

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver Street  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## THE GOSPEL OF GOD: TO THE NATIONS

Romans 1:5-7

By

Steven J. Cole

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Romans, Lesson 3

## The Gospel of God: To the Nations Romans 1:5-7

There is a familiar story about three men who were working on a stone pile at a construction site. A curious passerby asked the first worker, "What are you doing?" He tersely replied, "Chiseling stone."

Hoping for a better answer, he asked the second worker, "What are you doing?" "Bringing home a paycheck."

Still wondering what was going on, he asked the third man, "Sir, what are you doing?" The man dropped his sledge hammer, stood erect, and his face brightened as he waved toward the site and exclaimed, "I'm building a great cathedral!"

All three men were doing the same job, but only the third man had the proper vision to make his job meaningful and to put his heart into it.

If someone asked how you serve the Lord, what would you say? Some might say, "I teach Sunday School." Or, "I help clean up after church socials." Or, "I serve as a greeter on Sunday mornings." Or, "I lead a small group Bible study."

All of those answers are good as far as they go, but a bigger perspective would be, "God has saved me and is using me to help build His church and to be His channel for taking the gospel to the nations."

That was the apostle Paul's perspective, as we see in Romans 1:5-7. God saved Paul from being a persecutor of the church and graciously called him as an apostle to help lay the foundation for the worldwide church, which Christ promised to build. God was using Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles (or, nations) for His name's sake. While none of us are called as apostles in the same sense that Paul was, the principles still apply:

God saves us and gives us spiritual gifts so that we will be His channels for the gospel to go to the nations.

You should see whatever you do to serve the Lord as fitting into that greater purpose of seeing His name glorified through the power of the gospel going to every people group. Maybe you're thinking, "But I'm not cut out to be a missionary." Maybe not, but as God gives you the greater vision of bringing about "the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (1:5), there are many ways that you can help out in that cause.

Each of us can pray for the various people groups around the world and for the gospel to go to the ends of the earth. We can give from what the Lord has provided to support missions. We can seek to lead boys and girls and men and women to the Savior, and then instill in them a vision for taking the gospel to the nations. Maybe God will raise up a Hudson Taylor or a William Carey from your labors. Even if it's a mundane job, like cleaning up after a church social or helping maintain our facilities, it's helping to build the church. As long as the church keeps its focus on discipling the nations, then you're part of the team effort.

In these verses, which are the tail end of a seven-verse sentence, Paul gives us five principles about salvation and service. The main thing to keep in mind is that God didn't save you so that you could sit around and be happy or have a happy family. Happiness is a means to an end, namely, that the gospel would go out to the nations. That, in turn, is a means to the ultimate end of glorifying God. So if God has saved you, He wants you in some capacity to be part of His means of channeling the gospel to the nations.

1. God saves us by His grace and gives us gifts to be used in His service.

Paul writes, "through whom we have received grace and apostleship..." The plural "we" may refer to Paul, along with the other apostles. But the context does not seem to support that meaning, so probably Paul is using "we" in an editorial sense, to mean, "I" (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Apollos/Eerdmans], p. 48).

*Grace* is one of Paul's favorite words. He uses it 100 out of its 155 uses in the New Testament, including 24 times in Romans, the most of any book (Morris, *ibid.*). Paul received grace, which means, God's unearned, unmerited favor. If you deserve it, it's not grace. All you can do with grace is to receive it. The Christian life is not a

matter of striving to do enough good deeds to pay for or outweigh your bad deeds, so that God owes you forgiveness. Rather, it's a matter of coming to God as a guilty sinner, deserving of His wrath, and receiving His undeserved favor through Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty you deserved (see Rom. 4:4-5).

So before I go on, may I ask, "Have *you* received God's grace through Jesus Christ?" Have you come to Him as a guilty sinner to receive His grace? It's vital that you start there. You can't serve God until you have received His grace.

God not only gives grace for salvation, but also grace for service. God sovereignly bestows various spiritual gifts on His people by His grace (Rom. 12:3-8). Paul did not volunteer to be an apostle, much less an apostle to the Gentiles. Rather, God appointed him to that task (Acts 22:10; Gal. 1:1; 2:7-9). The word apostle means "sent one," and it is used in the New Testament to refer to the twelve and to Paul in the narrow sense of those who had seen the risen Lord (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1), who performed confirming miracles (2 Cor. 12:12), and who laid the foundation for the church (Eph. 2:20). As such, they were given special authority over the churches (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). When those men died, there were no successors with apostolic authority. Their authority is passed on to us in the New Testament.

The word *apostle* also is applied to Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), James (the Lord's brother, Gal. 1:19; 2:9), perhaps Silas (1 Thess. 2:6), and to Andronicus and Junias (or, Junia [fem.]; Rom. 16:7; see also, 2 Cor. 8:23, "messengers"). These workers were sent out by the churches for various ministries. In this limited sense, missionaries today are "sent ones." But the foundational gift of apostle passed off the scene when the twelve and Paul died.

We will look at spiritual gifts more in Romans 12. But for now, let me just say that if God has saved you, He has given you a spiritual gift to use in serving Him. Peter (1 Pet. 4:11) divides them into two broad categories of speaking gifts and serving gifts. While I am not a fan of spiritual gift inventories, I would encourage you to figure out what God has equipped you to do in His service and get involved in serving Him. There are no bench-warmers in the body of Christ!

2. God saves us and gives us gifts to bring about the obedience of faith in others.

Paul continues by saying that he has received grace and apostleship “to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.” There is debate about how to interpret the phrase, “obedience of faith.” Some say that it refers to the obedience that springs from faith in Christ. Others say that it means that obedience consists in faith. That is, God commands you to believe the gospel, so not to believe is to disobey.

I think that Douglas Moo is correct when he says that the two words are mutually interpreting (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], pp. 52-53): “obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience.... Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience—for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord—and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith—for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to him in faith.” (See, also, Rom. 10:16, where “heed” means, “obey”; 15:18; and 16:26.) Genuine faith is obedient faith. Genuine obedience stems from faith (14:23).

This has two implications for us all, whether we’re gifted as evangelists or not. First, when we present the gospel we must be clear that the call to trust in Christ as Savior is also a call to follow Him as Lord. There is not the option of believing in Christ as your Savior, but having the freedom to continue living in disobedience to His commands (John 3:36).

Second, to be a part of calling others to the obedience of faith requires that we live in obedience to Christ. We must practice what we preach. If you are not living in obedience to Christ, please don’t try to share the gospel with others. Your life will send a confusing message to them. For example, I’ve seen young women who profess to know Christ, but they’re sleeping with their boyfriends. Yet they’re also trying to tell them about Jesus, hoping that they will get saved so that they can have a Christian marriage. It doesn’t work! It sends a mixed message! If the young woman truly knows Christ, she needs to repent of her sin and break off the relationship with her unsaved boyfriend. Our witness for Christ must flow out of a life of obedience to Christ.

3. God saves us and gives us gifts to take the gospel to the nations (Gentiles).

When Paul uses the Greek word, *ethne* (1:5), he probably means Gentiles as opposed to the Jews. This does not mean that he did not preach to the Jews. The Book of Acts shows that his custom was to go first to the Jewish synagogues. When they rejected the gospel, he then preached to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-48). But it's significant that this formerly ethnocentric, proud Jewish Pharisee would get saved and then devote his life to preaching to the Gentiles, even though it resulted in great personal persecution.

Paul's focus was *all* the Gentiles. He could not rest as long as some of the Gentiles had not heard the good news. Bear in mind that the Gentiles to whom Paul preached were raw pagans. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul catalogs some of their former sins: "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." *That* is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16)!

This means that no matter how pagan your neighbor or co-worker or fellow student may be, no matter how degrading his sin, no matter how enslaving his substance abuse is, God is able to save him from his sin and to make him a new creature in Christ. He does it through the gospel. So your task is to use your testimony, your spiritual gifts, and your verbal witness to share the gospel with the pagans around you. And, as the Lord raises up workers go to foreign cultures and to cross cultural barriers, we at home need to support them with prayer, finances, and in other practical ways, so that the gospel goes to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation.

Thus, God saves us by His grace and gives us gifts to be used in His service. The aim of our service is to bring about the obedience of faith through the gospel among all nations. But, we need to keep the ultimate motive in view:

4. God saves us and gives us gifts to bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul's aim in bringing about the obedience of the faith among the Gentiles was, "for His name's sake." *Name* stands for the person and all of his attributes. It is because of who Jesus is—the eternal Son of God, who took on human flesh as a descendant of David, according to God's promises in the Old Testament, who offered Himself on the cross as our substitute, who was raised from the dead and is now exalted on high—that Paul endured beatings, plots against his life, and many other hardships to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul's ultimate goal was to glorify the name of the Savior who gave Himself to redeem rebellious sinners.

This principle is so important to keep in mind in your service for Jesus Christ. It's easy to fall into the trap of serving Christ for personal fulfillment. It makes you feel good to help others. It feeds your pride when others tell you how kind or generous or caring you are. But then someone criticizes you because you didn't meet his expectations or you neglected to do something in the right way. Or you don't receive the thanks that you thought you deserved. Your feelings get hurt and your pride is deflated. But, also, your motive for serving gets exposed. You weren't serving for *His* name's sake. You were serving for *your* name's sake!

After 33 years now as a pastor, I'll let you in on a secret: If you serve Christ, you will be criticized. Your labors will often go unnoticed. Your motives will be attacked. Your character will be slandered. Why should you keep on serving when people treat you like that? You keep on serving "for His name's sake." Finally,

5. God's saving us and giving us gifts is based on His calling us and setting His love on us.

Paul's emphasis in all of verses 1-7 is not on what we do for God, but rather on what God has done for us. The basis for any service for Christ is that God has effectually called us to belong to Christ, He has set His love on us, and He has set us apart unto Himself, bestowing His grace and peace on us. Note five things:

- A. God calls us to belong to Jesus Christ.

After mentioning the Gentiles (1:5), Paul continues (1:6), "among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ." The geni-

tive (“of”) is probably possessive. Throughout Scripture, God the Father is the one who calls us to salvation (Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9). For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:9 Paul writes, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Here, He calls us to belong to Jesus Christ.

“Called” in the New Testament epistles always refers to God’s effectual call to salvation. Douglas Moo explains (*ibid.*, p. 54), “What is meant is not an ‘invitation,’ but the powerful and irresistible reaching out of God in grace to bring people into his kingdom.” Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:30, “and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” The entire chain of salvation is God’s doing, so that no one may boast in himself, but rather, only in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

To be a Christian means that God has intervened in your life, calling you out of darkness and into His kingdom of light, where you now belong to Christ and have fellowship with Him. Paul often refers to our new standing as being “in Christ.” We are totally identified with Him. This implies a fundamental break with the world, where we no longer love the world and live for the same things that the world lives for (1 John 2:15-17). We now are those who have been called to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. God calls us because He has set His love on us.

Paul writes (1:7) “to all who are beloved of God in Rome.” Perhaps you’re thinking, “But doesn’t God love everyone?” Yes, but He has a special love for His chosen bride. I’m commanded to love every Christian woman as my sister in Christ, but I have a special love for just one: my bride and wonderful wife, Marla. Even so, “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). The foundation for everything that we do for Christ is that He “loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

C. God calls us as saints.

“Saints” never refers to a special level of believers, who tower above the average. Rather, it refers to all believers. In fact, Paul uses this same phrase, “called as saints,” in his opening greeting to the Corinthian church, with all of its problems (1 Cor. 1:2). The

word means, "holy ones," or "set apart ones." God calls us to be set apart from this evil world unto Himself.

Robert Haldane points out that there is an order here (cited by James Boice, *Romans* [Baker], 1:67), "They were saints because they were called, and they were called because they were beloved of God." In other words, God didn't call them and set His love on them because of their good deeds. Rather, He called them and loved them and set them apart to Himself for good deeds. The result of God's calling them as saints is that they live as saints, set apart for God and His service. If you know Christ as your Savior, you are a saint, set apart unto God by His calling you.

#### D. God calls us to live in a sinful world.

Paul writes "to all who are beloved of God *in Rome*" (1:7). Rome was the capital of the huge empire that stretched from England to Persia. The Roman emperor was worshiped as a god. Rome was the center of commerce, wealth, power, and status. It represented all that is worldly at its apex. That is where these saints lived and where they were to reach their fellow Gentiles. In Revelation 2:13, the Lord addresses the church in Pergamum, saying, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name ...."

In the same way, we live in the midst of a flagrantly sinful city, where even the "welcome to Flagstaff" signs proclaim our "inclusive community," a code phrase that means, "your sinful lifestyle is welcome here!" God calls us to live as saints in this city, holding fast to Jesus' name, and holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:16).

#### E. God calls us to receive grace and peace from Him as our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

This phrase is a greeting, but it's more than a greeting. It stems from the priestly blessing (Num. 6:24-26), "The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace." It also combines the usual Greek greeting, *Charein*, which in sound, although not in meaning, was close to *charis*, grace, with the Hebrew *shalom*, peace. The two words sum up the gospel: "Grace is the cause and Peace is the effect" (W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 49). Being saved

by God's grace, we now have peace with Him through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:1-14). Our new standing with God as recipients of His grace and peace is the basis on which we take His good news to the evil city where we live and beyond to the nations.

### Conclusion

Several centuries ago in a mountain village in Europe a nobleman wondered what legacy he should leave to his townspeople. He finally decided to build them a church. No one saw the complete plans until the church was finished. When they gathered inside, they marveled at its beauty and craftsmanship. But then someone asked, "Where are the lamps? How will it be lighted?"

The nobleman pointed to some brackets on the walls. Then he gave each family a lamp, which they were to bring with them each time they came to worship. He explained, "Each time you are here the area where you are seated will be lighted. Each time you are absent, that area will be dark. This is to remind you that whenever you fail to come to church, some part of God's house will be dark."

God also wants us to carry the light of the gospel out of the church, into the dark world around us (Phil. 2:15-16). He has saved us and given us spiritual gifts so that we will be a part of building His great cathedral, His church, among every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. So whatever you do to serve Christ, do it in view of that greater purpose, for His name's sake.

### Application Questions

1. Why is salvation the necessary foundation for service? Should churches allow unsaved people to serve? Why/why not?
2. Why is saving faith necessarily obedient faith? Some argue that this confuses the gospel. Agree/disagree? Why?
3. How can we guard against serving for some selfish reason, rather than for Christ's sake? What happens when we don't?
4. Why is it important to emphasize God's calling and His special love as the basis for our service? What can happen practically if we forget this?

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