

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 1:1-7
“Paul’s Business Card And Mission Statement”

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(1st Sunday after the Epiphany)

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Following Christ From City Center!”

IA: ROMANS 1:1-7
"PAUL'S BUSINESS CARD AND MISSION STATEMENT"

Paul Presents His Credentials, Seeks Common Ground (Epideictic Rhetoric)

		1. vv.1-6 AUTHOR AND STATUS.		Letter Opening (1:1-7, 10-17), Body (1:18-15:13) Closing (15:14-16:27) 16:23 <i>Tertius</i> As Secretary, <i>Phoebe</i> As Likely Carrier (16:1-2), Gal. 6:11
		a) vv.1-2 Paul And The King Jesus Gospel: 3 Things About Each.		Longest Intro Of All Letters vv.1b-6 = Elaborate Insertion Into Letter Format, Acts 23:26, James 1:1, Big Alert! No Co-writers = His Statement! Paul (3): Servant/Called/Set Apart
1 a	Paul,			
b	1	a servant of Jesus CHRIST ,	Is. 49:3-6, Jam. 1:1, Gal. 1:10, Phil. 1:1 (<i>doulos</i>)/Moses, Joshua, David, Prophets	
c	2	a called one,	Jer. 1:5, Call = <i>called to salvation</i>	
d	3	an apostle ,	8:30, 1 Cor. 15:9-10, <i>Called</i> = Chosen To Salvation, Vocation = (one sent out, <i>apostolos</i>)	
O.T.				Gospel, Is. 40:9, 52:7, 60:6, 61:1 (LXX), What Isaiah Wrote, Jesus Is
e		set apart for the <i>gospel</i> of God ,	p.v., v. Emperor, Called In A Vision, Gal. 1:15-17, Acts 9, 22, 26 (<i>euangellion</i>)	
2a	When?	1	which he promised beforehand/	1 Cor. 14:3-5, Answers Questions: When, How, Where?
b	How?	2	through his prophets/	3:31, Not New, Grounded In The Ancient: Cultural Value
c	Where?	3	in the <u>holy</u> Scriptures,	Gospel Of God (3), Continuity: Promised/Prophets/Scriptures God Makes Promises, Prophets As Predecessors, Fulfills Scripture
		b) vv.3-4 The Gospel: The Shared, Creedal Story (Oral Tradition, Common Ground)!		
Gospels				Not A Closed Universe, Paul Incorporates Early Confession: Parallels, <i>Rare Words</i>
3a	1	concerning his SON,	8:3, Gal. 4:4, Titles: Messiah (vv.1, 6, 7), Son [of God] (v.3, v.4), Lord (v.4b, v.7b) //Phil. 2:6-11 Begin With Pre-existence, End With Post-existence	
b	2a	who was <i>descended</i>	p.v.,, Action/Paternity/Mode Of Existence	
	b	from the <i>seed of David</i>	9:5, //2 Tim. 2:8, <i>Ign. Smyr.</i> 1:1, Credentials: 1 Sam. 7:11-14	
	c	according to the flesh	Son Of God <i>in flesh</i> , later Son of God <i>in power</i> Titles: <i>Messiah, His Son, Son of God, our Lord</i>	
4a	2'a	and <i>designated</i>	p.v., 2 Christological Statements: Davidic Birth, Spirit Resurrection	
	b	SON OF GOD in power	Age Of Messianic Liberation, Acts 13:33, <i>Ign. Smyr.</i> 1:1	
b	c	according to the (a) <i>Spirit of holiness</i>	= Holy Spirit, Is. 63:10-11, !QS 4.21	
		by resurrection from the dead(s),	1 Cor. 15:20, Transcendent Agent Of Power	
c	1'	CHRIST Jesus <u>our LORD</u> ,	vv.3-4 = Action + Title + Mode, Triadic Language = <i>King Jesus</i> , Invokes Traditional Language To Commend His Gospel To Rome Son In Descent & Suffering Becomes Son In Power	
		a') vv.5-6 All And The King Jesus Gospel: 3 Purposes Of Apostleship.		
N.T.				Apostleship Is A Spiritual Gift, 1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11-12
5a		through whom <i>we</i> have received grace (gift) of apostleship	Hendiadys = 2 Phrases/1 Idea	
b	What?	1	to bring about the obedience (that consists) of faith	Not Just Assent, 10:16, 15:18, Genitive Of Apposition
c	Why?	2	for the sake of his name	As Extensions Of His Person/Work
d	Where?	3	among <u>all</u> the nations,	Mal. 1:5, 14, Great Commission, Unreached Peoples, World Mission
6		including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus CHRIST ;	As <i>Slaves</i> , 3x (<i>CHRIST</i>): vv.1b, 6, 7b	

2. v.7a-c ADDRESSEES: THEIR GEOGRAPHIC AND SPIRITUAL LOCATION (3 Items).

				Geographical + Spiritual Location: <i>beloved, called, consecrated</i>
7 a	1	To all God's "beloved" in Rome,	Dt. 33:12, Neh. 13:26, A Church Paul Not Found/Not Yet Visit, Center Of World	
b	2	who are called	(3x) <i>called</i> : vv.1c, 6, 7b; (3x) <i>holy</i> : Scriptures (v.2c), Spirit (v.4b), people (v.7c)	
c	3	to be <u>saints</u> (holy, <i>hagios</i>);	1 Cor. 1:2, Not A Moral/Mystical State But A New Identity (holy ones/set apart, <i>hagioi</i>) i.e. Christians, Called/Chosen For Salvation, Just Like Paul Above, Eph. 4:1	

Triadic/Trinitarian Language, Not Modalist

3. v.7d GREETING: EXPANDED THEOLOGICALLY AND CHRISTOLOGICALLY.

				Not Use Normal <i>Greeting (charein)</i> , Grace Wish Ends Salutation
d		Grace to you and peace from God our Father	15:7, 1 Thess. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, God's Presence Brings Peace	
		and the LORD Jesus CHRIST .	2 Gifts + 2 Sources, God-Language (<i>Lord</i>) Applied To Crucified Jesus, Deity	

1 Long Greek Sentence: 90 Words

A Brief Treatment Of IA. Romans 1:1-7

Romans 1:1-7 is the formal letter salutation. The epistolary convention is “A to B, Greeting” which Paul greatly modifies for his theological and missiological purposes. The thought unit as a whole falls into three parts: 1) vv.1-6 Author, 2) v.7a-c Addressees, 3) v.7d Greeting. The inclusions for the unit as a whole are *Jesus Christ* (v.1b) // *Lord Jesus Christ* (v.7d), *God* (v.1d//v.7d) In vv.1-6 Paul greatly expands what in most letters was a simple introduction of the author. He turns it into an elaborate introduction of himself (v.1), his gospel (vv.2-4), and his mission (vv.5-6) It has a carefully formulated 3:1 concentric structure (a. vv.1-2, b. vv.3-4, a’ vv.5-6) which places the two-stanza creedal affirmation of vv.3-4 at the center. Three terms of inclusion mark off vv.1-6 as a discrete section within in the larger salutation: *Jesus Christ* (vv.1a//v.6), *called* (v.1c//v.6), *apostle* (v.1c) // *apostleship* (v.5a). There is a preference for patterns of three as Paul first characterizes himself in verse 1: *servant, called, set apart*. He follows with three characterizations of *the gospel of God* (v.1d) that answer the three questions of When? (v.2a, *promised beforehand*), How? (v.2b, *through the prophets*), and Where? (v.2c, *in the holy Scriptures*). The link word *holy* is used three times: *holy Scriptures* (v.2c), *spirit of holiness* (v.4b), *saints/holy ones* (v.7b).

At the center of vv.1-6 is a creedal confession (vv.3-4) that uses several non-Pauline phrases indicating tradition. The *gospel of God* (v.1d) is promised through the prophets in the Scriptures (v.2), but it is *concerning his Son* (v.3a). Then follows a three line formula composed of an action (*descended*), a title ([King] *David*), and a mode (*according to the flesh*). This covers Jesus life through his death; it is set in parallel to a second formula (v.4) of an action (*designated*), a title (*Son of God in power*) and a mode (*by his resurrection from the dead*). The titles *his Son* (v.3a) // *Jesus Christ our Lord* (v.4d) are inclusions for the 4:2 chiasm (1-2//2'-1'). It is from the risen Lord that the spiritual gift of apostleship is given to Paul and others (*we*) to act as his ambassadors to the nations (v.5). The church in Rome is proof (v.6).

The second part of the salutation (2. v.7a-c) is linked to vv.1-6 by the words *all* (v.5d//v7a), *called* (vv.1, 6//v.7a), *holy* (v.7c//v.2c). As with himself, Paul says three things about the church in Rome; they are 1) *beloved of God*, 2) *called*, 3) *saints*. The salutation concludes with a greeting in v.7d which has been turned into a blessing using the loaded Christian words *grace and peace* and the coordination of *God our Father* and *the Lord Jesus Christ*. There is a triadic– if not yet Trinitarian– use of language for God: *Jesus Christ* (v.1) , *the Spirit of holiness* (v.4b) , and *God our Father* (v.7b). The church was driven early on to use such triple roles and titles to do justice to what had been accomplished among them by the one God. Applying God language to Jesus through the word *Lord* (Old Testament [LXX] language for God, *Kyrios*) was a bold move (v.7d). By laying out his apostolic identity and the content of his message, Paul invites the Romans to acknowledge that the message he preaches and that they believe is the same and so could serve as the basis for a partnership and expanded mission, perhaps to the ends of the earth (i.e. Spain).

Paul’s mission is part of the larger sweep of God’s mission to bring the good news of the kingdom in King Jesus to all nations. Throughout this thought unit God’s initiative is to the fore in the sending and raising of the Son. This is the God who calls and sets apart, who places Paul as a slave of King Jesus, who keeps promises, who provides prophets and Scripture, who sends his Son as a Davidid, then designates him the Son in power through a mighty resurrection from the dead, who gives spiritual gifts, who calls for the obedience of trust and offers people everywhere the privilege of belonging to Jesus Christ and living within the sphere of his power characterized by grace and peace in the church which is much loved of God.



PAUL’S BUSINESS CARD AND MISSION STATEMENT

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

A restored relationship with God comes through King Jesus.

R O M A N S 1 : 7 d

In the summer of 2004, Warren Beamer— a youth pastor from San Antonio— visited an orphanage in Nigeria. He was startled when one of the children at the orphanage spoke to him in a southern accent with a Texan twang. The girl quickly shared she was from Houston. To convince Beamer, she recited her social security number, then led him to six others in the orphanage— her brothers and sisters.

The seven, who ranged from eight to sixteen, were sent to a Nigerian boarding school by their adoptive American mother. When she stopped making tuition payments, the children were sent to the orphanage, living in squalid conditions and gave up hope of ever returning home. They were lost, tossed away.

When the children saw Beamer, they began singing *The Star-Spangled Banner*, “Oh say can you see, by the dawn’s early light...” just like the start of an Astro’s game! With the help of Beamer’s pastor and congressman, the children were back in America in eight days.¹ Lots of tough details to be worked through, not the least of which is the children who were not rescued, but now— at last— seven were home.

Whatever else this may be, it’s a salvation story. In the most desperate conditions, someone came from outside into the world of seven abandoned children to rescue and restore them. Beamer did not come with the advice of *seven ways to adjust to your new limited circumstances* or the moralistic insight of *why this is really good for your character development*. His arrival was an event that changed life permanently. He came with the power of an American passport and influential friends to make a permanent change of status. Seven children were saved, and for the rest of life Beamer has a great story to tell around the Christian campfire. He will never forget the day he walked into an orphanage for a surprise divine appointment.

¹ PreachingToday.com search under Romans 1:1-7.

In just a few weeks the early 70's hippie musical *Godspell*– based loosely on the Gospel of Matthew– is coming to Greenwood, and guess who's playing Jesus? Phil Saunders, our youth minister! We were both glad to learn that recent archaeological and forensic discoveries in the cemeteries of ancient Palestine have proved what we knew all along, that Jesus was– like most of his contemporaries– under 5 feet 6 inches tall. Heidi confided in me that since her beau is to play such a man of character and service, she expects a little more help around the house! Can't you just hear it? “Hey, Jesus, if you can walk across Lake Greenwood, do you think you might take out the trash?” Oh the indignities of being a star!

Godspell is the old Anglo-Saxon word for *good message* or *good news*. It translates the Greek *eu-angellion* from which we get *evangelist*, a *good news* teller. In the plural– *Gospels*– it refers to the four biographies of Jesus that lead off the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the idea being that the life of this one man– who he is and what he does– is good news from God. But the word was not first a Christian word. We deliberately borrowed it from Roman imperial propaganda and the new state religion of Emperor worship. We have an inscription from Priene in Asia Minor in 9 B.C.– say five years before Jesus' birth– that September 23 was now to be observed as the *good news* of Caesar Augustus' birthday and as the beginning of a new era of peace and prosperity for all.² It reads:

“...since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a *savior*, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things... the birthday of the god Augustus was the *beginning of the good news* for the world...”³

Take out *Augustus* and *Caesar*, plug in the words *Jesus* and *Messiah*, and what you have is the Christmas story from Luke's gospel! “Good news of a great joy, for scruffy shepherds and people everywhere, for unto you is born this day is the city of King David a Savior, Christ the Lord!”⁴ The church is creative in it's own messaging

² For the full text, see <http://masseiana.org/priene>.

³ <https://frted.wordpress.com/2011/12/23/jesus-augustus-christ-caesar>.

⁴ Luke 2:11.

using borrowed politically-loaded language. The really good news of an event that changes everything and installs a new administration is not the birth of a new boss in Rome or the election of a new American President in Washington or a new Caliph in Baghdad but of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.⁵ Thirty or so years later he’s strung up by a conspiracy of government and religion to get rid of an annoying minority voice about how and by whom the world is to be run. Jesus is then raised by divine power in a mighty bodily resurrection from the realm of the dead, and then— a bit over a quarter century later— we find Paul pacing around a room in Corinth dictating a long letter to a church he did not found— unfolding the implications of the whole affair.

Romans is simply the most important letter ever written if judged by its effects. Two of many examples are the Protestant Reformation under Martin Luther who discovered in Romans that what God wanted most was simply his trust, and the testimony of John Wesley who came to an experience of deep inward assurance that Christ loved and forgave him while one was reading from the Preface to Luther’s commentary on Romans at a Moravian class meeting on May 28, 1738.⁶ And could it be, that as we work through Romans, God might rekindle the ancient fires in our midst? If Romans is kindling and the church a fireplace, may God the arsonist send down the fire! May God open our eyes, flood our minds with light, and kindle our hearts with the fires of holy love for God and one another.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

So when Paul dictated Romans to his friend Tertius— a professional scribe writing on expensive papyrus paper— he used the loaded term *gospel* or *good news* very near the start, knowing it would resonate as a loaded political term.⁷ But first he defined

⁵ For a full treatment, see N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2015), especially Chapter 4, “Distorted and Competing Gospels,” 57-88; and, on the larger discussion of borrowed Imperial terms, see Scot McKnight, Joseph Modica, *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire In New Testament Studies* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2013), especially Michael Bird, Chapter 7, “One Who Will Arise To Ruler Over The Nations: Paul’s Letter To The Romans And The Empire,” 146-165.

⁶ For further examples across church history, see Charles Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 1-5.

⁷ On the craft and form, see Jerome Murphy O’Conner, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1984).

himself as a *slave of King Jesus* because that's the clear meaning of *Messiah Jesus* or *Jesus Christ*. It's not his last name but a royal title: Hebrew *Messiah*, Greek *Christos*, English *King* or *Sovereign*. Paul was bought and owned by another, something everyone understood in world where perhaps twenty-percent of Rome's population were slaves. His allegiance was clear, "I am bought and paid for by one I delight to serve." Paul did not apply for the position; he was *called* by God who interrupted him on the Road to Damascus with the light of the risen Jesus.⁸ And, having been *busted and blinded* by God and then *healed* by God through Ananias—as we saw last week—Paul was commissioned and sent forth as an ambassador, an *apostle* to the whole world to notify Jews and Greek of the *gospel of God*, the *good news* that in the unlikely form of Jesus, God was setting the world right again and offering freedom and hope for all. It goes something like this:

“Whatever your history or heritage, you can be rescued from false religion and spiritual bondage to the Evil One. You can now come home to God's welcome and actually know God as Father, Jesus as brother, and the Spirit as teacher. Here the abandoned are family again. You will be forgiven, now and at the end. You are not a throw-away. You are sought and found. You are loved. God's Spirit will come to indwell you are an internal communications link with the risen Jesus and his Father. You can follow the Lord Jesus into a new future as his representative. You can be rightly aligned with the kingdom of God now and when it arrives in fullness. This Jewish Jesus, only a bit over twenty-five years ago, voluntarily died on your behalf to absorb all your sin and its consequences. And because of who his resurrection reveals him to be, the Son of God in full power, he has authority to reconstitute your life in a new community of his followers. There's so much to learn— a whole new way of seeing and living— but new life begins now as a seed in your soul. Not good advice about what you can do with current resources but good news of something God has done to change everything. The heavy lifting has already been done. It's all about a person, someone you can know, someone who's alive and active. King Jesus has come into your orphanage on a rescue mission. Trust him. Follow him. Love and listen to him. He is life. Come under his rule.”

Not the only reason, but one of the things most attractive about classic

⁸ Acts 9:1-31.

Christian faith is its broad explanatory power, because if our news is indeed from God and not just the next humanly-generated religious option, then it's what you would expect— for it to be highly explanatory. In God's reflected light we see everything else with greater clarity and insight. There is such a thing as a *Christian world view*.⁹ Yes, it's still being tweaked as we come to terms with new discoveries, but the basic foundations have not changed. We look at the world through the lens of the person of Jesus, the writings of Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments, and the Trinitarian faith of the church as outlined in the great creeds. God knows what is good and true and beautiful, and we believe we have access through divine revelation to the mind of God. It's a big claim, an offensive one in our tolerant world, but such is the price of doing business with Jesus Christ.

Seven years ago Darrell Johnson did something helpful. Drawing on the work of two theorists who spend lots of time analyzing the various lenses through which people view themselves and the world— James Sire and N.T. Wright— he compiled the nine basic questions every faith or world view seeks to answer, and here they are:

1. What is prime reality? What is the *really real*?
2. Who or what are we? What does it mean to be a human being?
3. Is there such a thing as *morality*, right and wrong? If so, what is its basis; how does one know the good and the bad?
4. What is the meaning of history? Or, is there any meaning?
5. What is wrong with us? Something is off: what is it?
6. Is there a solution; can things be fixed? By whom? How? How quickly?
7. Is there a God? If so, can this God be known? And is this God involved in the world, especially relative to human suffering?
8. What happens to a human being at death?

⁹ A good place to start is Phillip Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2013), or Brian Harris, *The Big Picture: Building Blocks of a Christian World View* (London, England: Paternoster, 2015).

9. What time is it? Where are we in the flow of history?¹⁰

So in answer to first question. What’s really real? Well, two things are real: the mysterious Triune God and the incredibly complex and diverse creation. God is unlimited; creation is not. Reality is twofold, and creation remains forever dependent. And who are we in this two-part reality? We are male and female creatures made as complements in God’s image, which at a minimum means deep relationality in order to love and create. And Yes, right and wrong are knowable. The basic moral law is written on each heart, inscribed in the Ten Commandments, and lived out and taught by Jesus who shows us what true goodness is. History has meaning because it has direction. It is not circular and going nowhere but linear and headed towards a transforming collision with the kingdom of God as previewed in Jesus. What’s wrong with each of us is the rebellion of not trusting God and of cooperating with the Enemy in sin and evil, which are related but not the same. There’s no solution to our troubles if left to us. We need help from outside our mess, and that comes through God’s over-ruling providence and finally in God’s personal coming to us in Jesus.

God is known in divine revelation available to all in creation, in conscience, to the Jews in their special history and Scripture, the principle being that when we follow the light we have, more comes. As for God and human pain, the daily healing ministry of Jesus and finally his suffering the indignities and terrors of the cross makes God’s supposed indifference to human misery a lie.

And what about death in question 8; what then? At death the software of the soul is temporarily separated from the hardware of the body. For Christians the storage of the essential self is in heaven and fully relational to God, others, and the good angels. For those who stubbornly resist God’s grace across a lifetime, we don’t know their post-mortem status; we are not told. But then, when the kingdom of God comes down from heaven to engulf and transform all that it, we will receive resurrection bodies like that of Jesus fit for the new creation.¹¹ Our souls will be clothed in a new and better garment,¹² and the wicked will be assigned to a realm that

¹⁰ *The Glory of Preaching* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009), 67-68.

¹¹ The hopeful last line of the Nicene Creed reads, “We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come” (*U.M. Hymnal*: 880).

¹² 2 Cor. 5:1-5.

should have– and could have– been avoided had they not run foolishly through a thousand red lights till the crash from which there is no recovery finally came.¹³ How sad to learn just that other side of death that *I was wrong about it all*. No love there. No goodness, no delight and joy there, just remains and the residue of what once might have been a full human being now shrunk to a tightly enclosed little ego, a forever lonely *me*. And what time is it? Where are we in the flow of history? The best I can tell you is this: we live between two great events, the initial unveiling of the new reality in Jesus– and especially in his resurrection– and the end of history as we have known in, but just where we are precisely no one knows, and God’s not telling! Jesus is the preview of the *What*; the *When* remains a mystery.

What is not a mystery is the purpose of every life: to love God and all that God has made– the world in a comprehensive sense- and out of the overflow of that relationship to love ourselves and others with all we are. First with love and wisdom flowing from God *to us*, then pouring *through us* on everything *around us*. This is human perfection; for this we were made, and of it we catch glimpses even now in pleasure and joy and meaning and service, and above all in worship and other times when the Holy Spirit opens our inward eyes to behold the Lord.

That, in brief, is the Christian world view that gives substantive answers to all nine questions, and it has great explanatory power for the whole of life. Take it or leave it because that is the dignity of your God enabled freedom;¹⁴ either way the consequences will be momentous because it will shape how you live by both what you believe is true and where you invest your life. And if you have better answers to the nine, I’d like to hear them, but I wanted to make sure that today you had the whole picture. And this is– in a sense– why Paul wrote Romans, so his hearers– whose support he wanted for a final mission to the ends of the earth in Spain– would understand the implication of the faith they shared and that Paul had been hammering

¹³ The U.M. Doctrinal Standards affirm the N.T. vision of only two destinies, “The Confession of Faith, Article XII: The Judgment and the Future State, ‘We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation’” (*The Book of Discipline 2012*: 74).

¹⁴ For an Arminian read on this idea, see Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief In Line With Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2013), Chapter 4, “Grace: More Prevenient Than Resistible,” 44-57.

out over twenty-years of missionary labors and suffering and prayer and thought and letter-writing and speech- giving across the eastern Mediterranean. Some adventurers wish to circumnavigate the world in a sail boat, others to climb Everest or descend to the depths of the Mariana’s trench. I want to preach through Romans, the theology of the Apostle Paul in letter form. And it may be, that in overhearing his dictation and following the patterns of this thought about the good news, the Holy Spirit may again turn on the lights and offer us new life and fresh hope. I think the letter to Rome may have begin with a conversation like this one:

"Tertius, before I head for Jerusalem with the money I’ve collected for the poor to show the unity of the church, I have a letter to write, an involved one, so make sure you have plenty of papyrus and ink. This is just the occasion to summarize my convictions about what I’ve been preaching all these years to Jew and Gentile alike.

I want the Roman Christians to know we share the same faith. I aim to inspire and instruct them– even correct them a bit– but since I didn't found the church there as here in Corinth, I must use more diplomacy and a bit more formality. It is Rome after all.

Let's begin with my Roman name and three qualifiers: 'Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ (he owns me!), a called one (he busted me!), an ambassador (I now represent his interests!),' followed by three statements about the message to show its continuity with what came before, ‘...set apart for the good news of God which he promised beforehand/ through his prophets/ in the holy scriptures...’ It’s the old Jewish faith reorganized around a new personal center in Messiah Jesus. It’s very old and very new all at the same time. How clever of God!

Yes, Tertius, that looks good. Be sure to write clearly; this letter must be read aloud to every house church in Rome; there will be only one copy there and one we keep with us. I want them to welcome me and support my mission to Spain. When one lives at the center of the world in Rome it’s easy to forget that not everyone comes to you and that you must still go to them. It’s what our Lord wanted, not for us to stay but for us to go to *all the nations*, and I aim to go to the ends of the earth if allowed. Jesus is stretching my heart out to new peoples.”

Think of the first two verses as Pauls’ business card and mission statement, the briefest summary of the man and his purpose. Three statements of his identity, three about its grounding in Jewish Scripture. Do you know yours? Are you as clear?

Paul’s next move in verses 3 through 4 is interesting. He’s just told us that the good news is not new news but old news with a new personal center in a Jewish Jesus who lived and died and lived again only about twenty-five years ago, in recent memory with plenty of eye-witnesses still around to verify the facts.¹⁵

Now if you are reading an author you enjoy, say John Grisham, and he quotes from an earlier author, say Mark Twain, you notice a change of vocabulary and style. It’s pretty clear where Grisham leaves off and Twain begins, and again where Twain stops and Grisham resumes. Verses 3 and 4 are not Paul’s construction but his quoting of an earlier creed with several odd phrases embedded.¹⁶ If I’m speaking and take a sudden shift to the language of the Apostles’ Creed, you know it immediately, as did the Roman Christians when Phoebe visited one of their homes and read the two central verses. “Yes,” they thought, “Paul is quoting a common summary of our faith. He uses the titles we have been taught, that Jesus is *Son of God*– God’s agent, that he is *Messiah*– the hoped for Jewish king, that he has the right to the name Jews give only to God, which is *Lord*- and thus divine. As far as his human life goes– from conception to death- he has a proper ancestry from King David for over nine hundred years and a Jewish mother,¹⁷ but that is not all that matters because that life ended in a horrible, agonizing death arranged by one of our governors.

But the same One who sent Jesus made it clear who he was, *the Son of God in power*, by having the Holy Spirit fill him with divine life in a first-of-a-kind bodily resurrection which left the tomb empty and was followed by multiple appearance which demonstrated his vindication.¹⁸ Not internal visions and dreams at night, not mass hallucinations– if there is such a thing, but embodied appearances including touch and conversation. The Jesus who preached the kingdom entered it and came back with a report. In the middle of time God the Son came in Jesus to give a

¹⁵ The definitive treatment is Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

¹⁶ For an update on the extent of traditional materials in vv.3-4, see Matthew W. Bates, “A Christology of Incarnation and Enthronement: Romans 1:3-4 as Unified, Nonadoptionist, and Nonconciliatory,” *CBQ* 77, 2015, 107-127.

¹⁷ See Galatians 4:4 for a parallel formula.

¹⁸ On the major resurrection passages, see my *Resurrection: A Pastor’s Reading of the Major New Testament Resurrection Passages* (Fort Valley, GA: Bristol, 2014).

preview of what the future holds and who rules the new world that is yet to be. *Jesus is Lord*, the world's rightful ruler, and one day it will be so. So creeds, even short fragments like this one, are not ho-humm churchy stuff. They are brief, elegantly balanced summaries of a much larger reality which can be experienced and known even now. Christmas— Jesus' descent from David through Mary to us, and Easter— his bodily re-entry into life beyond death and then back to us with the news of what happened to him and is promised to us, give the frame for the rest of the story. We get to receive this faith and pass it on intact; we don't get to make it up on the fly!

And that is the deep question before the church. Will we remain apostolic as United Methodists? meaning in deep continuity with the first witnesses— their faith and their ethics— or will we cut and trim our message for a self-indulgent, politically correct culture that demands not to be offended or challenged. All persons are called to follow Jesus Christ and receive his forgiveness, friendship, and fellowship in the church; all persons are called to submit their appetites and passions to him for guidance and right usage; all persons are called to lives of service in love, which means “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness”¹⁹ and an equal respect for both states of life. Unpopular? Yes. Good for people? Yes. No STD's, few abortions, no broken vows, no test driving people as if they were cars. So the question is: Will you let Jesus Christ fulfill your life on his terms, or only on yours? Simply put, if I belong to him, I may not just do as I please in any area of life; and if I fail— as all do— I do not justify my behavior and demand the church approve it and change its teaching. I'm a married man, happy about it, and I deal with all kinds of casualties with mercy and kindness, but also with truth and a call to new life. People are so easily bruised, so easily misled, and must always be treated with respect. The challenge of pastoral care is that it deals with the whole of life, not just a slice but the whole, just like Jesus, just like Paul, just like John Wesley, just like me.

This Jesus of whom Paul writes had— on the other side of their encounter— given him a gift of being sent. He would now spread to all the nations the faith he had tried to eliminate from Judaism, and in verses 5 and 6 we have Paul's version of the church's world mission. It is good that we have two trips a year to Honduras; it reminds us this faith is— in Paul's words— for *all the nations*, and had it not been for *all* from the start, it might never have reached us or our ancestors on the chilly damp isles of Britain and Scotland and Ireland a thousand or more years ago. The faith always come to us on the way to somewhere beyond us, and if we stall it, we kill it!

¹⁹ The summary phrase is from the U.M. Book of Discipline 2012: 766.

I recently had the privilege of watching my team get trounced by the Tigers at the Wake-Clemson game, and at our tail gate venue was a couple from just outside Manchester England visiting their daughter, a drama major with my niece. Never had they seen such a pageant with orange tents as far as you could see in every direction as in some ancient jousting match, and mead aplenty! There is nothing like this in all England they assured me, such scope and so few hooligans. I said to them, “Do not be surprised, my friends. This is what your redneck English and Scots-Irish cousins look like after two and a half centuries in your old colonies. See what you gave away! You are now at the epicenter of prosperous, Southern red-neck culture on full display. Is it not magnificent?” They smiled. They then told me with pride that their town, Worcester, to the East of Manchester, is the home of the famous Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce. I then told them they were wrong, that the brown sauce for steaks was first concocted in my ancestral town of Cheraw when a country boy wandered in a restaurant and asked the waitress, “Whus-thi-shere-sauce?” Miles blew whatever beverage he has drinking all over the bed of my brother-in-law’s truck. “Please, Pastor Phil,” he said after wiping his mouth and shirt clean, “let me swallow before you spin another yarn.” It is our job to put the good news and the challenge that goes with it to all the people where we live, and I did manage to put in a good word for Christ and his church in the flow of our afternoon. I walked away with the impression they had never talked to a pastor before. We must each learn to speak of Jesus and of the life he freely gives. I cannot do it for you, and we must do it with wit and wisdom in the normal flow of life. In coming to trust Jesus, based on a combination of both historical and personal evidences, we get to know God as God wishes to be known. This is the great gift of Christian faith: we get to know God.

In two short sections at the end in verse 7 Paul’s reminds his hearers that the church is not tolerated by God but *beloved*, that all are *called* to belong to Christ, and to be set apart as *holy* is not so much a moral issue as a new status that must be lived into over time. Because I am loved, I am called; and because I am called, I am empowered to live a new way as a happy companion of Jesus. Holiness and wholeness have the same root, and being made whole again is something only Jesus can do. We get the world’s attention by living in a new way that goes against the grain. What people are looking for can only be found in the Father and through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. It’s why Paul ends the first paragraph of Romans with a blessing, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

CONCLUSION

Romans 1:1-7 15

It was Saturday, January 5, 1990. Lori and I stood at the bedside of my ninety-seven year old grandmother Lida at a nursing home in Greenville. For the first time in her life she didn't recognize me till I reached in the drawer for her glasses and help her put them on. She then laughed out loud and hugged me; you could feel the room fill up with love. She hugged us, over and over and over. Now God is not a deaf and feeble old woman, but God feels that kind of love when we gather together in his Son's name, as Paul wrote, "To all God's *beloved* in Rome...."

Near the end of our visit she said, "Son," (that's what she called all males) "read chapter 10."

"What book, grandmother?"

"Chapter 10," she insisted, as if there was only one chapter 10 in the New Testament. You could see the wheels turning.

"John chapter 10?" I asked.

Then Lori piped in, "Matthew? Romans?" Her face lit up. I turned in her Bible to Romans and began to read. I could tell by the look on her face that she was waiting for a verse. It was underlined- Romans 10:9, "...because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Then she pointed to herself and we laughed together, "Yes, grandmother, that's you."

She then took my hand, "Son, I'm afraid for Chris in Saudi Arabia."

"I am too, grandmother, but he's a great tank commander with thick armor."

Then she said, "But I'm not afraid to die."

It does something to me down deep to think that Paul, dictating his deepest beliefs to Tertius in Corinth nineteen hundred and fifty-nine years ago, could pen words that would give my dear Lida such assurance in the face of death. Then she started singing off key in a crackling nasal voice the words of Charles Wesley, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise...."

Folks, that's the passion and faith God must restore if we are to hold this faith with a clear conscience and make a difference in our day. And it does me great good to think of Lida learning over the battlements of heaven this morning and shouting down to her no-longer-so-young grandson as I wear the robe she gave me, "It all true, Phil. Tell 'em it's all true! Paul is standing right here beside me, and he's pulling for you. Tell 'em it's all true!"

Study And Discussion Questions For IA: Romans 1:1-7

1. Take your Bible and read Romans 1:1-7, first silently— as we normally do— and then several times out loud- which may seem odd if you are alone! It is important to hear yourself read it. Imagine yourself being the lector who read the letter out loud as a public performance to twenty or more people in one of the house churches of Rome around 58B.C.

What did you hear when you read it aloud that you missed when you read silently?

2. The three opening parts of an ancient letter were 1) the author, 2) the recipients, and 3) a greeting of well-wishes.

Can you locate these three parts in Romans 1:1-7?

3. A business card serves as a reminder of who you are and what you are about.

If v.1 is Paul's business card, what three things does he highlight and why?

Give your first name and three descriptors of your relationship with Jesus Christ.

4. Why is it important that the good news of God (v.1d) not be something new but something old and promised beforehand by prophets in Scripture? (Hint: whereas our modern culture typically values *the new and improved*, the ancients valued the *old, the tried and true*.)

What three ways does Paul characterize *the gospel of God* in v.2?

5. Paul says that the great news is promised in the Old Testament and then revealed in Jesus, who is given three titles (Son, Messiah, Lord) in vv.3-4.

Why did it take multiple titles to begin to understand Jesus' identity?

Of all that he might have said about Jesus, what two great events does Paul highlight in the two three-line stanzas of vv.3b and vv.4a-b? (Hint: each of them is one of the two great holidays of the Christian year!)

What lines in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are parallel to these affirmations?

6. How is the missionary language of vv.5-6 related to what Paul said in vv.3-4?

Is this really a message for everyone in the whole wide world? Why is that?

7. In v.7a-c what three things does Paul say about the church that resides in Rome?

8. If God's kindness (grace) leads to well-being (peace) in v.7b, how do we keep it flowing?