

You are called by God's gospel promise.

Text: Romans 1:1-7 for 12/22/2019 by Pastor Jeff Bolwerk

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised in advance through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. ³This gospel is about his Son—who in the flesh was born a descendant of David, ⁴who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God's powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ, our Lord. ⁵Through him we received grace and the call to be an apostle on behalf of his name, to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, ⁶including you, who were called by Jesus Christ. ⁷To all those loved by God who are in Rome, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Alright, I just have to ask: Do you have your Christmas shopping done yet? If not, that's alright because you still have two more days before Christmas. But maybe you have your Christmas shopping done. What about wrapping those Christmas gifts, do you have that done? If not, that's alright because you still have two more days before Christmas. But do you have all of your Christmas cards done? Now that's going to be a little more difficult to take care of if you're not done yet, because you know if you mail any Christmas cards tomorrow they are not going to arrive at the person's house by Christmas Day. But if you don't have your Christmas cards done there is something else you could do. You can simply call! You can pick up the phone and call people, and personally wish each and every person on your list a Merry Christmas. Now, some might not consider a phone call as nice as a Christmas card. But that call can be something special. How wonderful it is to receive warm and personal wishes directly from someone who is dear to us.

The Apostle Paul tells us that God does something similar through his Word. God uses his Holy Scriptures to call you with a very special message. He calls you for a very special purpose.

Theme: You are called by God's gospel promise.

- I. Called to the obedience of faith.
- II. Called to be saints of God.

As Paul writes this letter to the Christians in Rome he is writing to a mixed group of believers. Some had been Jewish, but many had been Gentiles; people who worshiped pagan gods. Remember, to the Jewish mind Gentiles were people who were "unclean." They were separated from God; they were not God's people. That was because they did not have God's Word. The Gentiles did not know about God's law or his promises. They had nothing to turn them away from their sins. Paul tells these believers that he was called as an apostle so that he in turn could call Gentiles to the true faith – faith in Christ. And while many in the church at Rome had been "Gentiles" now they were Christians – people who had been called by the gospel to the obedience of faith.

We, too, were at one time "Gentiles." We were people who were separated from God. We were born without love for God in our hearts. Original sin made us "unclean." It caused us to rebel against God's law, and it made us blind to God's good promises. There was nothing in us to turn us away from our sins.

So God called us to faith through his gospel. By the power of his gospel promises God made us alive. He turned us from our sin and opened our eyes to his good promises, so that we could obey his commands. God gave us his commands to protect us from sin and to keep our souls safe.

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Yet we do not always like to obey God's commands. In fact, we especially do not like the word "obey." Dogs obey. Slaves obey. Each must do exactly what the master commands or face the consequences. And when our sinful nature hears the word "obey" it rebels. It cries out, "God's not telling me what to do! I'm in control of my life. I'll decided what is right or wrong for me. I am free to do whatever I want!" And our sinful nature has a great deal of support in its rebellion because our American culture looks at God's commands in the same way. The American mindset says we control our own destinies. Our culture tells us that we rely on no one and we are slaves to no one. So Satan and our sinful nature point to our American culture and say, "Look at what everyone else is doing. You don't want to look like some religious freak, do you? If you want to fit in and have people like you and accept you then you need to be like them!" Sadly, too often we listen to them, and we let our sinful nature get control of us.

Allowing our sinful nature to control our lives is a serious problem. The sole intention of our sinful nature is to kill us. It does that by using the very commands God set before us to keep us safe. The Apostle Paul says later in his letter to the Romans: **"Sin, seizing the opportunity provided by this commandment, deceived me and put me to death through it"** (Romans 7:11 EHV). When we reject obedience to God, we enslave ourselves to sin. When we make sin our master that sin puts us to death. It kills our soul and condemns us to hell.

But thanks be to God that he does not stop reaching out to us with his life saving gospel! You have been called by God through the gospel. **"This gospel is about his Son—who in the flesh was born a descendant of David, who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God's powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ, our Lord"** (vs. 3-4 EHV). With these words Paul describes Jesus as true man, a descendant of David. Paul also describes him as true God. Jesus displayed his power as God by rising from the dead.

So how does this God-man help us? By doing what we could not do. From the time he was born, that little baby in Bethlehem perfectly obeyed every one of God's commands. Jesus, the God who came to be with us, was perfectly obedient to his Father's law so that he could save us from our sins. Speaking of Jesus obedience Paul wrote to the Philippians that Jesus **"humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross"** (Philippians 2:8 EHV). That perfect baby in Bethlehem would grow to be the perfect sacrifice for sins. The perfect Lamb of God obeyed his Father's will, and poured out his blood over our disobedience, to wash our sins away. Then, as true God, Jesus went on to rise from the dead, proving he has the power to destroy sin and death!

That is why Jesus came into this world, to save people from their sins. And who does Paul say Jesus' "people" are? You are! Paul says that the gospel of Jesus was proclaimed, **"to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, including you, who were called by Jesus Christ"** (vs. 5-6). You have been called out of darkness into God's wonderful light. You have been called to faith in Christ, so that you now have the power to obey God's will. And this obedience is not the obedience of fear to some horrible, violent master. No, this is an obedience of love; obeying our gracious Father with lives of thanks. By faith we are obedient to God as a way of showing him how grateful we are that he has freed us from our sins and saved us from eternal death.

Being free from our sin is true freedom. It is the freedom to be something new. God has

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called us to this faith to make us something new; something special. Through God's gospel promise the Holy Spirit creates in us a new life. As people who trust in Christ, we are different than what we use to be, because we have been called to be saints of God.

The word "saint" literally means "holy one." Now, someone who is "holy" is someone who is "perfect." When we look at our lives we realize we are not perfect, Yet we are perfect before God because we trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. God's law makes it clear to us that we have sinned. And God's gospel moves us to turn away from sin and the death that it brings. His gospel empowers us to cling to Christ for forgiveness and life.

As saints of God we have this "holiness" because the gospel has been revealed to us. Speaking of the gospel, Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians, **"I became a minister of the church for your benefit when God gave me the task of fully proclaiming the word of God, namely, the mystery that was hidden for past ages and generations, but now has been revealed to his saints"** (Colossians 1:25,26 EHV). You are those saints.

And the mystery that has been revealed? It is the mystery that through faith in Christ we are covered with Jesus' perfection. All of the ugliness of our sins has been covered up by Christ's perfect robe of righteousness. It is a robe that makes us perfect in God's eyes.

As God's holy ones we are also covered with Christ's power. It is the power that gives us the ability to obey God's will – his good, pleasing, and perfect will. And It is a power that will one day allow us to rule with Christ and judge the world. As Paul said to the Corinthians: **"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world"** (1 Corinthians 6:2 EHV)? More importantly, the power of Christ that covers us gives us the ability to thank God for giving us eternal life. As Paul wrote, **"Giving thanks to the Father, who qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light"** (Colossians 1:12 EHV).

We have this power, this holiness, because it is God who has "called" us. This is not the call of an angry parent waiting to scold their child. This is not the call of a slave-master demanding service from his slaves. This call is the invitation of a loving Father to come and enjoy all that he has prepared for us – even though we do not deserve it; even though we did nothing to earn it. Our heavenly Father calls us to be his holy, perfect children; his saints. He calls us to enjoy the peace of his forgiveness and the joy of eternal life with him.

It is an invitation to enjoy God's grace and his peace. As Paul says at the end of our text, **"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"** (v.7). This grace is the undeserved love of God which he lavished upon us by sending his Son into the world. This peace is the peace the angels announced that first Christmas morning, proclaiming **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind"** (Luke 2:14 EHV). God's favor rests on us, because he has called us by his gospel; he has called us to be his saints.

While receiving a card from someone at Christmas can be quite special, receiving a phone call from someone we love can be just as special. How wonderful to hear the voice of a loved one wishing us the blessings of Christmas. Yet, how much more incredible it is to receive God's call. The call of God's gospel brings us to faith, a faith which moves us to obey our heavenly Father's will. God's call makes us saints. We have been made holy and perfect by the perfect and innocent babe of Bethlehem, the one who came and saved his people from their sins. He is Christ the Lord. Amen.