

5. The Book of Romans 1:6-7

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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We have begun a study in what many consider to be the greatest book in the Bible—the Book of Romans.

Paul gives us the theme of the book in the first sentence—“**The Gospel of GodWhat is the good news of God that allows a person be made right with Him and go to heaven?’**

Paul’s introduction to Romans is the longest (by far) of any of his other epistles—an introduction he packs a lot of theology into—which we have been trying to ‘dig’ out.

Romans 1:1–6 (NKJV)

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵ **Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,** ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ...

First of all—who are ‘**the called**’ that Paul is referring to in verse 6?

He actually tells us in verse 7—

Romans 1:7 (NKJV)

⁷ **To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints...**

The words “**to be**” in verse 7 are in italics because they don’t appear in the original Greek text—thus, this verse should read, “**To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints...**”

Most people have the idea that ‘**saints**’ were special people in religious history—as the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) teaches.

The RCC bestows sainthood on those who were especially holy and pious, those who did an exceptional amount of good works here on earth—like Mother Theresa.

But the Bible teaches that all children of God are called ‘*saints*.’

Ephesians 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus...

Philippians 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi...

Romans 8:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints [believers in Jesus] according to *the will of God.*

We are not called **saints** because we are *saintly* and super *pious*—we are called saints because that is the new title God has given us as the redeemed of the Lord.

The old title we bore was ‘*sinner*’—the new title is ‘saint.’

And really that new title is more of a description of what God has done rather than what we do.

The Greek word for ‘**saint**’ is *hagios* which means, “*set apart*.”

The idea being that the moment we received Jesus as our Savior, we were set apart from the world of fallen sinners—and placed into the family of God as His children (saints).

Biblically, there are only two categories of people in the world—believers (‘*saints*’) and unbelievers (‘*aints*’)!

Therefore, if you’re a believer (any and every believer in Jesus)—you are a saint!

One author said—

“A little boy attended a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows depicting St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John. One day, when asked in his Sunday-school class, ‘What are saints?’ he answered, ‘They’re people who the light shines through.’ Good answer!”

What does Paul mean when he says that we as believers in Jesus Christ are the called?

Well, he is going to elaborate on this theological concept or doctrine more in chapter 8:29-30—but for our study tonight we’ll just take a little peek ahead:

Romans 8:29–30 (NKJV)

²⁹ For whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also **called**; whom He called, these He also **justified**; and whom He justified, these He also **glorified**.

Here’s something important we need to understand—everyone who winds up getting saved has been called—but not everyone who is called winds up getting saved.

Even as Jesus said, “*Many are called but few are chosen.*” (Matt. 20:16 and 22:14)

And the idea behind ‘**chosen**’ is—‘*chosen for eternal life*'; ‘*chosen for salvation*.’

Ephesians 1:4 (NKJV)

⁴ just as He chose us [*for eternal life*] in Him before the foundation of the world...

Now, the 64-thousand-dollar theological question is—on what basis did God *choose* us for eternal life?

Peter tells us (1Peter 1:2) that God *chose* or ‘*elected*’ us (same thing) to salvation—“**according to His foreknowledge**”.

The Greek word for ‘**foreknowledge**’ is *prognosin* which means—“*knowledge known in advance*.”

Now, those who are Calvinists say that this Greek word translated ‘**foreknowledge**’—actually means ‘*foreordination*’.

In other words, God only knows the future because—He has foreordained the future.

He knows the future because He *predetermined* the future (He determined what the future was going to be in advance)—including all those who would be saved.

You see in Calvinist theology; it wasn’t that God simply knew in advance (foreknowledge) those who would get saved and those who wouldn’t—He predetermined the destinies of those who would be saved and those who wouldn’t.

In other words, He **predestined** some to be saved and the rest to be damned—with *them* choosing for themselves where *they* wanted to spend eternity (in Calvinist theology fallen man has no free will—more on that in a minute).

Now, let me say that *predestination* is a biblical doctrine—

Ephesians 1:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself...

The word ‘**predestination**’ comes from a Greek word that means “*to predetermine or plan beforehand a person’s destiny*.”

Or in other words, “*to predetermine those who would be adopted into His family as His children and those who wouldn’t be.*”

The strict definition isn’t hard to understand—the problem comes when we try to figure out—upon what basis does God predetermine someone’s destiny in heaven—who goes to heaven and those who don’t.

Is their destiny based entirely upon God’s sovereignty (i.e., ‘based entirely on God’s will’) or is it based upon man’s free will?

Extreme or hyper-Calvinists believe that in eternity past God chose some to be predestined to eternal life in heaven and the others He predestined to spend eternity in hell (the doctrine of *reprobation*).

All of this was decided before any of us were ever born and without any free will on our part to choose where we wanted to spend eternity.

In other words—we are nothing but ‘*puppets*’ and God is the puppet Master!

He makes us behave in certain ways and causes some to believe in and others not to believe in His Son—and we have no choice in the matter!

I thoroughly reject the Calvinist definition of *predestination*.

But before I give you my interpretation of predestination—let me talk for a moment about the Calvinist doctrine of reprobation.

First of all, with regard to the doctrine of reprobation—not all Calvinists hold to it.

Moderate Calvinists teach that although God *did* elect and predestine some to salvation before the foundation of the world simply on the basis of His sovereign will—they claim that that doesn't mean He predestined others to hell.

Now folks, this is trying to have it both ways!

It is their attempt to uphold God's sovereignty in saving people—but not holding Him responsible for choosing to send the rest of fallen humanity to hell forever apart from any choice on their part.

You see, in Calvinist theology a fallen sinner is so dead in trespasses and sins—that they can't believe on their own.

"How can a corpse believe?" they will say to you—*"God has to 'raise them from their spiritual deadness first before they can believe and be saved."*

And so, Calvinism teaches that God has to first 'regenerate' them ('make them alive spiritually and give them the ability to believe') before they *can* believe and be saved.

The problem is—He only does this for the elect!

Let me use a flawed analogy of this—if God commanded that to be saved a person had to fly but then only gave a few people (the elect) wings so they could fly—that would be tantamount to condemning (reprobating) the others to hell without any hope of ever being saved.

At this point, with regard to my illustration—Calvinists would be prone to respond, *"O but God isn't keeping the 'wingless' from flying—so their damnation is their fault."* That is so disingenuous it's hard to take it seriously. (Explain)

In Calvinist theology a person has to be 'saved' (regenerated) before they can believe and be saved?!

Now here is where our illustration of God saying to be saved a person 'has to fly—but then only giving wings to the elect—yet saying He isn't stopping the rest from flying!

Moderate Calvinists will tell you that even though God has to regenerate people (the elect) before they can be saved (give them the ability to believe)—He isn't keeping others (the non-elect) from believing if they want to—so it's their fault they go to hell! (Comment)

But listen, putting that aside and coming at this issue from a slightly different direction—if God can (and does) force the elect to be saved—then why does He not just force everyone to be saved?!

How can God, Who is all-love (omni-benevolent), only save a few when He could save all—how does that even harmonize with His nature as a God of love?!

I mean, what if you were passing by a pond on a hot summer's day and you saw 5 young boys who at first glance looked like they were swimming—but upon a closer look you realized they were actually *drowning*.

And let's say you could save all five of them, but you chose to only save one of them—do you think people would call you a hero or a heartless villain?

Calvinism turns God into a heartless villain—a God Who could save all of 'drowning' humanity (drowning in sin and on their way to hell)—but instead chooses only to save a small number of sinners called the 'elect'.

I have heard Calvinists respond to this accusation—"Well, the deep things belong to God." (Comment)

Or I have also heard them say, "*God is under no obligation to save anyone!*"—and of course that's true but it misses the point!

Of course, God is under no obligation to do anything for any of us—including and especially to save any fallen sinners.

But if He chooses (by force) to save sinners *at all*—then He must choose to save *all sinners*—or else He can't be an all-loving God.

Now at this point, many Calvinists would respond, "*That's right! God is only all-loving to the elect, the rest of mankind He hates!*—doesn't God say, '*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated?*'" (Mal.1:2; Rom. 9:13)—(Comment using Luke 14:26)

"Well then Phil, how do you explain predestination?"

Remember, the word '**predestination**' comes from a Greek word that means "*to predetermine or plan beforehand a person's destiny.*"

The strict definition isn't hard to understand—the problem comes when we try to figure out—upon what basis does God predetermine someone's destiny.

Once again, Peter said that we were elected (and predestined) according to the *foreknowledge* of God (1Peter 1:2).

"Foreknowledge" is a Greek word that means '*knowledge known in advance*'.

How do I explain predestination?

I explain it this way—that God in eternity past looked down into the future through His foreknowledge and knew everyone who, through His grace, would respond in faith to His offer of salvation when the gospel was presented to them (maybe not the first time but eventually).

And therefore, based on that foreknowledge He elected (chose) us to be His children and predetermined our destiny (the definition of predestination)—that we would spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Predestination only applies to heaven and those who receive Jesus as their Savior—nowhere in Scripture are we taught that God predestines anyone to hell.

If they do wind up going to hell—it is because of *their* refusal to believe in and receive Jesus as their Savior.

Now our Calvinist brothers and sisters would immediately jump all over that interpretation of predestination by saying—

"If God chose us based on us choosing Jesus—that would make God the responder and not the initiator of salvation."

This, they say, would violate what Jesus Himself clearly said on the subject—

John 6:44 (NKJV)

⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father...draws him...

And I totally agree with that—*God* is the initiator of salvation—not us (fallen man).

In fact, Paul is going to tell us in chapter 3—

Romans 3:10–12 (NIV)

¹⁰ As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

So as Jesus said in John 6:44 that "**No one can come to Me unless the Father...draws him (or her)**"—who then does God draw?

The difference between Calvinists and non-Calvinists (like me) is that—Calvinists claim that God only draws a small portion of fallen humanity called the 'elect' to Christ (those He chose to be saved in eternity past apart from any free-will on their part).

Whereas I believe, as Jesus said, "*If I am lifted up from the earth (the cross) I will draw all men and women to Myself.*" (John 12:32)

Now listen, just because God draws a person to Jesus (the ministry of the Holy Spirit) doesn't mean they *have* to be saved.

I believe the Bible teaches that they can resist the grace of God that is drawing them to Jesus.
(I don't believe in the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace—Explain).

I believe the Bible teaches that God is calling (and drawing) all men and women to be saved—but that His grace to be saved isn't forced on anyone and can be resisted and even rejected:

Matthew 23:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!

Acts 7:51 (NKJV)

⁵¹ "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so do you.

I believe that God is calling all people to be saved—but God knew in eternity past those who would receive Jesus as Savior and those who wouldn't—of their own free-will!

And based on His foreknowledge—He chose those who would receive Jesus to be His children and predestined them (pre-determined their destiny) to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

This is what Jesus meant when He said—“*Many are called but few are chosen.*” (Matt. 20:16 and 22:14).

John 3:18-20 (NKJV)

¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

One author had this to say—

“You see, the singular issue concerning predestination is neither intellectual nor theological—it’s moral. Through His foreknowledge, God sees the person who wants to continue to walk in darkness—and doesn’t choose them for eternal life in heaven. So, too, before the foundation of the world, He saw those who wanted to walk in light—and chose them to be His sons and daughters and live with Him in His Kingdom forever.”

But once again, let’s be crystal clear on this point—just because God chooses some for heaven, the Bible never teaches that He chose others for hell.

The Bible says that hell wasn’t even made for man—it was made for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

However, if a person wants to live their entire life in rebellion against God—then like the very first rebel in the universe (Lucifer)—they will follow him all the way to the place where he will spend eternity!

Hell is where everyone goes who wants to live in sin and rebellion against God’s will for their lives—and refuses to choose Jesus as their Savior—of their own free will!

That is the ultimate tragedy—because God desires *all* people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. (1Tim.2:4)—and yet so many refuse to come to Jesus for salvation:

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 10:11-13 (NKJV)

¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

¹³ For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Revelation 22:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

One writer tried to harmonize God’s election with man’s free will this way—

“On the door to heaven, from our side, it says, ‘Whosoever will may enter. I am the Door (Jesus said) if anyone chooses to enter by Me they will be saved and have everlasting life.’

Now, if a person enters that door, when they get on the other side (heaven) as they look back—on the other side of that door they will find the words written, ‘Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.’”

Romans 1:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ...

So let me say it one more time—everyone who winds up getting saved has been called—but not everyone who is called winds up getting saved.

Remember the words of Paul the Apostle—“*Today, if you ‘hear’ God calling to you—don’t harden your heart.*” (*Heb. 3:7-8*).

And “*Behold, today is the day of salvation.*” (*2Cor.6:2*)

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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