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Romans

To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:7

With this verse we move into a new section of Paul's letter. "To all who are in Rome" is speaking of the congregation specifically, not the city in general. As Paul says when speaking of his people Israel in Chapter 9, so can be said of the addressees in the letter – "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham."

The same thought applies here – "Not all who are in Rome are of the 'beloved of God' nor are they all 'called to be saints' because they live in Rome."

The reason we note this is because the church is an exclusive called out group of people in the world and not all, despite the common usage of the term, are "God's children." When Paul says these believers are "beloved of God" he uses the term *agapetois theo* meaning literally "God's love ones." It is these who are "called to be saints." The relationship – the calling – is offered by God and it is accepted by man. From that moment believers are set apart as holy and this is where the emphasis lies. Whereas we were once at enmity with God, there is now felicity and God sets His called ones apart from the world.

Next Paul gives what will become a standard greeting in his epistles, “Grace to you and peace to you.” Grace is unmerited favor which cannot be earned. This is a common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however is a common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is shalom. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet, but is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways. Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. Grace precedes peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God.

Paul extends this wonderful blessing on behalf of “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Throughout Paul’s letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which simply can’t be missed. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world.

In these seven opening verses enough theology has been presented to open the minds of the people of the world to the immensity of the work of God through Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of

- 1) The surety of the gospel as was revealed through the Old Testament prophets,
- 2) The inspiration of Scripture because of this surety,
- 3) The Son-ship of Jesus Christ,
- 4) The Lordship of Jesus Christ,
- 5) The humanity of Jesus Christ,
- 6) The deity of Jesus Christ,
- 7) The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
- 8) The unmerited favor and placement of those who have called on Jesus Christ,
- 9) And an introduction into the nature of the Godhead by indicating the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

In all, these seven opening verses are a storehouse of theological wealth for the saints of God to ponder.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. Romans 1:8

After his greeting, Paul begins the main portion of the epistle with the word “first.” There will be in Romans, as in all of Paul’s writings, a logical sequence of thought and an articulate presentation of his arguments. As he is writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, everything he will say is the absolute truth in how things are in relation to God. We may disagree, but we are only disagreeing with God. We may interpret doctrinal points differently, but in the end there is only one correct interpretation. Therefore, as with the entire Bible, a careful analysis is required.

Paul’s first thought is to “thank my God through Jesus Christ.” As intolerant as it may sound, there is only one path to God, and that is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and there is only one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). No prayer to God is acceptable which has not gone through Him. No thanks to or praise of God is effective unless it is directed through Him. And so Paul gives his thanks to God through Jesus on behalf of the believers in Rome. And it is a thanks grounded in the knowledge of their great faith, a faith “spoken of throughout the whole world.”

Although the reason for their faith being so widely disseminated isn’t directly stated, the content of the epistle certainly indicates some of the reasons. Paul will speak on immorality and it is probable that the believers were either mocked or held in esteem for holding a moral stand. He will also speak on God’s judgment, man’s fallen nature and unrighteousness, and etc. Any of these issues could be the basis for the recognition of their faith by the world’s people.

What Paul will do is logically defend our responsibilities and obligations towards God, both from His general revelation of Himself through nature as well as

through His specific revelation of Himself through the Bible and through Jesus. As humans, particularly in our post-modern society, we may find Paul's words out of touch, but God doesn't. What is presented in this epistle reflects God's standards and we ignore them or attempt to diminish them at our own peril.

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,... Romans 1:9

Paul draws God in as his witness for his thoughts in the next two verses. What he is going to convey then is the absolute truth. His vow is before God "whom I serve with my spirit." The word Paul uses for "spirit" is *pneumati*. As he writes throughout his epistles, he consistently and carefully makes a distinction, and even a contrast, between the "spirit" and the "soul." To Paul, the demarcation is absolutely clear. The spirit of a person, the *pneuma*, is not the same as the soul which is the term *psuche*. To him it is the difference between the spiritual life of the person and the natural/physical life of the person.

It's important to understand the nature of humanity as the Bible presents it though to fully understand and define what Paul is speaking of. Humans are a soul with a body. The two are united and are incomplete without the other. Paul assures us of this in 2 Corinthians 5:1-3 –

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked."

In these verses, he calls the soul without a body "naked." This concept is known as anthropological hylomorphism – man is a soul/body unity. The natural man is a soul united with a body whether connected to God or not. This is similar to an animal. There is a body and a life force which propels that body but not necessarily a spiritual aspect. The "spirit" (*pneuma*) Paul is speaking of is the

spiritual connection between God and man; it is that part of the man which is intimately connected to God.

Paul says that God, whom he serves with his spirit is “in the gospel of His Son.” The gospel is a spiritual force then. And of course this is so. In Ephesians 2:4, 5 Paul writes this –

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...”

As you can see, a living person (a soul/body unity) can still be “dead.” What is needed is the regeneration which comes through the gospel message. When this is received, the spirit is made alive. We are now reconnected to God through the gospel – our soul/body unity is as God intended for us. Got it? Good stuff.

It is in this quickened state that Paul “without ceasing” remembers those in Rome in his prayers. Does this mean that Paul didn’t eat, write letters, sleep, or do other activities which would keep him from praying for them? No. Rather, his life was lived in a constant state of prayer which occurred at any given moment. He could pray while doing any of these things or not pray while doing them and not be found a liar. He, like each of us, should live in such a way that we are always connected to God. If we are, then we will simply pray as things which need prayer come to mind.

A good example of this connection is explicitly stated by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-21 –

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

The verbs here indicate that these things should be done now, that they are crucial to our spiritual life, and that we are to be active in pursuing them. This is the state Paul tells us we should live in because it is the state he lived in and which he knew was pleasing to God.