**Grace and Apostleship**

 June 27, 2021

Romans 1:1-7

Key Verse 1:5 “Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.”

The book of Acts ends with St. Paul teaching the Bible in a rented house in Rome. So it is good to study the book of Romans. Paul wrote Romans in Corinth at the end of the third missionary journey in order to prepare for his visit to Rome. An excellent way to understand Romans is as a dialogue between Paul and an unnamed objector who raises all kinds of arguments against the gospel. Paul answers the questions one by one. We will think of Romans as dealing with 10 main questions: (1) What is the gospel? (1:1-17); (2) Why do men need the gospel? (1:18-3:20); (3) According to the gospel, how can ungodly sinners be justified by the holy God? (3:21-31); (4) Does the gospel agree with the Old Testament? (4:1-25); (5) What are the benefits of justification in the believer’s life? (5:1-21); (6) Does the teaching of salvation by grace through faith permit or even encourage sinful living? (6:1-23); (7) What is the relationship of the Christian to the law? (7:1-25); (8) How is the Christian enabled to live a holy life? (8:1-39); (9) Does the gospel, by promising salvation to both Jews and Gentiles, mean that God has broken his promises to his chosen people, the Jews? (9:1-11:36); (10) How should those who have been justified by grace respond in their everyday lives? (12:1-16:27) As Christians, we should have clear answers to these questions. When we have clear understanding of Romans, we can have a better understanding of the whole Bible.

Romans has had a great impact on prominent leaders throughout Christian history—Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and more. Romans has inspired countless people to truly understand the gospel and live by it. Martin Luther (A.D. 1483-1546) was a Catholic monk. But he wanted to marry, and he struggled with his lustful desire. He tried to meet the God of grace through works of prayer, fasting, and other extreme practices. Once he crawled 25 stairs with broken glasses on his knees. He made many confessions and his chief monk tired of his confessions told him, “Don’t come to me until you commit a big sin.” Yet nothing could ease the torment of his soul. But through Romans 1:17, “The righteous will live by faith,” he experienced God’s grace. Luther could understand the deep meaning of the righteousness of God in the gospel. This enabled him to start the reformation. He said in his preface to the commentary on Romans, “This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and it is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.” May God bless you through the study of Romans.

**First**, Paul a servant of Jesus Christ (1-4). Look at verse 1. “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.” Here the word for servant is ‘dulos,’ which means slave. It refers to a person who was purchased on the slave market. A dulos was expected to obey his master no matter what. His life was not his own. He was bought with a price. Of all the Greek words Paul could have used to describe himself, he used a word that describes the lowest person in Roman society. When we think about it, that’s pretty strange. Normally when we are introducing ourselves, we try to put our best face forward: “Hi, I’m Prof. Henry Kim; professor of mathematics at the University of Toronto.” Or, “Hi, I’m John Smith. I am a sanitary engineer.” (It means that he is a garbage collector.) Or, “Hi, I’m Nicole. I am an office systems specialist.” (It means that she is a secretary.) It is natural to want to leave people with a pleasant and positive impression of who we are.

We would expect Paul to do the same thing. He has never been to Rome. He doesn’t know if the church in Rome will accept him or not. So we might expect him to say something like, “Hi, I am St. Paul, doctor of law and history, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, a most fruitful pioneering missionary, and a great theologian.” But that’s not what he says. Instead, Paul says, “I’m a slave! I am a servant of Christ Jesus.” In other words, “The most important thing you need to know about me is that I am a devoted servant of the Lord.” This is not a popular way to present the Christian faith. As Canadians, we pride ourselves on our freedom: We are not servants of the queen. We are not servants of anyone! We are free to do anything we want! We can be our own boss! But being a Christian doesn’t mean that we are free to do anything we want. Romans 6:16 says, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or obedience, which leads to righteousness?” Paul believed that when he offered his life to obey Jesus, he belonged to Jesus. Paul believed that Jesus purchased his life with his precious blood when he was a slave to sin. Since then, his life was united with Christ. Here we see Paul’s sense of belonging. He was happy that he belonged to Jesus. He was willing to do anything for his master, Jesus Christ. He loved to be called as a servant of Jesus. These days people have a negative connotation about the word “servant.” But we must maintain our identity as Bible teachers and servants of Jesus in this generation. Belonging to Jesus is not a burden but a great honor. If someone asks you, “What are you doing?” we should answer confidently, “I am a Bible teacher, a servant of Jesus and I also work as a professor for my living.” We need to have a clear sense of belonging as servants of Jesus Christ for campus students. There is no middle ground in our relationship with Jesus. If we do not belong to Jesus, we belong to the devil.

Paul also believed that he was called to be an apostle. Paul’s life was in the eternal plan of God’s salvation. His calling was not accidental or a random chance. He had a high calling from God for the gospel of Jesus. That calling made him a great servant of God. He did not give up his mission in spite of hardships and persecutions. He endured hardships like a solider of Christ. Nothing in the world could stop his mission. The calling of God enabled him to endure all kinds of trials and preach the gospel to the Gentiles who were the objects of God’s wrath. Paul had a broken shepherd heart for those who were not saved yet. He gave his life to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. In the end he received the victor’s crown of life from Jesus. Paul also believed that he was set apart for the gospel of God. “Set apart” means separated. “Set apart” in Greek is the word “Pharisee.” “Pharisee” means one who is separated, one who is set apart. Paul was originally a Pharisee, set apart for the law as a Jew. Now he is set apart for the gospel as a Christian.

**Second**, the gospel. Look at verses 2-4. “The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” The gospel in old English is “godspel”; god+spel. “Spel” means story. So gospel is God’s story. It is a translation of the Greek word, “euangelion”, where we get the word “evangelism.” It means good news. The gospel means good news. It is not good advice. Some people think that Christianity is good advice, telling you how to live and how to behave. The word, “good news” in ancient world was used only when something actually happened to change the situation completely. It was to announce a victory in a battle against enemies. It was to announce that help is on the way. It was to announce that something happened to change their lives. The Christianity is not a way of life; the Christianity is not even good teaching you adopt in your mind. The Christianity is a person you accept by faith. The gospel is the story of Jesus and his salvation of all human beings. The gospel is the good news of the great joy that God sent his Son to save sinners from the condemnation and to give an eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. We can look at Jesus from two points of view: human and divine. Humanly speaking, he was a descendant of David. He had a royal blood in him. He was a king. The gospel is that Jesus was born as a human through Mary and died for our sins as a sin offering. But that is not all. Jesus was raised on the third day and was declared to be the Son of God. His resurrection conquered death and gave us the living hope in the kingdom of God. Someone said, “It is not only the virgin womb which tells us who Jesus is. It is the empty tomb which tells us who Jesus is also.” Womb and tomb together tell us about who Jesus is. Womb tells us that he was born of a woman. The empty tomb proved the divinity of Jesus Christ. By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus was proved to be the Son of God.

**Third**, Grace and apostleship (5-7). Look at verse 5. “Through him, we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.” This verse reflects Paul’s conversion story. Paul was thoroughly trained as a Pharisee, and strongly believed that the only way of attaining the righteousness of God was in keeping the law. To him, believing in Jesus who was crucified as the Messiah, was unthinkable, a blasphemy. Paul regarded Christianity as such a serious threat that it would lead the whole nation astray, and it seemed to be spreading like wildfire. He thought that it should be eradicated as a matter of life and death. He was so obsessed with persecuting Christians that he tried to destroy the church of God (Gal 1:13). On the authority of the chief priest, he put many of the Lord’s people in prison and to death (Ac 26:10). He participated in the stoning of Stephen. Then Paul was on the way to Damascus to hunt down Christians. The risen Jesus met him and said to him, “Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?” (Ac 9:5; 26:15) Paul realized that Jesus was not a dead cult leader, but the Risen Christ and the glorious Son of God. Instead of being punished for his terrible sins, Paul was forgiven and received Jesus’ calling as an apostle to the Gentiles (Ac 9:15-18; 26:16-18). Acts 9:15 says, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.’” Paul experienced God’s grace; he was justified simply by faith in Christ and made right with God. Through this encounter with the Risen Jesus he was completely changed. Right away he began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God (Ac 9:20). Later he confessed, “Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1Ti 1:13-15). His old name was Saul which means “asked for, prayed for.” Saul was the first king in Israel. Obviously his parents named him Saul in the hope that he would be great like king Saul. Paul, when he was Saul, lived for his selfish ambition. But he was changed to Paul which means ‘small, humble.” It reveals God’s marvelous grace.

Paul received God’s grace and became an apostle to the Gentiles. When Paul spoke of “grace and apostleship” he did not use the singular pronoun, “I,” but the plural pronoun, “we.” When Paul said this, he meant that all those who received grace, received apostleship, too. God saved Paul in order to use him as his servant. When we receive God’s grace, we must live for the glory of God (6). All Christians received grace and apostleship. Here the Greek word for “and” is “kai” which has a meaning of “in another word.” That means grace and apostleship are interchangeable. Grace and apostleship cannot be separated. They go hand in hand. It is like bread and butter. Some people say, “I like grace but I don’t like mission.” They are like people who say, “I like bread but I don’t like butter, or I like babies but I don’t like baby-sitting.” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” To Paul the work of God was not a forced labor but a great joy. From the moment of receiving the grace of God, Paul’s life goal was changed from selfish human ambition to God’s mission. He lived for Jesus’ name’s sake not for his worldly ambition. His mission was to call people and help them obey God by faith. In the 21st century God called us for world campus mission. God set apart UBF for campus evangelism. So far he has done a marvelous work among many young university students last 60 years. God has raised more than 1,800 self-supporting missionaries and sent them over 100 countries in the world. Should we alter our special calling when we confront many hardships? Though the work of God is slow, we must maintain our special calling for campus mission. Do you believe that God called you for campus mission? If the answer is “yes,” then you are chosen by God and your life will be very precious before God.

Here apostle in Greek means sent. An apostle is a sent one, namely, missionary. We are all called to be a missionary. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (Jn 20:21) 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, “We are ambassadors for Christ the king.” Missile has the same meaning as missionary, sent. Missile is sent to destroy. Missionary is a Christian missile. Missionary is sent to save lives. It is what it means to live for his name’s sake. God created man to live for his glory. It is man’s sinful nature to live for his own name’s sake. Unlike animals, human beings look for their life purpose. Some people live for the sake of animal rights. Some people live for the sake of planet earth. Some people live for the sake of their children by saying, “I can sacrifice anything for my children.” Some people live for the sake of their career. But Jesus taught us a true purpose of life. He said, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.’” (Lk 11:2) To live for his name’s sake is to honor God as God. It is to live for the glory of God. It is to live for the sake of God’s kingdom. We can live for the glory of God by calling all U of T students to the obedience that comes from faith. It is to expand the kingdom of God among many U of T students. Truly the gospel of Jesus makes our life great and we can be happy to live as the servants of Jesus Christ. May God bless you to renew your calling and grace and apostleship through the study of Romans.

Big Idea: Those who receive grace receive apostleship also.