

# The letter to the **ROMANS**

Former Adventist Fellowship Bible Study

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## 1. Notes on Romans 1:1-7

### Introduction

When Paul wrote his epistle to the Roman church in 57 A.D., he had never visited them personally. He had heard much about them and longed to visit, and this letter was part of his preparing them for an eventual visit from him. The Roman church had never had teaching from an apostle, and this letter was their first apostolic instruction.

Paul begins this letter with a greeting similar to that in most of his other epistles. He declares himself to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was “called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God,” he said. (v. 1) The word “apostle” means “one who was sent”. Today the generally accepted definition of an apostle is one who saw the risen Christ and received His commission to teach the gospel. In the Greek text, the word “called” in this context is an adjective; hence, we can say that Paul was a “called apostle”. He stresses his calling by Jesus because he was not one of the original 12 (or eleven) apostles who followed Jesus. His calling came later, after Jesus ascended to heaven. By emphasizing the fact of the Lord Jesus’s calling of him, Paul is stressing to his readers that he is no less an apostle than the original twelve who knew Jesus personally while he was on earth. He is demonstrating that the things he teaches are instructions from God, not merely his own opinions.

### Called from Eternity

When Paul declares his divine appointment as an apostle of Christ, he is asserting a truth which God’s prophets have known for millennia. God’s appointed prophets and apostles do not randomly rise up. God ordains their existence and their anointing even before they are born. Further, in the case of his appointment of Paul as an apostle, God confirmed this call with others to ensure that the church would recognize God’s will, put aside their fear of the murderous Saul, and accept him as Christ’s representative.

After Saul’s Damascus Road experience, God asked a Jew named Ananias to go to the house where Saul sat in blindness and to pray for his sight to be restored. Ananias was afraid and remonstrated with God, but God replied, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:15-16)

Paul did not meet Jesus and then decide to spend the rest of his life preaching. God appointed him to be an apostle and taught him in the presence of Jesus in paradise. ( 2 Corinthians 12:1-6) His call to preach was an appointment established in eternity, and God confirmed that appointment with his church.

Isaiah also knew his calling to be a prophet was a divine appointment, not a personal decision. “Before I was born the Lord called me,” he says in Isaiah 49:1; “from my birth he has made mention of my name.”

Likewise Jeremiah understood God’s sovereign plans for him. When the time came for God to call Jeremiah to his

prophetic assignment, He said to him, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5)

In his letter to the Galatians Paul uses language similar to that of Isaiah and Jeremiah when he describes his call from God. “But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.” (Galatians 1:15-17)

Paul uses more inclusive language when he writes to the Ephesians. He explains that all believers are chosen from eternity, and their calling fulfills God’s sovereign purposes. “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will... In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:4-5, 11-12)

We can know that as we surrender the parts of our lives to Jesus and allow him to direct us, he leads us to the work he has already designed for us to do. God has planned our place in his story from eternity, and when he calls us to the work he has prepared for us, he also provides the abilities and the means for us to do it.

## Gospel of God

Paul frequently referred to the “gospel of God”. While we usually talk about the gospel of the Lord Jesus, Paul addressed the eternal reality and historical significance of the gospel by linking it to God, including the Father, instead of only to Jesus.

Near the end of this letter, Paul reiterates his calling “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God.” (Romans 15:16) To the Corinthians he had written, “Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God...?” (2 Corinthians 11:7)

Peter also referred to the “gospel of God”. In his first letter Peter addressed the suffering of the Jewish believers who were enduring and referred to that suffering as judgment on God’s family (for the purpose of refining): “If it [judgment] begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17)

Calling it the “gospel of God” links the good news with eternity, not merely with the incarnation of Jesus. The coming of Jesus and the subsequent forgiveness of sin and the restoration of humanity to intimacy with God was not a last-ditch attempt to salvage mankind. It was not the result of Jesus’s impulsive good will. It was a reality that existed before time began. From eternity, redemption has been God’s plan for us.

In his letter to Titus Paul affirmed the eternal reality of redemption. He greets Titus with his customary declaration of his apostleship, explaining that his calling is “for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.” (Titus 1:1-3)

During the time of the Old Testament God deliberately began revealing his plans to save humanity. He established the Jewish nation to carry the knowledge and revelation of God’s will for humanity. Through the Jewish laws and traditions, God began to illustrate his will for mankind. Through the Jewish prophets, God foretold the coming Messiah, the Redeemer who would bring salvation and righteousness to all who believed.

When Paul preached in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, he explained that God’s prophecies to the Jews given hundreds of years before were finally fulfilled. “We tell you the good news,” he said; “what God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’” (Acts 13:32-33)

When the angel announced the birth of John the Baptist to his father, Zechariah “was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago).’” (Luke 1:67-69)

To the Romans Paul wrote that a righteousness “apart from the law” has come, a righteousness that comes from God “which the Law and the Prophets testify.” (Romans 3:21)

Paul understood that the gospel was not only of Jesus; it was the gospel of the Trinity. Salvation, the incarnation of Jesus, the restoration of mankind to fellowship with God—all this has been eternally part of our eternal God. Our redemption is not just an intervention by a loving Jesus to prevent an angry Father from destroying us. Rather, our redemption is the will and plan of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. From eternity God ordained the incarnation of Jesus and our acceptance as God’s righteous sons.

## Jesus As Man

In this greeting to the Romans, Paul alludes to the eternal paradox: Jesus is both human, a descendant of David, and divine, “through the Spirit of holiness... declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” (v. 3)

Jesus had to be a human in order to satisfy the demands of the law. Sinful humanity had to die. Since mankind sinned, a man had to pay the penalty. Jesus took on humanity so he could “destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Paul explained that just as all humanity has died both physically and spiritually because of Adam, so in Christ humanity will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22) Only a perfect God could redeem his own creation, but only a human could satisfy the law's requirement of death for the law breakers. Jesus satisfied the law's requirement on all counts: he was sinless, and he was human. He could fulfill the law, and he could redeem us from under it because he shared our substance and the substance of the one who first sinned.

Jesus' incarnation was a singularity: the eternal God took on human flesh and walked and lived and worked on his created planet. "In the beginning was the Word," writes John, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1, 14) Our Savior is our Creator and also our Brother. This paradox is a mystery we cannot understand, but it is a mystery which has saved us and which redeems all the pain and shame of our broken lives.

## Jesus, Our God

Our human Savior, Jesus, is also our God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and established forever as the Son of God by the power of his resurrection. Jesus' power over death, his role as the "first fruits" from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), establishes him as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies and of God's promises to Abraham and David.

When the disciples first reached the empty tomb, they were confused because they "still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." (John 20:8-9) Isaiah prophesied that God would give Israel "the holy and sure blessings promised to David" (Is. 55:3, quoted in Acts 13:33-37), and David had also prophesied that the "holy one would not see decay" (Psalm 16:10, quoted in Acts 13:33-37) Jesus' resurrection established him as the fulfillment of the prophecies that one who was indestructible would come. Even though he died, Jesus did not decay. He defeated death by swallowing it into life.

Further, Jesus' resurrection confirms that he is the one appointed to judge the earth. (Acts 17:31) Only a completely righteous judge could perform this duty; only One who sees the unseen and knows the humanly unknowable would qualify. Only One who fully understands humanity but also knows the eternal reality of God can justly judge the earth.

Jesus was chosen "before the creation of the world" and revealed to us "in these last times." It is through Jesus that we believe in God who raised Him from the dead. (1 Peter 1:20-21)

In his letter to the Colossians Paul said, "In Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form." (Col. 2:9) He is intrinsically God, and his victory over not only bodily death but also eternal death, the separation of humanity from God, has established him forever as our divine Savior. The penalty of the world's sins which He took upon himself was eternal death; only God could satisfy that legal requirement and die from separation from the Father yet come back to life. The resurrection

of Jesus, like his birth, was a singularity. Not only did the eternal God take on a temporal body, but he returned from the death caused by sin, healing the universe and restoring communion with God as he did so.

## Grace and Obedience Through Faith

After establishing the identity of Jesus, Paul affirms that he has received grace through Jesus to do the work of apostleship and to call Gentiles to obedience to Christ through faith.

The grace Paul received is the justification he received through Christ's death (Romans 3:22-24). This justification translates into the divine power God gives him through the indwelling Holy Spirit which makes it possible for him to endure incredible hardship and suffering yet boldly proclaim the gospel. (see 2 Corinthians 12:8-10) Because of the grace of God, the unearned, undeserved righteousness and power which Paul has through Christ, he is able to effectively minister for the sake of Jesus. He is sustained and gifted by God to do things that would otherwise be impossible for him to do. His profound ministry is the grace of God in action in his life.

That ministry, Paul asserts in this greeting, is to preach Christ to the Gentiles and to call them also to obedience through faith. That obedience, like Paul's gift of grace, is the result of people believing Jesus died for their sins and rose from the dead. When they believe, they also receive the Holy Spirit, and God's grace makes it possible for them to jettison their old works and efforts and legalism and to embrace a life of responding to the Holy Spirit instead. They become obedient to Christ through the teaching and nudging of the Holy Spirit, and their responding to the love of Christ in their hearts results in obedience directly to Jesus. No longer do they live by an external standard or by internal, human impulses. They live in obedience to Christ through faith in him.

## Called

Paul ends this introduction by reminding the Roman believers that they are called to belong to Jesus and called to be saints. Jude refers also to the called: "To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ." (Jude 1) In Revelation, John refers to the called in the context of the ten kings uniting with the beast and making war against the Lamb. "But the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." (Revelation 17:14)

Jesus metaphorically described his people's divine calling in John 10:27: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

Paul emphasizes the point that even our response to God is the result of His seeking and calling us. In our fallen, spiritually

dead natural state, we would not seek Jesus. God himself calls us from eternity. He puts in our shriveled spirits a desire for truth, a desire for acceptance and cleansing, and our response to Jesus is the result of His seeking and finding us while we were lost and dead.

The “called” and chosen are those who say “yes” to the desire for truth that our Creator awakens in us. God in his sovereignty knows those who are his from eternity. He reveals himself through creation, so all men are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20), and he gives every human a chance to respond to his call.

## Commitment

Ask God to reveal himself to you as you study the book of Romans. Ask him to make plain to you the reality of your call-

ing, of Jesus’s singular humanness and divinity, of the eternal significance and life-changing force of the gospel. Ask God to set you apart for him. Ask him to make your heart desire him and to surrender to him.

Ask God to reveal to you the places in your understanding where you need to be informed by Biblical truth. Ask Him to help you to walk and live by the Spirit instead of by your flesh or by the law.

Ask Jesus to help you to know him in a new way as you study this book, to understand his heart and to experience his love in ways you’ve never experienced them before. And ask God to keep you faithful, protected from deception and self-centeredness, focussing instead of Jesus and growing in surrender and grace.