

1:1 A Servant of Jesus Christ

CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE.

ORIGEN: The first question which occurs to us concerns the name Paul itself. Why is he, who in Acts 1 was called Saul, now called Paul? In Holy Scripture we find that among the ancients, many names were altered, e.g., Abram was renamed Abraham, 2 Sarai 3 became Sarah, and Jacob became Israel. 4 In the Gospels too, Simon was changed to Peter, 5 and the sons of Zebedee became known as sons of thunder. 6 But these things occurred by divine command, and we read nothing of the sort in the case of Paul. Because of this, some people have imagined that the apostle took the name of Paul, the proconsul of Cyprus, whom he converted to the Christian faith, 7 in the same way that rulers are in the habit of adding the names of conquered peoples to their titles, e.g., Parthicus would indicate someone who conquered the Parthians, Gothicus a victor over the Goths, and so on. In the same way the apostle would have called himself Paul to indicate that he had conquered the proconsul Paul.

We cannot exclude this reason completely, but given that no such custom can be found in Holy Scripture, we ought rather to seek a solution from the examples which we do have. And indeed we find in the Scriptures that some people have two or even three different names, e.g., Solomon is also called Jedidiah, 8 Zedekiah is also called Mattaniah, 9 Uzziah is also called Azariah, 10 and there are many others in the books of Judges, Samuel and Kings who have double names. But even the Gospels do not abandon this custom, e.g., Matthew was called Levi 11 ... and Thaddeus sometimes appears as Lebbaeus. 12 Obviously the Gospel writers did not get the names of the apostles wrong, but given that it was the custom of the Hebrews to have two or three names, they gave different names to one and the same man. It seems to us that it is in accordance with this custom that Paul appears to have a second name, and that as long as he was ministering to his own people he was called Saul, which was probably the name his parents gave him, but that when he was writing laws and commandments for the Greeks and other Gentiles, he was called Paul. Scripture makes it clear when it says: Saul, who is also called Paul, 13 that the name Paul was not then being given to him for the first time but was already habitual.

But why does Paul call himself a slave, when elsewhere he says: For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship, by which we cry Abba! Father! 14... We may understand this as an expression of humility ... and that would not be wrong. Nor is the reality of Paul's freedom compromised by this in any way. As he himself says: Though I am free from all men, I have

made myself a slave to all. ¹⁵ ... For he serves Christ not in the spirit of slavery but in the spirit of adoption, for Christ's service is more noble than any freedom.

Called is the name given to everyone who believes in Christ and is therefore a general term, although it is applied to each one according to what God has foreseen and chosen in him. He may be called to be an apostle or a prophet or a teacher; as free from a wife or as bound in marriage, and this is determined by the diversity of grace given to everyone, as it is written: Many are called but few are chosen. ¹⁶

In Paul's case, he was not called to be an apostle in the general sense, but he was also chosen according to the foreknowledge of God to be set apart for the gospel of God, as he says elsewhere: God set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace. ¹⁷ Heretics wrongly claim that he was set apart from his mother's womb on account of the goodness of his nature, just as from the opposite side of the fence we read in the Psalms of those sinners who were separated from the womb ¹⁸ because of their evil nature.

But we say that Paul was chosen neither by accident nor because of some natural difference, but he himself attributed the causes of his election to him who knows everything before it happens.... For God foresaw that Paul would labor more abundantly than anyone else in the gospel... and for that reason Jesus set him apart in his mother's womb for the gospel. Had he been chosen by fate, as the heretics maintain, or by some inherently better nature, he would not have been afraid of being condemned if he failed to preach the gospel.¹⁹

God's foreknowledge, by which those who will labor and succeed are known, comes first, and his predestination follows afterwards, so that foreknowledge cannot be regarded as the cause of predestination. With men, merits are weighed according to past actions, but with God they are weighed according to future behavior, and anyone who thinks that God cannot see our future just as easily as he can see our past is an unbeliever. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²⁰

CALLED FROM HEAVEN.

SEVERIAN: Paul here preaches the divinity of Christ to a world which was ignorant of it. Many people saw the Lord, and others believed in him without seeing, but Paul was called from heaven: *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?* ²⁹ He was more highly favored than the other apostles, for the Lord called Peter and James and John and made them his disciples; he did not immediately make or call them apostles. But he made Paul an apostle as soon as he called him. Thus the gospel is preached according to the plan of God.

PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.³⁰

THE NAME OF PAUL.

CHRYSOSTOM: Moses wrote five books, but nowhere did he put his own name to them ... nor did Matthew, John, Mark or Luke. But St. Paul everywhere in his epistles puts his own name. ³¹ Why? Because the others were writing to people who were present, and it would have been superfluous for them to have announced themselves when they were present. But Paul sent his writings from a distance and in the form of a letter, and so he had to add his name.

Why did God change his name and call him Paul instead of Saul? It was so that even in this respect he might not come short of the apostles but that he might also have the same preeminence that the chief of the disciples had ³² and on that basis be more closely united with them. Paul also calls himself the servant of Christ, and there are many kinds of servitude. One is related to creation, for all things are thy servants. ³³ Another comes from faith ³⁴ and a third is civil subjection, as it says: *Moses my servant is dead*. ³⁵ Indeed, all the Jews were servants, but Moses in a special way, since his light has shone most brightly in the community. Paul was a servant in all of these senses, and therefore he puts this term first, in the place of greatest dignity.

He says of himself, in all of his epistles, that he is *called*, thereby demonstrating his own candor in admitting that it was not because he sought that he found but that when he was called, he came near and obeyed. ³⁶ HOMILIES ON ROMANS I.³⁷

CALLED FORTH.

AUGUSTINE: By these two words, *called and set apart*, Paul distinguishes between the church, which is acceptable to God, and the synagogue, whose glory has faded away. The church (i.e., ecclesia) is so called because it *calls forth*; the synagogue, because it *gathers together*. RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS 2.1–3, 5.⁴²

1:2 The Promised Gospel

THE PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL.

ORIGEN: You the reader must decide whether this is to be understood simply of the gospel which was promised by God through the prophetic Scriptures or whether this is said in order to distinguish it from another gospel, which John calls “eternal” in the book of Revelation. ⁴⁷ This gospel will be revealed when the shadow passes and the truth comes, when death will be swallowed up and eternity restored. It seems

that those eternal years of which the prophet spoke also belong to this eternal gospel: *I had the eternal years in mind.*⁴⁸

It must be understood that what was predicted by the prophets concerning Christ was also predicted concerning the gospel, although the Evangelist Mark seems to make a distinction between Christ and the gospel when he says: *Whoever has left father or mother ... for my sake or for the gospel.* ⁴⁹ But if promises referring specifically to the gospel are what is required, you will find an abundance of them in the prophets, to wit: *The Lord will give his word with great power to those who preach the good news,* ⁵⁰ and: *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.* ⁵¹ COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁵²

THROUGH HIS PROPHETS.

SEVERIAN: Paul says his prophets because there are also prophets of idols, and by the word his he distinguishes one type of prophet from another and one gospel from another. For there are many gospels, but they are moral and temporary, whereas that of Christ proclaims in the holy Scriptures the enjoyment of eternal blessedness. These prophets are *his* because they are not of another god but of the Father of Christ. PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.⁵⁴

WORD AS ACT.

CHRYSOSTOM: When God is about to do some great thing, he announces it a long time before in order to accustom men's ears to it, so that when it comes they will accept it. The prophets not only spoke, but they wrote what they spoke; nor did they merely write, but by their very actions they represented what would come, e.g., Abraham when he offered up Isaac ⁵⁵; and Moses when he lifted up the serpent, ⁵⁶ and when he spread out his hands against Amalek, ⁵⁷ and when he offered the paschal Lamb. ⁵⁸ HOMILIES ON ROMANS I.⁵⁹

WHETHER THERE ARE PROPHETS AMONG THE GENTILES.

AUGUSTINE: The prophets arose from the Jewish people, and Paul testifies that the gospel, in which believers are justified by faith, had been promised earlier through them.... For there are Gentile prophets as well, in whom also are found some things which they heard of Christ and prophesied. This sort of thing is even said about the Sibyl [Virgil, Eclogues 4.4] ... but the writings of the Gentiles, so very full of superstitious idolatry, ought not to be considered holy just because they say something about Christ. RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS 3.2–5.⁶⁰

1:3 The Gospel Concerning His Son

SON OF GOD AND OF DAVID.

IGNATIUS: I glorify God ... that you are fully persuaded that our Lord was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh and the Son of God according to the will and power of God. To THE SMYRNEANS I.

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NEVER A TIME WHEN HE DID NOT EXIST.

ORIGEN: Without any doubt, he was made that which he had not previously been according to the flesh. But according to the Spirit he existed beforehand, and there was never a time when he did not exist.

COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁶⁷

A GENERATION ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul is here hinting that there is also a generation of Christ according to the Spirit. Why then did he begin from the flesh, and not from the higher principle? First, it was because that was where Matthew, Luke and Mark started from too. Anyone who wants to lead men by hand to heaven must lead them upward from below. This was the way the actual dispensation [of grace] was ordered. First, they saw Christ as a man on earth, and then later they understood that he is God. His disciple therefore followed the same order in which Christ himself had framed his teaching. Thus the generation according to the flesh comes first, not because it was first in actual fact but because he was leading his hearers upward from one thing to the other. HOMILIES ON ROMANS I.⁷²

1:4 Divine and Human, the Son of God

DESIGNATED SON OF GOD.

ORIGEN: Let no one think that we are reading more into this text than the meaning itself permits. For although in Latin translations one normally finds the word *predestined* here, the true reading is *designated* and not *predestined*. For *designated* applies to someone who already exists, whereas *predestined* is only applicable to someone who does not yet exist, like those of whom the apostle said: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined.* ⁷⁴ ... Those who do not yet exist may be foreknown and predestined, but he who is and who always exists is not predestined but designated. These things are said by us concerning those who speak blasphemously about the only begotten Son of God and ignoring the difference between

designated and predestined think that Christ is to be numbered among those who were predestined before they existed. But he was never predestined to be the Son, because he always was and is the Son, just as the Father has always been the Father.... The apostle makes an essential distinction when he says that from the seed of David according to the flesh Christ was made, but as the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness he is designated. And when he says Son of God it is not without reason that he adds in power, indicating by this that in substance he is the Son according to the Spirit of holiness. For Christ is called the power of God and the wisdom of God. ⁷⁵ ... But we want to know what to make of the soul of Jesus, if what is born of the seed of David is according to the flesh and what is designated in power is according to the Spirit of holiness the Son of God and in the substance of God. The soul, however, is not mentioned either with the flesh, with the Spirit of holiness or with the substance of God's power, although the Savior himself speaks of it elsewhere: My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death ⁷⁶ and: Now is my soul troubled. ⁷⁷ Here he means the soul which he laid aside of his own free will, which went down to hell and of which it is said: Thou dost not leave my soul in hell. ⁷⁸ It is certain that this soul was not born of the seed of David, for he says that what was born of the seed of David was according to the flesh.

The soul cannot be included with the things which are according to the flesh, nor in that which is designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness. I think that the apostle is here following his usual custom, knowing that the soul is always midway between the spirit and the flesh. Either it joins itself to the flesh and is made one with the flesh or it associates itself with the spirit and is made one with the spirit. From this it may be concluded that when the soul is united with the flesh, men become carnal, and that when it is united with the spirit, men become spiritual. For this reason, Paul does not mention the soul independently but only as flesh or spirit. For he knows that the soul must necessarily attach itself to one or other of these, as it does in those to whom he says: But you are in the flesh and not in the spirit, ⁷⁹ and: *Whoever joins himself to a harlot is one body with her*, calling the harlot here "flesh" or "body," but *whoever joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him.*⁸⁰

Some people come to us raising the most serious problems as to how Christ can be descended from the seed of David when it is clear that he was not born from Joseph, in whom the line of David descends from one generation to the other. Unpleasant as it is to have to argue according to the literal sense of the text, some of our people answer by saying that Mary was already engaged to Joseph and that before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Spirit. According to the law, she was therefore already

united to Joseph's tribe and family. ⁸¹ ... Whether you think this line of argument is valid is up to you, dear reader, to decide!

In our opinion, these things must be understood according to the spiritual or allegorical sense, according to which there is no reason why Joseph should not be called the father of Christ, even though he was not his father. For in the generations recorded by Matthew it is stated that Jehoshaphat begat Joram and Joram begat Uzziah, ⁸² but in 2 Kings it is said that Jehoshaphat begat Ahaziah and Ahaziah begat Joash and Joash begat Amaziah, and Amaziah begat Azariah, who was also called Uzziah. ⁸³ ... Matthew therefore left three generations out! The explanation for this is surely not to be sought on the historical level but in conjunction with the spiritual understanding.... It is therefore enough for us to say, in answer to our opponents, that just as Jesus is called the son of Joseph even though he did not descend from him, and Uzziah is called the son of Joram even though Joram was not his father, so can we also reckon that Christ was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. What we accept as reason and proof in the case of Joram and Joseph must, we think, be allowed to stand in the case of David as well.

How it is that he who is said to have been made from the seed of David according to the flesh should be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead is not hard to understand for anyone who has read that it is written: *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.* ⁸⁴ Now the end of Christ's sufferings is the resurrection, and after the resurrection *he will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him* ⁸⁵ And again: *Even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer.* ⁸⁶ Thus everything which is in Christ is now the Son of God.

How this all relates to him who is designated Son of God in power is hard for us to understand unless we accept that, because of the indissoluble union of the Word and the flesh, everything which pertains to the flesh may be attributed to the Word also, and everything which pertains to the Word may be attributed to the flesh also. For we often find Jesus referred to in either nature as both Christ and Lord.
COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁸⁷

ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS.

CHRYSOSTOM: What is being said here has been made obscure by the complex syntax, and so it is necessary to expound it. What is he actually saying? *We preach, says Paul, him who was made of David.* But this is obvious. How then is it obvious that this incarnate person was also the Son of God? First of all, it is obvious from the prophets [cf. v. 2], and this source of evidence is no weak one. And then there is the

way in which he was born [cf. v. 3], which overruled the rules of nature. Third, there are the miracles which he did, which were a demonstration of much power, for the words in power mean this. Fourth, there is the Spirit which he gave to those who believe in him, through whom he made them all holy, which is why he adds: *according to the Spirit of holiness*. For only God could grant such gifts. Fifth, there was the resurrection, for he first and he only raised himself, and he also said that this was a miracle which would stop the mouths even of those who believed arrogantly, for he said: *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.* ⁹¹ HOMILIES ON ROMANS I.⁹²

HUMAN AND DIVINE.

AUGUSTINE: Paul had to oppose the unbelief of those who accept our Lord Jesus Christ only according to the man whom he put on but do not understand his divinity, which sets him apart from every other creature. RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS 4.4.⁹⁴

WEAKNESS AND POWER.

AUGUSTINE: Christ is the son of David in weakness according to the flesh but Son of God in power according to the Spirit of sanctification.... Weakness relates to David but life eternal to the power of God. RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS 5.7.⁹⁵

THE ASSUMPTION OF HUMANITY BY THE WORD OF GOD.

AUGUSTINE: Jesus was predestined, so that he who was to be the Son of David according to the flesh should nonetheless be in power the Son of God, according to the Spirit of sanctification, for he was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. This is that unique act, performed in an ineffable manner, the assumption of a man by the Word of God, so that he might truly and properly be called at once the Son of God and the Son of Man—the Son of Man because of the man who was assumed, the Son of God because of the only begotten God who assumed him. ON PREDESTINATION 15.31.⁹⁶

THE GLORIFICATION OF CHRIST.

AUGUSTINE: With respect to this predestination Christ was glorified before the foundation of the world, so that as a result of his resurrection from the dead he might have glory at the Father's right hand, where he now sits. Thus, when he saw that his predestined glorification had come, in order that what had already been done by predestination might now also take place in fact, he prayed: Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made. ⁹⁷ COMMENTARY ON JOHN 105.⁹⁸

SONSHIP IN POWER AND SONSHIP BY GRACE.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: As Christ was predestined to be the Son of God in power, so we too have been predestined to be sons of God, not however in power but by grace, having been made worthy of such a calling and having received it only by the will of God the Father. There is a big difference here between Emmanuel and us. For even if he was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and so we can say that the Son of God was one of us in his humanity, still, in power and in truth he is the natural Son, and it is through him that we are made sons as well.... We stand in the same relation to him as images do to their original. COMMENTARY ON ROMANS.¹⁰⁰

CONFIRMATION AS THE SON OF GOD.

JOHN OF DAMASCUS: By his miracles and resurrection and by the descent of the Holy Spirit, it was made plain and certain to the world that Christ was the Son of God. ¹⁰³ ORTHODOX FAITH 4.18.¹⁰⁴

1:5 Grace and Apostleship

TO FAITH THROUGH GRACE.

ORIGEN: Paul says that he has received grace and apostleship through Christ, the mediator between God and men ¹⁰⁵— grace with respect to his patience in many labors and apostleship with respect to his preaching authority. For Christ was himself called an apostle, i.e., one who was sent by the Father, because he said that he had been sent to preach the gospel to the poor. ¹⁰⁶ And everything which is his, he gives to his disciples also. Grace is said to be spread on his lips. For he gives grace to his apostles, by which those who are struggling may say: I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God which is with me. ¹⁰⁷ ... It was only through the grace which had been given to the apostles that the Gentiles, who were strangers from the covenant of God and from the life of Israel, ¹⁰⁸ could believe in the gospel. Through this grace it is said that they came to faith because of the preaching of the apostles, and it is recorded that by the grace given to them the sound of the name of Christ went out into all the world, reaching even those who were at Rome. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹⁰⁹

NOT OF OURSELVES.

CHRYSOSTOM: See the candor of the servant. He wants nothing to be his own but everything to be his master's. And indeed it was the Spirit who gave him this freedom.... Paul says: We have not achieved the apostleship by ourselves. It was not by much labor and toil that we were given this dignity, but we received

grace, and the successful result is a part of the heavenly gift.... It was the apostles' duty to go about and preach, but conviction belonged to God, who worked in them. HOMILIES ON ROMANS I.111

GRACE, THEN APOSTLESHIP.

AUGUSTINE: Paul preserves the main point of his case very well, so that no one would dare say that he has been led to the gospel because of the merits of his previous life. How could one claim this, when even the apostles themselves ... could not have received their own apostleship unless they had first... received grace, which cleanses and justifies sinners? RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

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1:6 Belonging to Christ

DIFFERENT CALLINGS.

ORIGEN: Paul is said to be called to be an apostle, and the Romans are also called, though not to be apostles. Rather they are called to be holy in the obedience of faith. We have already spoken above about the different callings. 115 COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.116

THE ROMANS WITH OTHERS.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul does not say that God called the others along with the Romans but the Romans along with the others. HOMILIES ON ROMANS I.119

SALVATION TO JEWS AND OTHERS.

AUGUSTINE: Paul teaches here that this salvation had come not only to the Jews, as some Jewish Christians thought. RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS 6.4.120

1:7 Grace and Peace to the Saints

GRACE AND PEACE.

ORIGEN: The blessing of peace and grace, which the apostle Paul gives to all God's beloved to whom he is writing, is, I think, analogous to the blessing of Noah on Shem and Japheth, 122 which was fulfilled in the Spirit toward all those who were blessed in the same way. It is comparable to the blessing with which Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek 123 and Jacob by his father Isaac, 124 and the twelve patriarchs who

were blessed by their father Israel ¹²⁵ ; or the blessing of Moses, with which he blessed the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹²⁶ I do not think that the blessing of the apostle's, by which he blessed the churches of Christ, is inferior to any of these.... The apostle writes in the Spirit of God and blesses in the Spirit. Therefore it is through the same Spirit that those who are blessed by the apostle receive their blessings, as long as those on whom the blessing comes are found to be worthy of it. Otherwise it will happen as it is written: And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. ¹²⁷ What is written about peace will also be the case with grace, because Paul aligns grace with peace. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹²⁸

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.

AMBROSE: There is one grace on the part of the Father and the Son, and there is one peace on the part of the Father and the Son, but this grace and peace is the fruit of the Spirit. THE HOLY SPIRIT 11.125.¹³²

FEW ARE CHOSEN.

SEVERIAN: Paul does not say to the saints lightly—for many are called but few are chosen ¹³³ and not all have remained in their calling—but so that he would not be throwing holy things to dogs. ¹³⁴ ... According to the heretics, if Christ is the Lord and God is our Father, then the Father will be a servant of Christ, for as the son is, so is the father. But it is not like that at all. Paul said that God is our Father, in order to show his grace, and that Christ is Lord, in order that the Romans should not become proud and think that because they too were sons of God they could despise the glory of the Son or raise themselves up beyond what was natural. Paul called God the Father because he judges no one, but the Son he called Lord, because he is the judge. ¹³⁵ He calls God the Father so as to point out his guardianship over us. He calls the Son Lord so that we might understand that we are called sons by the goodness of God but that Jesus is the true God by nature and our Lord. PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.¹³⁶

CALLED TO BE SAINTS.

CHRYSOSTOM: See how often Paul uses the word called! ... And he does so not out of longwindedness but out of a desire to remind them of the benefit which calling brings. For since it was likely that among those who believed there would be some consuls and rulers as well as poor and common men, Paul casts aside inequality of rank and writes to them all under one common heading. But if in the most important and spiritual things everything is laid out as common to both slaves and free men, e.g., the love of God, the calling, the gospel, the adoption, the grace, the peace, the sanctification, etc., how could it be other than the utmost folly to divide those whom God had joined together and made to be of equal honor in the

higher things, for the sake of things on earth? For this reason, I presume, from the very start this blessed apostle casts out this mischievous disease and then leads them to the mother of blessings—humility. *Grace and peace!* Christ told his apostles to make *peace* their first word when entering into houses. ¹³⁷ So it is from this that Paul always starts also, for it was no small war which Christ put an end to, but a many-sided and enduring conflict. And it was not because of anything we had done, but by his grace. Since then love presented us with grace and grace with peace ... he prays over them that they may abide constant and unmoved, so that no other war may ever break out, and he beseeches the God who gave this peace to keep it firmly settled. HOMILIES ON ROMANS I.¹³⁸

EMPHASIZING GOD’S GRACE.

AUGUSTINE: Here again Paul has emphasized God’s grace rather than the saints’ merit, for he does not say “to those loving God” but rather “to God’s beloved.” RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS 7.5.¹⁴¹

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION.

AUGUSTINE: Instead of saying “greetings,” Paul says “Grace to you and peace.” Grace then is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, by which our sins, which had turned us from God, are forgiven; and from them also is this peace, whereby we are reconciled to God. Since through grace hostilities dissolve once sins are remitted, now we may cling in peace to him from whom our sins alone had torn us.... But when these sins have been forgiven through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall have peace with no separation between us and God. RUDIMENTARY EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS 8.1–5.¹⁴²

1:8 The Faith Proclaimed

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

ORIGEN: Sometimes the apostle writes in the way he does to the Romans, giving thanks for everyone, but sometimes he just gives thanks without adding for all of you. If you notice this you will realize that in the places where he gives thanks for everyone, he does not draw attention to any grave faults or sins in them. But where he criticizes people or reproves them, he does not add to his thanksgiving that he gives thanks for them all—see, e.g., 1 Corinthians or Colossians. ¹ In Galatians he does not even give thanks at all, because he is surprised that they have so quickly abandoned the gospel that called them and chosen another one instead.²

Paul thus begins his letter with thanks-giving. To give thanks to God is to offer him a sacrifice of praise, and therefore he adds through Jesus Christ, as through a high priest. Anyone who wants to offer a sacrifice to God ought to know that he should offer it through the hands of a priest. But note also this important addition: (to) my God. This can only be the voice of the saints, whose God he is, as he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No one can say that the Lord God is his if his god is his stomach, or if his god is greed, or if his god is the glory of this life and the pomp of this world or the power of things which are perishing. For whatever anyone worships more than other things, that is his god.

But let us see what it is that the apostle gives thanks for. Because, he says, your faith is proclaimed in all the world. In all the world, simply understood, means that in many parts of the world, that is of this earth, the faith and religion of those at Rome is preached. But if, as in some passages, the universe is meant here, consisting of heaven and earth and everything in them, it may be understood to mean that the powers, of whom it is said that they rejoice over one sinner who repents, ³ rejoice much more over the conversion and the faith of the Romans when the angels who ascend and descend to the Son of Man ⁴ proclaim it to them. For these powers are amazed at the conversion of the Gentiles and that the sound of the apostles of Christ Jesus has gone out into all the world. Finally, they rejoice even at the sufferings of those in this world, as the apostle says: We have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.⁵

The verse may also be understood as meaning that this faith which the Romans have is the same faith as, and none other than, that which is proclaimed and believed in all the world and which is preached not only on earth but in heaven as well. For by his blood Jesus reconciled not only those things which are on earth but also those things which are in heaven, and in his name not only earthly powers but also heavenly and infernal ones bow the knee. This is what is meant by preaching the faith in the whole world, through which the entire earth may be subjected to God.

It may be noticed that there is no second which corresponds to first, but we have already explained that Paul's phrases are not always complete. On the other hand, it may be that first is picked up by I want you to know brethren [in verse 13]. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁶

PROCLAIMED ALL OVER THE WORLD.

CYPRIAN: This counsel was not recently planned by us, nor have these unexpected protections against the wicked lately surprised us. But this is read of among us as the ancient severity, the ancient faith, the ancient discipline, since the apostle would not have revealed so great praise of us when he said: because

your faith is proclaimed all over the world, if already this vigor had not borrowed the roots of faith from those times; it is a very great crime to have been unworthy of these praises and of glory. LETTERS 30.2.8

BOLDNESS IN CARRYING THE WORD EVERYWHERE.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul bears witness to two excellencies in the Romans—one, that they believed, and two, that they believed with boldness, and with boldness so great that their reputation spread throughout the world. It was their faith, not their verbal disputations, nor their questionings, nor their syllogisms which he remarked upon. And yet there were many hindrances to their teaching. For having recently acquired a worldwide empire the Romans were elated, and they lived in riches and luxury, and then fishermen brought the preaching there, Jewish fishermen moreover, who belonged to a nation which was hated and despised by everyone. And these Romans were asked to worship the crucified one who was brought up in Judea. Moreover, along with this doctrine, the teachers proclaimed an ascetic life to men who were used to luxury and concerned with material comforts. Those who proclaimed the gospel were poor and common men of no notable family, and born to those of no family. But none of these things hindered the progress of the Word, so great was the power of the crucified to carry the Word everywhere. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.11

1:9 *Service in the Spirit*

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES.

ORIGEN: God is witness for his saints, because they also are witnesses for God according to the word of the prophet Isaiah: You will be my witnesses and I am a witness, says the Lord. ¹⁶ The Savior also says to his disciples: You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Samaria and even to the ends of the earth, ¹⁷ according to what is written: Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father.¹⁸

Let us consider what Paul means when he says: Whom I serve with my spirit. It seems to me that to serve in spirit is both similar to but also much more than worshiping in spirit, as the Lord said to the Samaritan woman. ¹⁹ Paul does not merely worship in spirit—he serves in spirit as well. For it is possible to worship without commitment, but to serve requires personal involvement. Therefore the apostle serves, not in body nor in soul but in the best part of him, i.e., in spirit.... The apostle always prefers the spirit and rejects

the flesh and the things of the flesh. Similarly he praises the spirit of the law itself and rejects the letter as if it were flesh: The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.²⁰

When Paul says that he prays without ceasing for those to whom he is writing, he is recalling his own instruction and practicing what he has preached. ²¹ COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²²

THE GOSPEL OF HIS SON.

CHRYSOSTOM: Why does Paul call God as his witness? He had to declare to the Romans all his feelings toward them, but he had not yet seen any of them. So he called no human witness but God who enters the heart. For he was saying I love you, and as evidence of that he mentioned that he was constantly praying for them. This was not self-evident either, so he had recourse to the most trustworthy testimony. Can any of you boast that, when praying at home, he remembers the entire body of the church? I doubt it. But Paul drew near to God on behalf not of one city only but of the whole world, and this not once, twice or three times but continually.

When Paul says whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son, he shows us both the grace of God and his own humility, the grace of God because he entrusted such a great task to Paul, and his own humility, because Paul imputes it all not to his own zeal but to the help of the Spirit. The addition of the gospel shows what kind of ministry Paul had. For there are many different kinds of ministry ... one man serves God and labors by believing and ordering his own life in the right way, another undertakes the care of strangers, and another takes care of those who are in need. Even in the apostle's own time, Stephen's colleagues served God by looking after widows, while others (including Paul) taught the Word and served in the preaching of the gospel. ²⁶ This was the kind of ministry to which he was appointed.

Having spoken above about the gospel of the Father, Paul here says that it is the gospel of the Son. It makes no difference to call it the gospel of the Father or of the Son! Paul had learned from that blessed voice that the things of the Father are the Son's, and the things of the Son are the Father's. For: all mine are yours and yours are mine.²⁷

Praying for them without ceasing is the role of genuine love. Although Paul here seems to be saying only one thing, in fact he is saying four different things. First, he is saying that he remembers; second, that he does so continually; third, that he remembers in his prayers; and fourth, that he remembers to ask great things for them. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.²⁸

1:10 Seeking God's Will

JOURNEYING ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL.

ORIGEN: When Paul says that he is praying that somehow and at some point he may have a successful journey, so that in the will of God he might come to Rome, it must be remembered that since the apostle of God is dedicated to a holy work, that is, to the work of the gospel, he is waiting until by his prayers not only may he have a journey which is successful but also that it might be successful according to the will of God. How much more therefore ought we, whose work and worth are so much less important, to ask God for success on our journey when we have some business to attend to!

Nevertheless, I think that the apostle also wants us to understand that the success of a journey does not always mean that the journey is according to God's will. For Balaam had a successful journey when he went to Balak in order to curse the people of Israel, but this success was not due to God's will. ³² And many people have great success in worldly affairs and rejoice in their prosperity, but such prosperity is not of God's will unless the purpose of our journey is to do his will, as the apostle says here. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.³³

DELAY IN ANSWERING PRAYER.

CHRYSOSTOM: You see how much Paul longed to see the Romans, but he did not want to see them if it was not God's will, for his longing was tempered by the fear of God.... This is true love, not as our love, which tends to err in one direction or the other. Either we love no one, or if we do love, we love contrary to what seems good to God, and in both cases we go against the divine law.... For Paul to pray continually and not to give up even when he did not get what he prayed for shows very great love. But to love and yet at the same time to yield to the will of God shows deep reverence.... In this case Paul eventually got what he asked for but not when he asked for it, but this did not upset him. I mention all this so that we might not be upset at not being heard or at being heard only after some delay. For we are not better than Paul, who for good reason confesses that he is thankful in both circumstances. For once he had surrendered to the all-governing hand and submitted to it as far as he was able, like clay in the hand of the potter, he followed wherever God led. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.³⁶

1:11 *Some Spiritual Gift*

IMPARTING SOME SPIRITUAL GIFT.

ORIGEN: First of all we must learn that it is an apostolic duty to seek fellowship with our brothers for no reason other than to share some spiritual gift with them if we can, or if we cannot, to receive some spiritual gift from them. Otherwise a desire to visit the beloved is hardly commendable. When Paul says *that I might impart to you some spiritual gift* he seems to imply that there is something which may be called a gift but which is not spiritual. For the gift of faith is undoubtedly spiritual, as is the gift of wisdom, of knowledge, of virginity. But when he speaks of marriage and of virginity, saying: *But each one has his own gift from God, some this one, some that,* ⁴¹ he says that marriage is a gift, since it is written: *The woman was given to the man by God,* ⁴² but this gift is not, strictly speaking, a spiritual gift. Many other things may also be called gifts of God, e.g., riches and bodily strength, physical beauty and earthly power. These things are also given by God, as Daniel says: *He removes kings and sets up kings* ⁴³ but they are not spiritual *gifts*. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁴⁴

THE CHARACTER OF PAUL'S TEACHING.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul did not travel for no reason, as so many do nowadays, but for a specific and very urgent purpose. And he does not tell them his meaning openly but rather hints at it, for he does not say: that I may teach you, that I may instruct you, that I may fill up that which is wanting, but: that I may impart this spiritual gift, showing that it was not his own things which he was giving them but what he had himself received. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.⁴⁷

1:12 *Encouragement in the Faith*

ENCOURAGING EACH OTHER'S FAITH.

ORIGEN: Those on whom the apostle wishes to bestow spiritual grace for the encouragement of their faith, so that they will no longer be children, nor tossed about by every wind of doctrine ⁵⁰—they are the truly blessed. Paul himself received comfort from seeing his work firm and stable, and they are comforted because they share in the apostolic grace. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁵¹

FULL EQUALITY.

CHRYSOSTOM: The Romans were undergoing many tribulations. Paul wanted to see them in order to comfort them and also to be comforted by them.... What humility he had! He showed them that he needed them as much as they needed him. By doing this, he put learners in the position of teachers, not claiming any superiority for himself but pointing out that they were fully equal to him. Now if anyone should say that Paul's comfort was his gladness at the increase of the Romans' faith and that Paul needed this, he would not be mistaken. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.⁵⁴

1:13 *Divine and Human Plans*

DEALING WITH HINDRANCES.

ORIGEN: This sentence contains a rhetorical aside (*hyperbaton*), and the construction is defective.... It ought to be joined to the next verse by the words to whom, so that the phrase reads: *the rest of the Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, to whom I am under obligation*.... The whole thing would then read as follows: *Just as I have fruit among the other Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish, to whom I am under obligation, so also, as much as in me lies, am I eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome, for I am not ashamed to preach the gospel among any people, for the power of God is in it for salvation to all who believe, for the few first and for the Greek, for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, which was previously covered by a veil in the law. Now it is revealed in those who come from the faith of the Old Testament to the faith of the new gospel.*

So much for the order of the words; now we must examine the apostle's meaning. When Paul says: *I have often intended to come to you*, he demonstrates the love which he had for the Romans. But when he adds: *but thus far have been prevented*, though indeed it may be thought that he was prevented by God, it is shown by this that it is God's business where each of the apostles ought or ought not to go. It is by a particular dispensation that he appoints some to preach the Word of God and others not, as Paul himself says elsewhere: *When we tried to go into Bithynia, the Spirit of Christ prevented us.* ⁵⁷ ... But if this phrase refers to the passage where he says that: *Satan hindered us*, ⁵⁸ he shows clearly that he is constantly struggling in *prayer*, so that by overcoming the hindrances of Satan he may be given a successful journey in the will of God, to see those who are at Rome.

For he desires and does not cease to pray that he may obtain some fruit from them as he has from the other Gentiles. Thus like one who is acquisitive for many riches, Paul wants to amass some return from his many spiritual investments. He gathers fruit from the Greeks, fruit from the barbarians, fruit from the wise, fruit even from the foolish. For while to some he speaks wisdom as to those who are perfect, to others he says, as if speaking to foolish people, that he wants to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ⁵⁹ Some he teaches from the law and the prophets; others he persuades with signs and wonders. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.⁶⁰

A GODLY MOTIVE.

SEVERIAN: There were many who sped to Rome for human reasons. Paul reveals his own chaste desire to go there and that his motive was a godly one. It appears that he longed after the Romans, perhaps because their faith had become an encouragement to all their subject peoples. PAULINE COMMENTARY FROM THE GREEK CHURCH.⁶⁷

YIELDING TO PROVIDENCE.

CHRYSOSTOM: Here is an obedience as great as that of slaves and a clear demonstration of Paul's excellent temper. He says he was prevented from coming to them but does not explain why. For he does not pry into the command of his master but simply obeys. And yet one might expect someone to wonder why God prevented a city as conspicuous and great as Rome ... from enjoying such a teacher, and for such a long time as well.... But Paul does not concern himself with such things, yielding instead to the incomprehensible nature of providence. By doing this he shows the right tone of his soul and also teaches us never to call God to account for what happens, even though what is done seems to trouble the minds of many. For it is the master's place to command and the servant's to obey. This is why he says that he was prevented without giving the reason, because he did not know it himself.... So if you do not know why something has happened, do not be discouraged, for this is a main feature of faith, to receive what is told to us of God's providence even when we are ignorant of the way it which it is being dispensed. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.⁶⁸

1:14 An Obligation to All Nations

SPEAKING IN THE TONGUES OF ALL NATIONS.

ORIGEN: We must now ask in what sense the apostle is under obligation to Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and to the foolish. What has he received from them that he should be indebted to them? I infer that he is a debtor to the different nations because by the grace of the Holy Spirit he has received the gift of being able to speak in the tongues of all nations, as he himself says: I speak in tongues more than you all. ¹ Given that a man receives the gift of tongues not for himself but for the benefit of those to whom he is called to preach, Paul incurs an obligation to all those whose language he has received as a gift from God. He has incurred an obligation to the wise in that he has received the wisdom hidden in the mystery, which he is to speak to the perfect and to the wise. But how is he indebted to the foolish? In that he has received the grace of patience and longsuffering, for it is the height of patience to be able to endure the furor of the foolish. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²

MATURING THROUGH PERSECUTION.

ORIGEN: We can see how in a short time this religion has grown up, making progress through the persecution and death of its adherents and through their endurance of the confiscation of their property and every kind of torture. And this is particularly miraculous, since its teachers are themselves neither very skillful nor very numerous. But in spite of everything, the Word is now preached in all the world, so that Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish now adopt the Christian faith. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 4.1.2.³

PREACHING TO ALL, GREEKS AND NON-GREEKS.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul also said this when he was writing to the Corinthians, ⁶ in order to ascribe everything to God. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.⁷

1:15 Eagerness to Preach the Gospel

TEMPTATIONS THICK AS SNOWFLAKES.

CHRYSOSTOM: What a noble soul was Paul! Having taken on himself a task full of such great danger, a voyage across the sea, temptations, plottings, risings—for it was likely that one who was going to address so great a city, which was under the tyranny of ungodliness, should undergo temptations thick as snowflakes. He lost his life in this way, cut down by a tyrant. Yet still he was ready to undergo great troubles.

In fact he was enthusiastic even in travail, even as one in haste. He was in a constant state of preparation.
HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.9

1:16 *The Power of God for Salvation*

ALSO TO THE GREEK.

ORIGEN: Many attacks were made on the gospel when it was first preached, but Paul learned patience from the prophets who said: Fear not the reproach of men, and he not dismayed at their revilings. ¹⁰ He knew that he should preach the gospel, not in plausible words of human wisdom but in the power of the Spirit. ¹¹ Therefore, defining what the gospel is, he proclaims: It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. When he says the power of God for salvation he implies that there is another power of God which is not for salvation but for damnation. It may be that it is because of these different powers that right and left are distinguished in God, so that the power for salvation would be identified with the right, and the power by which he condemns would be identified with the left. ¹² COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.¹³

GLORYING IN THE CROSS.

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul says that he is not ashamed, which is not what we usually say of things as glorious as the gospel. Why does he speak like this, when he exults over the gospel even more than he does over heaven? In writing to the Galatians he said: God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁷ How is it then that in this instance he does not even get as far as glory but says only that he is not ashamed? The Romans were most anxious about the things of the world, because of their riches, their empire, their victories, and they thought that their emperors were equal to the gods.... While they were so puffed up, Paul was going to preach Jesus, the carpenter's son who was brought up in Judea, in the house of a lower-class woman, who had no bodyguards, who was not surrounded by wealth, but who died as a criminal among thieves and endured many other inglorious afflictions. Since it was likely that the Romans were pretending that they did not know any of these unspeakable things, Paul understates that he is not ashamed, in order to teach them not to be ashamed of Christ either. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.18

1:17 God's Righteousness Revealed Through Faith

THROUGH FAITH FOR FAITH.

ORIGEN: The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel in that no one is excluded from salvation, whether he be a Jew, a Greek or a barbarian. For the Savior says to everyone equally: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden. ²⁴ Concerning through faith for faith, we have already said that the first people were in the faith, because they believed God and Moses his servant, from which faith they have now gone over to the faith of the gospel. The quotation from Habakkuk ²⁵ means either that the one who lives in the law will also believe the gospel or that the one who believes the gospel will also believe the law and the prophets. For one of these does not have the fullness of life without the other. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.²⁶

SECURE IN THE PROMISE.

CYPRIAN: If you are a just man and live by faith, if you truly believe in God, why do you, who are destined to be with Christ and secure in the promise of the Lord, not rejoice that you are called to Christ and be glad that you are free from the devil? TREATISE ON MORTALITY 3.²⁷

THIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT OURS.

CHRYSOSTOM: Whoever has become righteous through faith will live, not just in this life but in the one to come as well. Paul does not merely hint at this but adds something else along with it, viz., that such a life will be bright and glorious. For since it is possible to be saved yet still be ashamed (as, for example, criminals whose crimes have been remitted by imperial clemency), Paul adds righteousness here so that no one may think like this about salvation. This righteousness is not ours but belongs to God, and in saying this Paul hints to us that it is abundantly available and easy to obtain. For we do not get it by toil and labor but by believing. Then, since his statement does not seem credible, if the adulterer and homosexual, the graverobber and the magician are not only to be suddenly set free from punishment but to be made righteous, and righteous with the righteousness of God, Paul backs up his assertion from the Old Testament. ³⁵ ... He sends the hearer back to the dispensations of God which took place in the Old Testament... showing that both the righteous and the sinners were justified by faith even then. For since what God gives transcends reason, it is only reasonable that we need faith to understand it. HOMILIES ON ROMANS 2.³⁶

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.

AMBROSE: It is right for you, my son, to have begun with the law and to have been confirmed in the gospel, from faith to faith, as it is written: The just shall live by faith. LETTERS TO PRIESTS 47.38

AUGUSTINE: What is now the church, prior to the appearance of what will be, lives in toils and afflictions, and in her the just live by faith. QUESTIONS 81.2.39

AUGUSTINE: He who claims to be just without faith is a liar. SERMONS FOR THE RECENT CONVERTS 189.2.
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THE RIGHTEOUSNESS BY WHICH THE FAITHFUL ARE JUST.

AUGUSTINE: This righteousness is the grace of the New Testament, by which the faithful are just as long as they live by faith, until by the perfection of righteousness they are brought to the face-to-face vision, as they are also brought to the immortality of the body itself, by the perfection of salvation. THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER 18.11.41