

Before the days of SMS, and before the availability of email... In the era when FaceBook and Twitter had never been heard of,,, people of my generation and older, had an archaic method of communication that some of you younger folk may have never, ever experienced...

It didn't take batteries. There were no contracts or monthly fees. We didn't need data; Nor a user name or password... All we would need, is a pen and paper, an envelope and a stamp. And we could write a letter, and post it to the person we wanted to communicate with.

And a letter would usually begin with an introduction:

*Dear Uncle Neville and Aunty Eunice,
I hope you are well....*

That's about the extent of my introductions... But when I read the introductions that the Apostle Paul used to write in his letters, and begin to see the depth and the richness of what he's written, and then compare it to what I've written,,,, Man, I'm shallow. I'm so very shallow...

Paul didn't waste any papyrus – he got straight into it. He just wanted to talk about Jesus, and that's exactly what he did. And even in the introduction of his letters, he touches on a fair bit of what he's going to cover in the body of the letter, and my, the richness of it....

In the Greek, the first four words, of the letter that we're reading today, are: Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ : **Paul, slave of Christ Jesus.**

Most bible translations try to tone it down a bit, and they use the word “Servant”, but the word is not “servant” – the word is “slave”. Paul describes himself, as a slave...

Now, to be a slave, is generally a pretty awful lot to have in life. But to be a slave of Christ Jesus – well, that’s a different kettle of fish all together. It is a privilege and an honour. And what Paul is trying to get across here, is that as disciples of Christ Jesus, our Lord requires our, utter, total devotion.

Leon Morris says: *“The goal of redemption, is obedience, rather than autonomy...ⁱ⁾”*

Alright, Jesus has redeemed us – He’s bought us back, not so we can just go off and do our own thing – but He has “redeemed us” – He has “bought us” into “obedience”. And Paul recognises, that he owesⁱⁱ⁾ it. It is a debt that Paul owes to Jesus – to be totally devoted to Him – that’s the only correct response, to being saved....

When we get to chapter 6, we are going to discover that all of us are slaves: we are either slaves to sin (and captured by sin, and unable to break free of it), or we are slaves to Jesus Christ – He has bought us **out** of slavery to sin. He got his cheque book out, and he signed it in his blood... He paid the ransom, and therefore, we who have been set free, are slaves to righteousness, through utter, total devotion to Christ Jesus, our Saviour...

And so Paul introduces himself, as a **slave**, and an **apostle**. To be an apostle means he’s been sent out on mission (but it’s

more than that)... Nobody today can claim to be an apostle, because the apostles, had the special authority of being eye-witnesses to Jesus. The apostolic testimony was carried by them. But there are no apostles today – the testimony of the apostles, is written down in the Bible.

And Paul says that he's been **set apart for the gospel of God...**

The word “Gospel”, is going to come up 11 times, as we work our way through Romans. It's a key-word. And last week we identified that the theme, of Romans, is the “Gospel”.

What a weird word, hey... What does it mean??? We've heard it, but what does it mean?
(Does it mean truth? This is the ‘Gospel Truth’???)

Well, let's go back, to first century Rome.

Imagine that Caesar's armies have been in a battle in some far-flung land...

And approaching Rome, comes a runner – a messenger – in Greek (euangelos or evangelist)- a messenger of good news.

And as he comes running into town, he's shouting εὐαγγέλιον εὐαγγέλιον or in English “Gospel. Gospel”. “Good news. Good news.” Caesar's armies have won the victory...

“Gospel. Gospel”

That's how the word “εὐαγγέλιον – Gospel”, was used.

And when Paul had to describe what Jesus has done for us, and the life that we live in Him, he could find no better word than “εὐαγγέλιον – Gospel”... A message of good news –

great news – a great victory has been won – it’s something to celebrate – It’s something to bring us joy...

Let’s move on: We’re still in the 1st sentence of the letter. And as Paul describes what the gospel is, he brings the Old Testament and the New Testament, together.

Jesus is the Son of God. He’s the one that the prophets had prophesied about in the Hebrew Scriptures. He’s the Messiah (the Christ). The Holy Spirit, raised Him from the dead...

Do you realise in this very first sentence, we have the Holy Trinity of God. Jesus was proven to be the Son of God, because the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead...

So, if Jesus Christ, is the Son of God – if Jesus is indeed, “God the Son”,,, then that means, “Jesus Christ, is Lord.”

Paul has already told us he’s a slave. And a slave, is slave to a master. A slave, is slave to a Lord...

When we pray, we **call** Jesus “Lord”... But do we really know what that means? It means, “He is the master, and we are His slaves”... But we’re not reluctant slaves – we’re not held there against our will, chained and compelled... We’re willing slaves... It’s actually a **gift**, to be a slave of Jesus.

V5 says, that through Jesus Christ our Lord, we **have received grace** (that means it’s a gift) And it is: **to bring**

about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations....

There's been some big arguments over the years, about the relationship between faith and obedience. Some say "You don't need to be obedient – you just have to have faith"... People in the world, however, who don't understand Christianity at all, might say the exact opposite – that Christianity's just about being good – being obedient.

But faith is more than obedience, and obedience is more than faith.

To Paul, the words "obedience" and "faith" are mutually interpreting: obedience **always** involves faith, and faith **always** involves obedience. You can't have one or the other – they have to go together. You don't come to faith, and then later on, if God is good enough, He makes you obedient... We can't separate these things out like that...

The Saviour in whom we believe, is nothing less than our **Lord**. And **as** our Lord, we owe Him our obedience. He is our Lord. He is our Master... And likewise, Jesus cannot be our Lord, unless we have faith in Himⁱⁱⁱ... Do you get this??? Faith and obedience must go together.

But if I'm forgiven through faith, why do I need to be obedient? Isn't forgiveness enough? If I'm disobedient, God forgives me – what's it matter???

Well, here's the answer: If I was to say, "For God's sake, be obedient"... or if I was to say "For God's sake, get a bit of faith"... , I wouldn't be blaspheming...

You see, Paul tells us, that the grace we have received from God, is given for a purpose – to bring about, the “obedience of faith”. Why??? For the sake of **His** name, among all the nations...

Disobedience, dishonours God's Name. When I am disobedient, I dishonour God's Name.

There's a great old hymn (Trust and obey):

*But we never can prove
the delights of His love
until all on the altar we lay,
for the favour He shows
and the joy he bestows
are for those who will
trust and obey.*

*Trust **and** obey,
for there's no other way
to be happy in Jesus
but to trust **and** obey*

– that's the obedience of faith: Faith is trust and belief...
And if we truly trust and believe, then we will obey.

So, v7, which by the way, is still the 1st sentence of the letter –
This one sentence is 132 words long – he's got a fair bit to
say, hey....

Anyway, v7 says,

7 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.

Alright, as disciples of Jesus, we are **called to be saints** (that means, we are called to be holy)...

Does anyone here feel a bit burdened by that calling??? Do you feel like you might be failing in it? I mean – no pressure – but you're just called to be a saint – that's all...

There's no burden here:

We're not "loved by God" because we **are** saints... We are called to be saints, **because** we are loved by God. Do you understand the difference??? We are not "earning God's love", by being holy... We are called to be holy, because God already loves us...

But you might say to me, "But Michael, I try and try and try to be obedient. I try to be holy. I try to do the right thing. I try to bring honour to God's name.... but I keep failing..."

Do you know what Paul would say to that?

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

You see, this is where faith kicks in. We have to trust **and** obey – we don't just obey... and nor do we just trust... The

two go together. And as we trust in God, and **strive** for obedience,, His grace, releases us from all of our disastrous disobedient acts, and failures...

And so Paul can say to us, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Not peace because “Hey, I’ve done it – I’ve achieved it... I am a saint, and I’m living a consistently saintly life...” Because I’m not good enough for that, and neither are you. I’m **called** to be a saint, but sometimes, I’m not very saintly. But by the grace of God, when we confess our sins, He forgives us of all unrighteousness, and He gives us peace...

And the letter will explain this a lot more, when we get further into it. Remember, this is still the first sentence of the letter...

Let’s move on. V8

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

The Christians in Rome – what they believed, and the way they trusted in God, was commendable. Paul had heard about it, in another country. And he praised God, for what he’d heard about their faith...

You know sometimes (and we pastors are just as prone to it as anyone)... But sometimes we can hear about the faith of a

particular church, and we might try and downplay it a bit (oh, they're not that good) and we might even feel a bit jealous...

But Paul has a true pastor's heart. And when he hears about a faithful church, well, that excites him... And so he thanks God for them....

And he's been praying for them. And he's been wanting to visit them, so that they could receive from him, and he could receive from them.

You know, Christians, building one another up, is a key part, of growing in Christ...

And I hope, that when you go away for a weekend, or when you go away for a holiday – I hope you don't take a holiday from church... You know, I've known **ministers** who, when they go on holidays, "Oh, I don't go to church on holidays – that's work, and this is my break"... How sad is that?

And I really want to encourage you, when you are away from this town on a Sunday, ask around. Who are the people of faith??? Pray, and ask "Lord, what church would you have me visit today?" and see where He leads you. It most probably won't be the biggest church. It most probably won't be the flashiest church... It may be a very small church. It might be a new church plant. It might be a small group of very faithful saints...

You visit them,, and be blessed by them.... And you be a blessing to them. Go, expecting that you will have a part to play in building **them** up, and they would have a part to play in building **you** up.

How do we feel, when a visitor to town, decides to visit this little church of “Bush Disciples”? Isn’t it wonderful??? What a wonderful encouragement it’s been, when visitors, discover this little church, and come to visit... And you mightn’t know this, but what an encouragement we have been, to these visitors, who have given glory to God, because they’ve discovered a young church, full of faith, and a people faithfully following Jesus out in the bush... A lot of people have the impression that churches in country towns are dyeing, and what an encouragement it has been to them, to discover this new church that’s just been born.

Well, we haven’t covered all of the introduction, but I think that’s enough.

Paul finished off his introduction, by telling them that he’s “obligated”, to preach the Gospel all over the world. To the wise and the foolish; To the cultured and the Barbarian... It’s an obligation.

And that’s our obligation too. We’re not apostles.... We may not be sent off into other countries as missionaries... But we are all obligated, wherever we are, to preach the Gospel – to be ambassadors for Christ – and to live in the obedience of faith, to bring glory to God.

Let’s pray,

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you.

We thank you for your gracious gift of faith.

We thank you that you love us enough,
That you would not only die for us,
But that you would call us to the obedience of faith.
That you would call us to be saints – to be holy ones.
And that you would not leave us to this task, alone.
Lord, we thank you for the Gospel – the good news,
That as we repent,
You give us forgiveness, for all of our sins,
All of our failures,
For all of the times that we've brought your name into
disrepute.

Lord, by your grace,
Help us, to bring glory to Your Name among the nations.
That your disciples, right across the world,
(including us),
would be brought to an obedience of faith,
that truly honours Your Name.

Lord,
Give us peace. Give us hope. Give us Joy,
In Christ Jesus, our Lord, and our master,
Amen...

ⁱMorris, L. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 1988 . (P.37)

ⁱⁱ Romans 8:12

ⁱⁱⁱ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Paul saw his task as calling men and women to submission to the lordship of Christ (cf. vv. 4b and 7b), a submission that began with conversion but which was to continue in a deepening, lifelong commitment. This obedience to Christ as Lord is always closely related to faith, both as an initial, decisive step of faith and as a continuing “faith” relationship with Christ. In light of this, we understand the words “obedience” and “faith” to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. They should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of Christian experience. Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience—for the Saviour in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord—and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith—for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to

him in faith. Viewed in this light, the phrase captures the full dimension of Paul's apostolic task, a task that was not confined to initial evangelization but that included also the building up and firm establishment of churches.