

Romans 1:1-7

Greeting

A. Notes on the Text

Verse 1

The change of name from Saul to Paul has occasionally given rise to the following pietistic or mystical remark in certain types of "conversion-literature": "It is necessary to change from a Saul into a Paul." Wrong! Luke calls him Saul many times after Acts 9!

"Servant," literally: slave (Greek: *doulos*). (See also Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:2; Jude 1.) In Romans 6:16 (twice), 17, 20 always: slaves. In the east, every servant of the king was called a slave, even if he was a royal prince. Paul (along with every believer) is the private property of Christ. (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:22; Ephesians 6:6. Also see Glossary #31, and Heidelberg Catechism, A. 1.) Paul (along with every believer) belongs completely to Christ and his service.

"Christ Jesus": Paul does not simply use the name "Christ" as a given name, like the name, Jesus, but as a symbol for the office for which he has been anointed, Jesus the Messiah (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 31).

"Called": called, followed by a positive good result, so that the person called comes and obeys. (See Main Thoughts, 3).

"Apostle": one who is sent, a delegate, one commissioned, with authority and authorization for a certain mandate or office. In the New Testament era we can distinguish between the actual apostles (the twelve, Matthias, Paul) and others also called apostles (see 2 Corinthians 8:23 [R.S.V. messengers; Greek: apostles], Philippians 2:25 [ibid.]).

"Set apart for the gospel of God." The word "gospel" means good tidings, happy message. (Also see Glossary #9). We should not think only of the first four books of the New Testament, for there is only one gospel! The four gospels offer a fourfold description (not the only one). In the New Testament the gospel is not a book, but a work: the ongoing message of redemption, so that "gospel" here means the proclamation of the gospel. (See also Heidelberg Catechism, A. 19.)

Verse 2

The gospel that is being preached by Paul and the other apostles is not an innovation! The Old Testament is referred to as "Holy Scriptures," We can add names such as: Scriptures (Matthew 26:54 and other places), scripture (John

2:22 and other places). The name "Old Testament" is based on 2 Corinthians 3:14 (old covenant).

Verses 3 and 4

The name "Son" is the designation of Christ as the second Person in the Godhead (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 24,25 and 33; Belgic Confession, Articles 8, 9 and 10).

"As to his human nature": as a man.

"Descendant" Literally it says "seed". The word means offspring. But in the scriptures the word "seed" is a redemptive-historical concept: it means that all children from Adam via Abraham and believing parents belong to the covenant and form a unity in Christ (see Galatians 3:16). It is regrettable that the NIV translates this concept of "seed" as: descendants, offspring, and similar terms, thus losing the redemptive-historical aspect! "Seed" (Greek: *sperma*) occurs in Romans 1:3 (NIV: descendant of), 4:13,16,18 (offspring), 9:7,8,29 (descendants) and 11:1 (descendant).

"Through the Spirit of holiness": of the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35; see also Luke 3:21,22). In the resurrection, the Holy Spirit has completely sanctified, that is, glorified, Christ's human nature. Later we shall see what sanctification by the Spirit means for God's children.

"Was declared...to be the Son of God by his resurrection". This sentence does not mean that Christ came to be God's Son through or at the time of the resurrection from the dead (as if he were not his Son before), but that it could be concluded from his resurrection that he was God's Son: here we are dealing with the Son of God! He already proved to be what he was.

"With power to be the Son of God": in the unfolding of his redemptive power for the benefit of his people (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 45 "by his power"; see also 1 Corinthians 1:24, 5:4, 6:14; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Philippians 3:10).

"By his resurrection from the dead". The fact of the resurrection is very important to Paul. (See Romans 4:25; 6:5ff.; 8:34; also 1 Corinthians 15!)

"Our Lord": the title, *Kyrios* (Lord), came from the Aramaic-speaking church, in emulation of the Old Testament. The meaning of the word *Kyrios* in reference to the Mediator is two-fold: first, it denotes his power and majesty; second, it conveys to the congregation (church) the inherent deliverance and service. (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 34)

Verse 5

"For his name's sake": God's "name" is God as he is revealed to us. God's names tell us who he is for us, his people, and for the whole world.

"Grace and apostleship": that is, the gracious gift of apostleship.

"To bring about the obedience of faith." [RSV] Commentators are divided about whether we should take this to mean: faith born of obedience, or obedience born of faith. The text speaks of obedience in faith.

"All the nations." [RSV] The Greek word used (*ethnè*) is usually translated as Gentiles, as opposed to Jews and Christians, sometimes also as nations, people (as with Israel). This word occurs 29 times in Romans. The RSV usually translates it as nations, or people. Some commentators think this means Gentile-Christians, as opposed to Jewish Christians. We will return to the translation of this word as necessary. In this text it clearly means: the Gentiles, the non-Jews and the non-Christians.

Verse 7

"Loved by God"; in many places in the New Testament the children of God are called "loved by God". (cf. Romans 11:28; 12:19; 16:5,8,9,12; 1 Corinthians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 2:7; 3:2; Jude 3; and other places) It means that they are objects of God's love and that the Holy Spirit fills their hearts with a love for God and the neighbour. (See Glossary #21.)

"Called to be saints." "Saints" means "holy ones." "Holy" usually has a double meaning. In the negative sense it means: set apart from normal (or, also, sinful) use; in the positive sense it means: dedicated to the Lord. (cf. what the Belgic Confession, Article 34, says about the holiness of the children of the covenant: "separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to Him.") "Called to be saints": called by the gospel and consecrated to the service of the Lord, and to that end separated (set apart) from the world of sin, in which Satan is served. (See Glossary #12.)

It is remarkable that Paul does not speak of "the church" at Rome (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:2). Apparently there was not a single organized local church, but there were groups and house congregations, 16:5,10. (also 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2.) We can only guess at the cause of this. Was the geographical area of the city too large for one local church? Was the church at Rome still only in its beginning stages, so that there had not been enough time to organize? Note that, for various reasons, in the early centuries of the Christian church, no thought was given to the construction of church buildings. That came later.

"Grace and peace." (See Glossary #10 and #24.) The Jews greeted each other with: *Shalom Aleichem!* Peace be with you! The Greeks with: *Chaire!* Joy to you! The Romans with: *Salut!* Paul joins the Jewish and the Greek greeting, and turns it into a Christian greeting, having intensified *chaire* into *charis* (grace).

In the text it says: "Grace and peace to you." Some ministers also say this at the beginning of the worship service. This grace and peace do not become ours automatically. They have to be accepted in faith (e.g. Matthew 10:12ff.). Certainly, the blessing is pronounced over us at the beginning and the end of the worship service. However, if it is not received in faith, this blessing will return to the minister.

"From God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Question: isn't God the triune God? Isn't Paul forgetting to mention the Holy Spirit? Answer: the name "Father" means the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, also as in the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father" means the triune God, a fact we often forget! (cf. Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 31:9) The Mediator with his specific names (our Lord Jesus Christ) is mentioned separately. Through him we receive grace and peace with God.

B. Main Thoughts

1. Paul introduces himself as an apostle, that is, ambassador, office bearer of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he speaks with the authority of his office. Special office bearers in the church (see Ephesians 4:11ff.) have authority over the members of the church; hence, they command. Their authority is that of the Word of God. When an office bearer acts contrary to the Word, his authority ends. He must also maintain good order (1 Corinthians 14:40). Measures to that end must be accepted as such by the church members. Questions regarding the authority of ecclesiastical office can be discussed at this point. Were the apostles always inspired? No! (See Galatians 2:11ff.) On what points does the authority of the apostolic office differ from the authority of the offices of minister, elders and deacons? Or is there no essential difference?
2. In the New Testament the word "apostolate" is used exclusively for the office of those referred to as apostles, to emphasize the element of eye and ear-witness (Acts 1:25; cf. 1:22), the apostolic mandate (1 Corinthians 9:2), and the spreading of the gospel (Romans 1:5 and Galatians 2:8). In our time, people speak about the apostolate of the church, by which they mean the calling of the church to go out into the world and proclaim the gospel. This spawned "the theology of the apostolate." However, this is in conflict with the New Testament, which limits the apostolate to the redemptive and church history of the apostles' time.

We can also speak about the apostolicity of the church: the church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; Colossians 2:7). The church must guard what has been entrusted to it by the apostles (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14; 2:2; 2 Peter 3:2; Jude 17).

3. It is remarkable that Paul speaks here of the effectual calling through the gospel. Among Reformed Christians there used to be talk of an external and an internal calling. With the external calling, so it was said, the Word of God

goes no further than the ear and does not reach the heart, for then the Spirit of God does not work together with the Word. With the internal calling, the Word supposedly enters the heart via the ear, which results in our repentance and rebirth through the regenerating work of the Spirit. So the external calling was said to be without saving effect, while the internal calling supposedly had saving effect.

This theory about internal and external calling is wrong. When the Word of God is heard without saving effect and is rejected, it most certainly reaches the heart. For man believes with his heart to salvation (Romans 10:10), and man rejects the Word with his heart, for the heart does not accept it. So rather than making a distinction between an internal and external calling, we should rather distinguish between calling with saving effect and calling without that effect. Here the question can be asked again how man comes either to accept or reject the Word. In connection with that we can speak about the work of God's Spirit and man's responsibility.

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