

May 1,2022
The Message of Romans 1
Romans 1:1-15

The Grace of Obedience in Faith

1. Background of Paul's writing of Romans

The Book of Romans was written in Corinth in AD 57, at the end of Paul's third missionary journey. The letter was written with Paul speaking and Tertius writing on his behalf (Rom. 16:22).

And the Church of Rome already existed before Paul's writing to Rome. In Acts 2, after the Day of Pentecost around AD 33, believers filled with the Holy Spirit told the gospel of Jesus Christ in the languages of the nations. The foreigners who had come to Jerusalem from various countries at that time were amazed to hear the gospel of Jesus being preached in their own languages. Some of them had come from Rome (Acts 2:10). And they were joined by 3,000 who had been baptized through the Apostle Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:41). From this time on, Rome had a family-centered congregation and a house church (Romans 16:3-16). The Roman a house church at that time was a small house church of about 20 people, which is about the size of today's MJCF. That gives us a sense of closeness.

The Church of Rome was not a church that Paul himself built. However, Paul was preaching the gospel in Corinth and Ephesus, cooperating with a Jewish Christian couple, Priscilla and Aquila, in making tents, so he was well aware of the situation of the Roman church (Act18:2). The Jewish Christian couple I just mentioned, Priscilla and Aquila, were great helpers of Paul, who had moved from Rome to Corinth and Ephesus (Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19). Our church has also experienced the movement of members as is typical of Japanese churches of abroad. For example, recently Pastor Gerald's family came to Japan, and the Imai family returned to Vancouver.

2. Problems faced by the Church of Rome

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the day of Pentecost was celebrated, and the gospel of Jesus Christ was widely preached even to Rome. However, there were conflicts among believers in the church due to differences in faith. Jewish Christians, who cherished the Jewish Law, fought with Gentile Christians, who did not know the Law, over food and circumcision. The Roman Emperor Claudius, who judged that this strife was becoming so intense that it was disrupting Rome, had all Jews expelled from Rome around AD 49-

50 (Acts 18:2). However, after the death of Emperor Claudius in AD 54, about five years after this Jewish expulsion decree, Jewish Christians were able to return to Rome again.

The church in Rome became more crowded with believers, but once again, the Roman church was once again in conflict because of the differences in beliefs among the believers from different backgrounds. The Jewish Christians insisted on observing the Jewish Law, saying, "Gentiles should also be circumcised because Christianity also originated from Judaism." The Gentile Christians from Rome and Greece were not to be outdone, saying, "Are you bound by the old law and so particular about food?" and they criticized the Jewish culture as closed and low, not accepting the new.

This kind of problem in churches can be found anywhere in the world. In Japan, where Buddhism is a strong culture, we are also faced with such issues as whether Christians are allowed to eat food prepared for Buddhist memorial services and whether we are allowed to go to Buddhist funerals. Looking back, I am sure you must have been troubled by these issues, especially in the early days of your faith. The congregation of the Church of Rome was similar. After all, the early Christians, who were only 20 years after Jesus' calling, did not have a solid doctrinal book, so they must have been perplexed in their life of faith.

Here, you may be asking, "How can there be Christian strife from the beginning of our study of the book of Romans?" You might think, "That's ugly." But the reality of human society, unfortunately, is that there is constant strife. If the Bible were just a moral book, it would contain only beautiful stories, but the Bible reflects human society as it is, so it contains vivid descriptions of conflicts and strife. In particular, the Bible does not turn a blind eye to the struggles of faith we face as believers in God in this sinful world. The Bible confronts and faces conflict and struggle, not avoids. Why? Because faith in Jesus Christ is so noble that it has the power to solve any problem, even death. I pray that the study of Romans will be of great help to us in our life of faith.

It is a misnomer to say that it is thanks to this struggle of faith in Rome, but in order to solve these problems, the Apostle Paul felt it necessary to summarize the doctrine of faith to the Christians. He wanted to tell them that above all else, the faith in Jesus Christ was the most important thing, which finally led him to write the book of Romans. The Apostle Paul was a Jewish Law as a Pharisee with authority (Acts 23:6; Galatians 1:14), so he was an expert with Jewish law. He was also a firm believer in Jesus Christ because of his personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ in Damascus and his confession (Acts 9:1-9). Paul's deep knowledge of the Jewish law and

limitations of the law and the grace of faith in Jesus Christ made him the right person to resolve the confusion in the Roman church. Later, the book of Romans contributed greatly to the development of Christianity, and the gospel was proclaimed not only in Rome but throughout the world, and the gospel was brought to us.

3. Paul's identity (grace and calling)

See verse 1. Paul greets the congregation of the church in Rome "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God." Paul introduces himself as a "servant of Christ Jesus" and an "apostle. A "servant" is a person who obediently follows the orders of his master. And also Paul proudly states that he is as the same the 12 disciples. At the time, there was some controversy as to whether Paul was qualified to be an apostle. The reason was many people did not accept Paul as the Apostle because Paul had persecuted Christians and he was not one of the 12 disciples who accompanied Jesus during Jesus' public life. However, Paul did not give in to this opposition and was convinced of God's calling to evangelize the Gentiles. And he pledged himself to complete obedience, submission, and devotion as a servant of Jesus Christ.

So what does Paul say he was chosen for in his obedience to Jesus Christ? It was for the gospel of God. See verse 2 for more on this gospel of God. "This gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures." When one hears the Christian gospel, one might think that the gospel is about helping the poor, loving even one's enemies, and being a person of good character. They all are very important to live as a Christian. But Paul says that "the gospel is about a person, Jesus Christ Himself." Jesus was the Savior Christ who had been promised thousands of years before in the Old Testament prophecies.

4. About the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ

So what is "Jesus Christ the Gospel" like? Verse 3 continues. Around AD734, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus Christ in Isaiah 11:1, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Jesse is King David's father, and Jesus came to this world as a human being as a descendant of King David (Matthew 1:6, 16), so the prophecy is true. Then Paul says "Jesus who as to his human nature," teaching that Jesus Christ was fully human.

Then in verse 4 he tells us that "Jesus who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ our Lord." The "Spirit of holiness" means "the Holy Spirit and God Father," which means that Jesus Christ is fully God. How do we know that the human Jesus is God? It is

because Jesus had resurrected. No matter how much virtue a human being has, when he gets old, he has no choice but to die. This is because no one is righteous before God and all human beings are sinners (Romans 3:10). Many philosopher and religious leaders also died because they were human beings and sinners. However, only Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He who is the sinless and the holy bore the sins of mankind and was crucified on the cross to become the sacrifice of reconciliation between God and man. Through the sacrifice on the cross of Jesus, the sinless Son of God, the righteous God and human sinners were reconciled. This historical fact of 2000 years ago proved by His resurrection that Jesus alone can be our Lord and Christ the Savior. This grace of Jesus is the Gospel itself.

5. Obedience of faith Grace and truth

In 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," Paul says of himself that it is a great grace that he was led as an apostle to preach this gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. And the expression "the obedience that comes from faith" that appears in verse 5 is closer to "obedience in marriage". In Ephesians chapters 5 and 6, Paul refers to "obedience from faith" as the concept of "obedience" that precedes freedom and love that come out between husband and wife, as distinguished from the vertical submission of master and slave, and parent and child. Faith in God is based on obedience that comes from our free will and love relationship with God. We should be obedient to this truth that we can obtain eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ, the Son God has sent us. And also we can have loving relationship with God during this world too.

The Jewish Christians of that time had heard the gospel of Jesus, but they were in the trouble of faith because they still believed that they could not be saved unless they kept the law, such as circumcision. For them, they should have simply accepted God's plan of salvation and the truth of salvation, that they could be saved by faith and become children of God. They should have simply obeyed and followed this great grace instead of refusing to accept it. It is a strange expression to be obedient to grace. But when we look at people today who are still not obedient to this grace, we may understand the first Jewish Christians.

I remember Corrie Ten Boom's message on TV. She explained about Gospel to the young people. Especially she taught about faith and obedience to follow Jesus. She said this with tricks, "You know what is KISS?" She is smiling and said "KISS means 'Keep it simple, stupid!'" All the people burst out laughing in the studio. She said, "Believing

Jesus and following Jesus is very simple. I have been following Jesus from the age of 5.” We are too required to live obediently to the grace of Jesus Christ on our daily life. I think we all need to know more and experience the abundance about the obedience of faith. I pray that the Holy Spirit will teach each of us what "obedience of faith and obedience by faith".

6. The identity of the believers in Jesus Church

Up to now, Paul has emphasized that the Lord Jesus Christ became our Savior and that Paul himself was called for the sake of that Gospel. He also speaks of the identity of the believers in Rome who are listening to the reading of this letter.

See verses 6 and 7. “And you also are among those who called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He greets them and declared that the congregation of the Church of Rome was called to belong to Christ. Paul says that each believer is called by God, just as he himself was called as an apostle. It is amazing that each believer is also called in a special way. We are not afraid of the world because we belong to Christ in the possession of Jesus, or rather, because He lives in us.

Also, the believers are loved by God. This love is so deep that God crucifies His Son Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. And the believers then declare itself holy. The Roman Christians were considered unclean by the Jewish Christians, who also ate the food of the idols, but Paul declares that they are called to be saints, to be holy. He is not saying that they will become holy. He is saying that they are already holy. We are very encouraged by these words. God recognizes us as "holy" even though we are faithless, still living in sin. We may even hate people and do wrong some times. Sometimes we suffer from illness and feel depressed and can't praise and thank God. We may lose our jobs and panic. There may be failures such as divorce. Yet, God still recognizes us as holy people who obey Him by faith. We are grateful. God is always on our side, so let us all live with confidence.

7. Paul's desire to go to Rome

After finishing his brief initial greeting, Paul reveals in verse 10 that he hopes to have the opportunity to visit the congregation. As I mentioned at the beginning of this message, Paul had heard a lot about the Church of Rome from his evangelistic partners. He knew that the believers in the church of Rome were preaching the gospel to the whole world through their zealous evangelism. Here, the whole world means the territory of

Rome. He also knew that the Roman church was suffering from a difference in understanding of faith. The gifts of the Spirit in verse 11 refer to Paul's overall knowledge of the gospel and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. In verse 15, Paul says that he would love to meet with the people of the Roman church because he has a responsibility to preach the gospel to the Greeks and to the unsaved, to the wise and the unwise.

Oh, I would love to go to Vancouver and meet you all in person. Perhaps Pastor. Gerald and Rie san would like to visit you and encourage you as well. Fortunately, we have ZOOM, so we can talk freely every week. But in Paul's time, traveling must have been difficult because it was life threatening. But Paul's prayer to go to the Roman church to meet everyone was answered by God. Paul actually entered Rome in AD 61, about three years after he wrote this letter. However, Paul was accused by the Jews in Jerusalem who were against Jesus, and entered Rome as a sinner. Once in Rome, Paul did as he wished and preached the gospel to many people in Rome. About 7 years later, in AD 67, he was put to death by Emperor Nero and martyred.

How was today's message? In the form of a sermon, I try to provide you with what the Bible says according to the commentary without putting too much of my personal thoughts into the message. The beauty of this type of preaching is that the congregation is less influenced by the preacher's personal interpretation and can directly confront their own faith and God through the Bible itself. The preacher provides some guidance, and the congregation is free to deepen their faith in God's grace with the help of the preacher. The disadvantage is that it can get a little difficult and boring, and you might get sleepy.

As you all know, we studied the book of Romans for about a year and a half during our Friday Bible study. Mr. Akira, who lives in Ibaraki Prefecture and does not have much knowledge of the Bible, joined us every week. And another members were Mrs. Rie, Mrs. Sanae, and myself, and occasionally Pastor. Gerald came to support us. Mr. Moriyama and Mrs. Masako also came for a long time. After this Bible study last month, I have tried to write in this message the blessings, realizations, questions, etc. that we noticed in each other during the study. I would like to continue this monthly message in the same way as today. However, if you would like to hear a different message, I will try to prepare as much as I can, so please let me know what you think.

Let's pray.

Beloved Heavenly Father. Thank you for your Word today. The Gospel is Jesus Christ himself. I pray that you will give us this grace of Jesus Christ and that the Holy Spirit will

guide us to live in peace this week. Please help us with all our problems: sickness, unemployment, suffering in relationships, straying from our faith, and the struggles and conflict of this world. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ who loves us. Amen.

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Slide 1

About the Book of Romans

Author: Apostle Paul (Romans 15, written on behalf of Tertius)

Date: AD 57 (around the end of the third missionary journey of the Apostle Paul)

Place of writing: Corinth (Rom. 16:23, 1 Cor. 1:14)

Slide 2

Problems of the Church of Rome:

Difference in faith between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

(regarding food prepared for idols, circumcision, etc.)

Slide 3

The order to expel the Jews (Acts 18:2)

Issuer: Roman Emperor Claudius

Date: 5 years from around AD 49-50

Target: Jews living in Rome

Repeal of the order:

In AD54, after the death of Emperor Claudius, Jews returned to Rome.

Slide 4

Identity of the Apostle Paul

Apostle and servant called for the Gospel of God

Slide 5.

The Gospel of God is

Jesus Christ Himself

Slide 6

The obedience that comes from faith

To simply believe and follow in the grace and truth
of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Slide 7

Believers Identity

We are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

We are loved by God.

We are called to be a saints.