

Dear Romans

By Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

Text: Romans 1:1-7;

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OPENING PRAYER:

Our gracious God and Heavenly Father, we come with joy into your presence. We thank you for the Lord's day that you have given to us. And for the assurance that you have granted to us already that Jesus Christ has risen from the grave and conquered death and sin, and Satan and hell. And we pray as we come afresh this evening to the study of your word, that our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, by His Holy Spirit, through His Word, will be our teacher, and our guide. We pray that the book will live for us. And we pray that by the power of your truth, you will more and more conform us to Christ, its author. And grant our God that your Word will not only do us good, but through us do good to our church, to our community, and in the blessing of your Holy Spirit, to the ends of the earth as you take many of us from this place, and send us to spread abroad, the gospel of God: the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we come to you tonight as disciples, and students. We pray that the Holy Spirit will be our master, and that our Lord Jesus Himself will be our teacher. And this we pray for his great namesake. Amen.

Please be seated.

SERMON AND SCRIPTURE READING:

Now, we're coming this evening to the beginning of our extended series of studies, in Paul's letter to the Romans, and it certainly would be helpful for me as I begin to expound it, and I hope for you, if you have your Bibles open. If you're using the Pew Bible, it's on page 939. And this evening, we're looking at this introductory section in Romans chapter one, and verses one through seven.

I've no doubt that if one of our newspaper or television reporters were able to catch the apostle Paul, just as he was beginning to dictate the letter to the Romans, he didn't himself write it as it

becomes clear at the close of the letter to the Romans, he dictated it. And I can imagine, a television reporter bursting into his room with the cameras whirring and the lights flashing, and the microphones stuffed under the nose of the apostle Paul, and the reporter saying to Paul, Now, Paul, how do you feel about writing to the Romans? How do you feel about writing to the Romans? I guess the thought that would have passed through the apostles mind was, the important thing is not how I feel, the important thing is what I'm writing. But if he'd humored our reporter, I think he would have said two things. I think it would have said, I'm excited. I have rarely been so excited about any letter that I've begun to write, as I am excited about what I'm about to dictate to the Romans. And also, I think he would have said, I'm rather nervous about what is going to happen.

I think that's true. It's certainly what I feel at the beginning of this series of studies in the letter to the Romans. This is a book, perhaps more than any other letter that's ever been written in history that has shaped and molded the Christian church. If our series were to last, as long as for example, Dr. Lloyd Joneses' series did in Westminster chapel in London (he retired when he got to Romans chapter 15, verse 17, after preaching on Romans for 16 years, he never got to the end) then I suppose we would have the leisure this evening of me recounting for you stories from the history of the church, of those who like ourselves, have come together to study Romans and have found their lives and their churches and their future destiny transformed by one or other passage or perhaps by the whole 16 chapters in this book. That certainly would be true, for example, of the great St. Augustine who was converted through a text from the letter to the Romans. It would be true of Martin Luther. In many ways the Reformation was Luther's rediscovery of the message of Romans. It was true of John Calvin. It was true of John Wesley, as many of you will remember. And that's true right through to the present day.

I've confessed to two friends in telephone conversation that this evening I was beginning a series of studies that I'd never, ever in a church attempted before. One of them said to me, you know about, and he mentioned the name of an extraordinarily famous actor. Somebody many of you may have seen on public television, one of the most famous actors in England. Oh, yes. I said, I remember his story. Wasn't he in a hotel in New York, and he was burdened about the condition of his life. And he went through Manhattan looking for somebody who would sell him a Bible. He came back to his hotel room, opened it at the letter to the Romans and by the time he had finished, he was a new man in Christ. I said to another friend, just this afternoon, in a telephone conversation, I said, "You know, I'm doing something I've never done in my life before in a church, I'm beginning a new series, guess what it's on?" He said, "Song of Solomon?" I said, "Well, you're right about the fact I've never done a series from the Song of Solomon." In God's mercy, there may still be time. I said, "The remarkable thing for me is that I can't remember any time throughout the whole course of my Christian life, when I've been in a church, when I've sat under an exposition of the whole of Paul's letter to the Romans. And now that I'm staggered well into middle age, I'm determined at least to begin it." You have never

done Romans? People say to me. I wonder if the same thing would be true of you? Have you ever done Romans? Or perhaps to put it the right way around? Has Romans ever done you? Has Romans impacted your life transformed your life, because like all of Scripture, this is what Paul's letter to the Romans is given to us to do. It's the Everest of Paul's letters. And I suppose if I can borrow a contemporary metaphor, it's the Olympics of biblical exposition. And we're going to try and make our way through it in the weeks and months that will follow.

And like Paul, I think I'm a little nervous. And I'm also very excited. I'm nervous, because this will be by our standards, a long exposition. It will take us, I think, about 18 months. That's only about a tenth of the time, Dr. Lloyd Jones took to get through most of the book of Romans. Why have I chosen 18 months? Well, first of all, because it's going to take us that length of time at tonight's speed to get through Romans. But secondly, because I remember a most interesting conversation I had years ago with a physician who had some expertise and knowledge in life changes. And he said, you know, we reckon I found this most interesting, we reckon that in any life change it takes 18 months for the person whose life has been changed, actually, to believe that their life has been changed. For the person to begin to think of themselves as this different person, and really to be released from the old way of life and the old style of doing thing. And perhaps, in the providence of God, therefore it takes us 18 months to get through Romans with some natural breaks at various places in the time that lies ahead, then, by God's grace, if we get through some of the difficult places in Romans, (that some of you watch the women's marathon incidentally last night, and see those runners getting through the difficult places, and then getting a second wind and going on) -- if by God's grace, we can do this, then it is almost guaranteed to us in God's word, that this letter will transform our lives. And so I'm a little nervous about it because I have such great hopes for it. And yet at the same time nervous because I wonder this, will we last the pace. Will I last the pace? Will after five weeks I come to you and say, do you know, I feel the Lord is leading us to study the letter of Jude. Or perhaps Habakkuk? And I'm reminded of those bottles that the doctor used to give to my mother with the wagging finger to her, that was really meant for me, make sure he finishes the bottle. Or the pills that you get. And the doctor says, but the pharmacist says, make sure you take the whole course. And if we will take the whole course, then some of the dreams we have for understanding the gospel will surely come true. And I'm excited about it for this reason. That I think I can sense as a minister of the gospel, the spirit in which Paul writes, when he says, you'll notice here in verse 11, "I longed to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

I've already been mutually encouraged by the faith of others. One of our men said to me this morning, 'Do you know what we're going to do in our small group? We're going to listen to the messages, and then we're going to discuss them together. To work them through. So that the word of God, as you know,' Spurgeon said about John Bunyan, 'the word of God will so much become part of us that, as Spurgeon said of Bunyan, if you pricked him anywhere, his blood

would flow bibli.' Now, that's what the letter to the Romans is for. And as I say, it is undoubtedly the Everest of Paul's letters.

And it is the first of his letters that we find in the canon of the New Testament, not because it's the first one that was written. Probably First Thessalonians, or Galatians, is the first letter that Paul wrote. But because the church has always understood that while this letter doesn't have a chronological priority in Paul's ministry, it does have an enormous doctrinal and theological priority as he writes it sometime in the mid-50s, at the height of his powers, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and to expound what he calls very interestingly, both in chapter two and in chapter 16, to expound what he calls 'my gospel.' 'My gospel.' And there's a reason, as we shall see, why Paul calls Romans 'my gospel.'

Why do you think he's writing this letter? We only know part of Paul's conversation with the Romans. We don't know what was happening in the church at Rome. Certainly, it was appropriate for him to write to the church in the capital city because he was the apostle to the Gentiles. And actually, if you go right to the back of the book, sometime at your leisure, not just now, and read through the long list of names there is there in chapter 16, you'll realize that there were more than two dozen people in the church in Rome whom Paul personally knew. Isn't that something? Isn't that an amazing indication, as we were saying in church this morning, that this kingdom of Jesus Christ, that in the first century from the outside looks so poor and so shriveled up, and here's Paul writing to Christians, most of whom, as Neil Mathias said, he'd never met, never seen, didn't know their names. But such were the bonds and the wonder of the gospel in its power in his life that he already had somewhere between two and three dozen close friends in Christ who were witnessing to Jesus Christ at the very heart of the Roman Empire. As though Paul already himself realized, when the Gospel comes, there's nowhere ultimately safe from the gospel. Rome was impregnable. Rome was the mighty power that could apparently demolish the Christian church, and it sought to do so within a few years of the apostle Paul writing this letter. But the apostle's confidence was in God and in the Gospel. And he knew that no power on earth, no empire on earth could withstand the power and the grace of the kingdom and the Empire of the Lord Jesus Christ."And so he's writing to people for whom he has a concern in the city of Rome, some of whom he knows. And it's very evident, both at the beginning of the letter, and at the end of the letter, that he has often wanted to visit them. I think he's probably wanted to come and say what's in Romans face to face with them. But he indicates in chapter one, and then again, towards the end of the latter and chapter 15, that although he is often wanted to visit them, he has frequently been hindered from doing so. I don't know whether the day came when he said, I'm just fed up being hindered, getting to the Romans. And so I'm going to sit down and tell them what I would say to them. If I could see them face to face. I'm going to explain to them my gospel.

There were two things on Paul's mind as he wrote this letter. The first was where he was going in the immediate future. He tells us again in chapter 15 that he was on his way to Jerusalem with the great collection he had taken. I think you know that the only reference to the church collection that there seems to be in the New Testament is not to the collection that we take on Sunday in order to undergird the ministry of the church. The only collection the New Testament speaks about in Paul's letters is the collection Paul was taking from the Gentile churches to the

Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem that was undergoing great hardship. He was passionate about this collection because it was going to be a wonderful visible evidence that in the Gospel there was neither Jew nor Greek, no barrier in between, but all were one in the Lord Jesus Christ. He had a tremendous burden. He writes to the Corinthians about it. He speaks here in the letter to the Romans about it. We read in the Acts of the Apostles about it. A tremendous burden to show that the gospel worked. One of the ways in which he wanted to show that was by this love gift from the Gentiles to Jewish believers who formerly had despised them and ostracized them. So he's going — he's very excited about going to Jerusalem.

But then there was something else in his mind. God seemed to have impressed upon him that his ministry in these Roman provinces, where he had preached the gospel, was coming to an end. So he was now looking westwards. Not sure that the apostle Paul knew of the existence of South Carolina, so I'm not sure he was looking quite that far westwards. But he was looking as far westwards as Spain. So by the end of the letter, he says, I'm wanting to go to Spain, and I think there's just a little hint in what he says to the Romans. I'm wondering this, Antioch has been my sending church on my missionary journeys. But I'm needing a sending church much nearer Spain. I want to come to you because I longed to bring the Gospel to what he may have thought was the ends of the earth almost. Wondering if you will support me in that ministry? And of course, if that was his hope and expectation, the Roman Christians had a right to say, What then are your credentials? What is your gospel? Because it's evident in Romans that they'd heard some less than favorable things about Paul's Gospel. So he's writing what he calls in chapter two, my gospel to the Romans. His credentials for being an evangelist and apostle of Jesus Christ that they will want to support. He's going to their missions committee as it were and saying to them, This is the gospel I preach. Will your church support me in the great expansion of the gospel to Spain and potentially beyond? So he sits down on this day and he begins to dictate. Verse 22 of chapter 16 indicates to us that he's dictating it to his friend Tertius, the letter to the Romans.

And it begins with this extraordinary introduction in chapter one verses one through seven. We've time this evening to look at only two things. Number one, the greetings which Paul gives. And number two, the Gospel that Paul shares. The greetings Paul gives in verses one through seven. Then, sandwiched in between that, his explanation of the gospel he shares. Now most of us I'm sure know that letters in antiquity had the form of contemporary emails. You didn't need to look at the end of the letter to see who the letter was from. You got it right at the start. A is writing to be and to sends greetings. And that's the style of Paul's greetings, Paul, verse one and verse seven, to "all those in Rome, grace to you, and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." But Paul's greetings have a difference. I've often been asked over the years, either by people in the United States or by people whom I know well and Scotland, what's the what's the difference between living in the United States and living in Scotland? And I have a standard answer. I always give the same answer. I always give the same answer with a straight face as I can muster. Although inwardly I'm I'm really smiling and almost laughing. What's the difference between living in South Carolina and living in Scotland? The answer is almost everything. Almost everything is just a little bit different. It didn't dawn on me, although I'd visited the United States many times until we first

came to live here. And I got my first checkbook, I opened it. And I thought, I have no idea what these lines mean. I don't know how you do this. Even if I have money in the bank, I don't know how to get it out of the bank and pay for the things I need. And then I discovered in most stores, they didn't want my checkbook. They wanted my credit card. And I couldn't get a credit card, because I had no credit history in the United States almost brought to the president to say what's going on here that a decent citizen like me can't get a credit card these days. Almost everything is just a little different. We need to realize that incidentally, when we send missionaries overseas, we need to realize that when we welcome people from overseas, just about everything is a little different. Now, exactly the same is true of the Christian life. What's the difference between being a Christian and not being a Christian? The answer, this time with a smile on your face is everything is different. "If anyone is in Christ", says Paul, "then there's a new creation." We're in a new kingdom. There is a new style of life. It's not that we don't breathe in and breathe out. It's not that we use one foot rather than two feet to walk. It's not that we've got three years that we hear things other people don't hear. It's that the way we live is empowered by Heaven. The kingdom of God has taken hold of us. And we're marching to the sound of a different drummer. And it touches everything in our lives. And you know, dear ones, if we can just have a confidence that the gospel does that to us, then we can have a confidence as we live the Christian life, that absolutely everything we do and the way we do it is going to be just a little bit different from those who aren't Christians, and they will see it. Now listen, that included the way Paul dictated letters. That included the way Paul dictated letters. He doesn't write A to B greetings. He begins to expand on the glorious privileges that have made him who he is. And to expand on the glorious privileges that belong to the fellow Christians to whom he's writing. Look at the description he gives of himself. Paul, a servant, (that's an indentured servant, incidentally, or what we would call a slave). Roman society depended on slavery. Roman civil service was run by slaves. Slaves were not necessarily people who did the menial things. Many of them were doctors, and lawyers. Some of you think that some menial thing, but I assure you, it's not. Teachers, civil servants, extraordinarily gifted individuals. But whether they were doing those high powered services for the Roman government or doing very menial things, (and some of them were badly treated, although not all of them) there was one thing they all had in common. And that is that they belonged to their master 24/7, as we would say. They had at the end of the day, no will of their own, but only lived at the good pleasure of their master. They were owned by their master. And Paul, is eager to say to people, I am a bond slave of the best of masters, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, that was a remarkable thing to say, when you think about this, that this man was a Roman citizen. This man was a Roman citizen. Since we're all in such a good mood this evening -- the President of the seminary which I taught in Philadelphia said to me one day when I'd been there a number of years, "Have you taken out American citizenship yet?" I said, "What?" He said, "Have you taken out American citizenship yet?" I said, "But I'm Scottish." And you would say the same? Have you taken out British citizenship? Why would I want to do that? I'm an American. And here was Paul, in many ways, a proud citizen of Rome, who is prepared to use this word about himself. The most important thing about me is not my freedom as a citizen of Rome, but that I am a bond slave of my Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, that's, that's actually far more challenging than most of us think, I suspect. How irritated you get sometimes at the way people do things in other countries that are different from ourselves. And, and you give evidence, and we all do this, maybe I do this, even more than you do this. We give evidence of the fact that we think what defines us as individuals is our citizenship and our nation. Paul is

saying not for the Christian believer. For the Christian believer, what defines me is not that I'm from Colombia, not that I'm from South Carolina, not that I'm an American citizen, not that I'm from Scotland, not that I'm a citizen of Her Majesty the Queen, but that I am first and foremost, a bond slave, a happy bond slave of my Lord Jesus Christ.

And coupled with that, it's magnificent. And this so marvelously expresses the gospel, my friends, coupled with that is, on the one hand, he's a bond slave of the Lord Jesus, and on the other hand, he is an apostle, a sent one. Somebody set apart for the gospel of God. Now, Paul was not in a special sense. But you and I are that, aren't we, are not subsidiary sense. These are the two things that define us as Christians. Actually, these are the things that help us. And it's so important for us, I think, especially when we are younger, or perhaps when we've got a lot older. So helpful for us to be absolutely clear what we are for in this world. And we are for two things, to come to Christ and submit to his Lordship. And to go for Christ, and take the message of the gospel into the world. So that's how he describes himself.

Look in his greetings to how he describes the Romans in verse seven. "To all those in Rome." Interestingly, he doesn't call them the church in Rome. That's interesting, isn't it? And when you turn to the back of the book, you realize all kinds of groups in the Roman church, and there seems to be not only just disorganization but a kind of cliquishness of a certain kind among them. And so he doesn't say to the church in Rome, but to all those in Rome, who are loved by God, and called to be saints. Now, Paul had not planted the church in Rome. He planted some of the churches to whom he writes in the New Testament. He had not planted the church in Rome. Perhaps some of those who had been there on the day of Pentecost had heard Peter preach the Gospel. Who had come from Rome, perhaps they had gone back to Rome and started little house churches. But although he hadn't planted the church in Rome, he writes to them, and describes them in a way that, that in many senses, summarizes this whole letter. Look at the way he describes them. He says, "To all who are in Rome, who are loved by God, and called to be saints, grace to you, and Shalom, from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, actually, those simple statements summarize the letter to the Romans, don't they? Romans divides if there's a dividing point, a hinge point, in Romans. It's at the end of chapter 11 and beginning of chapter 12. Beginning of chapter 12, Paul says to them, "Now, in the light of everything I've been saying to you, since these things are true, I appeal to you brothers to yield yourselves to God as living sacrifices." For 11 chapters, he has been expounding how much they've been loved by God. And then from chapter 12 to 16, he describes the lifestyle of those who are called to be saints. So it's a wonderful way of describing them in terms of everything that he's going to say in the rest of the letter. And the same is true of what he goes on to say, "Grace to you." He takes 11 chapters to expound to them the riches of the grace of God to them in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then in chapters 12, and 13, and 14 and 15, and 16 he describes the Shalom, the peace, the well-being, the spiritual health of those whose lives are committed to Jesus Christ.

Or to put it as we often do, and Duff James did this the other Sunday evening from Colossians chapter three, if we are going to understand Romans we need to understand that the gospel has a grammar all of its own. And the grammar is this every command, every imperative in the Gospel is rooted in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ -- in what we might call the

Indicatives of the gospel. And unless we grasp that grammar, that every imperative, every exhortation, every command is rooted and grounded in the resources of God in Christ to enable us to fulfill it, instead of transforming us, the gospel will drown us. The imperatives of the gospel are far too demanding for any of us to fulfill unless we are first of all rooted and grounded in the glory of the gospel itself. And it's amazing, actually, between these two verses, verse one and verse seven -- between what Paul says in his greetings to the Romans -- Paul gives us an extraordinary summary of the gospel that he is about to expound. So let me just take a few minutes to walk us through. And if you're like my friend going to be in a small group studying Romans, then you will need to study this for yourself. I'm just going to give you the outline, and you can do your homework at home. There's a marvelous summary in verses two through six of the wonder of Paul's Gospel. And I want you to notice there are six points to it. And I promise I'll be quick. And I will keep that promise, even if I have to finish in mid sentence.

First of all, the gospel is not a novelty. Paul speaks about its advanced preparation. This gospel, he says, was prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. The gospel of God, verse two, which he promised beforehand, through His prophets, in the Holy Scriptures. Let's be very clear about this from Romans. The gospel is not plan B. The gospel is plan A. God since the fall has made it clear from Genesis 3:15 onwards. As Jesus did to his disciples on the Emmaus road, they were so surprised by his death and resurrection. He said, "Let me take you back to the beginning." And he showed them in all the scriptures how God had been preparing the way for the coming of his son. So the coming of Jesus Christ has been prepared beforehand, by a multitude of Old Testament prophecies. Well, it would take us more than 16 years to go through Romans if we paused at this point, and then said, "Let's just pause there. And we'll go back to the Old Testament, and we will undergird all this with every single promise in the Old Testament Scriptures that relates to our Lord Jesus Christ. We'd be here, what, we'd be here long past my retirement. They will be seeing in 25 years' time Lloyd Jones did it in 16 years, Ferguson didn't get past the first seven verses throughout the whole of a ministry. It was promised before in the Old Testament scriptures, that's its preparation.

Secondly, its center. What is the center of the gospel? If somebody says to you, "What is the center of the gospel?" your answer should not be "I have been born again." That may be the beginning of your spiritual life, but it's not the center of the gospel. You're having been born again is not going to save anybody who has not been born again. So what is the center of the gospel? The center of the gospel is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And you notice how Paul expresses this. The Gospel promised beforehand concerns his Son. And then he begins to describe the experience of God's Son. And he does this in a very interesting way. First of all, he describes the Son of God, as he enters into what we could call his state of humiliation. He was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh. The Word, the eternal Word, took our frail flesh and entered into the state of humiliation that we confessed at the beginning of our service, "though he was in the form of God, he didn't count equality with God something to be made a special consideration in his life, but he humbled himself -- took upon him the form of a servant in the likeness of men." His graciousness in humbling himself in the incarnation, the state of humiliation, and then says Paul, he was declared or better, since the word is generally translated this way, appointed to be the Son of God in power, by the resurrection from the dead. It's exactly what he says in Philippians two. The humiliation of the

Lord Jesus Christ and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. At His resurrection, he stepped forth from the tomb in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. As the first man to break through the power of death, and said, as I sometimes say, as though he had thought of these words long before Neil Armstrong did, "That's one small step for a man. And a giant leap for mankind." Broke the power of death, came forth strong in the glory of His resurrection, as the beginning of the new creation that God would bring into being as he gathered from east and west and north and south this community of those who have been raised into newness of life in Jesus Christ. Glorious center of the Gospel.

The preparation for the gospel. The center of the Gospel. The goal of the gospel. What's the gospel for? What's it meant to do in my life? Answer, produce the obedience of faith. Now, does Paul mean there, that faith is obedience? Well, in a sense, faith is obedience, because when I trust in Christ I'm obeying the command of God. Does Paul mean that faith produces obedience? Which it certainly does. Perhaps he means both. The hallmark, the indication that the gospel is mine, is quite simply this, that I have been brought to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. It's as simple as that. It's not my profession. It's not my words. It's not how able I am to explain the gospel to others. It's quite simply this -- has brought me to the obedience of faith. So first of all, it's preparation. Secondly, it's centered. Thirdly, its goal. Fourthly, its scope. Who is this gospel for? Now, here is explosive material. This is for everybody. We need to be transported 2000 years back to Jerusalem to realize that this was heresy in the ears of most Jews. But sadly, in a way, it's heresy in the ears of most Christians, isn't it? If the gospel is for everybody, you've heard these stories of tribal chiefs hearing the gospel and saying to the missionaries who came, when did this happen? And they said 1600 years ago. And the tribal chiefs have said, Why did you take so long in bringing the good news to us? That could be true of our neighbors, never mind distant tribes, unknown languages. It's for all. It's for the person who works beside you tomorrow. It's why Paul says later on in this chapter, I feel myself to be under an obligation to bring this gospel to people because it is for the sake of Christ's name among all the nations. And It's effect? Oh, this is so beautiful. It's the fact is to embrace the Romans, verse six, who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. That has my, dear friends, a most 21st century ring about it. That's the problem of most young people today, apparently. They don't feel they belong. They don't belong. The world the Western world certainly is full of people who, who no longer know who they are, because they don't know where they belong. And, isn't this one of the glorious things about being a Christian, you come in here and you see brothers and sisters, and you say to yourself, I know where I belong. I know where my roots are. To belong. Isn't this beautiful? Called to belong to Jesus Christ. Called to belong to Jesus Christ. Sometimes, strangers at the church door -- husbands and wives, maybe the husband will come out first and then floating along afterwards the the wife will come and shake my hand and she'll say, I belong to Him. Now sounds a bit old fashioned to some of you. But those are beautiful words. Those are the words of a woman who knows that she's cared for, loved, protected. Knows who she is. I know where I belong. That's the blessedness of the Christian.

Remember meeting a woman, along with Frank Barker, who was the Minister of the great PCA Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and we fell into conversation with her. She'd been converted fairly recently. I've never forgotten her saying, "you know, when I came to Christ, for the very

first time in my life, I felt myself to be loved." And its effect is that we belong to Jesus Christ as Lord.

But I said, there's a sixth thing, and with this, I'll finish. Its preparation in the promises of the Old Testament. It's centered on the person of Jesus Christ. Its goal is the obedience of faith. It's for all the nations. Its effect is that at last, I belong to Christ, and in Him, I belong to God. And it's motivation. What is the motivation that drives the gospel and those who belong to the gospel? Oh, you see it towards the end of verse five? It is for the sake of His name. For the sake of His name. You know those simple words could transform your life, couldn't they? Whatever you do tomorrow -- some of you are getting back to the grim book drill, as my children used to call it. Back to school? Or you're going back to the office? Or you're going back to the dishwasher? Or you're going back to the humdrum of life, and is there really any point to it? I mean, beyond your immediate family. Is there really any point to it? Well, says, Paul, here's the motivation of our lives, for the sake of His name. Paul knew what he was for. I say again, especially to those of you who are young, this one thing can transform your whole life through all its vicissitudes. Or if you don't know what that means, it means the changes and the difficulties can transform your life, make you different from your contemporaries. Because even if you don't know what your life calling will be, you know what you are for. You are for the sake of His name.

Is that true of you? And of me? God grant it. And may it be granted more and more as we study Romans.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank You for the word of the gospel and for the servant that you raised up to give us this letter to the Romans. And we pray as we study it together and read it and reread it and try to soak it in privately and together -- and as it's expounded to us in this room, we pray for its life-transforming power to transform our lives too. And this we pray in Jesus' name.