

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED ROMANS 1:1-7

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

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We have just finished studying through what is perhaps the foundational book in the Old Testament. Genesis has given us a theology, anthropology, and some insight into the beginnings of the Judeo-Christian religion.

In other words, we were introduced to God and He was revealed to us in several different ways. We met Him as the creator of the universe, as a personal, intimate, covenant God, and one who makes promises to His people and fulfills them. We were introduced to the powerful God, the angry God, and the nurturing God, but the principal characteristic of God we were introduced to is His love. It seems that the primary way God approaches us is through love.

As far as anthropology goes, we have learned several things about who we are as humans. God created us with great hope and potential, He was like a proud parent with all sorts of hopes and dreams for the future of His children. We were created for the sole purpose of being in a love relationship with Him and we were created in His image.

However, we also saw that when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, there was a break in that relationship. From that time on, we as humans have had a natural propensity to live apart from God. The Apostle Paul will call this "living according to the flesh," in the book of Romans. As humans we are this strange mixture of being created in the image of God; and yet at the same time, because of sin, we have this strange pull on us that draws us away from God.

Finally, Genesis describes for us the origins of the Judeo-Christian religion. Most of you who have known me for a while know that I hate to refer to Christianity as a religion. I prefer to call Christianity a relationship, a relationship with God and with others. I think it is safe to say

that we finished the book of Genesis with a description of God's interaction with human beings as a promise, rather than a religion. God promised that He would send one who would take care of the sin problem that separates us from God, and further, He promised He would come from Israel, more specifically from the tribe of Judah.

In the book of Romans, written over 2000 years after the events described in Genesis, we will revisit all these issues and demonstrate how God has kept all of His promises in the person of Jesus Christ.

In this morning's text we are going to get acquainted with some of the major players and themes in Genesis. My feeling is that most of us don't have a good grasp of what we as Christians believe. We believe a lot of stuff, but my guess is that many of us do not have a biblical grasp of what the essentials of Christianity are. The Apostle Paul has made the task of learning these essentials a little easier for us. As Genesis was the foundation for the Old Testament, Romans seems to be the foundation for understanding the New Testament. I hope that we will take seriously our study through Romans.

I don't know about you, but for me, it seems that I am always playing catch-up. When I finally get the answers, it seems the questions have changed.

Now that I'm older, but not much wiser, let me share some of the things I've learned (discovered) through the years:

- (1.) I started out with nothing, and I still have nothing.
- (2.) My wild oats have turned into prunes and all-bran.
- (3.) I finally got my head together, but now my body is falling apart.
- (4.) All the data is in, life is now officially unfair.
- (5.) If all is not lost, then where is it?

- (6.) It is easier to get older than it is to get wiser.
- (7.) Some days you're the dog; some days you're the hydrant.
- (8.) I wish the buck stopped here; I sure could use a few.
- (9.) Kids in the back seat cause accidents.
- (10.) Accidents in the back seat cause kids.
- (11.) It's hard to make a comeback when you haven't been anywhere.
- (12.) The only time the world beats a path to your door is when you're in the bathroom.
- (13.) If God wanted me to touch my toes he would have put them on my knees.
- (14.) When I'm finally holding all the cards, why does everyone decide to play tennis?
- (15.) It's not hard to meet expenses; they're everywhere.
- (16.) The only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth.
- (17.) These days, I spend a lot of time thinking about the hereafter; I go somewhere to get something, and then I wonder what I'm here after.
- (18.) Funny, I don't remember being absent minded.
- (19.) Funny, I don't remember being absent minded.

Here's my serenity prayer these days; perhaps I should call it my senility prayer. God grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do like, and the eyesight to tell the difference.

The thing about Romans is all the information is relevant, because it answers the questions we have been asking since the beginning of time and the questions we will be asking until the end of time.

I see a huge problem in the Western world today which has become biblically illiterate wherein religious vocabulary has been erased from our memories. The majority of people in our culture today couldn't answer basic bible facts. What makes me sad is that most Christians are biblically illiterate even though we have beliefs, plenty of beliefs, and the problem is we don't know where they come from. If I had to guess, I would guess that less than 5% of Christians have read through the entire Bible and that most Christians could not pass a basic Bible test.

If the Bible is God's love letter to us, than how can we be in a healthy relationship with Him if we don't read it? This is my point: Many of the spiritual, emotional, and psychological problems we face in life oftentimes come from a faulty understanding of who God is, who we are in Christ, or a faulty understanding of the essentials of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul will address several of these questions in His letter to the church in Rome that there is only one way we can live a healthy, mature Christian life. That is to know, to accept, and to live the truth as it is spelled out in the Bible. The book of Romans contains many of the basic and essential truths to help us live a healthy Christian life.

The seven verses we are studying this morning are the salutation of a letter. In the business letter, we have our logo and address on the top, the name and address of the person we are writing to, the date, the greeting, the body of the letter and finally our signature.

A typical salutation in the first century was usually one sentence. It normally identified the author, the recipient, and a greeting of grace, it would read, "A to B, Greetings." To be sure, Paul's address here is one sentence, but it is loaded. In the Greek, verses 1-7 are one sentence in fact the NASB captures that. Perhaps the greeting is so long because Paul was not the founder of this church in Rome, nor did he ever visit it before so he wanted them to get a feeling for who he was and what he taught, since he planned to visit them in the near future.

I. WITH PAUL (V.1)

First, let's get acquainted with Paul in verse 1. As we look at how Paul describes himself, let's try and understand what a healthy outlook on who we are would look like. An example being: **God has given us an identity, a meaningful existence, and power to live free and accomplish all He has for us.**

- HIS IDENTITY

Look at how Paul describes his identity and let me give you some insight into which Paul was. Paul came from an upper class background and was a Roman citizen. He was free to travel throughout the Roman Empire unhindered and he had all the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen, it would be tantamount to being a U.S. citizen, carrying a U.S. passport, perhaps it was even more prestigious to be a Roman citizen. In addition to that, Paul was highly educated and he held the equivalent of the modern day Ph.D. degree. He was educated in Jerusalem under the tutelage of one the most famous Rabbis, Gamaleil. He climbed the religious and political ladder in the Jewish community.

Paul was not always his name. He was, in fact, from the Jewish tribe of Benjamin and was named after the first king of Israel, Saul. As Saul, he persecuted the Christian Church with passion and fervor. If you remember from our study through Genesis, it was predicted that the tribe of Benjamin would be real fighters and they were described as ravenous wolves who would devour their prey and divide the spoils. Saul certainly lived up to this description. As a young man, he held the coats of others while they stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to death. Saul hunted down Christians and had them jailed until one day, the risen Lord Jesus met him on a plain outside of Damascus and there his name was changed to Paul, and changed as well was the direction of his life.

Look at how Paul describes himself in the first phrase of verse 1. He refers to himself as a slave of Christ Jesus. Let's look at each of these words. First of all, for a Roman citizen to refer to himself, as a slave would be unheard of in the whole Greek and Roman world, there was nothing noble about being a slave. During the time of Paul, the Jews would never refer to themselves as slaves. In their history, they had been slaves in Egypt, they were slaves in Babylon and they were slaves to the Greeks. But during Paul's time, they prided themselves for being free.

As we will see in the book of Romans, Paul came to realize that we are all slaves. We are slaves to the world, slaves to our thoughts and behaviors, slaves to our passions and desires, and slaves to the devil. We may think we are free, but the truth is that we all have a master. Since that is the case, Paul decided that he would indenture himself to Jesus.

Now let us look at the word order. We are used to seeing Jesus Christ. But Paul reverses the order here to Christ Jesus this is because he is emphasizing two things. First, he is identifying who this Jesus is. Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel. "Christ" is the Greek word for Messiah it means the anointed One. Jesus is the One God promised back at the beginning of time, the One who would defeat evil once and for all. Secondly, Jesus comes from the Hebrew nation and Messiah comes from the nation of Israel, so Paul has willingly made himself a slave to the Messiah, the promised Deliverer of Israel. There is a history of this in Paul's religious tradition, and ours. Moses, David, and the prophets were referred to as servants of God.

We all choose whom we will serve. We will either serve MTV, the playboy philosophy, our own lusts, other people's opinions and ideas and yes, even Satan.

The only appropriate master to serve is the Lord Jesus Christ. Because, when we indenture ourselves to Jesus, He in turn will set us free. We come to Jesus as slaves He in turn brings us to God the Father who immediately calls us His children, that is our identity if we are Christians. We are not doctors, lawyers, janitors, fathers, mothers, pastors, or any such thing. We do these things and fill these roles, but they are not what define us, nor are they to be our identities. If someone asks us who we are, the only true answer is, “We are children of God” and with that goes all the rights and responsibilities.

- HIS AUTHORITY

For example, Paul goes on to define his authority. He says that God called him to be an apostle. The other twelve apostles traveled with Jesus from His baptism, death, and resurrection. Jesus, however, made a special post-resurrection appearance to Paul. The word apostle means “one who is sent on a mission.” Paul was appointed, commissioned, and sent by Jesus. He had the authority of Jesus to write to this church and to visit them.

If we can keep straight in our minds our identity, that we are children of God, it will keep us from committing two errors. First, we should never have low self-esteem because our Father is God. Secondly, it will prevent us from being proud, because we realize that our only right is to come to Him as slaves.

Here, we realize that we have the power and authority to defeat evil in our lives. We too are called by God to be His children. He has given us the power of His Holy Spirit. We do not have to believe lies about ourselves, and we can defeat sin in our lives. We have the power and authority to live free.

- HIS PURPOSE

Finally, Paul finds his purpose and meaning in life. Here is another error we make in living. We have come to think that we find meaning and purpose in life through jobs, recreation, and relationships, most of which are unhealthy. Look at what Paul says here: He was set apart for the Gospel of God. Paul had been a Pharisee and in the Jewish religion of the time, the Pharisees set themselves apart from the common person by strictly adhering to religious laws. But here Paul makes it clear the Jesus set him apart for the Gospel of God. That is where our meaning and purpose in life comes from. If we keep in mind that we are set apart for the Gospel of God, it doesn't matter what our job is or where we work.

Let me give you an example. I have the gift of pastor. It doesn't matter if I am working in a church, in a paid position as a pastor, or if I am working as a janitor, a ditch-digger, a teacher, a secretary, or an accountant. My purpose in life is to be set apart for the gospel and I will exercise my gift of pastor in any of these situations. In fact, I think I did better pastoring in the secular work world.

Our identity is in being children of God and our purpose is to live for the Gospel. Our security, power, and authority come from God living in us, by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit. **God has given us an identity, a meaningful existence, and the power of life free and to accomplish all He has for us.**

II. WITH THE GOSPEL (Vs. 2-3a)

In verse 2 and the first half of verse 3, we get acquainted with the Gospel. **If we want to live free and enjoy life, we must know what the Bible has to say about life, there are no shortcuts.** The Bible is the word of God. Paul's purpose and meaning in life, and ours, come from being set apart for the Gospel of promise.

- OF PROMISE

First of all, it is a gospel of promise. We have a great head start because we just finished studying through the book of Genesis. After sin entered the world in Genesis 3, God promised He would send one who would take care of this sin problem. That promise was carried through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The whole Old Testament is centered round this promise. The promise is that God would redeem His people and take care of evil. So the whole Bible is really Christocentric or in other words, the Bible is centered round Jesus Christ. The prophets wrote about the coming of Jesus in the Old Testament and the New Testament confirms the promise of a Deliverer, a Redeemer, and Messiah. This leads us from a gospel of promise to a gospel of fulfillment.

- OF FULFILLMENT

In Greek, the word Gospel means “good news.” The good news is that God loves us, and that His son Jesus is the One who came to set us free from our slavery to sin, to this world, to our own lusts, and to Satan. The good news is all about Jesus and if we want to find peace, joy, happiness and fulfillment in life, then, our lives must be centered round Jesus since He is the good news. And since He is such good news, we should be sharing Him with everyone. The story of humankind is that we were created for greatness, but because we fell into the slavery of sin, we were frustrated from fulfilling our destinies. But Jesus came to set us free by His death and resurrection. But again, for us to understand the full import and design for our lives, we must understand, read, and study the whole Bible because it describes the promise and fulfillment. **If we want to live free and enjoy life, we must know what the whole Bible has to say about life. There are no shortcuts.**

III. WITH JESUS (Vs. 3-4)

Verses 3-4 get us acquainted with Jesus. I think this will be a very important theme in Romans, and a very important theme in our lives. **A powerful and vibrant faith can only be realized in knowing and acknowledging whom it is we believe in.** Did you ever stop and think about faith? We say things like, “I need more faith.” Well, how do we get more faith? How does our faith grow? The answer is pretty simple. We can’t give ourselves more faith; the only way our faith can grow is to continue to get to know the object of our faith more personally and more intimately. Therefore, if we want to have more faith, then, we need to get to know God better.

- FULLY MAN (V. 3)

Verse 3 reminds us that Jesus was fully man and He chose to empty Himself of all His Godly privileges, come to earth, and live life as we do. He experienced all the pain and suffering we do, so He is a God who understands all of our pain and suffering. There is nothing we can ever go through that God cannot understand and empathize with. Were you ever betrayed? Jesus understands that. Were you ever misunderstood? Jesus understands that. Are you suffering physically, emotionally, or spiritually? Jesus understands that. Let’s pick the most horrible human experience we can think of. When a parent has to watch their innocent children suffer, or when a parent has to bury their child, who can understand that? God the Father is perhaps the only one who can really understand and empathize with that. He had to watch His one and only son Jesus suffer and die. Jesus was fully human and because we just finished Genesis, let’s quickly trace Jesus’ lineage. Jesus comes from the family of King David, who came from the tribe of Judah, whose father was Jacob, whose grandfather was Isaac, and whose great-grandfather was Abraham.

- FULLY GOD (V. 4)

Jesus was fully human but He is also fully God. At this point I need to explain some of the wording in Greek because these two verses may have been an early Christian saying, song, or creed. In verse 3, where it says, “as to his human nature,” literally that says, “according to the flesh.” In verse 4, it says, “according to the spirit of holiness.” Now throughout Romans, Paul will contrast the flesh and the spirit, but in Jesus, the flesh and the spirit live in perfect harmony. He is fully God, and fully man. Now, let us look at the divine side of Jesus. He is powerfully declared to be the Son of God. The word “powerfully” is “dynamics” from which we get our English word dynamite and in Greek it means ability potential, a cosmic force. Just to give you an example of how this word powerfully is used, it is used to describe how God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians with a powerful hand. If you remember, God brought ten plagues on Egypt, the last one killing the firstborn in each household, while sparing the Hebrew. Then, He parted the Red Sea, allowing the Hebrews to pass through but when the Egyptians tried to cross, He closed the sea and the whole Egyptian Army was killed. That’s what is meant by power.

What kind of power resides in God the Son? Resurrection power! He was raised from the dead, and God the Father said to God the Son, “Sit at my right hand.”

The Bible says that the fullness of the Godhead lived in Jesus while He was in bodily form. The Bible goes on to say that if you and I have given our lives to Christ, then, He brings that same fullness of the Spirit into us. Do you get it? That same dynamic, that same dynamite of ability, of potential, of cosmic force, that resurrection power, lives in us. What is it that you’re facing this morning that you don’t think you can handle? How does it stand up to the cosmic force of resurrection power available to you? It doesn’t.

The object of our faith is Jesus. The good news about Jesus is that He was promised from the beginning of time. He came down from heaven, He took on human flesh, He lived with us and He was crucified and died for the sins we committed. He rose from the dead and has set us free and He has promised to come back to destroy evil once and for all. Do we want our faith to grow? The secret is focus on the object of our faith, Jesus, and all his power. **A powerful and vibrant faith can only be realized in knowing and acknowledging whom it is we believe in.**

IV. WITH GOD'S PEOPLE (Vs. 5-7a)

In verses 5 through the first half of verse 7, we become acquainted with God's people. Paul is going to talk a lot about calling and predestination later on in Romans, but we must be very clear so as not to confuse the message of the gospel. Jesus said, "Whosoever will, may come." The point is **God offers salvation to all.** The Bible says that God doesn't want anyone to perish.

- ALL ETHNICITIES

Salvation is offered to all ethnicities. I want you to follow this very carefully in verse 5. Paul says, "Through Jesus, and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship." Paul recognizes that without Jesus, we can do nothing. Without His calling, and without His empowerment, anything we attempt is doomed to failure. Furthermore, Paul is not interested in making himself famous, rich, or powerful; he is interested in promoting the glory and reputation of God.

Now look at the next phrase in verse 5. He says, "We received grace and apostleship." You see apostleship was a special grace that Paul feels he received from God it was a gift and a privilege for him to be a special messenger of God's good news.

Here is what I want us to understand: If you are a Christian, then God has graced you with a spiritual gift, natural talents and abilities. We are to identify our gifts, talents, abilities, and resources, and use them to further the good news: that Jesus came to set us free.

Now we come to the phrase in this verse that fascinates me. Paul was commissioned to reach the Gentiles. For the Jews, the word Gentile referred to every nation, every ethnicity, and every people group that was not Hebrew. For the Greeks and Romans, everybody that was not Greek or Roman was a Barbarian. The word used here for Gentile is “ethnicities.” Listen to the command God gives Abraham in Genesis 12 the first book in Bible. He says, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse: and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Let me read to you from Revelation, the last book of the Bible, in the final fulfillment of this from chapter 7, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” That is a final fulfillment of the command and promise given to Abraham. If that is the promise and fulfillment, then we find ourselves with Paul, in the middle. Our goal as a Christian community is to bring reconciliation between all groups; economic, racial, ethnic, gender, etc., because in Christ there is no slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male or female. We are to bring all into harmony under the headship of Jesus Christ.

And look at the goal. We are called to live out the obedience that comes from faith. In Greek this is a difficult phrase to translate. Paul is going to make it clear that we are saved by

grace through faith, and not by doing religious stuff. But for Paul, faith results in obedience. Obedience without faith doesn't mean a thing so for Paul true faith involves obedience, and true obedience involves faith. Obedience to Jesus means that I am switching masters. I think the best description I can give is marriage, and that conversion is somewhat like marriage. We leave all others behind, we join ourselves together with Jesus, and we become one with Him. Paul will also describe baptism this way.

- ALL WHO ARE CALLED

God's people are called for not only are all the nations, tribes, and languages called, we are called personally. Jesus called Paul to be an apostle and He is calling you and me. Can you hear Jesus calling to you? Jesus calls us and as we respond, He grafts us into the body of believers. We become part of the body.

The book is addressed to the saints in Rome. The church in Rome was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, but the majority was probably Gentiles. In the year A.D. 49, the emperor kicked the Jews out of Rome, but by the time Paul wrote to the Roman Church in the year A.D. 57, it seems as if many of the Jews had returned. Now some of the manuscripts we have of the book of Romans omit the phrase "In Rome" however, most manuscripts do include it. The theory is that the original letter was written to Rome, but maybe Paul wanted to circulate it to many local churches, so he left out "to Rome" in later copies.

- ALL WHO ARE LOVED

The message is timely and universal and the message is important to us as well that we are loved by God. Did you ever stop and think about how tender God is, and that he chooses to call us beloved? Because of His love for us, and because of Jesus' work on the cross, we are to look at ourselves as saints. The word literally means "holy ones." We are holy ones because we

are God's children. Part of successfully living the Christian life is to view our selves correctly. If I start to view myself as a saint, and as a child of God do you suppose that will affect the way I live? Paul will answer that in the affirmative later on in Romans so let me say to all of you, "You are saints, you are holy ones, you are children of God. Now go out and act like it." It is imperative that we realize that the gospel message is for everyone, **God's offer of salvation is to all.**

V. WITH WHAT GOD OFFERS HIS PEOPLE (V. 7b)

The last half of verse 7 describes what God offers His people. Do not take this lightly.

- GRACE AND PEACE

Grace and Peace are promised to us as God's people. We saw the birth of the nation of God's chosen people in Genesis. Here we realize that through faith in Jesus Christ, we become part of that same family.

We receive grace. In other words, there is nothing that we can do to earn God's love or deserve salvation. We receive salvation by grace through faith.

We receive peace. Again, this is not the absence of conflict or hardship it is that Hebrew "shalom," that brings everything together in right harmony, even in the midst of difficult times.

Grace and peace, those are gifts available to us, God's children. In Genesis, we came across different names for God. Look at what Paul says: this peace comes from God our Father. The word for God in the Hebrew was "Elohim" and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord is the "Adonai" in Hebrew. Elohim, Adonai, this God is the YHWH of Genesis. Jehovah is our God. We are His people. **Grace and peace are promised to us as God's people.**

As we study through Romans, I hope you are diligent in reading and studying because the truth is this; **many of the spiritual, emotional, and psychological problems we face in life**

oftentimes come from a faulty understanding of who God is, who we are in Christ, or a faulty understanding of the essentials of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul will address several of these questions in his letter to the church in Rome.

I read this passage from Revelation chapter 7, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in the hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”