

## Prayers

### **To God**

In this world of jumbled emotions, confusing politics, mixed up justice, misunderstood religion and unknown futures, be our sanctuary of peace and security, Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. We thank You that through Your death and resurrection, we may have the assurance of eternal life and peace with the Father; for this is our Faith. We praise You for this sure hope and certain destiny. AMEN

### **For Self**

*Consider what has happened to you in the last day or so. At what point might you have been able to honour God more fully in your life?*

*Spend a few moments reflecting on this and challenging yourself to do those good things that will change your life for the better.*

### **For others**

*Pray urgently for all those affected by recent disclosures of mass child abuse in some English cities and regions (most recently in Rotherham).*

*Pray urgently about the tenuous and strained relationships between European countries and Russia.*

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## Meditation

*Lord Jesus Christ, grant me the gifts and graces I need  
To be a faithful disciple and to do Your will:*

*May I accept the true nature of the life I have been given;  
May I refrain from jealousy over the gifts of other people;  
May I strive to hold my tongue so I might not hurt others;  
May I smile to show true delight, and not do so falsely;  
May I put others first and question my own motives;  
May I conquer my anger before it rises to conquer me;  
May I pay attention to people so they know they are heard;  
May I strive to be a peacemaker, and a source of real love,*

*Complete this work of grace in me so that I may be more like You,  
Christ Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord.*

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## Bible Passage

### **Romans 1:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, and set apart for the Gospel of God <sup>2</sup> which was previously promised through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> the Gospel about His Son whose natural human descent was from David <sup>4</sup> and who was designated Son of God in power by the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ our Lord because of the resurrection from the dead. <sup>5</sup> Through Him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations for the sake of His Name, <sup>6</sup> which also includes you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> To all God's dearly loved people in Rome who are called to be holy: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## Bible study Review

Today, we begin to study probably the most substantial and influential letter ever written.

Romans has had a profound effect on generations of Christians, largely because it contains the only self contained explanation of Christian faith to be found in the Bible. Romans contains some powerful texts, and they have guided Christians for centuries. This is a letter we can return to time and time again for wisdom, correction, spiritual succour and plain advice.

After the introduction (1:1-15), Romans contains a detailed explanation of the state of humanity and the salvation won for us by Jesus and accessed by faith (chs.1-3). Paul then explains that this is consistent with Jewish Scripture (ch.4), and describes the immense benefits of salvation (chs.5-8). In a powerful central section, He describes his heartache at the rejection of Jesus by the Jews (chs.9-11), and then continues by offering sound advice about Christian living (chapters 8 to 14). Lastly, the letter has a lengthy but revealing ending (chs.15,16).

Most of Paul's letters were written to churches he either knew or founded, but this one is quite different. The letter is addressed to the church at Rome, the capital city of the Roman Empire and the supreme centre of power and culture. The Gospel had found its way there quite naturally and probably without evangelism, through the movement of people, perhaps servants attached to the households of high ranking officials in the Roman administration. It was Paul's intention to go to Rome (1:8-15), so he wrote by way of personal introduction. Paul was also concerned that God's people should be united in faith, so it seems obvious that he should set out his beliefs to the church at Rome in a clear and systematic way.

To begin with, Paul introduces himself as an apostle, 'set apart for the Gospel of God' (1:1); he does not defend the title as he does in other letters. He presumes that the church at Rome have heard of him and will accept his role as a leader of the church. Paul then sets out a summary of the Gospel (1:2-6), so that his readers can be in no doubt about the authenticity of the message he brings. He gives a clear statement of the Gospel, mentioning Scriptures, the prophets and King David, and presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of God's plan. Paul says little more about the Gospel at this point apart from a brief reference to the Holy Spirit and the 'resurrection from the dead' (1:4), but he concludes by emphasising faith (1:5). He makes it clear that his purpose is to facilitate faith, for the Gospel is the good news that people have access to God through faith in Jesus, His Son. As we will discover, most of the letter is about this faith.

Although this is only an introduction and there is much that Paul does not say, there are a number of interesting features to this passage. Because he is describing the work of Jesus as

the fulfilment of God's plan for the world, Paul describes the Gospel as the 'Gospel of God' (1:1), and not 'the Gospel of Jesus Christ', as we might say. He also describes Jesus as both human and divine, having a 'human descent ... from David' (1:3) and 'designated Son of God in power by the Holy Spirit' (1:4). We can read this all too quickly and forget the revolutionary nature of such ideas when they were first written. Also, Paul hints at the task of evangelism in verse 5, where he describes the process of bringing faith to people throughout 'all nations' (1:5). Again, with only a few words, Paul declares a profound truth not preached before, which is that God's love is for all people and all nations.

In the last verse, Paul greets his readers more specifically. His words reach out to them in Christian fellowship, for the church at Rome are a people 'dearly loved' and 'called to be holy' (1:7). He offers his readers his warm, inclusive greeting, using words familiar to both Gentiles and Jews; 'grace and peace ...'. Paul may not have founded the church at Rome, but he accepted them as God's own people.

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## Going Deeper

### ***Paul – a man set apart***

At the beginning of his letter, Paul uses four words to describe himself; 'servant' (or 'slave'), 'called', 'apostle', and 'set apart'. All these words except 'apostle' are connected to the Old Testament and this can help us understand what Paul means. Paul's life changed completely when he met the Lord on the Damascus Road, but his scholarship as a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) means he was uniquely placed to connect the Old and the New Testaments. His main task here is to explain how God's eternal plan of salvation is fulfilled in the 'Gospel of Jesus', that is, the work and ministry of Jesus (1:1-6).

Doing this great task, Paul knows he is a 'servant' (sometimes translated 'slave') of God, and this description fits because most of the Old Testament characters used by God were called 'servants' (a Hebrew word meaning 'slave'), e.g. Abraham (Gen 26:34), Moses (Ex 4:10), David (2 Sam 3:18), and Solomon (1 Kings 8:53). The prophets also used the word 'servant' to refer to all Israel; Isaiah calls Israel God's 'servant', called to bring light into the world (Isaiah 42:1-7 etc.). Great OT characters were also 'called', for example, Moses (Ex 3:1-15) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:1-10). So the words Paul uses here place him firmly within the historic line of people specially chosen by God to reveal His salvation to the world.

Paul knew that he therefore bore a great responsibility to take God's revelation to the whole world. To do this, God had 'set him aside' as an apostle, a word which means someone with a special mission. It was Paul's testimony that the power of God to build the early church did not rest exclusively on the twelve disciples (often referred to as 'the apostles'). God called other apostles such as himself for this special 'service' within the Kingdom of God.

### ***The 'Gospel of God'***

Paul said openly that the Gospel he preached was no new religious phenomenon. There was great interest in those days in 'something new' (see Acts 17:15f.), but Paul knew such a quest was irrelevant; and it remains so today. The truth of God is consistent throughout history, or it is not truth about God at all. In order to quash speculation, he firmly placed the Gospel within the Jewish traditions of God's revelation through the Old Testament (1:2).

However, Paul's preaching was not in the tradition people might have expected from a trained Pharisee. Judaism was firmly rooted in the interpretation of the laws of Moses by the main Jewish teachers of the day – largely Pharisees. However, Paul knew enough about Jesus to know that He connected His teaching to the Old Testament not through the laws of Moses but through the prophets, usually Isaiah (e.g. Matt 13:14, 15:7). He says here that the Gospel 'was previously promised through His prophets' (1:2), and in this way connects firmly with Jesus' teaching rather than Pharisaic tradition.

### ***The Saviour***

Paul then announces that the Messiah God's Son (1:3), and describes Jesus in three phrases. Firstly, he says He was a 'natural descent was from David' (1:3), again placing him in the prophetic tradition. The second phrase recalls Jesus' baptism, when Jesus was given the Holy Spirit, and God's approval to fulfil the ministry God had given Him; in Paul's words 'designated Son of God in power by the Holy Spirit' (1:3). The third phrase honours the fulfilment of Jesus' ministry in which He is given the right to be called the 'Christ', the 'Anointed One' of Israel; 'because of the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord' (1:4).

This last phrase has one other special feature; Paul calls Jesus 'our Lord'. Now, whilst we are used to hearing such words today, it was a remarkable thing to be said at that time. The word 'Lord' was spoken by Jews in place of the sacred 'name' of God spelt 'JHWH', but regarded as so holy it could not be said for fear of death! So by using this term, Paul claims that Jesus is indeed the 'Son of God'. He has risen, ascended and returned to the Father; He is divine, and is part of the very make up and nature of God!

### ***The commission***

Paul's call to make God's love known to the whole world through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was not something that anyone could do of themselves, for they needed 'grace and apostleship'; in other words, they needed not just the call, but also the godly qualities that would enable the task to be achieved. Furthermore, we learn here that the great mission to which he was called was intended to bring about 'the obedience of faith', the true mark of God's new People who responded to the Gospel. These are key words for Paul, and we will find that they are central to His explanation of Christian faith throughout his letter.

Paul did not at this point claim an apostleship that was his own or a mission that was his to perform alone. The task of spreading the Gospel was one that was shared, and others were involved; others had brought the Gospel to Rome, and his desire was to engage with the church there and share in the riches of God (see later). He knew that the task of apostleship was shared with others, and not necessarily the other disciples

### ***The Greeting***

Having introduced himself and explained the Gospel he preached in a powerful and condensed way, Paul formally greets the people of the church in Rome with warm words similar to those he uses in other letters (1:7). He combines two greetings, the Greek greeting 'grace', which conveys the idea of generosity and favour, and the Hebrew greeting 'peace' ('Shalom') which conveys the ideas of happiness and contentment. Throughout the world, peoples use different words by way of greeting which say a great deal about the intention of those who use them.

Paul seeks here to be as open and friendly as possible to the church of Rome, because he wants his letter to be received. He intends to write extensively about the Gospel, and he knows

this will be a substantial document. By offering this warm greeting, he hopes the church will accept what he is about to say!

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## **Application**

### ***Discipleship issues***

#### ***The challenge to apply***

It is not easy to 'apply' this text, as if we can find something to do as a direct consequence of each part of what it says. Romans is a powerful statement of belief, and the challenge we will face throughout our study of this letter will be to try and understand what Paul says and then connect this with our own faith in Jesus. Sometimes, we will find that what Paul says is profoundly challenging, and at other time we will agree with him wholeheartedly and without question. Nevertheless, we must not shirk the challenge of this letter and what it says, for it is Scripture, and it carries the weight of being God's Word.

#### ***Applying the Gospel to real life***

As an introduction to a letter, this passage describes the Gospel of Salvation in a direct and condensed manner which has much to teach us. Paul points out that the Gospel has its origins in God, and it is foretold in Scriptures through the prophets of the Old Testament. They were inspired by God, so their words must be consistent with what God did through Jesus. The Gospel is fulfilled in Jesus, a man filled with the Holy Spirit and declared 'Son of God' for His work as Messiah; but more than this, His death and resurrection proves to us that He is God. Because of this, Jesus is the heart of the Gospel we proclaim, which is designed by God to bring salvation to the world, and also 'the obedience of faith' amongst those people who believe in Him and believe the Gospel.

As long as we seek to apply these Gospel truths to our lives, then we remain connected to the long tradition of apostolic and Biblical faith in which we stand. Of course there is much more to come, and we will have to stay the course if we are to be helped to understand the extent and depths of the Gospel. As we read about it we will be challenged to the core.

#### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Try writing a letter in which you intend to tell some Christian people elsewhere in the world what you believe about Jesus Christ. How would you start the letter? Does Paul's method of starting give us a good example, or should we do it differently today?
- Fast and pray for other Christians around the world who long to know more of the Gospel, but because of repression and troubles, they are not at liberty to study openly or discuss their beliefs in an open way.

### ***Questions for groups***

1. *Discuss what you think is being said by each of the three statements about Jesus in verses 3 and 4. Is this a sufficient explanation of the person of Jesus Christ?*
2. *What is an 'apostle'? Discuss what this passage of scripture says about the role of an apostle.*

3. *If you were a member of a church who had not heard much about Paul before, how would you receive his letter, having read the introduction?*

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## **Final Prayer**

**Thank You, heavenly Father, for the call that You have placed upon our lives. You have loved us, given us Your love, and revealed Your truth to us; help us therefore to give you the best of our time and energy so that we may be used in Your service. All praise to You, heavenly Father. AMEN**