

Romans: The Good News of God

To Rome, with Love

Romans 1:7

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Scripture

Today we come to the end of Paul's introduction in his letter to the Romans. Paul used the ancient format of beginning his letter with the sender's name, followed by a brief summary of the gospel, then the recipient's name, and a greeting. Today, we are going to look at the recipients of Paul's letter and the greeting. So, let me read Romans 1:7:

⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:7)

Introduction

In writing to the Christians in the imperial city of the Roman Empire, Paul's goal was to clarify the content of the gospel for them. He gave the Romans a summary of the gospel, which was the center of his preaching and mission, which was a divine one.

Now Paul told the Roman Christians something about their own position in Christ.

There are many Christians who do not know all the wonderful things that happened to them the moment they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps you do not know what happened to you the moment you became a Christian.

A newborn baby has no knowledge whatsoever of the biological processes that brought him into being. A baby does not know of the physiological changes which take place in his little body when he comes out of the dark waters of his mother's womb into the sudden light of this world.

In the same way, a new Christian often has no idea of the di-

vine process by which eternal life is received. He often has no understanding of all the privileges of his new inheritance that are his from the moment that he is made a partaker of the divine nature.

Lesson

Today, I want you to notice that Paul sets before the Roman Christians five divine privileges that belong to all Christians because of their position in Christ. Paul says:

- (1) that they are loved by God,
- (2) that they are called,
- (3) that they are saints,
- (4) that they are the recipients of grace, and
- (5) that they are the recipients of peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Loved (1:7a)

The first divine privilege that belongs to all Christians is that they are loved by God. Paul addresses the recipients of his letter by saying, **“To all in Rome who are loved by God”** (1:7a).

This is no bland statement, as if Paul was only declaring that it is God’s nature to love and that these Roman citizens, like all people everywhere, were therefore **loved by God**. That is not the way the Bible speaks of God’s love. The Bible usually speaks of God’s love as an *electing* love, a *saving* love. So the statement **“loved by God”** actually describes how those who are Christians come to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ in the first place.

So, how do Christians come to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ? Some think that people become Christians by their own unaided choice, as if all we have to do is decide to trust Jesus. But how could we possibly do that if, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:1, each one of us is *“dead in . . . transgressions and sins”*? How can a dead person decide anything?

Others think that we become Christians because God in his

omniscience sees some small bit of good in us, even if that “good” is only a tiny seed of faith. But how could God see good in us if, as Paul will later remind us in Romans 3:12, “all have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one”?

Why, then, *does* God love us? The answer is. . . “because he loves us.” There is nothing to be said beyond that. He simply loves us because of who *he* is and not because of who *we* are.

A lady I know discovered the truth that God loves us because of who he is and not because of who we are. This is how she put it in a letter:

Later on I went to visit a friend. He has suffered from cancer for two decades or more. He has been given no more than two weeks to live. His wife is caring for him at home in a hospice environment. I went by to offer a few hours of relief. He has a tracheotomy and can just mouth words. When I arrived, I went right in. He was lying [naked] in his bed covered only with an 18 inch square cloth over the groin area. He weighs no more than 80 lbs. I greeted him with a kiss and told him how happy I was to see him and that I loved him. His eyes were wide open as he mouthed the words, “Like this?” It was though I was jolted with an electric prod. Of course I loved him—without question. I just kissed him again and said, “More than ever!”

And then she said, with insight, “My thoughts went immediately to God. When he looks at me, he surely sees the same—love for me despite my condition.”¹

God loves us not because of what he sees in us. In fact, God does not see any goodness in us at all. He sees only sin. Nevertheless, God loves his own.

Do you remember how Moses explained God’s love for the people of Israel? He said in Deuteronomy 7:7-8a: “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peo-

¹ Letter of an anonymous friend.

ples. But it was *because the LORD loved you. . .*” The only explanation of why the Lord loved them was simply that he loved them.

This is a tremendous thing if we are Christians. It is something so great we can hardly begin to take it in. Pastor and preacher Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says:

We are Christians for one reason only and that is that God has set his love upon us. That is the thing that brings us out of the world and out of the dominion of Satan. . . . And therefore it is not surprising that the apostle here should remind these Christians of this wonderful thing. The world hated them; it persecuted them. They might be arrested at any moment, at the whim of any cruel tyrant who happened to be the emperor, and they might be condemned to death and thrown to the lions in the arena. They were oftentimes hated of all men, so Paul is anxious that they should realize this, that they are loved by God; that they are in Christ and that God loves them in the same way he loves Christ.²

If you are a Christian, know that you are loved by God. And you are loved by God not because of who you are but because of who he is.

II. Called (1:7b)

The second divine privilege that belongs to all Christians is that they are called by God. Paul says that Christians are **called**. He says, “To all in Rome who are loved by God and **called to be saints**” (1:7b).

In Greek, the verb “to be” is not there. The words “loved,” “called” and “saints” are all adjectives, and so one could read the phrase as follows: “To all in Rome who are loved by God, who are called, and who are saints. . . .” So, Christians are loved, they are called, and they are saints.

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 1, The Gospel of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1985), 159-160.

Let's examine now the privilege of being **called**.

Here is the same idea that occurs in verse 6 in the phrase, "called to belong to Jesus Christ;" but although the meaning of the verb is the same, the emphasis here is different. In the earlier phrase the emphasis was on what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is one who belongs to Jesus Christ; that is his identity.

Here, in verse 7, the emphasis is on the call itself, and it is a follow-up to the truth that Christians are loved by God. First, loved. Then, **called**. This calling is what theologians term "effectual calling."

There are two kinds of calling in any presentation of the gospel. The first is a *general call*, which means that all who hear are called to turn from their sin and to trust in Jesus Christ. This calling corresponds to the demand for obedience that comes from faith. Not all who hear this call will respond to this call. Not all will obey. Nevertheless, when preachers call in Christ's words, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (Matthew 11:28-29a), it is a genuine calling. From God's side no barrier is erected. Nothing stands in the way. At the same time, as we also saw (in Ephesians 2:1), people do not obey God if left to themselves. No one responds to God's offer. No-one wants to.

So, that some might be saved, God adds to the *general call* (which is ordinarily proclaimed to the unsaved by Christians), a specific call by which God's elect inwardly hear and respond by becoming Christians. This is known as *effectual calling*. The situation is similar to Jesus' call to dead Lazarus. Left to ourselves, we are all spiritual corpses. We cannot do anything. But when God calls savingly, some of these spiritual corpses come to spiritual life and do God's bidding. Every one who has been saved by God has heard this call in some way and has responded to it.

This *effectual call* usually comes through the preaching of the word. The word of God is proclaimed and somewhere sitting in a pew with only God looking on, the person involved hears God himself speak, as it were. He or she says, "That preacher is de-

scribing me. That is my need. It is what I must do.” And the person trusts in Christ and repents of his or her sin.

For someone else, it is through loving witness of a friend who says, “Do you want to become a Christian? Here. Let me show you what the word of God says about trusting in Christ alone for the gift of eternal life.”

For yet another person, the *effectual call* comes through the quiet reading of the word of God. Or it can come through a Christian book, or a movie, or a tract.

What is common to all these experiences is that God has called—effectually—and the person has heard and trusted in Jesus Christ.

Well-known theologian and teacher R. C. Sproul tells of his own conversion during his first year in college. He and a college friend heard the gospel one night and both responded to the gospel. For R. C., life was never the same. He was and remains an entirely different person. But his friend came down from his room the next morning and said, “Wasn’t that crazy, what we did last night? I guess I just got carried away. You won’t tell anybody, will you?”³

Both R. C. Sproul and his friend heard the gospel. Both responded to the gospel. But the friend heard only the *general* call of the preacher. R. C., however, heard the *general* and *effectual* call of God, and the *effectual* call, being from God himself, produced a new man through the new birth.

If you are a Christian, know that you are loved by God and that you have been effectually called by God.

III. Saints (1:7c)

The third divine privilege that belongs to all Christians is that they are saints. Paul says that Christians are **saints** in verse 7c: “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be **saints**.”

Here “**saint**” does not mean what it has come to mean in

³ R. C. Sproul tells this story in a fictional way in his novel *Johnny Come Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books/ GL Publications, 1984), chs. 4-6.

some sectors of Christendom: one who has attained a certain level of holiness and is therefore worthy of some special veneration, or even hearing human prayers. Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse tells the following story:

Years ago, in his earlier ministry, [Dr. Harry Ironside] was on his way to the Pacific Coast at a time when it still took about four days to make the trip from Chicago. In his railway car was a party of nuns, and day by day he spoke to them and they spoke to him. He would sit reading his Bible, and at times the group of nuns talked with him about spiritual things. He read some of the stories from the Word, and they were delighted with the reading. About the third day, he asked them if anyone of them had ever seen a saint. They all answered that they never had. Then he asked them if they would like to see a saint. Then he astonished them greatly by saying, "I am a saint. I am saint Harry." He then opened the New Testament and showed them the truth that . . . God Almighty does not make a saint by exalting an individual, but by exalting the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴

In the Bible, being a **saint** always means being separated by God to God and to his work. This is precisely what Paul said of himself in verse 1 in the words, "set apart for the gospel of God." Having been loved by God and called by him, the Christians at Rome, like all Christians, were then also set apart to him, to live for him and work for him in this world.

This is why the faith of the Roman Christians was "being reported all over the world," as Paul says in verse 8. Because they had been loved by God and called by God and were therefore separated to him, these Christians were different from the culture around them. And the people noticed it!

Do people today notice the difference in those who profess to be Christians? They should, shouldn't they? People should notice that Christians live for God and work for God in this world. People

⁴ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Man's Ruin: Expositions of Bible Doctrines, Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 88-89.

should notice that Christians have been set apart to God.

Notice the connective relationship between the terms in verse 7. Robert Haldane speaks of the believers being *loved* by God, *called* by God and being *saints*, saying rightly, “They were saints because they were called, and they were called because they were loved by God.”⁵ That is, their being saints was not the *cause* but the *result* of their election. Being elect, they were saints; that is, they were separated to God.

So, if it is ever the case that one who professes to have been called by God is not actually separated unto him—I don’t mean “perfect,” but “but not headed in God’s direction”—that person is not saved. He or she is not a Christian.

The person who has been loved by God and called by God is a saint who lives for God and works for him in this world.

IV. Grace (1:7d)

The fourth divine privilege that belongs to all Christians is that they are the recipients of the grace of God. In the greeting, Paul wishes the Christians “**grace . . . from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ**” (1:7d).

When Paul closes his introduction with the wish that the Christians at Rome might experience “grace and peace . . . from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ,” he is not merely passing on a traditional Christian greeting. He is wishing them what they—and we also—need every day we remain on earth.

We have been saved by grace. Paul said in Ephesians 2:8 that “it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith.”

But we must live by grace also. Just as we live moment by moment by drawing breaths of God’s good air, so we must live spiritually moment by moment drawing on his favor. Remember, Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b).

Velma Barfield was a woman from rural North Carolina who

⁵ Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (MacDill AFB: MacDonald Publishing Co., 1958), 33.

was charged with first degree murder. No one could have surmised the effect her life and death would have upon so many people. In 1978 she was arrested for murdering four people, including her mother and fiancé. She never denied her guilt, but told the chilling story of her drug-dazed life, beginning with tranquilizers which were prescribed for her following a painful injury.

Velma was a victim of incest as a child, and the abuse of prescription drugs as an adult. After she admitted her guilt, she was taken to prison and confined in a cell by herself. One night the prison guard tuned into a twenty-four-hour gospel radio station. Down the grey hall, desperate and alone in her cell, Velma heard the words of a preacher, and trusted in Jesus Christ. She wrote, “I had been in and out of churches all my life and I could explain all about God. But I never understood before that Jesus died for me.”

Her conversion was genuine. For six years on death row she ministered to many of her cellmates. The outside world began to hear about Velma Barfield as the story of her remarkable rehabilitation became known. Velma wrote to Ruth Bell Graham—Billy Graham’s wife—and a real friendship developed between them.

In one letter Ruth wrote to Velma, “God has turned your cell on Death Row into a most unusual pulpit. There are people who will listen to what you have to say because of where you are. As long as God has a ministry for you here, he will keep you here. When I compare the dreariness, isolation, and difficulty of your cell to the glory that lies ahead of you, I could wish for your sake that God would say, ‘Come on Home.’”

Before her execution, Velma wrote to Ruth: “If I am executed on August 31, I know the Lord will give me dying grace, just as he gave me saving grace, and has given me living grace.”

If you are a Christian, you are saved by grace and you also live by grace. You must live every moment of every day dependent upon the grace of God.

So, a Christian is a person who is loved, called, a saint, and a recipient of the grace of God.

V. Peace (1:7e)

And finally, the fifth divine privilege that belongs to all Christians is that they are the recipients of the peace of God. In the greeting, Paul wishes the Christians **“peace . . . from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ”** (1:7e).

Paul says in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” What a wonderful privilege this is!

As non-Christians we were at enmity with God, but when God loved us, called us, made us saints, and extended his grace to us, he also made peace with us.

Johnny Hart, cartoonist and creator of the enormously successful *B.C.* and *Wizard of Id*, was angry at God after the death of his mother. He resorted to drinking to cope with the loss, and he also dabbled in the occult, using an Ouija board to try to contact his deceased mother. But God used Christian television to bring Johnny to himself. Today Johnny Hart is at peace with God and with himself. Many of his cartoon panels creatively proclaim the gospel because he has found peace with God.

One of the marvelous privileges of the gospel is that we have peace with God.

Conclusion

So, in this greeting in Romans 1:7 Paul says that five divine privileges belong to all Christians. A Christian is a person who is loved, called, a saint, and a recipient of the grace and peace of God.

I close then with Paul’s own greeting: **“To all [at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church] who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

Our Father, how grateful we are for these wonderful divine privileges that are ours in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your love. Thank you that you set your love upon us not because of who we are but because of who you are.

Thank you for calling us to salvation in the Gospel. We thank you that you effectually call your elect to new life in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for making each Christian a saint. You have set us apart for yourself so that we may know you and make you known in this world.

Thank you for your grace. Your grace not only saves us but help us to live day by day.

And thank you for your peace. Having made peace with God we now enjoy the peace of God as one of the divine privileges that belongs to all Christians.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.