

The Way

According to Paul

Chapter 2 - Romans 1.1-7

An apostle greets his readers

The text:

008 Opening greeting of the letter

009 Paul is a dedicated man

010 Paul's relationship to Jesus

011 Faithfulness of a promise-keeping God

012 God's Son

013 Paul has received grace and apostleship

014 Holy ones - belonging to Jesus Christ

"The Way" in practice:

015 Reading the Bible

016 Obedience of faith

017 To receive his Gift is to obey Him

Where can I see the chapters before this one?

Chapter 1 - <http://theframework.net.au/david-boan/wp-content/uploads/TheWayChap01-.pdf>

The text:

1 Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called an apostle, set apart to God's gospel, 2 the good news he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. 3 This good news concerns his Son: who, according to the flesh, was descended from David, 4 and according to the Spirit of holiness, he was declared Son of God in power, by his resurrection out from among the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to bring about an obedience of faith among all the nations on behalf of his name; 6 among whom are you also, called of Jesus Christ. 7 To all those beloved of God being in Rome, who are called saints - grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [DB 2020]

The flow of the writer's first paragraph, as he moves from one thing to the next, could be listed this way:

1. As a servant of Jesus Christ, Paul's life is dedicated to God's good news
2. This good news
 - was something already promised by God
 - it concerns God's Son
3. About the Son of God
 - He was humiliated and exalted
 - He is Jesus Christ our Lord
4. Paul is gifted and authorised to bring about an obedience of faith
 - among the Gentiles
5. The Christians in Rome

are called holy ones ['saints'] of Jesus
are greeted

008 - The opening greeting of the letter

*To compare some parallel texts, here are other greetings of Paul's letters
[1 Corinthians 1.1-3, 2 Corinthians 1.1-2, Galatians 1.1-5, Ephesians 1.1-2,
Philippians 1.1-2, Colossians 1.1-2, 1 Thessalonians 1.1, 2 Thessalonians 1.1-2
Philemon 1-3]*

What we are reading here is a greeting which follows the model of a typical, first century letter. It has certain elements:

- [a] it identifies the author [1.1-5] and
- [b] the receivers of the letter [1.6]; then it
- [c] brings an opening greeting [1.7].

Other letters of Paul have similar styles of greetings. This greeting to the Romans is tailored to present Paul's credentials to a church to which he had never been. His current circumstances of life, along with his personal greetings, are reserved until the 15th chapter.

It was a common practice to dictate a letter to an amanuensis - a person capable of writing letters and other official documents. Paul dictated this letter to his friend, Tertius [16.22].

009 - Paul is a dedicated man [1.1]

The manner in which people greet each other shows the way they understand their relationships [1.5-7]. This is seen in that way that Paul goes directly to the driving motive of his own life and its connection with the life that he has with those in the church at Rome [1.11-13].

The source of this motivation is not himself, nor his readers, but 'Christ Jesus'. Christ is a Greek way of speaking of the anointed, authorised person of the promised Messiah. Paul puts the word 'Christ' before the word 'Jesus', because he wants to emphasise for the

reader that they should think first of Jesus as being God's promised Messiah, the Christ for Israel.

So he immediately proceeds to remind his readers that God's promises about the Messiah, which are good news, were spoken by the Old Testament prophets. When he writes 'Jesus' second, he will then speak of his human descent and life and how, after his death and burial, his resurrection declared him to be Son of God. Later, for both himself and the Romans, he will reverse the order, speaking of 'Jesus Christ, our Lord'. [1.4]

Concerning himself and his relation to the Messiah, Jesus, he emphasises two things. First, he understands himself as the personal property of Jesus Christ; 'slave' is his word. Second, he is Jesus' authorised messenger; he is an apostle. He has been set apart to preach this good news by Jesus Christ, who called him, authorised him and gave him this commission [Acts 9.1-22, especial v 15-16; 22.6-16; 26.12-18]. He does not want to speak for himself but only for his master. So, he speaks it as an accredited ambassador of the Gospel, the good news.

010 - What Paul's relationship to Jesus means for his readers

[i] 'Paul, a servant (slave) of Christ Jesus' [1.1]

Speaking of the relationship from his point of view, Paul thinks of himself as owned entirely by his master, the Messiah, who is Jesus, which emphasises the obedience which he is required to give. He does not tell us how, or in what way, he has come to be in this relationship. He has not been forced into it from the master's side; his being a "slave" is Paul's own free response to Jesus' call, a matter that is true for us as well.

As it was then, for the original readers of this letter, so it is for us now; Paul's submission to Jesus makes us more certain that we can hear Jesus speaking through him. The submitted agent is the surest way of hearing the authoritative master. Notice that he doesn't speak of himself as a "disciple", that is a man following a rabbi; which has the sense of a learner, of a man being formed to be like his rabbi. And while this may have been true for Paul, it is not the issue here, where he is stressing the authority he has as a slave under a master.

If we don't think of a tyrannical master but a good one, slavery is not a bad word. Paul will re-visit the understanding of slavery again in this letter [6.15-23; 12.1-2]. The early Christians threw their lives away to become slaves of Jesus, their Saviour. As they received the Spirit of Christ they were aware they had received His life. So they embraced the repentant life, turning from all that was involved in the old, former, fleshly life [Colossians 3.4-11].

Clearly, they were conscious of having made an exchange of masters. They had been rescued from serving themselves which really meant serving the power called 'sin' in this letter [6.11-14; 7.7-13]. They had begun to serve the Lord, which was to become a slave of righteousness [6.16-18, 23]. For them, this great exchange of masters was a move from a slavery, that was leading to death and corruption to a life of trusting obedience which became their liberty of sharing in the life of God [8.20-21]

[ii] Paul is 'called to be an apostle' [1.1]

An apostle is an authorised messenger (slave) who held the power of attorney for his master. In everyday life it implied the authority to transact legal dealings

for his master anywhere in the country. Paul sees this as a "calling", in the sense of a commissioning. He would, I think, date this from his Damascus Road experience when God spoke through Ananias and made clear what his task would be [Acts 9.15-16] .

'Called an apostle', then, states the source and basis of his authority. At that time in Rome and for us today, this will have the effect that when the apostle speaks it is the Master who is speaking. A message from Paul is message from Jesus. So it is for us as well - for, although we are not authorised apostles as he was, yet we have received the same Spirit of the risen Christ that Paul had.

[iii] Paul is set apart for the gospel of God [1.1]

The task Jesus has designated for Paul is his dedicated mission. He has set him apart - cut him out, divided him off - to his work of announcing the good news among the Gentile nations. This task of Paul's was recognised early among the Christians at Jerusalem from where it all started [Galatians 2.7].

Paul is a focussed person in regard to the preaching of the gospel. He says he is a 'debtor'; he feels he owes it to others, to preach to them the gospel [1.14]. He does do other things, such as tent making, to support himself and those he travels with; but he has a disciplined life regarding his preaching of the good news.

011 - The faithfulness of a promise-keeping God is good news [1.2]

The good news was promised by God; it is contained in what has been asserted by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures of Israel - the Old Testament, as we call it now in the Christian era. These Scriptures should be read as
18 announcements made ahead of the time of the

arrival of Jesus Christ. The subject of the gospel is Jesus Christ and these Scriptures bear witness about Him.

So, in our reading through the letter to the Romans, we shall see Paul constantly wants to present the gospel as previously stated by the witness of the Old Testament. His statement of the good news asserts there is nothing promised in those Scriptures that has not found its full expression in Jesus Christ [2 Corinthians 1.20a].

012 - God's Son [1.3-4]

The good news - the gospel - has two perspectives concerning God's Son. First, from the human side, it involves the humiliation of the Son of God. For he lays aside his glory when He comes amongst us, taking flesh which is like ours [8.3]. He lived our lowly life, He died and was buried. Second, this good news concerning God's Son also includes his exaltation which is most clearly declared when He is raised from the dead.

[i] born of the seed of David, according to the flesh [1.3]

When Paul thinks of these two standards, he calls the one which emphasises the humanity of Jesus, a view taken 'according to the flesh'. So, he says, Jesus is born of the seed of David, according to the flesh [1.3] This points us to the Messiah's historical life. It was openly visible and could be easily understood by a simple human, fleshly way of knowing. Jesus is of King David's line and so stands in the promises of God as the line through which the ruler of Israel will come [2 Samuel 7]. He is a true human, born of a woman as we are.

[ii] powerfully 'declared to be Son of God', according of the Spirit of holiness [1.4]

The other perspective is in accord with the standard of the Holy Spirit's operation. When Paul says , 'according to the Spirit of holiness', he is using an Old Testament way of speaking to refer to the Holy Spirit.

In this way, Jesus is powerfully 'declared to be Son of God' according to the Spirit [1.4]. Looking at Jesus from the perspective of the revelation which He brings about, we see that, on the one hand he is "born" in the world, but He is also designated [shown to be, or declared to be] Son of God. This points to revelation about Him declared by the Spirit; information not able to be gained by any fleshly person.

[iii] 'by his resurrection out from among the dead' [1.4]

The resurrection of Jesus is an act of God's Spirit which pulls Jesus up from among all the dead ones. Being among the dead was an ambiguous position; for it seemed to imply that He was dead for all the reasons that men, who live according to the flesh, die. So that, in dying, He seemed to be a sinner who had fallen under death, as all sinners do [5.12,14,21; 6.23].

After men and women condemned him they went on to crucify him, in their view, as a sinner. By his resurrection he was He shown to be in the right; he was vindicated or justified from this ambiguous, seemingly sinful position. His resurrection, seen from the perspective the Holy Spirit, declared him to be the Son of God who is possessed of a life which the place of the dead could not hold.

Philippians 2.6ff

20 The Spirit of holiness has made this perspective crystal clear. So, Paul's opening greeting has

portrayed Jesus of Nazareth as a single person, who may be truly viewed from both a place of humiliation and also of exaltation. He is also stated by Paul elsewhere, to be not just simply a man who, like the prophets of old, might bring the Word of God – He is the Word of God incarnate. He is the God-man, truly human and truly divine; both at once.

[iv] “Jesus Christ” is the Lord of the Church [1.5].

He is accepted as truly God to those who call upon his Name. Paul wants the Romans to know that their Lord is the Jewish Messiah, the son of man and the Son of God [John 5.36-47].

013 - Through Jesus Christ -along with the rest of the apostles - Paul has received grace and apostleship [1.6]

Jesus Christ is Paul's Lord. It is from Him that he has received grace - the gift - to call all the Gentiles to obedience to Israel's King. It is an obedience of faith - that is, it is an obeying of Jesus Christ which involves trusting Him; and so, because He is trusted, his Name is honoured in this obedience which the Gentiles offer to Him - both as Son of God and son of David.

It is a grace and apostleship '...to [unto, leading to,] bring about the obedience of faith'. The grace they have received is the basis for the faith-obedience that follows. Their trust in that good news sets them free from doing things to get rewards from God – it sets them free from their own self motive.

Such grace calls forth from within us a voluntary, happy, obeying of Jesus. This is what is involved in the obedience of faith. While it is an obedience that we must do for ourselves; yet it is not done by ourselves. It is drawn freely from us by the grace we have received

and is energised by the Holy Spirit, Who has come to dwell with us. It leads to the experience of joy - the exhilaration of having freely done what was asked simply for the pleasure of the One who asked [14.23b]. Later in this letter, Paul will show that any obedience, based on trusting the person we obey, is a moment-by-moment thing that has us constantly moving from 'faith to faith' throughout the duration of our life [1.17].

014 - 'Called to belong to Jesus Christ' and so are holy ones [1.6-7]

Daniel 7.13-14,27; Colossians 1.12-14

These readers, to whom the letter is written, are Christians predominantly from among the Gentiles. This seems to be the clear inference of the issues pre-occupying the church in Rome which are laid out in chapters 14-15 of this letter.

The word 'saints' - holy ones - has a long history. The prophet Daniel, speaks vividly of the beastly, dominating kingdoms that arise out of the peoples of the world. In contrast to them, and yet enmeshed in the history they share with them, Daniel speaks of the saints of the most High God. Being oppressed by these Gentile kingdoms at the time, the saints, the holy people of God, will eventually receive the kingdom - they will take a share in the reign of God which is coming over the whole world.

In Romans, as we shall see, being the holy people of God has nothing to do with their own religious effort. It points rather to the work of Jesus Christ for them and, by his Spirit, now at work within them. In just the same way that Paul is, they too, are "called" to know Jesus Christ, they are beloved of God and are in a good standing with God.

All of this is by grace, as a gift given to them.

22 "...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you

to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.” [Colossians 1.12-14 ESV].

So, in our Romans text here, Paul does not greet them in the normal way of the formal correspondence of the day, but says “grace and peace” which comes from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ [1.7; 5.1]. It is a shorthand way to bring to their attention the gracious way God has acted freely towards us in Christ. The results of that grace is their own reconciliation and rested peace they now have with God. The recipients of the letter, like Paul, share the same common base of life.

It is that in Jesus Christ grace and peace has become their own experience, for they have come to know God as their Father because they have seen Him revealed though the Son, their Lord, Jesus Christ. As creatures of God, they have a shared life with their Father and with their Lord, by the Spirit [Ephesians 1.3ff].

'The Way' of our life with God

015 - Reading the Bible

When we read the apostolic witness and the Old Testament scriptures we do two things at once; we **read the text** and we also **read the author**. When we read the words written on our page, these are translated from Greek. So the act of reading requires us to bring a skill to understand what is written. It is the knowledge of the words and grammar of our native language. That is pretty straight-forward if we can read; but we must ask another to read to us if something prevents us doing it for ourselves. In which case, as we listen we will hear the

voice of the reader.

But we are also **reading the author** who wrote the text. In doing that we bring our will, submitted and open to what he is saying. We are getting into his mind as we read. We are responding to him in what he writes. Or, if we are listening to the voice of someone who reads the text to us then, while we are hearing the voice of the reader, we are also hearing the Word of the Author. This is particularly true when we have the text read to us while we are gathered together [1 Timothy 4.11-16]. This was probably how it was in Rome when Phoebe turned up with the letter she carried and they assembled and had it read aloud to them. They might have done this many times in order to discuss it.

There is more here; in reading a submitted apostle, we are reading Paul's word-fall, his own way of saying things as the Spirit guided him; but, because of his submission, that means we are **reading the Master's mind**. For, the same Spirit of Christ that he received, we, as Christians, have also received. And since the apostle is submitted to pass on what his Master wants said, then we are hearing from the risen Jesus, by his Spirit, even as we read.

There is more yet, the same holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, we have received into our persons - for that is what makes us consider ourselves to be Christians [8.9-11].

And the same Spirit within us also teaches us to know the truth when we hear it [1 John 2.20-27]. In this way we **register within ourselves the Spirit's confirmation**. This is what happens within us when we "know" something and it is made more certain to us as we read the Scriptures. We shall say more about this aspect later [See the consideration of 1.9].

In this way, Paul's letters come to be for us **the voice of Jesus**, instructing us how to think about Him, and about ourselves in relation to Him and also about matters we should receive and obey. So, whenever we read both text and Author, there is lots to consider about the living out the Way. It all becomes very practical and real.

So why not check out these possible transactions with the Lord as you speak with Him.

About reading the apostolic witness, so:

(1) You may need to change your mind - repent - of a previous, simply human, approach to the apostolic witness. Don't forget to turn from any old view, abandon it completely, renounce it and embrace the truth. You can tell the Lord this. He will honour your single-mindedness here.

(2) Check out your own willingness to accept the message from Jesus through Paul.

(3) Even though we know that the Scriptures are written by a human agent who is inspired by the Holy Spirit, always be mindful that we are reading the scriptures as from God Himself. The whole Church recognises scripture as authorised by God.

About the gospel concerning God's Son

(1) There is no salvation outside of what God has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus. It is all done in and through his Son. Do you have any other mediators than Him? Do you trust anyone else, pray to anyone else whom you allow to come between you and the Lord.

(2) Do you see Him as fully God and fully man, having two natures and yet being the one person?

016 - The obedience of faith

What may surprise us in this opening greeting, is that Paul recognises the outcome of his mission of preaching the good news. It is that the news brings about a response in people which Paul calls the 'obedience of faith'. We shall have to look more closely at this later, for Paul writes a lot about the way that a Christian, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin, is to respond to what God has said in the gospel. In a startling way he has linked obeying with trusting. And this is the one thing we need to think about here in the greeting of the letter. There will be much more about this later.

Our initial response is to be one of trust. As we hear the good news, we are receiving it as true. We are taking what God has said He has accomplished for us, in sending his Son, to be how things now stand for the world - and it is so for each of us individually.

We are accepting the gracious work which has been done for us - the way that God has worked, through his Son, so that we may be found righteous in His sight. This is to respond to the Word of God who has taken flesh for us, and to respond to the Father who has sent Him on our behalf and in certain ways, to act for us in our stead. This is to be 'called' by God, of which we shall have more to say [8.28].

Perhaps you have thought about obedience as a matter of doing what you are told. And that aspect of it is certainly in this letter; and that too is a matter of trust as well [6.12-23]. But before we come to the 'task' we are set, we must be very sure of the free 'gift' which precedes it. And in the first 8 chapters of this letter we shall be concentrating on that wonderful free gift, that grace of God, which has come to us in Christ Jesus. The

reception of this free gift is matter of trust, of faith in what is offered to us by God.

017 - To receive his Gift is to obey him.

So, be prepared for Paul to show us how it is true that we begin by trusting God's initial word to us, and then, once we have received that word as a basis to stand on with God, we are then going on to live by faith as we walk out the way of life to which we are now committed. For the moment, here in this reading, we need to absorb the powerful truth that to receive his gift is to obey Him. Whenever we are complicit with someone's initiative towards us, we have in fact obeyed the intention of their will. It is to begin to relate to Him by faith; it is an obedience which is faith.

To go on with the Lord is to move from that initial faith to a life of moment-by-moment faith. We will have begun to live 'from faith to faith' [1.17].

[1] So, check out if you are trying to live the Christian life in your own drive and push. There is more about this later [chapters 7-8].

[2] Check out if you are trying to keep rules and laws that others put on us. Remember that we are obeying by trusting God *himself*. It is not a matter of others telling us what we 'ought' to do so that we 'should' do what they say.

In fact, we need to beware; for, to follow the methods which others put upon us as a way to deal with our struggles with our own flesh and its desires can disqualify us from realising in practice what God has done for us.

"Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reasonably his sensuous mind...(sc. don't)

submit to regulations -21 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' 22 [referring to things that all perish as they are used] - according to human precepts and teachings...they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh" [Colossians 2.18-23 ESV].