

Why Romans Matters
Beloved of God
Romans 1:7
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Today, in the time we have together before communion, I want us to finish our study of Paul's opening greeting to the Romans, in Romans 1:1-7. Because it's been a couple of weeks since I've had a chance to unfold this to you, let me just remind you that Paul's greeting here follows the basic form of first century letters, but as you would expect from an apostle of our Lord, it's much longer than the average greeting and it is much more rich and profound than the typical letter. Let's read it together one last time as we complete our study of this paragraph. Romans 1:1-7. I hope, by the way, that in the future as you read the openings to Paul's letters, now that we've studied through one in detail, you will never read them the same way again. There is so much there. Paul writes:

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 descendant 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, as we have discovered in that typical opening, in some ways, we find something that's not typical. Paul here unfolds for us really, and as he did for his first century readers, the reasons why Romans matters. There are three of them. The first one is in verse 1. It's because Paul wrote it. This letter should matter to us, as it mattered to the believers in first century Rome, because it came from Paul, and Paul was an apostle, a proxy for our Lord Jesus Christ. So what is written here is not from Paul. Ultimately, it is from our Lord. Therefore, it matters to us. There's a second reason that Romans matters in these verses, and it's in verses 2 through 5, because it's about the gospel. Nothing matters more to sinful man than the good news that God has announced and this letter is about that good news. He introduces it at the end of verse 1: it is the gospel of God, its source is in God; God is the one who's proclaiming it. And then, he unfolds some of the details about that gospel in verses 2 through 5, and we looked at those in detail.

The third reason that Romans matters comes in verses 6 and 7, and it's because of its intended audience. Paul identifies the audience to which he writes and we learned that really, ultimately,

he writes to us. And, therefore, this letter matters. But he unfolds the identity of his audience in two ways. First of all, he identifies Romans' unique historical audience. Paul wrote this letter to actual churches in an actual place in the middle of the first century. Notice how he identifies them in two ways: verse 6, "...among whom you also..." That refers back to the end of verse 5, "...among all the Gentiles for His name's sake..." So in other words, he is writing this to a group of people made up primarily of Gentiles, although as we will see, there were Jews who were part of these churches as well.

The second way that he identifies them historically is in verse 7, "...to all who are....in Rome." This letter is addressed to the churches that were in the great imperial city in the middle of the first century. Now as we've discovered, the first believers in Rome were probably saved under the ministry of the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost. Sojourners from Rome are mentioned in Acts 2:10; they were probably saved on that day, baptized, and then returned to their homes in Rome. Some 20-plus years later, Paul writes this letter and, by then, the gospel has spread across that imperial city, so that there are a number of churches across the great city of Rome. That's the unique historical audience. But as we discovered, we share so much in common with them, even historically, because our culture is essentially Roman. We looked at that as well.

But, the intended audience of this letter wasn't merely the historical audience. We notice, secondly, Romans' shared spiritual audience. Paul writes to really all believers in all times who share common spiritual characteristics with these Roman Christians. Notice there are three shared spiritual realities that make Romans significant for every true believer. We've looked at one of them a couple of weeks ago. It's this: God called us to Himself. Notice verse 6: "...among whom, [that is, from the Gentiles, the pagans,] you also are the called of Jesus Christ." Paul means that the Father called us to belong to Jesus Christ. This is what theologians call the *effectual call*. If you sit here this morning, and you're a Christian, it's because one day you heard the gospel, and you really heard the gospel. Maybe you'd heard it many times before, but on that day, the Father was speaking in and through the gospel message, calling you effectually, we could even say irresistibly, to Himself. He was drawing you, to use Jesus' expression in John 6. That doesn't mean He was dragging you against your will. It means He was changing your will, so that there was nothing you wanted more than to come to the Father in and through His Son. But He was drawing you. You are the called to belong to Jesus Christ. God the Father, at a point in time, called you through the gospel message to belong to Jesus Christ.

But that raises a question and that is, why? Why did God call us to Himself through the gospel? Why us? Or let me make it more specific, why did God call you on that day He called you, whether it was through reading the scripture, or whether it was through a friend, a stranger, or through a message you heard. Somehow, He called you to Himself. The question is why? Why you? Why me? Well, the answer comes in Paul's second description of all believers. It's because God set His eternal love upon us. Paul says you are, notice verse 7, "...beloved of God." Literally, in the Greek text, verse 7 reads this way; it sort of breaks these two things into two

different descriptions. Here's how it reads in the Greek text: "To all the ones who are in Rome, beloved of God."

That is a staggering statement. Think about that for a moment. I mean, we are so accustomed to this that it just sort of runs off of our tongues and over our heads without really bearing fruit in our lives. Think about the fact that there are people on this planet, scattered across this planet, on whom the eternal Creator God has set His specific love. Clearly, Paul meant to say that God's love for the believers in the churches in Rome set them apart from the other 1 to 1.5 million people who inhabited that great city. They were, in a unique way, beloved of God.

Now it's important for us to note, it is very true that God loves all men. God loves all men, just as He commands us to do. We looked at that when we looked at the Sermon on the Mount, chapter 5, verses 44 and 45. It's been a couple of years ago now, when we were there. But you remember that, if you were here at the time, we noted what our Lord said. Listen to His words, "...I say to you, love your enemies...so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven..." You love your enemies because God loves His enemies; Your Father loves His enemies. And then Jesus gives an illustration of how He loves His enemies, "...for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and [He] sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous."

Here is the expression of God's love in what we would call His common grace. God does good to all men, even His enemies. Ever thought about this? If God didn't love His enemies, (right now that rain that's falling outside) would only be falling on the yards of believers. That's what Jesus said. If God didn't love His enemies, the sun would only come up over us. But God loves His enemies, and, therefore, He does good, even to those who will never trust Him, who will never believe in Him. But that does not mean that God loves all people in the same way and with the same intensity. He loves all men, but He doesn't love all men the same way He loves His own.

This is clear in scripture. 1 John 3:1 puts it this way, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, [in order] that we.... [should] be called [the] children of God..." There's a great love, there's love of a different order, a different magnitude that God has shown to those who are called His children. John 13:1: John begins this upper room discourse with this description as Jesus contemplates His coming crucifixion. John writes, "...Jesus knowing that His hour had come [and] that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." The Greek word, "to the end" means completely, He loved them comprehensively, He loved them perfectly. That was how He loved His own.

So, God loves all mankind. But He loves His own with a special, electing, saving, adopting love. It is a unique love. Paul makes that clear even here in Romans. Turn over to Romans chapter 5. He begins this chapter by identifying to whom it is this chapter's written, very clear; it's those who have been justified by faith. It's those who have peace with God. It's those in verse 2 who stand in grace. So he's talking to believers, and notice what he says to us as believers. Notice

verse 5, the knowledge of God's love, that's probably how we should understand this, the knowledge of the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who was given to us. How do we know of God's love for us? Verse 6: "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." And he goes on in verse 7 to say, "You know, listen, there are human beings who will give their lives for the people they love, and for good people." "But...[Verse 8]...God demonstrates [He proves] His own love toward us, [who are the justified by faith, who stand in grace] in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is the ultimate demonstration of God's love.

Iain Murray has written a book called, *The Cross: The Pulpit of God's Love*. That's exactly right. If you ever have questions, believer, about God's love for you, just go back and think about what the Father did at the cross in giving His own, unique, one-of-a-kind Son, for you. He demonstrated His love, His special love for His own. You see it in Romans 8:35. Paul's talking about the troubles and struggles of this life, and he says, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" The love that Christ has for us. And then he lists some of the things that we encounter in this life: tribulation, distress, persecution, natural disasters (famine), personal disaster (nakedness), or man-made disaster (sword). He says, "Listen, none of those, none of those changes the love that Christ has for us." Verse 37: "...in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."

And then he changes, and he says this in verse 38, "For I am convinced [I am persuaded, I am confident] that neither death, nor life..." Stop there. If we could just stop there, that's all inclusive, there's nothing else, there's death and there's life. He says none of that, nothing that can happen to you in this life, nothing that can happen to you in the process of death, nothing that comes after death is in any way, notice what he says, "...able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So nothing can separate us from Christ's love, nothing can separate us from the Father's love. Nothing.

Notice how he goes on in other places in his letters to make this point. Look at Ephesians chapter 2. We looked at this text three weeks ago now. But But I want you to notice in a different context, Ephesians 2:4, after describing our sinfulness, Paul writes, "But God, being rich in mercy, because [underscore that word, because] of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ..." The reason you sit here this morning with new life in Christ, the reason you are spiritually alive, is because of the great love with which He loved you. That's what motivated Him to make you alive.

Now, you see the connection in several texts between God's election and His love. Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:4, we see that it was God's love that moved Him to choose us. 1 Thessalonians 1:4: "...knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you..." You see the connection between His love and His choosing us, His election, as it's called? You see this again in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, and here you have the flow of redemptive history in our lives. "...we should always give

thanks to God for you, brethren [here's where it starts] beloved by the Lord,...[and out of that love] God has chosen you from the beginning [there's election, and out of that election comes our actual salvation] for salvation..." And that happened as the Spirit sets us apart to God and through our response, faith in the truth, faith that's been given to us by God Himself. "It was for this He called you through our gospel, [and here's glorification] that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It's all there, and it's all rooted ultimately in God's electing love, in His love for us. God's eternal love for us - that was the moving force and it was moving toward a specific goal, a terminus. But the goal of God's love, listen carefully, the reason God set His love upon us was because He had decided to adopt us as His own children. Look at Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians 1:3, Paul begins to recite all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. And the first blessing he comes to in verse 4 is our election. "He...[that is, God the Father]...chose us [that is, every believer] in...[Christ, when?] before the foundation of the world, Why? Here was the goal. He wanted us to]... be holy and blameless before Him." We learn in other texts, He wanted us to be like Jesus Christ so we'd reflect His glory.

Now, in the Greek text this is one sentence, and so you have to go back to the main verb, "He chose us," and then put it together with the end of verse 4. "He chose us, in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." In other words, God set His love upon us, and He chose us to be His children. He set His love on you and me because He had decided to adopt us. Now, many here this morning understand this in a very personal way. Perhaps your parents adopted you, or maybe you have adopted one or more of your children. You understand this in a unique way that the rest of us cannot. This is what God has done for us.

You see, when a couple chooses to adopt a child, they are not personally responsible for the tragic condition of the other children they don't adopt. And neither is God personally responsible for the sinful condition of those He does not choose to adopt. It's because of their own sinful choices. And the adopting parents don't actively condemn all those other children by their choice of one or two children. They simply pass by the other children, and chose the child or the children on whom they will set their love. This is what God has done. He has adopted us.

But listen, there's one key difference between human adoptions and God's adoption of us. Sometimes, not always, but sometimes human parents chose the child they're going to adopt based on something in that child. Maybe it's the appearance of the child. Maybe it's, and often this is true, it's the response of that particular child. A Christian couple will go and visit an orphanage somewhere internationally, and as they're interacting with the children there's one child that just seems to respond to them in a way the other children don't. And they chose therefore to set their love on that child. There's certainly nothing wrong with that at a human level.

But understand this: God did not choose to adopt us based on anything in us. He didn't look down and say, "Aw, there's a really cute one, I'm going to adopt that one." No. So why did God choose to adopt us? Why me? Why you? Why did the eternal God set His adopting love on me and on you? Well, there's an introduction to the reason using Israel as an example in Deuteronomy 7:7-8. Moses is talking about God's choice of Israel, and this is what He says, "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples..." In other words, God didn't choose you, Israel, to be His people because you were impressive, because there was something in you. No, but because the Lord loved you. Did you catch what He said? He loved you because...He loved you. That's the answer; that's the reason.

And the New Testament makes exactly the same point. In fact, Paul makes it right here in Romans. Look at Romans chapter 9. This a great text and one we'll spend some time in when we get there, eventually. Romans chapter 9. Paul is dealing with the issue of why all Jewish people didn't believe the gospel. Why is that? Why didn't they embrace their Messiah? Is there some problem with the message? Verse 6: Paul says, "...it is not as though the word of God has failed." It's not a problem with the message. Instead, he says it's because it was never God's intention that all the physical descendants of Abraham be redeemed. And he cites three examples, three men. The first one is Abraham. He says, "Listen, Abraham is a believer because God chose him; He snatched him out of his idolatry in Ur and made him one of His own." And then he uses a second example, and that's Isaac. God chose Isaac and not Ishmael. You say, "Yeah, but that might be because Ishmael wasn't the full son of Abraham and Sarah. He was only Abraham's child, so maybe it was because of something in Ishmael."

So, Paul uses a third example where's there's no question. It's twin boys. Notice verse 10: "...not only this,... there was Rebekah, also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad...[so God's choice of one of them had nothing to do with anything they had done, but] ...so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of [their] works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, [This is My decision] 'THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.'.... 'JACOB I LOVED...ESAU I HATED.'" You say, "Whoa, wait a minute. That's not fair." Verse 14: "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?" He says, don't question God's fairness. Verse 15: "For He says to Moses, 'I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.' So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills [on human decision] or the man who runs [human effort], but on God who has mercy."

You see what Paul is saying? There was absolutely no reason in you that God set His love upon you. Nothing. Nothing in me. Nothing that made us desirable, attractive, absolutely nothing about us whatsoever. It was simply God's sovereign decision to have mercy on whom He would have mercy. Lloyd-Jones writes, "We are what we are, not because of our goodness, not because

of our lives, not because of anything in us. It all comes from the love of God, that everlasting, inscrutable love. Whatever made Him look upon us? We don't know. It is amazing. While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us. While we were sinners, and opposed, and aliens, it was then He did it. We are beloved of God."

But the truth is even more amazing than that. Turn to John 17. This is truly staggering. John 17:22: this is in our Lord's prayer on the night before His betrayal. He's praying to the Father, He says, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, [that is, to My followers] that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, [I want the world to know, Father, that I am everything I've claimed to be] and [I want the world to know that You loved them. Who? My followers, my disciples, those You've given to Me. You, Father, have] loved them, [And here's the staggering part beyond that] even as [in the same way, with the same intensity] You have loved Me."

Let that sink into your mind for a moment. Jesus Christ, who perfectly knows the heart of the Father, says, "Father You have loved, the ones You've given to me, You've loved My followers, in the same way, with the same kind of love, with the same intensity that You loved Me." If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, God loves you in the same way and to the same degree that He loves His unique, one-of-a-kind Son. There's no difference in His love for you and His love for Christ. We are beloved of God.

There's a third part of our common spiritual identity. Not only did God call us to Himself, not only did He set His love upon us, but thirdly, God set us apart to Himself. He set us apart to Himself. Notice Romans 1:7: "...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints..." We are called as saints. It is by a divine act, a divine call, a divine summons that sinners become saints. Martin Luther writes, "They are saints, not because of any merit on their part, but because of God's love and call. So that Paul ascribes all things, their whole salvation, to God. No one becomes a saint unless he is called by God."

Now, I think you understand that *saints* is Paul's normal way to refer to all Christians. The English word *saint* comes from the Latin word *sanctus*, which means consecrated or holy. And that's because the Greek word literally means 'holy ones.' You are called as 'holy ones.' But the focus of this word translated *saint*, is not on our behavior, rather, the focus is on our spiritual position. Notice in verse 7, "...all who are... [loved] by God in Rome...." In other words, all true believers in Rome were saints, without exception. Sadly, our view of what makes a saint has been terribly skewed by the Roman Catholic Church. But the biblical word for saint is not a title for some special, select group that's somehow super pious, and therefore deserving of special veneration. This word is used for all Christians. If you are in Christ, you are, today, a saint.

Now, if you're thinking with me you should be asking yourself this question: how can we, who are so constantly sinning, be called saints? It's because the description of us as 'holy ones' does

not refer so much to that ongoing, progressive growth in grace, as it does to something that happened to us and to every Christian, at the moment of salvation. Theologians call it *definitive sanctification*, that is, it's sanctification that isn't our progressively becoming more like Christ, but it's sort of a onetime event that happens at salvation. It has to do, not with our individual spiritual progress, but with our common spiritual position.

The Old Testament helps us understand this. If you've read the Old Testament at all, you know that the word *holy* is used in some surprising ways. When something was set apart from common, ordinary use to the use of God, it's called holy. So you have holy buildings, and holy places, and you have holy pots and pans, and holy fire, that burns on the altar, and holy incense, and all of these things are holy. They're not morally pure, that's not what it's saying. What is it saying? It meant those places and objects had been set apart from sinful, everyday use to the service of God. That's what it means when we're called 'the holy ones.' It means at the moment of our salvation, God set us apart from sin, and devoted us to Himself and to His use. That's what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 6:11, when he says, he talks about a number of sins, and he says, "Such were some of you; but you were washed, [past tense]...you were sanctified, [past tense; you were set apart]."

I've used this illustration before but, it makes the point I want to make here. And that is, a number of years ago, after my dad's death, I had his watch. It was just an ordinary watch, nothing really special about it. I had my grandfather's railroad watch, and I'd already set it aside, but I just had this ordinary, stainless steel Seiko watch that my father had worn. And I sometimes wore it around, and used it in various ways, and then I got to thinking, "You know, my dad's not coming back, and once this watch is done, it's done; I'm not going to get anything else from my dad, I probably shouldn't be using this every day." And so I took that watch and I set it apart from every day use to something special. That's what God did with us, the moment of salvation. He set us apart from our past and our sinfulness unto Himself and His special use.

Robert Reymond writes, "Every Christian, the moment he becomes a Christian by virtue of his union with Christ, is instantly constituted a saint, and enters into a new relationship with God Himself, a relationship in which he becomes His servant." You can't decide to be a saint. You don't become a saint by your behavior and your efforts, you're not voted into being a saint by a group of cardinals. When God effectually calls us to Himself, He calls us as saints, as those who've been set apart unto Him. Now, although the word *saints* describes our position, it also reminds us that God expects those who have been called saints by God, by an act of His grace, to live in keeping with that calling. We are saints, so live like ones that have been set apart to God.

Paul will do this, in fact, in Ephesians chapter 5, for example. He's talking about sexual sin. He deals with sins of behavior, sexual sins of behavior, sexual sins of the mind, lust, etcetera, and he says, this, he says, don't do those things, as "...is proper among saints..." He says, "listen, you've already been set apart for God and His holy use, don't act like you haven't been." 1 Peter 1:15:

“...like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior...” Live in keeping with your calling. John Murray writes, “The life into which the people of God are ushered is one that separates them from this present evil world, and imparts to them a character consonant with that consecration.” Listen to this, “If we find ourselves at home in the ungodliness, lust and filth of this present world, it is because we have not been called effectually by God’s grace.”

Those whom God calls to Himself, He calls as saints, as ones who’ve been set apart. So, we learned in verses 6 and 7 that Paul’s letter to the Romans was in reality written to all genuine Christians everywhere and in every time, because all of us share these common characteristics. All true Christians, like those in Rome, are those whom God has called to Himself to belong to Jesus Christ, those on whom God has set His love, and those whom God has set apart as His own special, holy possession. Therefore, this letter is every bit as appropriate for us today as it was for them, because we’re just like them; this is who we are.

Now, notice Paul completes his greeting with his normal blessing, which is really a prayer. To all of those who were called to belong to Jesus Christ, beloved by God, called as saints, Paul writes this in verse 7, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It’s really interesting how he puts these together, because in Greek, the word *grace* sounds a lot like the normal Greek greeting that’s translated ‘greeting.’ So, it’s the sound of the Greek word, and the word *peace* is the normal Jewish greeting. So Paul puts the two together to show that both Jews and Gentiles have been brought together as the people of God. He greets them both in the way they’re normally greeted.

Now in praying for grace and peace for us, Paul was really just repeating the priestly blessing of Numbers 6. My wife and I, through the years, have sung this to our children at bedtime, from Numbers 6, the Lord be gracious to you and give you peace. It’s really what he was reciting. Paul prays, “May God, who has become our Father, grant you through Jesus Christ, who has become our Lord, two things: grace and peace.” Grace - we’re going to learn a lot about as we work our way through Romans. It’s mentioned 24 separate times in this letter. Let me give you a preliminary definition that we’ll fill out as time goes on. Grace is the quality in God that delights in doing good to those who deserve exactly the opposite. Every one of those words is very important to me. There is a quality in God that delights in doing good to those who deserve exactly the opposite. You already experienced that, Christian, at salvation. Paul says, ‘I want you to continue to experience wave after wave of goodness from God that you don’t deserve.’

And peace - *peace* is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word *shalom*. Now, we have objective peace with God, in chapter 5, verse 1, he says, “...we have peace with God.” That is, the war is over; we’re no longer His enemies. But here, I think he’s using the word in the typical Hebrew sense. This was a Hebrew greeting, *shalom* is the Hebrew word, and this is the Greek equivalent. He’s saying, basically, I want you to experience the ongoing, positive benefits and blessings that

come from God. God's positive blessing. Paul prays that God will continue to extend His grace and His peace to us. And notice verse 7, that He'll do so through our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, think about this: every time you receive any expression of God's grace, every time you experience any divine blessing, known as peace here, it's because of the work of Jesus Christ. His past work in His life, and death and resurrection, and His present intercession on our behalf. It's the work of Christ our Lord that brought us grace and peace, and it's that work that we celebrate in the Lord's Table together.

Our Father, we will never know the cost that was truly paid, but we thank You for what we do understand. We thank you for the truth that we have exchanged our sin for His righteousness, His death for our life. Father, we thank You for the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ. He, as though I, accursed and left alone; I, as though He, embraced and welcomed home. Father, we thank You. Help us to live in keeping with our calling, as those who've been set apart. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.