

## A Study in the Book of Romans

# 5

## Romans 1:5-13

### Key Verse

“ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ”

In **1:5**, Paul expresses the three major focuses of his life and ministry. As J. B. Phillips translates this verse:

“He is our Lord, Jesus Christ, from whom we received grace and our commission in his name to forward obedience to the faith in all nations.”

In this verse, we discover that Paul had received three things from God:

- **Grace** – “...we received grace...”
- **Task** – “...we received...apostleship...”
- **Fruit** – “...to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

Let's take a look at these three components of **verse 5**:

### **Grace**

Grace always describes a gift which is absolutely free – no strings attached. It is something that is totally undeserved and unearned.

Paul had found salvation by grace (**Ephesians 2:8**), but had also learnt a secret he would soon share with the Roman Christians. The *whole* Christian life is based on grace – God's enabling power – undeserved but made available to the be-

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liever. The Christian life doesn't just *start* in grace; it *runs* on grace!

On setting out in his ministry to reach the Gentiles for Christ, Paul had been "commended to the grace of God" by the church in Antioch (**Acts 15:40**). If you read Paul's description of his hardships in ministry, found in **1 Corinthians 11:23-33**, **2 Corinthians 6:4-10** and **1 Corinthians 4:13**, you quickly realize just why he was first commended to the grace of God! He needed it to survive!

Through all the trials and hardships and persecutions he had faced it had only been the grace of God (the free gift of God's enabling) that had kept him going. For God had given Paul this incredible promise in **2 Corinthians 12:9**:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

To this, Paul had responded in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**:

"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul had received grace, not just for salvation, but also to preach the Gospel. This lifestyle of grace distinguished not only his personal life but also his ministry. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* puts Paul's words into this modern slant:

"...I begged God to remove my hardships. Three times I did that, and then he told me, 'My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.' Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size – abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become."

But this grace was not just an abstract experience for Paul. It was what empowered his ministry. It was directly tied to the task God had given him.

## **Task**

Paul was set apart by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He had a special function to fulfill and was strongly aware of the responsibility placed upon his shoulders. He wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:16-17**:

"...when I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me."

But God never gives us a task without also giving us grace to enable us to fulfil it. The saints of old had discovered this. Every hero of faith in the Old Testament began his walk with God fully aware of his own weakness and inability. Moses and Gideon are just two examples:

**Moses****Read Exodus 3:11-13****Read Exodus 4:1-13**

The task the Lord gave Moses to do was no small thing. Egypt was the ruling empire of the day. It was an evil nation, and Pharaoh, its satanic leader, held authority that was claimed to be divine. Every nation in the known world lived in the fear of Pharaoh. When God told Moses to go down to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let his three million people go free from slavery, Moses' immediate response, out of his own weakness and inability, was:

- ☞ "Who am I?" (3:11)
- ☞ "Who am you?" (3:13)
- ☞ "They won't believe me!" (4:1)
- ☞ "I'm not eloquent!" (4:10)
- ☞ "Lord, send someone else!" (4:13)

But Moses did go down to Egypt, and through great miracles brought the people of Israel out as God had told him to. What made the difference? God's grace!

**Gideon****Read Judges 6:1-24**

When Gideon was given his task from the Lord – to deliver his people from the conquering armies of Midian – Israel had known only defeat for many years. In his response to God's call in **verse 13**, Gideon expresses his unbelief:

"But sir,' Gideon replied, 'if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, "Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?" But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.'"

Just take a look at the substance of Gideon's response to the Lord's call:

- ☞ "But..."
- ☞ "...if..."
- ☞ "...why..."
- ☞ "Where..."
- ☞ "But..."

Even when the Lord encouraged him and promised to be with him, Gideon's answer is, in effect: "How can I save Israel? I'm the smallest member of the smallest family in the smallest tribe of our small nation!" (see **verse 15**). But Gideon did, with just a small band of men, deliver his nation from its enemies. What made the difference? The grace of God!

So, too, for us, God gives the grace to match the task he sets before us.

**Read Hebrews 4:16****Read 2 Corinthians 4:8**

**Read 1 Peter 4:10*****Fruit***

The purpose of the task that Paul had received was, as J. B. Phillips translates it, “to forward obedience to the faith in all nations.” Paul’s greatest joy was to see the fruit of his ministry. To the Christians in Thessalonica, he wrote in **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20**:

“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”

**Read also 2 Corinthians 3:2-3**

Through God’s grace, and his own faithfulness to the task given him, Paul saw the whole of Asia Minor “turned upside down” for Christ (**Acts 17:6**, KJV). He could joyfully proclaim, “All Asia have heard” (**Acts 19:10**). He had his eyes focused on the task of preaching Christ to the nations. Indeed, the focus of his task was “to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

These three aspects of ministry – grace, task and fruit – apply to each of us in the Body of Christ. We have each received a task from God. To fulfil it God gives us grace. These two fit together to produce the results. We have all been called to bring forth fruit.

**Read John 15:1-8**

The whole purpose for remaining in Christ is so “that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” Where does “much fruit” come from? It comes from the task that God gives you and the grace he provides to complete that task? How does that happen? It happens as we “abide” in the vine.

*The Message* renders Jesus’ instructions in this way:

“I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is dead-wood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is – when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.”

In **John 15:16**, Jesus said:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last...”

Every believer is called to “reproduce.” In **Genesis 9:1**, when Noah stepped out of the Ark after the flood waters had abated, he stepped out into a whole new world. A new life stretched before him. Then God spoke to him and gave him this command: “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.”

In the same way, when you were born into God's family, you left behind your old way of life and stepped into a whole new "world." Now, in **Matthew 28:19-20**, Jesus has given you the command:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

## Loved by God

### Read Romans 1:6-7

The theme of God's intense love will be developed by Paul in the course of his letter to the Romans. Just take a look at these verses, lifted from the body of the rest of Paul's letter:

- **5:5** – "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has *poured out his love into our hearts* by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."
- **5:8** – "But God *demonstrates his own love for us* in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- **8:35** – "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*"
- **8:37** – "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors *through him who loved us.*"
- **8:38-39** – "For I am convinced that [nothing]...will be able to separate us *from the love of God* that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- **15:30** – "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and *by the love of the Spirit*, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me."

But that is not all. According to Paul, the Roman Christians are not just "loved by God"; they are also "called to be saints."

## Called to be Saints

After a thorough description of his own call and ministry, Paul now focuses on his recipients. He writes to all the Christians in Rome and says they are all loved by God and called to be saints.

The word "saints" literally means ones who are "set apart, separated, or holy." It is the general title given continually throughout the New Testament to all believers in Christ. In God's eyes, *everyone* who is born of the Spirit of God is a saint (note **Ephesians 1:1,18 and Colossians 1:26**).

### ***God's part toward his saints***

#### Read again verse 7

Paul pronounces two blessings upon his readers on behalf of the Lord. His words were not given as an idle good wish, but with the full authority of a blessing. We see this in operation when the Lord Jesus sent his disciples into the towns and villages to proclaim the Kingdom of God. In **Matthew 10:11-13**, Jesus' instructions are:

“Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you.”

At that time, as even today, the Jews' greeting to one another was “*Shalom!*” meaning “Peace!” But in his instructions, the Lord reveals that for the believer it was not just to be an empty word. There is the authority of heaven behind the words we speak (**Mark 11:22-24**). When we bless, people who have open hearts to the Lord experience the reality of that blessing in their lives. As **Proverbs 15:4** explains:

“The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life...”

There are two special blessings that belong to us as saints. They are yours because of the wonderful new relationship the Lord Jesus has made possible for you to have with God. He is now your Father and he desires that you experience these blessings continually:

### **Grace**

As we saw earlier in this lesson, grace is God's enabling power given to you even though you don't deserve it. It is through grace that you are born into the family of God, and it is by grace that you are able to live victoriously day by day in your Christian life. **2 Corinthians 9:8** tells us:

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

### **Peace**

One of the many wonderful gifts left to us by the Lord Jesus after he went back to heaven is his peace. On the eve of the crucifixion, facing the time of greatest darkness, he said to his disciples in **John 14:27**:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

His peace is different to the kind of peace the world knows. In the world, men only know peace if there is an absence of strife or trouble or war. The peace that Jesus gives us is an inward peace that is ours no matter what may be happening around us. His peace is not dependent on the outward circumstances.

### ***Our part as saints***

**Read again verse 8**

Paul praises the saints at Rome for two things he had heard they had, and the Lord is looking to find these in each of us also:

### **Faith**

The Lord puts a high priority on faith because it represents our total dependence on him. This is why he says in **Hebrews 11:6**:

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

It is our faith that releases God's grace to work in our lives.

### **Testimony**

The whole world had heard of the faith of the Roman Christians! What the Roman Christians believed in their heart, they put into word and practice. People both saw and heard their faith. We, too, are called to give testimony to our faith, both by our way of life and by sharing what we believe with others.

In **1 Peter 3:15-16**, we find this general instruction:

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

### ***Our part as saints together***

Paul acknowledges the depths of his love and concern for the Roman Christians, whom he has never seen, and expresses the two ways in which he can best show that love to them:

### **Prayer**

Paul prayed constantly for the Roman believers. His whole heart was in God's work – not just in the part he had to play (preaching the Gospel), but even in areas in which he had not been personally involved – e.g. Rome (see **verse 9-10; Philippians 1:3-6**).

As Christians, we belong to Christ's spiritual Body, his Church (**Ephesians 1:22-23**), which is made up of people of every race, language and culture (**Revelation 7:9-10**). Prayer is our link with the whole Body of Christ, worldwide. It is a dynamic force, for Jesus gave us the promise: “If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it” (**John 14:14**). When we pray to our Father on behalf of His people, something happens! There is no distance in prayer. Whether near or far, we can bring blessing to our fellow Christians through our ministry of prayer. As **Ephesians 6:18-19** instructs us:

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints...”



## Fellowship

Paul longed to see the Romans. His love for them was expressed every day through his prayers, yet still he longed to be able to impart to them personally something of himself. He yearned to have fellowship with them (see **verses 11-12**).

Fellowship is person-to-person contact between Christians, sharing their hearts and lives together and giving to one another from that which God has given them. Each of us has received something special from the Lord that we can share with others. He gives every believer spiritual gifts in order to bless others (**1 Corinthians 12:1-13**), and all of us can share from our experiences of how God has helped us in times of trouble and thus help others going through a similar experience (see **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**). This is what Christian fellowship is all about.

## Summarizing the Passage

In this passage of Paul's letter to the Romans – **1:5-13** – we have seen Paul's heart expressed to the Roman Christians and in sharing his heart, we have had insight into Paul's own ministry. Let's take another glance at what Paul wrote:

- **Verse 5** – “Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” – Here Paul describes the nature of his own call and ministry. The fruit of that ministry is described as those who have entered “the obedience that comes from faith.”
- **Verse 6** – “And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” – Even though the Roman Christians were not the direct result of Paul's ministry, he includes them among those who have entered “the obedience that comes from faith.” They too are the fruit of the Gospel.
- **Verse 7** – “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints...” – Paul now formally addresses the Roman Christians, but specifically describes them as being 1) “loved by God” and 2) “called to be saints.”
- **Verse 7** – “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” – Paul now identifies the two principal blessings that come from knowing Christ – grace and peace. He also identifies the source of these blessings – God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Verse 8** – “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world” – From the very beginning of his letter, Paul is expressing thanks for what the Roman Christians already have – faith. The rest of Paul's letter will be describing the basis of that faith – the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Verse 9-10** – “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you” – Paul shows that the “whole heart” with which he



served God in preaching the Gospel is always directed with equal passion toward the Roman Christians, through prayer and a desire to visit them.

- **Verse 11** – “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong” – Paul explains now the reason for his desire to visit them – that he might be able to minister strength to them.
- **Verse 12** – “...that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” – He now qualifies his previous statement, since in Paul’s view his visit will not be a one-way blessing, but will result in mutual encouragement and strengthening. He values the quality of the Romans’ faith and recognizes that they have much to contribute to him as well.
- **Verse 13** – “I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now)...” – Paul again expresses his desire to visit Rome, explaining why he had not come earlier, and shares again the reason for his expected visit – “in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.” Once again, Paul ties his visit with the object of all his ministry: to see a further harvest in the Roman community who would become committed to “the obedience that comes from faith.”

To the Colossian Christians, in **Colossians 1:6**, Paul writes:

“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.”

Now to the Roman Christians, he writes the same thing, this time emphasizing that news has come to him from their part of the world of how the Gospel is “bearing fruit and growing.” Paul expresses his desire to participate in this wonderful harvest in the Gospel – as a co-laborer with the Romans – when he visits them soon.

The introduction Paul makes to Romans is especially long – much longer than the introductions in any of his other letters. But Paul obviously felt that he needed to lay more groundwork for his letter. Since his readers didn’t know him personally, he wanted them to become better acquainted with him. He does this by firstly establishing his authority to write to them, and then by unburdening his heart to them. Before he shares his revelation in the Gospel, he first shares *himself* with his readers, allowing them to see the depth of his affection for them.

We are almost at the end of Paul’s introduction. In the next few verses, he will begin to launch into the core of his message and his purpose for writing his letter to the Romans.