

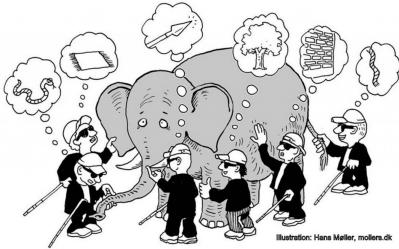
## Romans 1:1-7

### *The Victorious Gospel*

**Main idea:** Jesus is the only Son of God, and all the nations are called to be obedient to Him.

You've probably seen this illustration before.

#### **[Illustration of the blind men and an elephant]**



In the illustration, there are six blind men all touching various parts of an elephant. One touches the trunk and thinks that the elephant is like a snake. Another touches a tusk and thinks that the elephant is like a spear. Another tries to reach his arms around a massive leg and thinks that the elephant is like a large tree, and so on.

The illustration of the blind men and the elephant is most often used to say that religious people tend to argue with each other over things they don't really know about, and that we really all ought to be more open to the ideas and beliefs of others. They say that Christians ought to be open to the truth in Buddhism, Buddhists ought to be open to the truth in Hinduism, and so on. And that's actually true to an extent, because anything that's true is ultimately from God.

But the thing that many people fail to see about this illustration is that there really is an elephant! In other words, there really is an absolute truth that all of our ideas and beliefs are going to be measured by. So we need to seek not just to understand each other, but to understand the truth. Because if we don't, the truth may trample over us like a herd of elephants.

And here's the truth. We find in the book of Isaiah, God says this:

To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance. (Isaiah 45:23b)

We find this quoted in the New Testament as well, both in Romans and Philippians,<sup>1</sup> and it shows that eventually, every person will believe the truth about Jesus and bow before Him, swearing allegiance to Him. You see, the good news of Jesus isn't just for Christians, or Jews, but for all people, so that all nations might come to believe.<sup>2</sup>

I've come to believe that the gospel that many confessing Christians believe is not victorious enough.<sup>3</sup> We're often content to believe the gospel for ourselves, but we lack the hope and boldness to preach the gospel to all people in all nations, so that they also would embrace Jesus and be saved.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10-22

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 22:27, Psalm 145:9, Zephaniah 3:9, John 3:17, John 12:32, Romans 5:18, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:14,

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:28

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

So for the next year or so, I'm going to be preaching through the book of Romans. I'm calling this series, "The Book of Romans: Good News for All Nations" because Romans is like Paul's most thorough explanation of the gospel. He writes about our need for the gospel, our powerlessness without the gospel, and the global necessity for the gospel to be preached and received in all the world.

So, let's begin with Romans 1:1-7. It's actually one long sentence, but we're going to break it down piece by piece. Let's read it now. Romans 1:1.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-7)

*Father, as we begin looking at the book of Romans, help us to believe the truth. Help us to let go of unbiblical ideas that we've clung to, and believe the true gospel. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

Even in the introduction of his letter to the Romans, Paul gives us several challenging thoughts. The first is this idea about our identity.

Who are you, really? If you were suddenly the key speaker for a group of people, how would you introduce yourself to an audience in one sentence? Would you talk about your family, or your job, or your accomplishments? Maybe if you're well-known, you need no introduction, or maybe you might introduce yourself anyway in order to be clear about what's most important.

Facebook allows you to write yourself a brief bio that appears at the top of your page. Here's mine.

### [Pastor Chris's Facebook Bio]



That's me in a nutshell. I'm a pastor, I have a family, and I like ice cream.

I think it's important to know who we are. What are the most important things that make you who you are? Our culture today would say that it's all about your racial or gender identity, but as we see at the beginning of most of the letters of the New Testament, Paul begins the letter to the Romans by identifying himself primarily by his relationship with God. Verse 1.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (Romans 1:1)

So, right off the bat, we read that Paul's primary title for himself is a servant of Jesus. I want to challenge all of us to think of ourselves the same way. Do you see your primary identity as that of a servant to Jesus?

It's crazy how caught up we can get with all kinds of things that ultimately don't even matter. We can get sucked into tv, sports, games, news, or even certain people. And I'm definitely not saying that every aspect of all of these things are bad. We should absolutely care about people. We should absolutely be aware of what's going on in the world. But if we're not careful, we can allow these things to completely consume our thinking, time, and energy.

There was a point in my life that I was absolutely obsessed with pogs.

### **[Picture of pogs]**



Do any of you remember those things? There were these small circles made of cardboard, or plastic, or metal, and you could trade them with each other or play a game with them and try to win them from others. I had several tubes of these things! But years later, I

realized they were completely meaningless. And I wonder how many of the things that we consume ourselves with today are just as meaningless.

Instead, we're to think of ourselves primarily as servants of Jesus. We're not to be servants of culture. We're not to be servants of entertainment. We're not to be servants of money, or food, or popular movements. We're to be servants of Jesus Christ.

That's tough. That can mean turning off the tv, and instead of binge watching another episode of that show, investing that time in people to show them God's love. It can mean setting time aside not just to earn money, but to serve others in the name of Christ. Being a servant of Jesus means recognizing that you are not your own master, like we so often seem to think that we are, and recognizing that Jesus is your Savior and Lord.<sup>5</sup>

As Christians, we confess that this is the case, but are we serving Him? That's our first challenge.

Our second challenge is also in verse 1. Paul writes that he is called to be an apostle. The word "apostle" simply means "missionary."<sup>6</sup> We often think of the apostles as Jesus's first disciples, but the New Testament actually names several other apostles as well.

Paul wrote in Galatians 1:19:

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:24

<sup>6</sup> ἀπόστολος: a messenger, one sent on a mission, an apostle (Strong's #652)

I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (Galatians 1:19)

So even though James didn't even believe in Jesus as the Messiah until after Jesus rose from the grave, James not only became a Christian, but an apostle who also wrote the book of James which we studied most of this year.

We also read in Acts 14:14 that Barnabas was also an apostle alongside Paul. In fact, by some counts, there are as many as 25 apostles named in the New Testament. One of them was even Jesus. Check it out. Hebrews 3:1.

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1)

So our Savior and Lord, whom we're to follow, is called not just an apostle, but THE apostle. Jesus is the greatest apostle, who came preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.<sup>7</sup>

So as an apostle, or missionary, Paul had that same purpose. He writes, at the end of verse 1, that his purpose was that he was set apart for the gospel of God. Paul saw the gospel as so good, so victorious, that he devoted his life to sharing the gospel with all people and all nations.

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 4:43

And once again, the Scripture challenges us all. This ought to be our purpose as well.<sup>8</sup> Maybe you're hesitant to see yourself as an apostle, that's fine. It sounds like such a holy title. But at least see that we're all called to be missionaries, sharing Jesus with the people God has placed around you. And that doesn't mean that you necessarily need to quit your job in order to do so. God calls some people to do that, and we want to support them, but God calls most of us to stay where He's already planted us, and see the opportunities all around us every day as opportunities to share Jesus with lost people who desperately need the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

Paul then begins to explain in verse 2 what this gospel is. Verse 2. The gospel of God is that:

which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:2-4)

So, there are several things about the gospel that Paul points out in these verses. First, we read that God promised the gospel long ago through the prophets. It's just mind-blowing how many prophecies Jesus fulfilled when He came.

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 4:2

Second, we read that the gospel is concerning God's Son. The gospel isn't about moral living, or about the pursuit of happiness. The gospel is primarily about Jesus Christ our Lord.

Third, we read that Jesus was descended from David according to the flesh. This is one of those prophecies Jesus fulfilled. It means that although Jesus has always existed because He is God in the flesh, He was born in the exact family line that God promised beforehand.

And fourth, we read that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead. In other words, Christ's resurrection proved His message. During His ministry on the earth, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and His death and resurrection proved it and proclaimed it even louder.

And when you come to trust in Christ's death and resurrection for your salvation, you also receive this challenge to proclaim His salvation to all people. Verse 5.

[It's Jesus] through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations (Romans 1:5)

You see, the gospel is not merely for one people, but for all people. It's not for one nation, but for all nations.

In Genesis 12:2, God told Abraham:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2)

So it's clear from the first book of the Bible that God chose one family to become a special nation: the nation of Israel. But notice that God did this not to bless Israel exclusively, but so that Israel would then bless others. Continue reading the next verse. God told Abraham:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:3)

It's interesting that sometimes we focus on the first part of this verse, but don't continue to the end of the verse. We like the part that says that if we bless Israel, we'll be blessed, and that if others curse Israel, they'll be cursed. And this has led many evangelicals to start huge campaigns to support the sovereign state of Israel. But notice that the conclusion of the verse is that all of the families of the earth shall be blessed. Isn't that interesting?

This isn't some obscure verse, either. Similar promises are given over and over throughout Scripture. As we heard in our Scripture reading earlier, in Isaiah 49:6, God told the Israelites:

I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6b)

Psalm 22:27 says:

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.  
(Psalm 22:27)

1 John 4:14.

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)

Jesus said in Matthew 24:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

And He also said in John 12:32:

And I, if I am lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself. (John 12:32)

Jesus is the only Son of God, and all the nations are called to be obedient to Him in faith. The goal is not merely for some people to confess Jesus as Lord, but for all people of all nations to confess Jesus as Lord, as we see in Philippians 2:10:11:

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.  
(Philippians 2:10-11)

You see, there's no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is the Savior of the world.<sup>11</sup> It's not a weak gospel, but the Victorious Gospel, in which Jesus Himself is the apostle, the Savior, and the King of all kings.<sup>12</sup>

But finally, Paul also points out that the gospel is not just for the nations, but for you. Verse 6.

including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:6-7)

God calls you, each of you, to belong to Jesus. He desires that you experience His grace and peace. He desires that you see yourself as His servant and missionary, so that you would go and share the good news with all the world.

You see, we believe and proclaim a victorious gospel. It calls all of us, all nations, all peoples, all families, and each one of us, to trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 4:12

<sup>11</sup> 1 John 4:14

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 19:16