

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 1, Verses 1-7**  
**Notes from Tuesday July 12, 2010**  
**Last Revised on July 17, 2010**

**Songs**

**Opening Prayer**

Dear God,

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Thank you for bringing us here again tonight, to study your word together.

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Please watch over those who are running late and may still be on their way here.

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Please help them get here safely.

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Please watch over those who cannot be here tonight because of work or some other conflict.

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Please help them to come next time.

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Especially please watch over those who have not yet understood that you are God, and that you draw your people to yourself and speak to them, to us, through the Bible.

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Please open the hearts and minds of all who are far away from you and lead them to someplace where they can hear your words spoken.

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Please watch over us, here tonight, and over Christians everywhere who are gathered around your word.

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Please protect us from all evil, without and within, which might possibly come against us and try to snatch your word from us.

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Let your voice, O Lord, be the only voice that we hear.

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Please protect us from mistakes in our understanding and guide us into all truth.

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Please forgive our sins and sanctify us and help us to willingly do that which pleases you.

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And above all please grant us a better and more perfect faith in you.

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In Jesus Name we pray,

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Amen.

## Introduction

Last week, for those who were attending this class for the first time, I explained something about this class and how it is conducted.

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We also did some introduction to the Bible generally, in an effort to place The Letter of Paul to the Romans within some overall Biblical context..

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Tonight I will not review those things again. So if you are new to Bible study or new to this class, and you were not here last week, you may wish to review the notes from last week's class which have been posted to the website that we maintain for this class.

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Last week as part of our general introduction we read the first 15 verses of Chapter 1 of the Letter of Paul to the Romans, and discussed these verses in a very general way, mostly to understand who were the author and the readers of this letter.

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Tonight we will reread and carefully study the first seven verses of Chapter 1.

## The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 1-7

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 1, verses 1-7, in Japanese.

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Thank you. Now will someone please read it in English.

**1Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

**2which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,**

**3concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh**

**4and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,**

**5through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,**

**6including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,**

**7To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Thank you.

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From our general introduction last week, we know that this document which we have just begun to read, is one of the 12 letters written by the Apostle Paul which are included in our

Bible.

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We know that these letters were all written in Greek, that this particular letter we are studying is addressed to certain people living in Rome, and that probably this letter was written during Paul's third missionary journey in around 55 AD.

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Regarding Paul, himself, we know certain things from what Luke has written in Acts of the Apostles and certain things from what Paul himself wrote in the 12 letters included in our Bible. We also have a brief remark concerning Paul in 2 Peter. And there are some additional data concerning the life and death of Paul available from outside the Bible, some of it probably true.

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On top of this basic information we have mountains and mountains of books that have been written analyzing Paul's writings and speculating about Paul.

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We could very easily spend a year trying to review the smallest part of all this material on Paul, but we will not do that. This class is not about Paul. It is about the Letter which he wrote to the Romans, which is about Jesus!

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However in order to understand this letter properly, it will sometimes be helpful to consider at least some of what we know about Paul, particularly what we know from elsewhere in the Bible.

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For example I think it is worth asking how this letter we are presently studying compares to other letters written by Paul and how Paul's letters compare to other letters written in the Roman Empire in those days.

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I mean would this seem like just another letter to the people who received it, or would this strike them as extraordinary in some ways and, if so, how was it extraordinary?

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Well, for one thing, it appears that most of the letters written by Paul which we have in our Bible are longer than the letters that were normally written in those days.

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And this is especially true of Romans, which is the longest of the 12 Pauline letters that we have.

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Upon receiving this document, the recipients in Rome would presumably have been struck, first of all, by its length. You can almost hear them say: "Wow, somebody has just sent us a really long letter!" That in itself says something ...

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Paul had a lot to say to them. He felt that it was important. He has been forced to say these things in a letter, rather than in person, as he presumably communicated similar things in Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and other places where we know that he spent many months or sometimes several several years teaching face to face an in person.

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This may also explain why Romans is so doctrinal and systematic compared to Paul's

other letters and why it includes so little that is personal or directed at particular issues and problems in Rome.

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Paul had a lot of basic stuff to say, and it was the really important, foundational, stuff.

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Having said that, except for being a bit on the long side, Paul's letters all do tend to follow the standard format for letters written in those days, among civilized people, within the Roman Empire.

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For example most letters in those days began with a prescript consisting of the sender's name in the nominative case followed by the recipient's name in the dative case, followed by a short greeting and Paul's letters follow this convention exactly.

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In fact that is what we have just read, in verses 1-7 of Chapter 1, the prescript of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

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Paul's letters are also, by the way, said to be very well written in the form of Greek common to that era. So from the beginning the readers would have understood that they were reading the letter of a literate, civilized, well-educated person.

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Paul's prescripts, like Paul's letters generally, do tend to be longer than was common with personal letters of that day, and the prescript of Romans is the longest of all the letters of Paul that we have.

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So in addition to the length of the letter overall, the readers might have been struck, upon starting to read, by the unusually long prescript.

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And what is especially long in this case is the first part of the prescript describing Paul, the author.

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In this respect, Romans resembles the letters written in those days by Roman officials who, in addition to their name, would also add their titles and descriptions of their offices and authority.

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So probably the recipients of Paul's letter would have been struck not only by its unusual length, overall, and the unusual length of the letter's Prescript but also and, first of all, by the lengthy and some say rather majestic description of the author, Paul, and his offices and authority.

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But at the same time Paul's lengthy self-description and much that is to follow expresses humble, loving, Godly things that would never be found in any communication from imperial Rome!

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Likewise the the greeting which concludes the prescript, that is the second half of verse 7, is profoundly and beautifully Christian.

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In a year from now, when we finally come to the concluding segment of this letter, which begins at verse 14 of chapter 15, we will find similar things to say about that --- i.e. that it is an ending fairly typical of the letters of the period but with some uniquely Christian, and uniquely Pauline flavor to it.

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In summary, then, what we have in our hand is a letter typical of an intelligent, well-educated Roman of the First Century, but one that is longer than usual (even for Paul who tended to write long letters) and one that begins with with an extraordinarily long description of the sender and his office, and one that is very Christian in terms of its content.

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I think all would agree that it is the content of Romans, and not the form or the style in which it is written that is most remarkable.

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Now let's consider in detail the content of the long prescript which we have just read.

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Again Verse 1 reads:

**(Verse 1)**

**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

Verse one, and the whole letter, begins with the name "Paul"

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As we have already said, this is the place, in a letter written in that time and place, where the name of the author is supposed to appear.

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We know by this and many other reasons that this letter was written by a man named Paul, and that he was the Paul of which we know certain things from our reading of Acts, the other Pauline Epistles, and 2 Peter.

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We know, for example, from reading Acts, that Paul was also known by the name of Saul.

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We know that he began his life as a kind of a super-Jew who persecuted Christians but that upon encountering the risen Lord on the road to Damascus he was suddenly converted to Christianity, and became the hardest working of all the apostles.

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Some people mistakenly think that his name was changed from Saul to Paul upon his conversion to Christianity, but there is no Biblical evidence of this.

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Probably people conflate this with the Biblical stories about how Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and other characters from the Old Testament were given new names by God after major changes in their status.

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But there is no evidence of anything like this having happened with Saul.

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On the contrary, Luke in Acts refers to him as Saul both before and after his conversion and

so too, for that matter does the Holy Spirit!

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The significance of this for our immediate purposes is that, Paul had two names and when composing the letter before us, he chose one of them by which to identify himself, and he did not choose the Jewish one. This is true of all of Paul's letters and, I believe, of all of his dealings with gentiles as recorded in Acts. He does not wear his Jewishness on his sleeve, although he sometimes does play that up when dealing with those who are overly proud of their Jewishness.

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We also know from Acts that Paul was born a Roman Citizen. And from secular history we know that Roman Citizens had three names: one associated with their clan, one with their family, and one with themselves personally. (Saul was probably not one of Paul's Roman names but a name used only within the Jewish community.)

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It was not unusual for Roman Citizens to identify themselves with several names, particularly in a formal setting or document. Paul could have done so in this letter, which would have drawn attention to his Roman citizenship. It is almost surprising that he didn't, in addressing this letter to Rome itself.

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But in composing this letter Paul has mentioned only his Roman personal name, something which even slaves would have had. And there is no place in the Bible, or outside the Bible so far as I know, where we are ever told what his clan or family names were. We know only that he was a Roman citizen who went about identifying himself only by his personal name Paul.

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This informality and down-playing of his citizenship makes sense, when you consider that some zealous Jews would have hated Paul for his ties to the Roman occupier, and many Jews and gentiles would have been jealous of Paul's status as a citizen of Rome, which was a very rare and valuable thing in those days.

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It may occur to those of you who have read Acts that Paul sometimes did assert his rights as a citizen of Rome, very aggressively, in order to achieve certain objectives during his missionary journeys. (...just as he sometimes but not usually aggressively asserted his Jewishness...)

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That is indeed true, but he seems only to have asserted his Roman citizenship when dealing with Roman soldiers and high officials of the Roman Government. Their shock and dismay upon first discovering that he was a citizen of Rome is perhaps the best proof of how well he ordinarily hid his Roman citizenship.

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This absence of any claim to worldly (or religious) status and authority would have been all the more significant to people who actually knew of Paul's status as a Roman Citizen! (or Pharisee) They would notice that he did not put these things first and understand that Paul's priorities were very different than those of the world in which he lived.

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In verse 1, the name of the author, Paul, is followed by three clauses, each of which describes

Paul and his office and authority.

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First, Paul is described as “**a servant of Christ Jesus**”

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The word here translated as “servant” means literally “bond-servant” or “slave”

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It is hard to think of any word that a civilized Greek speaking person, particularly a freeborn Citizen of Rome, would be less likely to use to describe himself...

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and it is hard to think of a word more likely to stir feelings of revulsion among highborn readers...

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“Paul, a slave”.... what?! ... yuck!

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Perhaps the only reason that Paul’s mind could hold such a thought, was his rabbinical training and deep Jewish roots.

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Because that same word here translated servant was also used when translating into Greek those passages of the Hebrew Old Testament which speak of the Servant of the Lord --- Moses, Joshua, David as prominent examples.

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So it was not so difficult for Paul to understand that being a slave to God is actually a good thing.

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But that way of thinking would not have come easily to gentile readers, or perhaps even to Hellenistic Jews, and this describes most of the readers of this letter.

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So by proclaiming himself to be a slave, Paul probably got their attention right off the bat.

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Here the one of whom Paul claims to be a slave is “**Christ Jesus**”

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“**Christ**” is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah,” God’s anointed one.

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This term was used in the Old Testament to describe men whom God had specially chosen, including the patriarchs, priests, prophets, Kings, especially King’s of David’s line, and most especially the Son of David who was foreseen and promised to come and restore Israel.

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Paul claims to be the servant of that One.

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The order here (i.e. Christ Jesus instead of Jesus Christ) is probably calculated and significant.

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Because it tends to emphasize the office of Christ and the promises made concerning him in the Old Testament and to make it clear that this is not just an alternative proper name for Jesus of Nazareth, as it would probably have seemed to many of the readers of this letter.

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Paul makes it very clear that he is a slave of the Messiah of Israel, the King of the Jews.

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This may have been provocative.

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Certainly Paul's claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of Israel who had risen from the dead would have been provocative to unconverted Jews.

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Like Christ, his master, Paul is an inherently divisive figure.

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Next, Paul is described as **"called to be an apostle"**

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The word here translated **"call"** means the sort of gracious divine call that is always answered by the faith and obedience of the one who is called, what is sometimes referred to as an "effective call."

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Abraham was called. Moses was called. David was called. The prophets were called. Jesus' other apostles were called. And in the same way Christians are called.

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The word describes not just an invitation, but an invitation accepted and made certain by God.

Paul is an apostle precisely because Christ made him one.

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To reject Paul as an apostle is to oppose the will of God, perhaps even to reject God Himself.

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Therefore a claim to have been called by God to any particular office is a really big claim!

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And what is an apostle?

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The word generally refers to an authorized agent or representative.

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Christ has made Paul his authorized agent or representative.

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This is a bigger claim, even, than that of being called by God to be a pastor, preacher, or teacher.

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Paul speaks and acts in the Name of Christ, with His power and authority.

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This term is sometimes used in a very general way, in which case it could be said that all Christians are are apostles of Christ.

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However this term is ordinarily used in the Bible in a very high and technical way, and this is how Paul means to use the term here.

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The narrowest definition would would apply only to the 12 originally chosen and taught and



then sent out by Jesus, possibly less Judas, and possibly plus Matthias who was chosen to replace Judas.

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But Paul describes himself as part of this group, albeit the least of them, because he came last after first being a persecutor of the church.

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In his writing Luke rarely if ever admits additional names to the list of Apostles, however we do read in Acts 14:14 of Paul and Barnabas being referred to collectively as apostles.

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And in the conclusion of Romans (Verse 16:7) Paul may identify two other men, Andronicus and Junias, as being apostles, although the ESV translators have not read it that way.

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In any case, the number of men who can be rightfully referred to as apostles in the sense that Paul means here, is very small.

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Finally, in the third and final clause of Verse 1, Paul describes himself as **“set apart for the gospel of God”**

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The term here translated **“set apart”** is used in the Old Testament to describe things which have been consecrated to the service of the Lord:

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Levitical priests, firstborn male children and animals, the “firstfruits” of agricultural produce to be offered to God.

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So how exactly is Paul supposed to represent Christ and to serve him?

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The answer has to do with something called **“the gospel of God.”**

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The word here translated “gospel” was used in Paul’s day to describe announcements regarding the Imperial Household, such as announcement of the birth of an heir to the Emperor, the heir’s coming of age, his accession. I guess we still have some of that in Japan! And in England and other places where there still is an Imperial or Royal Family.

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The related verb was also used in the Greek Old Testament, meaning “to announce good news,” such as victory in battle, vengeance, vindication, salvation, and the coming of God’s kingdom.

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Paul’s listeners might hear one or both aspects of this, understanding that “the gospel of God,” is some kind of portentous even royal good news arising, not from the cult of the Roman emperor, but from the household of the living God, the God of Israel.

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It is the proclamation of such good news for which Paul has been set aside, consecrated, appointed authorized agent and representative, and become as a slave.

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He is at least a kind of royal herald crying out the good news.

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Q. But what exactly is this good news?!

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A. That is where we go next (and perhaps the overarching theme and purpose of this entire letter is the proclamation of this good news and the explanation of exactly what it is.)

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Verse 2 reads:

**(Verse 2)**

**which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,**

This clause clearly looks back to the “gospel of God” which Paul must now proclaim

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and Paul says that this is good news regarding something that God promised ahead of time.

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Q. To whom did God make this promise?

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A. The Jews.

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This promise is recorded in the holy Scriptures, which means our Old Testament

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More specifically it is a promise spoken by God through his prophets.

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This expression is generally understood to include all or most of the books of the Old Testament and not the only the books which we tend to classify narrowly as the prophets.

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There is, in other words, a promise made to the Jews, contained in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of which constitutes the good news of God that the Apostle Paul has been called to proclaim.

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Please pause here to reflect: Paul is saying that, whatever this good news is, it is first of all good news to the Jews to whom the promise had been made originally and who had waited so long for the fulfillment he now proclaims. It is their faith which has been vindicated!

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As a religious Jew, a pharisee, trained as a rabbi. and filled with a deep love and respect for the Old Testament scriptures, It must be such a joy to Paul proclaim this gospel.

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Far from opposing the hopes and dreams and teachings of his cultural and religious heritage, this gospel of God finally and fully confirms it. God has not forgotten the Jews after all!!

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The gospel is the fullest expression and final fulfillment of God’s promise to the Jews.

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This is an overarching theme of the Letter of Paul to the Romans --- an important aspect or implication of the gospel of God.

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Q. But again, what exactly is this gospel, this promise made by God which has now been fulfilled?

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A. The answer follows in Verse 3. This is the promise.....

**(Verse 3a)**

**concerning his Son,**

Q. Whose son?

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A. God's.

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Q. Which son? The Old Testament speaks of several different "sons of God"

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A. Specifically the son in view here is one ...

**(Verse 3b)**

**who was descended from David according to the flesh**

so this one called God's son was somehow descended from David,

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Q. Who is David?

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A. King of Israel.

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Therefore the one called God's son is a prince of the Royal House of Israel,

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"according to the flesh"

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Q. What does that mean?

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A. It means that humanly speaking, insofar as his human nature is concerned, the one called God's son, is a descendant of King David.

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God's son is a man. (A royal Jewish man.)

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Please ponder this. God's son is a man .... still!

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He is not a disembodied spirit who once became a man temporarily, as some suppose.

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He was born a real Jewish prince, although his people rejected him. He lived a real human life, albeit without sin. And he died a real human death. God's son was in every sense a man.

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But then God's son did something unique...something than no other man had ever done

before.

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He rose from the dead, bodily. He was not a ghost or a phantom apparition. He was a human being: alive, dead, and alive again from the dead!

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The Apostle Paul is one of the many who saw the risen Lord Jesus Christ and spoke with him.

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He is one of the few who were called by the Lord to be an Apostle and sent out to proclaim the good news of God.

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Death has been defeated.

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Jesus is alive.

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He reigns and his kingdom shall have no end.

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These thoughts all come together in Verse 4, which is a very difficult passage for translators and interpreters alike.. In the ESV it reads

**(Verse 4)**

**and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,**

This looks back to the son of God descended from David according to the flesh, and now clearly identifies him as being the Son of God in power, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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He was not always that, not in human history.

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He first needed to be born, and live among men, and die.

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During all that time he was certainly not in power, else how would they have killed him?!

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It is resurrection from the dead which manifestly establishes Jesus as the Son of God in power,

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not just his resurrection but the resurrection of all who will follow him from death to life and comprise his eternal kingdom.

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And the Holy Spirit is involved in making all of this happen and bringing it to light.

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This, then, is the good news about God's son, Jesus Christ...

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He has risen from the dead, bodily, and lives and rules forever, bodily.

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And so shall we, live and, in some sense, rule with him forever, bodily.

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That is the content of the gospel. Now Paul returns to speaking of his apostleship.

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He informs his readers in Rome that it is Jesus Christ our Lord...

**(Verse 5)**

**through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,**

When Paul says “we” have received ... he may mean to include other apostles and even other Christians, but probably this is just the editorial “we” and Paul is here referring only to himself.

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When he speaks of receiving grace and apostleship, it could possibly mean receiving first salvation and then apostleship, but this is not the most likely reading.

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Probably this is a figure of speech meaning that he has received his apostleship as a gracious gift from Christ. (Apostleship is referred to elsewhere in the Pauline epistles as a grace gift.)

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When he says that his apostleship is intended to bring about the obedience of faith, this could mean the “obedience which comes from faith” or “obedience to the doctrines of the faith” The grammar will permit these and several other possible readings.

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But the best way to understand this, probably, is as “the obedience which consists of faith.”

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When people hear the gospel proclaimed and embrace it, this is an act not just of understanding but also of willing assent and obedience. It is an effective call.

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From a different perspective, faith is necessarily the first act of obedience of which any person is capable, and all subsequent acts of obedience flow from it.

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In still other words, it is impossible to obey God without faith.

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Paul says that his apostleship is intended to bring about such faith, among all the nations.

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This may literally mean among all the nations or it may be a figure of speech, common among Jews, meaning among gentiles.

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In any case the reason to promote faith in Christ among the nations is to glorify the God of Israel!

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In summary, then, it is simplest to understand Verse 5 as meaning that it is through Jesus Christ that Paul graciously received his apostleship, in order to proclaim the gospel among all the nations, so that God may be glorified in all the world.

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Rome is no exception. Verse 6 reads:

**(verse 6)**

**including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,**

In view of what has gone before, this may possibly mean that the intended readers of this letter are mostly gentiles

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or it may simply speak to the fact that Rome is located outside of palestine among the Gentile lands and, indeed, is the capital of the whole world.

---  
In any case it is interesting that Paul includes only those among his readers, or considers his readers only to include, those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

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Here again, I think, Paul has in mind the same sort of effective calling that we have been discussing.

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He has been called to be an apostle to all who have been called to be Christians.

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It is the effective call of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal will of God, that binds Paul and his readers together.

---  
They are all called to be the church of Christ. Paul is called to by Christ's apostle among them.

---  
That completes his description of himself, the author of the letter, and his apostleship. He now proceeds to the second part of the prescript, identification of those to whom the letter is addressed.

**(Verse 7a)**

**To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:**

We see here that the letter is intended for all who are called to be Christians and who happen to be in Rome at the time this letter is delivered.

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And really who else could the letter be addressed to?

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To all who are not called to be Christians, the contents of this letter will avail nothing.

---  
Among those who are called the entire contents of this letter will be beneficial and authoritative.

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Notice that Paul does not suppose that he, himself, can effectively call anyone to be a believer.

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 Only God can do that. Paul is simply one of God's instruments to that end.

---  
 Now we come to the third and final part of the prescript, the greeting.

**(Verse 7b)**

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The word here translated "grace" means God's undeserved love revealed to us in Christ and may be said to summarize the whole Gospel in a single word. It occurs 24 times in Romans.

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 The word translated peace was a common greeting among Jews and borrowed by Christians.

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 It has a range of possible meanings

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 Here it may have most in mind the peace with God that comes through the gospel.

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 It may also suggest other spiritual and physical blessings that flow from reconciliation with God.

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 Taken together grace and peace are intended to cover the full range of evangelical blessings.

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 Paul pronounces these blessings in his capacity as an authorized representative of Christ.

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 He makes no distinction between Christ and God the father as the source of these blessings.

---  
 This does not necessarily mean that Paul thinks in precisely the same trinitarian categories that the church later developed, as a correction and protection against false teachers of various kinds.

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 But this is one of many passages from which our trinitarian understanding was developed.

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 That ends my prepared remarks for today.

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 Are there any questions?

**Closing Prayer**

Lord God,

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 Thank you for loving us so much, despite our willful disobedience.

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 We know that we deserve to die, that we deserve to suffer things worse than death.

---  
 We are amazed that instead you promise blessed, eternal, life in the Kingdom of your Son.

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We are amazed that you sent your Son to live the life we should have lived,

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and to suffer the death that we deserved to die,

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and then to rise from the dead to be the Savior and the Lord of all who believe.

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We thank you Lord for calling us to believe, unto life eternal.

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We ask you please to sanctify us even now, in this life, that we can serve you better.

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We pray the you will graciously also call us into service in your kingdom.

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And grant us the gifts of grace that we need to serve well.

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Thank you for giving us your words in the Bible.

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Please bless unto us all that we have read this evening.

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Please, Lord, cause whatever mistakes I have made in what I said to be driven quickly from our minds, as if these words had never been spoken.

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Please take those portions of your eternal word which we have spoken and understood correctly this evening, to be burned into our hearts and minds an to change us by them.

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Please forgive us Lord and protect us all from the dreadful sin of handling your word carelessly or, worse, mishandling your word intentionally.

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You are our God who loved us so much as to die for us and to create all things for our benefit, we love you Lord and we fear being ever disobedient or disrespectful to you, and we confess that we all too often are disobedient and disrespectful. Please forgive us and make us better.

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In Jesus Name we pray.

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Amen