of its intended audience. This morning we will study together the letter's address where Paul identifies to whom it was he wrote, and he identifies his

intended audience in two ways. First of all, he identifies their historical identity and secondly he identifies their spiritual identity, and remarkably you and I can identify with both of those. The way Paul describes his readers in verses 6 and 7 not only made this letter compelling for the Christians in Rome in the first century, but it makes it compelling for us as well. So let's look at the audience together and we will see ourselves here.

First of all, though, I want you to notice the Romans' unique historical audience. The book of Romans was written to a unique historical audience, and we're told about that audience in two ways, the beginning of verse 6 and the beginning of verse 7. Notice, first of all, the beginning of verse 6, "among whom you also are the called." Now that refers back, that "among whom," refers back to verse 5, and specifically to the phrase, "among all the Gentiles." In other words, Paul is saying, listen, you are among that group that I identified as "all the Gentiles." You have been called by God out of paganism and idolatry. This implies that the churches in Rome were primarily made up of Gentiles. You see that again down in verse 13, he says, I have wanted to come there "so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles." In Romans 11:13 Paul says this, "I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry." The primary constituency of the churches in Rome, they were Gentiles.

Now, notice a second way he describes this unique historical audience in the beginning of verse 7, "to all who are," and the phrase in Greek, "beloved of God," is a separate phrase, so we're going to deal with it separately. Literally verse 7 begins, "to all who are in Rome." This is the audience to whom he wrote, all the Christians living in Rome. Now how did there come to be Christians in Rome? It's not, as Roman Catholicism teaches, that Peter went there and founded the church in Rome. There is no evidence of that. We can't be absolutely sure how the church there began, but the evidence points in a very clear direction.

It seems likely that the first believers in Rome were some of those who were saved on the day of Pentecost. Turn back to Acts 2. You remember, 50 days after the resurrection, after, excuse me, after the crucifixion, after Passover, there was another feast, the feast of Pentecost, in the early to midsummer in Israel, and the people of God, the Jewish people, were to gather for the feast, and this was a feast they gathered for, and there on Pentecost, you remember, Peter preaches, but Luke tells us in verse 8, that this was their response, "how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?" And then Luke lists a number of nationalities, but notice the end of verse 10, and there were "visitors from Rome, both Jews," so Jewish people who had come for the feast of Pentecost, "and proselytes," that is, Gentiles who had become converted to Judaism, and they were from, some of them were from Rome. It's very likely, since they're listed here, that, in fact, some of those visitors from Rome came to believe through the preaching of Peter. Then, of course, after the feast was done they would return to their homes in Rome, and they brought their new faith in Jesus as Messiah with them back to their homes in Rome.

Now depending on when you believe Jesus was crucified and raised, what year, I personally lean toward 30 A.D., there are some who believe it was 33 A.D., but regardless, these believers from Rome likely returned to their homes in Rome in the early 30's A.D. with the gospel. And, of course, you know what happens wherever there are true believers, they begin to tell others, they just can't keep it to themselves, and they begin to talk about Christ, and what they've discovered, and the gospel begins to spread, and other Jews are converted, other Gentile proselytes are converted, and then the gospel begins to spread among neighbors and coworkers and family and friends, and Gentiles are converted out of paganism to Christ.

So the church in Rome then, was initially composed of Jews and Jewish proselytes, likely those who were saved at Pentecost and returned to their homes, but when that gospel meets those who are unbelievers it creates antagonism, and that happened in Rome. The Jewish Christians sharing the message of the Messiah met opposition from those who were in the Jewish community and unbelieving. We read about this in history, in his *Life of Claudius*, which is a story about the Emperor, the Roman Emperor Claudius, the Roman historian Suetonius writes this, "Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus. Chrestus is likely a Latinized reference to Christos, to the Messiah, to Jesus Christ. So Claudius, the Emperor of Rome, expelled all the Jews because there was a conflict among the Jews about Chrestus. Acts 18 records the same event. Acts 18:2 says, "Aquila and Priscilla had recently come from Italy because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome."

So understand then, this is how it unfolds, about 15 to 20 years after the first Christians returned from Pentecost to their homes in Rome, Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome, and this was, by the way, in 49 A.D., apparently because of the conflict that was created among the believing Jews and the unbelieving Jews, and you see that throughout the book of Acts. That's a frequent occurrence, and apparently that happened in Rome, the Jews hostile to the Christian faith were embattled with those Jews that embraced Jesus as their Messiah. As a result of this expulsion of all the Jews, the only believers left in the churches in Rome at that point, in 49 A.D., were Gentiles. After the death of Claudius in 54 A.D., the Jews were allowed to return to Rome and some of them had slowly begun to do so. So, in 57 A.D., three years after the death of Claudius, when Paul wrote this letter, the house churches in Rome were still primarily Gentile, but some Jewish believers had returned.

So let me summarize it this way, early in the history of the Christian faith the gospel was planted in Rome, probably in the year 30 A.D. More than 35 years later, when Paul wrote this letter, the believers in Rome and their faith had become known around the world. Look at Romans 1:8. "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world." Now when we talk about Paul writing this letter to the Romans, understand there was not one mega-church in Rome. In a city the size of first century Rome there were instead a number of smaller house churches. We can see this in chapter 16, turn to Romans

16, and I'll show you one example of this, Romans 16, Paul is going through and greeting everyone he knows there in Rome, and in verse 3 he says, "Greet Prisca," or Priscilla, "and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus," and he describes them further, and then notice verse 5, "also greet the church that is in their house." Now that comment implies a couple of things. It implies that the church meeting in Aquila and Priscilla's house was in Rome, otherwise it didn't make any sense for him to say to greet them. But secondly, it also implies that there were other believers who were not a part of that house church, because he says to those to whom he writes, "greet the church that meets in their house." So, understand then that scattered across that magnificent ancient city were these little pockets of believers, these little house churches, to whom Paul wrote this letter.

Now as I thought about the Roman Christians this week, I was struck with the fact that we have so much in common with those Roman believers. Do you understand that our culture, the United States' culture, is primarily Western European, albeit there are many in our day in colleges and universities who are trying to rewrite that history, nevertheless that is true, we are primarily a Western European culture. That's why when I was in college it was called History of Western Civilization. In historical terms, our culture is Greek and Roman. I mean, think for a moment about how our culture has been shaped by the Romans. I'll give you just a couple of examples.

Rome is the origin of some of our most common cultural icons. You ladies who enjoy going to the mall, do you understand that multistoried covered shopping malls are not original with 20th century America? There were multistoried, covered shopping malls in first century Rome. There were fast food restaurants in first century Rome. I had the chance to visit Pompeii and there visited one of the early fast food restaurants. I didn't eat anything, there was nothing to eat, but you could see, of course, how it was laid out and how this was a part of the culture. Their lives were focused on sports and entertainment. Like us, Rome was the world's dominant military power at that time. Also like us, it was a nation of builders and creators and inventors. Politically, our country has many similarities with the early days of the Roman Republic.

Sadly, we also have the same moral decadence and continuing moral decline. If you doubt that, read Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and you will discover that our culture is declining because of the same problems in the Roman Empire, and our culture is enslaved to the same sins. Also like the Roman Christians, we find ourselves under growing persecution, not only from the culture around us, but even potentially from our government. And we struggle, as the Roman Christians of the first century struggled, submitting to an increasingly wicked anti-Christian government. So you can see that we have much in common with these Roman believers to whom Paul wrote, because of the culture, and for that reason this letter should matter to us. But it should matter far more to us because we don't have just a little in common, we have everything in common with these people spiritually.

I want you to notice with me Romans' shared spiritual audience. There was a unique historical audience to whom Paul wrote, but he didn't just write to that group of believers in the first century in the city of Rome. He wrote this letter, in a sense, to all who believe in Jesus Christ. It is a shared spiritual audience, because when we examine the way Paul described the Romans spiritually, we discover that they were exactly like us. In fact, Paul identifies three shared spiritual realities. Notice them in verse 6, first of all, of Romans 1. This was the first shared spiritual reality that they have with us and we with them, "you also are the called of Jesus Christ." The second shared spiritual reality we have is in verse 7, we "are beloved of God," and the third shared spiritual reality is also in verse 7, we are "called as saints."

Now, this morning I just want to look at the first of those shared spiritual realities because it is often misunderstood, often not known at all, and it is so rich. Notice verse 6, we are called "the called of Jesus Christ." Let's put it this way, as we look at this spiritual reality, God called us to Himself. God called us to Himself. Again, notice verse 6, "among whom," that is among the Gentiles, among the non-Jewish pagans, among the idolaters, "you also are the called of Jesus Christ." Now to fully appreciate this I need to paint a little picture for you. I want you to stay with me. The city, the imperial city of Rome, was the center of the great Roman Empire. In the middle of the first century, when Paul wrote this letter, it was a city of somewhere between 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 people. It was known for its emperors, its senators, its generals, for its magnificent architecture, its monuments, its buildings, I love the city of Rome, not because of the church that's there, I hate it because of that, but I love it for its history. My wife will tell you that when I come back from Rome there's just an energy because of the life of the city and its history, there's so much there.

But the ancient city of Rome was also a monument to human sinfulness. If you've read anything in Roman history you understand that, but if you haven't read Roman history just read the second half of Romans 1 and you'll know exactly what first century Rome was like. It was a decadent city. It was guilty of all of the sins that you see, and we'll see that unfold as we work our way through chapter 1. That's the way the people of Rome were, but incredibly, scattered across that massive sea of sinful humanity there were these small groups of people, like the ones that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, and those little house churches sprinkled across Rome were filled with people whose lives were remarkably different from the million plus people around them. How did that happen? How did they come to be so different from their neighbors and family and friends? How did we come to be so different? Paul explains in verse 6, you were "called."

The only reason those little pockets of believers scattered across that magnificent city were different was because of something God had done. God had called them out of their paganism and rebellion to Himself. Paul uses this same word, "called," you remember, back up in verse 1 to refer to himself, when he says "I was a called apostle." In the same way that God had called

Paul to be an apostle, He called us to be believers. This emphasizes that God is the one who initiates our salvation. It is a divine act. It is a divine call. It is a divine summons.

Notice specifically, Paul says we, “are the called of Jesus Christ.” That doesn’t mean called by Jesus Christ, the rest of the New Testament makes clear, as we will see, that it is the Father who calls believers to Himself. Instead, Paul means the Father called you to belong to Jesus Christ. That’s even how some of the translations put it in English, “called to belong to Jesus Christ.” This is why you’re a Christian today and this is the heart of what it means to be a Christian. God has called you to belong to His Son. That’s why Jesus Christ has become, notice at the end of verse 4, “our Lord,” at the end of verse 7, “the Lord Jesus Christ.” It’s because God called us to belong to Him.

But I want to look a little more deeply at what Paul really is talking about here when he says, “you are the called,” because the word called refers to an event theologians have labeled the effectual call. Maybe you’ve never heard that expression. If you haven’t, stay with me, you will love this expression by the time we’re done. The effectual call, or the effective call, it’s a call by God that actually accomplishes something. Now to understand the effectual call we’ve got to backup and look at the larger scope of the New Testament. When we examine the New Testament we find that there are two related but distinct calls from God. The first we will call the general call, and the second, the effectual call. Let’s look at both of these.

First of all, the general call, what do we mean by that? The general call is simply the proclamation of the gospel message. Every time someone preaches the gospel, every time an unregenerate person hears the gospel, God is making, through that gospel message, a general call, a general invitation to believe the gospel. We read one of those this morning, didn’t we, in Isaiah 45, God says, “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” That is a general call to respond to the gospel. If I had time I would take you to Matthew 22, wherein, Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast, you remember, a king throws a wedding priest for his son, and he calls people to attend that feast. This is a general call. He says, “come to the wedding feast” of my son, and you remember the parable, they refuse, they’re busy, we’ve got things to do, no thanks, I don’t really want to come, and then Jesus finishes that parable with this statement, Matthew 22:14, “many are called,” in other words, there’s this general call, “come to the wedding feast,” of my son. So why don’t they come? He ends it this way, “many are called, but few are chosen.”

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 I think we have a beautiful picture of what this general call looks like. It’s one of my favorite passages, as you know, and Paul says, “we are ambassadors for Christ,” and every time I present the gospel, Paul says, it’s “as though God were making an appeal through us.” He’s making a general call, repent and believe, “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” So that’s the general call. Every time the gospel is presented God is in that message extending a general call, “Turn to Me and be saved.”

That brings us to the second call, the effectual call. This is when God reaches out in grace, powerfully, irresistibly, to bring a person into His kingdom. Both the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Baptist Confession of 1689 describe it essentially the same. Listen carefully,

Those whom God has predestinated to life, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time to effectually call by His word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death which they are in by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. He renews their wills, and by His almighty power, causes them to desire and pursue that which is good. He effectually draws them to Jesus Christ, yet in such a way that they come absolutely freely, being made willing by His grace.

That's the effectual call, and that is exactly what the Scripture teaches. Paul comes back to this in Romans 8. Turn to Romans 8. In one of the most familiar passages in all the New Testament, Romans 8:28, "we know that God causes all things to work together for good." Now notice how Paul describes all Christians, they are "those who love God," and, "those who are called according to God's purpose." Christians are the "called," and then he goes on to explain, verse 29, "For those whom He foreknew," that's God's eternal electing purpose in eternity past, those whom He elected to Himself, those whom He chose, "He also predestined," that is, He pre-determined our destiny, and here's our destiny, "to become conformed to the image of His Son." God said, when He chose us, someday that person is going to be just like my Son in his moral character. Now watch verse 30, "these whom He predetermined their destiny to be like Christ, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." Do you see the link? Notice that everyone called in this sense, in the sense of the effectual call, everyone called in this sense will be justified and will eventually be glorified. This is an effective call, this isn't some general invitation that everybody can refuse. Commenting on this text, William Hendrickson writes this, "God's concern for His children is an unbreakable chain. It reaches from one eternity," that's election in eternity past, "to the next," that's glorification in eternity future. This is God's purpose.

Look at Romans 9:24. This is in the heart of that challenging section about election. But notice what is said in verse 23. There are, so that He can "make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy," there are those vessels, "prepared beforehand for glory." So who are these? "Even us, whom He also called." So, the called are those who are the vessels of mercy, who were prepared beforehand for glory. God calls them, "not from among Jews only, but also from the Gentiles." Now, this is a recurrent theme in Scripture. I wish I could take you to every text and overwhelm you with how often this occurs in Scripture, but let me just show you a few. Get your fingers ready, Acts 2:38. This is the day of Pentecost, Peter finishes his sermon, and they respond the way every preacher wishes people would respond, "'Brethren, what shall we do?'" Verse 38,

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise, [*that is, the promise of the Spirit, the promise of forgiveness*] is for you and your children, [*that is, for Jewish people,*] and for all who are far off, [*that’s the Gentiles, but here’s the key, of both Jews and Gentiles*] as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.

That’s who will receive the promise, the ones God calls. Look at 1 Corinthians 1:9, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” God called you into fellowship with Christ. That’s the reason you love Christ.

Now notice verse 23,

but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews that’s a stumbling block, to Gentiles it’s foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Jews and Gentiles normally reject the message of the cross, but for the ones God effectually calls, it’s “the power of God.” Now whom does God call? Verse 26, “For consider your calling, brethren,” He doesn’t call “many wise according the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;” but instead, “the foolish,” “the weak,” verse 28, “the base things,” “the despised,” the nothings and the nobodies, He calls. Why? “So that no man may boast before God.” And here’s the key, verse 30, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus,” because He called you.

Turn over to, again I wish there were other passages I could take you to, I’m going to skip a bunch here, but let’s go to 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Here we learn something else about this calling, this effectual calling, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation,” there’s election in eternity past, “through the sanctification of the Spirit,” that is the setting apart unto holiness, “by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” Now watch verse 14, “It was for this He called you,” now notice how God calls effectually, “through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, God doesn’t just whisper in somebody’s ear. God calls us through the gospel.

Turn over to 2 Timothy 1:9. Paul says, God “saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works.” Your salvation, your calling, God’s calling you, was not according to your works. In other words, God didn’t look down and say, “Wow, look at that guy; I need him on my team.” No, He goes on to say it wasn’t our works, “but according to His own purpose and grace which He granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” Listen, the reason God chose you and called you to Himself, is because of nothing in you, it’s because He called you because He called you. It has absolutely nothing to do with something He saw in you. It’s humbling, God

just chose to show me grace when there were so many others He could have chosen to show grace.

Look at 1 Peter 5, 1 Peter 5:10, Peter's writing to those believers who are experiencing growing Roman persecution and hostility, and he says, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Listen, here's the good news, because God initiates your salvation, because God is the one who called you, He's going to complete what He started. One other passage, look at Jude 1, "Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James," now watch how Jude describes all believers, "to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." Listen, here's a great description of Christians, if you're a believer, you are "the called," you're the one God called to Himself.

Now, I want to show you an illustration of the effectual call. Turn with me to John 6. The word called does not occur in this passage, but the concept clearly does, and there's another word that has a great word picture in it. John 6:44, this is a foundational verse. You ought to memorize this verse, you ought to meditate on it. This is worth several messages, but let me just briefly walk you through it. John 6:44, this is our Lord speaking, He says, "No one," now stop there. That is a categorical denial. "No one," without exception, "can," the Greek word is a word which means to have power or ability, it's the same as in English. If you grew up in a home where there was a grammatical mother, sometimes she would say to you, it's not *can* you have a piece of dessert, it's not, do you have the physical ability to have a piece of dessert, it's *may* you have a piece of dessert. That's the word for permission, can, ability. It's the same thing in Greek, the word that's used here for can is a word which means to have power, to have ability. "No one," without exception, "has the power or ability to come to Me," in context, Jesus is talking about coming to Him for salvation, "unless," here's the one exception, "unless the Father who sent Me draws Him." The Greek word that's translated "draw" here is a powerful word. It's used eight times in the New Testament. According to a massive full shelf of Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament that I have in my library, this word means, "to compel by irresistible superiority." In fact, it's used, this word translated draw here, is used in a couple of cases to literally mean drag. For example, in Acts 16, when the owners of that slave girl got all upset that Paul had cast the demons out, they dragged him before the court. It was this word. So Jesus's meaning here is very clear. No human being has the power or ability in himself to approach Jesus for salvation. Instead, the Father must irresistibly compel him to come, this is what we call irresistible grace. It doesn't mean God drags the sinner to Christ, kicking and screaming against his will. It means He makes him willing to come, He changes his desires. This is the effectual call, the Father drawing sinners to Himself.

Now I can illustrate the difference between the general call and the effectual call we've been talking about from the conversion of R.C. Sproul. Many of you are familiar with the ministry of R.C. Sproul. R.C. tells the story that when he was a freshman in college, he and a college friend

both heard the gospel on the same night, and they both, as he puts it in quotation marks, “accepted Christ” that night. The next morning, R.C.’s friend came to him and said this, “Wasn't that crazy, what we did last night? I guess, I guess I just got carried away. You won't tell anyone, will you?” But from that night, R.C. Sproul was, and remains, an entirely different person, a committed follower of Christ. So what happened? R.C.’s friend only heard the general call, that is, the announcement of the gospel, and at some surface level, emotionally responded to it. But through that same Gospel message the Father called, effectually, R.C. to Himself, He drew him, He made him an entirely new person through the miracle of regeneration. That is the effectual call.

Unregenerate people are spiritually dead, so normally when an unbeliever hears the gospel, you know what he hears? He hears an unimpressive irrelevant message from an unimpressive irrelevant messenger. He wishes he were somewhere else, doing something else. But with one whom God has chosen, there comes a time when as he listens to the gospel message, something miraculous happens. Here's how Robert Raymond describes it, “Mysteriously, imperceptibly, he no longer hears simply the voice of the preacher. Instead, what he now hears is also the voice of God, summoning him into fellowship with His Son, and he responds to Christ in faith.” What happened? The Scriptures would say that God had effectually called an elect sinner to Himself.

I understand this at a very personal level. Until I was seventeen I sat, every week, in a church and every week I heard the truth, and many, many, many times I heard the gospel. But in February of 1978, the little country church where my dad was serving as an interim music director, sponsored a Bible conference, and since my dad was the music director it meant our family was there every time the door was open, and this was no exception. So we were there, every night, for the Bible conference, and let me tell you, as a teenager I was just thrilled. The speaker for the week was a man named Gary Gilmore, and Gary Gilmore did something that was unusual in many of the churches in which I grew up. He actually read and explained the biblical text in its context. His sermon was about heaven, taken from Revelation 21 and 22. It wasn't evangelistic at all, but he read those verses at the end of Revelation about the kind of people who won't be in heaven and I saw myself in that text. For the first time in my life I really understood at a personal level that I, Tom Pennington, would not be in heaven. There was no way, no how, because of the person I was.

And in that moment all the truth that I had heard over the years just came crashing in upon my soul and the seeds of truth that had been planted all along the way produced a harvest. In terms of what we're discussing this morning, as I heard the truth the Father, that night, was in that truth drawing me to Himself, effectually calling me to Himself, and I believed. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ it's because one day the same thing happened to you. You heard the gospel, perhaps as you had countless times before, or maybe for you it was the very first time you heard it, but on that day God the Father called you through that gospel message to Himself and He called you so that you would forever belong to Jesus Christ. This is absolutely staggering. It's absolutely

humbling because it had nothing to do with me. It had everything to do with God and His grace. We are “the called of Jesus Christ.”

Now what are the implications of this? There are many of them, let me just give you two, very briefly, turn first of all to 1 Thessalonians 2. First Thessalonians 2:12, Paul says, I want you to “walk in a manner,” that's another way of saying I want you to live in keeping with, I want you to “walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” Here's how you ought to respond to the amazing truth that the reason you're sitting in here this morning in Christ, if you are, is because God's in His grace called you to Himself, you ought to respond by living your life in a way that's worthy of the one who called you. That means in how you treat your spouse, it means in how you interact within your family, it means in what you do at work, and what you do in interacting with your neighbors and family and friends. Live in a way that casts a good reflection on the God who called you.

There's one other implication. Turn to 1 Peter 2. Again, these are just two that sort of jump out at me. There are many others. First Peter 2:9, “But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION.” This is us believers. Why? Why do we enjoy such an exalted position? “So that,” for this purpose, “you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Open your mouth and talk about the God who called you. Tell others that He is a savior, that He rescues the one who calls out to Him. You are “the called of Jesus Christ.” Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are overwhelmed by the truth we've studied together this morning. We are humbled, Lord, that You would call us out of darkness into Your marvelous light, that through the gospel message there was a day in our lives when You called us to Yourself to belong to Jesus Christ. Father, we love You and we're so grateful. Help us to manifest that gratitude by living lives that are worthy of You, the one who called us. Father, help us to live lives that honor You in our homes, in how we treat our spouses, and our children, and our parents, and what we do at work and at school, and how we interact with all the people around us. Father, help us to reflect our gratitude as well in proclaiming Your excellencies, You, the one who called us out of darkness into marvelous light. And Father I pray that today, through this simple message, You would be in the truth, calling someone here to Yourself. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.