

## ***The Calling & Gift of Belonging***

(Where Do I Belong?)

### **READ: Romans 1:1-7**

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

6 And you also are among those Gentiles **who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.**

7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.



### **Challenge...**

Romans may be the most important letter you will ever read. It is Paul's masterpiece, the clearest and fullest explanation of the gospel in the Bible. John Calvin said that "if a man understands it, he has a sure road opened for him to the understanding of the whole Scripture." William Tyndale, the father of English Bible translators, believed that every Christian should learn it by heart. Those who study Romans are rarely the same afterward.

**When & why was Romans written?** The Epistle to the Romans was written by the Apostle Paul to Christians residing in the city of Rome (1:7, 15). Probably around A.D. 55-57, about 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Romans is different from most of Paul's other letters. He did not found the church in Rome; in fact, he had never been there. It has been suggested that the church in Rome was founded by some of those who were present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10).

Rome was the center of the Empire and was ethnically diverse. In the first century AD it had a population of around one million people in an area less than ten square miles. Two thousand years ago, the world was ruled by Rome. From England to Africa and from Syria to Spain, one in every four people on earth lived and died under Roman law. The Roman Empire in the first century AD mixed sophistication with brutality and could suddenly lurch from civilization, strength and power to terror, tyranny and greed.

In AD 64 there was a large fire in Rome that led Nero to expulse the Jews. This also resulted in the first major persecution of the Church. Of course the city of Rome was predominately populated by Gentiles and so it is expected that the church was comprised of both Jewish and Gentile believers (cf. 1:6, 7:1). Paul addresses both groups in this epistle.

**What can we learn from Romans?** The book of Romans is a powerful, important letter than can be appreciated by any church. Its clear outline of the Gospel speaks for itself. And even the issues that were specific to the 1st-century Roman church—the tension between Jews and Gentiles—have clear relevance to the diverse, worldwide Christian church today. I want to encourage you to read the book of Romans instead of trying to sum up its many key points. Consider these questions as you read:

1. Why do you think Paul took the time to lay out the Gospel so clearly, rather than dive straight into the church-specific issues that needed addressing?
2. The church in our culture isn't as divided over the Gentile/Jew question. What issue might Paul have addressed instead if he were writing to our churches today?

### **Definition: "Belong"**

GK: esmen, ginomai, allēlōn

Are, be, have our being, to *emerge, become, transitioning* from one point (realm, condition) to another, joined to another, become, come to pass, part of you, in you, one of another,



**Romans 7:4-5** (NIV) So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might **belong** to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

**Romans 8:1-2** (NLT) So now there is no condemnation for those who **belong** to Christ Jesus. And because **you belong to him**, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

**Romans 12:4-5** (NIV) For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and **each member belongs to all the others**

**Romans 14:8** (NIV) If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, **we belong to the Lord.**

## **REFLECT**

**Q: Why is "belonging" such an important concept to God?**

**1 Peter 2:8-10** "...for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."

You were CALLED (invited) and our RESPONSE to that calls show our allegiance to the greatest relationship and priority in life = Jesus Christ.

**Titus 2:11-14** "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

## **RESPOND... How does “belonging” impact how we live?**

“The idea is that God is gathering together groups of people to love God, to love one another, to die to self, to become one.” That’s it—that’s what the church is about. But we must realize that the end of the church is not simply to be the church. Rather “*the mission of the church is to be the church for the world*”.

Being Church: Reflections on How to Live as the People of God, John Alexander

The job of the church, the most significant work we have to do, is to love one another, celebrate and welcome one another’s gifts, and be Christ’s body in the world.

### **Q: What changes will Jesus call us, the church family, to make as we pursue Him?**

*“First of all, you have to keep unmasking the world about you for what it is: manipulative, controlling, power-hungry, and, in the long run, destructive.*

*The world tells you many lies about who you are, and you simply have to be realistic enough to remind yourself of this. Every time you feel hurt,*

*offended, or rejected, you have to dare to say to yourself:*

*‘These feelings, strong as they may be,  
are not telling me the truth about myself.*

*The truth, even though I cannot feel it right now,  
is that I am the chosen child of God, precious in God’s eyes,  
called the Beloved from all eternity, and held safe in an everlasting belief.”*

Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*