

Lesson 10 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 1:4, Continued

Romans 1:4 — and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

When we ended last week, we were just about to look at the final phrase in verse 4.

Phrase #4: “Jesus Christ our Lord”

Paul referred to Jesus by name in verse 1, but he referred to Jesus as “Son” in verses 3 and 4. And so now at the end of verse 4, Paul again refers to Jesus by name, as he will do again in verses 6, 7, and 8. In fact, Paul will use the name “Jesus” nearly 40 times in this letter.

And, as always, I have a question for myself, and you may have the same question for yourself: do I use the name of Jesus as much as Paul did? I am reminded of a beautiful song:

If the name of the Savior is precious to you,
If His care has been constant and tender and true,
If the light of His presence has brightened your way,
O will you not tell of your gladness today?

Is the name of the Savior precious to me? It certainly was to Paul. And think about one line from that song — “if the light of His presence has brightened your way.” That was certainly true of Paul! And Paul never quit talking about the one he had seen.

But we do have a question about what Paul says here about Jesus — he says that Jesus is “our Lord.” Why not “**the** Lord”? Why does Paul say “**our** Lord”?

Is Paul making a distinction here between those over whom Jesus is Lord and those over whom Jesus is **not** Lord? Jesus is **our** Lord, but Jesus is not your Lord?

No, that is not possible. While Paul could be making a distinction here between those who obey Jesus and those who disobey Jesus, Paul could not be making a distinction here between those over whom Jesus is Lord and those over whom Jesus is not Lord.

Why not? Because Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords! (See Revelation 17:14; 19:16 — and possibly also 1 Timothy 6:15.) And that phrase “King of kings and Lord of lords” means that Jesus is King over everyone and Lord over everyone. That’s what the phrase means. And so, if Jesus is Lord over everyone, then Paul could not possibly be saying here that Jesus is not Lord over everyone.

The question is not whether Jesus is my King or my Lord — he is. The question is whether I am obedient or rebellious. I do not obey the gospel to make Jesus my Lord or to crown Jesus King (as if it is in my power to do either of those things!); I obey the gospel because Jesus is my Lord and my King and because I want to be his obedient servant.

Isn’t that what we see in Acts 2, in the very first gospel sermon?

Acts 2:36-38 — Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the

rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Notice the order there — Peter tells them that Jesus is their Lord; they ask what they must do; and Peter tells them what they must do. Peter did not tell them to make Jesus their Lord. Instead, Peter told them the opposite — Peter told them that Jesus was already their Lord, and they needed to obey him as Lord. I think we all understand that. I just wish that the people who edited our song books understood that!

So, if Paul is not saying that Jesus is our Lord and not your Lord, then what is Paul saying here? Why does Paul say “**our**” Lord?

There is a word in the next verse that may be helpful in answering this question — and that is the word “we.” Let’s look ahead slightly and read the end of verse 4 along with the next verse: “Jesus Christ **our** Lord, through whom **we** have received grace and apostleship...”

Paul says that Jesus is “our” Lord through whom “we” have received grace and apostleship. I think a natural reading of that phrase suggests that the words “our” and “we” are referring to the same people — “**our** Lord, through whom **we** have received.”

But who are “we”? Let’s save that question until we get to the next verse, but whatever we conclude about the word “we” in verse 5, I think we should then back up and reach the same conclusion about the word “our” here in verse 4.

But before we move on from verse 4, let's review what Paul has told us about Jesus so far in this letter:

- Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.
- Jesus reigns as a descendant of King David.
- Jesus is the Son of God in power.
- Jesus rose from the dead.
- Jesus is Lord.

Why does Paul start his letter this way? Paul starts his letter with all of these descriptions of Jesus because those facts about Jesus are the basis for everything that Paul will say in the remainder of this letter.

If even one of these descriptions of Jesus were not true, then there would be no reason to read any further. But they are all true — and those facts about Jesus explain everything that follows!

Jesus is the Christ! Jesus is the King! Jesus is the Son of God! Jesus lives! Jesus is Lord! That is how Paul begins this letter — and there could be no better beginning than that!

And, again, I think there is a lesson for us there. When we proclaim the gospel of Christ to someone, we need to start with Christ! Before anyone can obey the gospel of Christ, they must first know Christ. They must know that he is the Messiah, that he reigns as King, that he is the Son of God, that he lives, and that he is Lord.

That is how Paul started. Is that how we start?

Romans 1:5

Romans 1:5 — through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

Grace. Obedience. Faith. Verse 5 is full of key words! But before we look at those words, we need to first look more closely at that little word “we” that we mentioned just a moment ago. Paul says that “**we** have received grace and apostleship.” **Who are we?**

Given the word “apostleship,” I think we can certainly say that the word “we” in verse 5 must refer to one or more of the apostles, and possibly to **two** or more of the apostles given that “we” is a *plural* pronoun.

But there is the problem — what other apostle or apostles could Paul have in mind here? As we said in our introduction, there is no evidence that any apostle had been to Rome prior to this letter, and there is evidence in this letter itself that Paul expected to be the first apostle to reach Rome (Romans 15:20).

That evidence has caused some commentaries to conclude that Paul is referring only to himself with these plural pronouns “our” and “we” in verses 4 and 5. That is, when Paul says “our Lord” and “we have received,” he really means “my Lord” and “I have received.”

And I think we can say that a point in favor of that interpretation is that it fits well with the context. Paul refers to Jesus as “our” Lord in verse 4, and Paul told us in verse 1 that **he** is the slave of Christ. And Paul refers in verse 5 to the apostleship “we” received, and Paul told

us in verse 1 that **he** was called to be an apostle. So maybe Paul did mean “my” Lord and “I” received.

But, if so, why not just say that? Why not just say “my Lord” and “I have received”? Why instead say “our Lord” and “we have received”?

If Paul is, in fact, referring only to himself here, then Paul may have used these plural pronouns as what is called a “literary plural.”

A literary plural is when a plural pronoun is used for a singular subject for the purpose of an official emphasis, as a rhetorical softening, or as an identification with the reader or listener.

We hear literary plurals used all the time today for these same purposes:

- **Official emphasis:** The Queen says, “We are not amused!”; The Judge says, “We find the defendant guilty.”
- **Rhetorical softening:** A teacher asks, “How are we doing with our homework?”
- **Identification with the reader or listener:** A young preacher says, “As we grow older, we start to realize what truly matters.”

So, before we start saying that Paul would never write this way, we need to explain why we are allowed to write that way but Paul is not! And we would also have to explain the other places where Paul is possibly using a literary plural, either to refer only to himself or to refer only to others.

Romans 6:1 — What shall **we** say then? Are **we** to continue in sin that grace may abound?

1 Thessalonians 5:5-6 — For **you** are all children of light, children of the day. **We** are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let **us** not sleep, as others do, but let **us** keep awake and be sober.

Galatians 1:8-9 — But even if **we** or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one **we** preached to you, let him be accursed. As **we** have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

2 Corinthians 10:10-12 — For they say, “**His** letters are weighty and strong, but **his** bodily presence is weak, and **his** speech of no account.” Let such a person understand that what **we** say by letter when absent, **we** do when present. Not that we dare to classify or compare **ourselves** with some of those who are commending themselves.

Philippians 3:17 — Brothers, join in imitating **me**, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in **us**.

If that literary device is being used here in verse 5, I think we can say that it is not being used for a rhetorical softening or an identification of Paul with his readers. Neither of those reasons makes sense here — but that does leave the third option: official emphasis.

And that reason for a plural pronoun — official emphasis — would make sense here in this context. This letter is not just from Paul the person; this letter is from Paul the person and Paul the apostle. It

would be similar to what we might today call “the royal we,” in which a monarch refers to himself or herself with a plural pronoun. And why does the monarch do that? For official emphasis. That is the same reason a judge might write “we rule” or “we hold” rather than “I rule” or “I hold.”

Paul may be using a plural pronoun to refer to himself here, but we can’t say for sure. If we don’t like that explanation, there is another possibility — Paul may be referring both to himself and to his companions. We know, for example, that Timothy was with Paul when he wrote this letter (16:21). So perhaps the pronouns “our” and “we” refer to Paul and his team.

If that is the case, then the word “apostleship” in verse 5 might refer to an apostolic team consisting of an apostle and those who were doing the work directed by that apostle.

Is there anywhere else in the Bible where we see that? Again, possibly.

Acts 14:14 — But when the **apostles Barnabas** and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out.

Was Barnabas an Apostle? Or was Barnabas just a member of an Apostolic team led by the Apostle Paul? The description of Barnabas in the Bible looks more like the latter. Note, for example, Acts 9:27 — “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles...”

I think either of these answers could be correct — “we” refers to Paul with official emphasis, or “we” refers to Paul and his team of co-workers. Let’s leave that choice as an open question for now, and

perhaps we will get some more guidance as we work through the text.

Now, back to verse 5:

Romans 1:5 — through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

Whether we interpret “we” as just Paul or as Paul and his team, we know that “we” must at least include Paul. And so, verse 5 tells us that Paul “received grace and apostleship.” What does that mean?

“Grace” is a key word in this letter, and this is the first time that word occurs. And we all know what that means! It means that we need to define it!

If you look at the left side of the Handout for Lesson 10, you will find 25 New Testament verses that use the word “grace.” (Note that the lists on the Handout are not exhaustive, and that some of the verses on the lists are excerpted — and, so, please be sure to look at the entire verse and the context for each verse on the Handout, and please do a word search yourself to find all of the verses that use these words. I included these verses because they seemed particularly helpful for our purposes here.)

As with most of our definitions, our plan is to start with a working definition and then refine it as needed as we work our way through the text. That will definitely be the case here. Why? Because I think Paul is using the word “grace” here in verse 5 more broadly than he will use that word later in this same letter.

As for a **broad** working definition, I think we can use the definition with which I am sure we are all already familiar — “grace” is the unmerited favor of God. In short, “grace” is a gift from God that we did nothing to earn. If we earned it, then it is not grace. Paul will tell us that very plainly later in this letter.

Romans 11:6 — But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

And, as we will also see in this letter, our salvation is the best example of the grace of God — but our salvation is not the only example of the grace of God. I think we see another example of God’s grace in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:7-12 — But **grace** was **given** to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s **gift**. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave **gifts** to men.” . . . And he **gave** the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

I think that verse is telling us that Jesus had given gifts of various degrees to members of the church for the purpose of building up the body of Christ — and that some people (such as Paul) had received the gift of Apostleship.

I think that gift of Apostleship is the grace that we see here in verse 5. I think Paul is saying that his Apostleship was a gift or a grace from God, which, of course, we know that it was. In fact, Paul elsewhere uses the word “grace” to describe his Apostleship.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 — For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But **by the grace of God** I am what I am, and **his grace toward me** was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, **but the grace of God** that is with me.

Paul was an Apostle of Christ by the grace of God. That is what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, and that is what he tells us here in verse 5.

But why? What was the purpose? Why did God give this gift to Paul? Paul answers that question next in verse 5.

Romans 1:5 — through whom we have received grace and apostleship **to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.**

Paul became an Apostle “to bring about the obedience of faith.” What does that mean?

Well, the first thing we should note is that we have found two more key words — obedience and faith. I think we all know what “obedience” means, but “faith” is a bit more difficult. Also, we need to look at the entire phrase “obedience of faith” and how those two words relate to each other in that phrase.

As for “faith,” the right side of the Handout for Lesson 10 is a good starting point. However we define “faith,” our definition needs to make sense in light of every other use of that word in the Bible, including the 50 verses on the Handout.

What is faith? That is a very difficult and hotly debated question, but I think the best approach to defining the word is to let the Bible define

it for us. And I think the best place to start looking for that definition is right here in the book of Romans, although we must not limit ourselves to just this one book of the Bible. Both Hebrews and James, for example, also have a great deal to tell us about faith.

But where should we begin? If we wanted to start with a simple, working definition of “faith,” what should we choose?

Here is one proposal: **“faith” is reliance upon and trust in God.**

- Faith is not reliance on myself or trust in myself.
- Faith is not reliance on or trust in man.
- Faith is not reliance on or trust in money.
- Faith is not reliance in only what I can see.
- Faith is reliance upon and trust in the promises of God.
- Faith is reliance upon and trust in the word of God.

In short, “faith” is reliance upon and trust in God. Let’s start with that definition and see how well it works as we proceed through the text of Romans.

Sometimes we hear that the Old Testament was only about works, and that faith is something we find only in the New Testament. I think Paul will torpedo that view in verse 17, but I think we can already see a problem with it based on our working definition. “Faith” is reliance upon and trust in God. Did people rely upon God in the Old Testament? Did people trust in God in the Old Testament? We know that they did. We find many examples of such people in the Old Testament.

So, if our working definition turns out to be correct, then we should not be surprised at all to learn that faith played a primary role in the Old Testament just as it does in the New Testament.

But what about the obedience of faith? What is that?

I think perhaps the best illustration of the obedience of faith comes, not from Paul, but from Peter:

Matthew 14:25-31 — And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” **So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, **“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”**

What is the obedience of faith? The obedience of faith is getting out of that boat! Jesus said, “Come!” And Peter came! Why? Because Peter relied upon Jesus and trusted in Jesus. That’s why. And when Peter’s faith faltered, Peter sank like a rock.

And notice the action there. These events did not just involve what was going on in Peter’s head. Instead, Peter got out of the boat. Faith is not just a mental process. It includes a mental process, but it can never end with only a mental process. A living faith is a working faith — a living faith always involves action.

Those today who proclaim that belief alone is all we need to be pleasing to God need to understand just how low a threshold that is! Yes, there are many atheists in the world today, but the Bible has another word for them — fools! (Psalm 14:1) And Paul will explain why that is the case before we leave this first chapter of Romans (verse 20). James will tell us that “even the demons believe — and shudder!” (James 2:19). Atheism is a belief that can be held only by people who are alive in this world. There are no dead atheists! Atheists learn that they were wrong about God as soon as they die.

And so, whatever we conclude about faith, it must be more than just belief in God. If my faith is confined just to my head, then my faith is a dead faith (James 2:26).

But, some might say, I don’t see any of that in our working definition — “reliance upon and trust in God.” To which I respond, look again! If I am relying on God and trusting in God, then I will be doing what God wants me to do. Could anyone have said that Peter was relying upon Jesus and trusting in Jesus if Peter had just kept his seat in that boat? “Yes, Jesus, I certainly believe you, but I think I will just sit right here where I am.” Would that have been faith?

We will have much more to say about “faith” as we work through this letter. In fact, in this first chapter of Romans, we will soon encounter a single verse that uses the word “faith” three times! But at this point, I think we can say that this phrase “obedience of faith” in verse 5 will be crucial to reaching a correct view of “faith” in the Bible.

Why? Because Paul begins his letter here with that phrase, and, as we will see, Paul ends his letter with that same phrase (16:26). The fact that this phrase serves as bookends to the entire letter has caused one

commentator to suggest that the obedience of faith is the key purpose of the letter, and that may be correct. It is certainly a central theme.

But what does it mean? What is the obedience of faith?

We can interpret that phrase in two ways: (1) it is the obedience that comes from faith, or (2) it is the obedience that consists in faith. That is, the obedience of faith could be our obedience to God after we have been saved through faith, or the obedience of faith could be our obedience to God through which we are saved through faith.

Grammatically, the phrase “obedience of faith” could include either of those views or both of those views. But you wouldn’t know that if all you had was the *New International Version* of the Bible.

Romans 1:5 (NIV) — Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to **the obedience that comes from faith** for his name’s sake.

The Greek text is ambiguous on this issue. A good translation carries that ambiguity over into the English, while a bad translation does not. And that means that the NIV is a bad translation! But we already knew that.

These two verses in Romans are the only two places where this phrase “obedience of faith” occurs. There is a reason this particular phrase was used. And, if the phrase is ambiguous in some way, I think we can be certain that the ambiguity was intentional.

So what is the answer? I think the answer is simple, at least at this stage where we are looking for a working definition that can be our starting point — the obedience of faith includes both our obedience

through which we are saved and our obedience after we are saved. I don't see any reason to choose one over the other at this point.

But if we did choose only one, I think we would have to choose the one that the NIV left out. Why? Because we see that part of our obedience later in this same letter:

Romans 10:16 — But they have not all **obeyed the gospel**.

Romans 15:18 — For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to **bring the Gentiles to obedience** — by word and deed.

So we know the obedience of faith must at least include our obedience to the gospel through which we are saved, but I think we will see that it also includes the obedience that comes from our daily walk with Christ after we are saved.

What we must never do is drive a wedge between faith and obedience. This opening phrase alone is enough for us to know that is the wrong approach. Obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. Here is how one commentary described the relation:

Faith and obedience should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of Christian experience. Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience — for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord — and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith — for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to him in faith. As Karl Barth puts it, “Faith is not obedience, but as obedience is not obedience without faith, faith is not faith without obedience. They be-

long together, as do thunder and lightning in a thunderstorm.”

Now, back to verse 5:

Romans 1:5 — through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith **for the sake of his name among all the nations**,

We know what Paul means by that first phrase: “for the sake of his name.” That is a phrase that could apply to everything Paul did after he came up out of that watery grave of baptism with his sins washed away (Acts 22:16). Everything Paul did was for the sake of Jesus’ name, and that was especially true of Paul’s great mission.

Acts 9:15-16 — But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine **to carry my name** before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

But what about the final phrase in verse 5: “among all the nations.” Does that phrase include both Jew and Gentile, or just the Gentiles?

The Greek word translated “nations” in verse 5 is “*ethnos*,” from which we get the English word “*ethnic*.” The KJV translates the word as “Gentiles” 93 times and as “nation” 64 times. The issue is not whether *ethnos* **includes** the Gentiles; it always does (except for when only the Jewish nation is being described). The issue is whether *ethnos* also includes the Jews, and sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn’t. Here are some examples where it does include the Jews.

John 11:48 — If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our **nation**.

Acts 2:5 — Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every **nation** under heaven.

So the word can include the Jews, but very often it does not. Very often the word *ethnos* refers only to the Gentile nations of the world and the Gentiles living in those Gentile nations.

When that usage is clear from the context, most translations translate the word as “Gentile” or “pagan,” but those same translations leave the word as “nation” when it is not entirely clear whether or not the Jews are included.

That is why we find the word “nations” here in verse 5 of the ESV, but we will find the word “Gentiles” for the same Greek word later in the ESV translation of Romans 2.

Romans 2:14 — For when **Gentiles**, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

So which is it here in verse 5? Here is how one commentary answers that question:

“In the light of the meaning it most frequently carries, and the fact that Paul was called specifically to be an apostle to the Gentiles, we can safely conclude that here in 1:5 Paul is speaking of the scope of his apostleship as among Gentiles.”

I think that statement is a bit strong, especially given what we will soon read in verse 7: “To **all** those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.”

I think a better view is that the phrase “all the nations” is more geographic than demographic. That is, I think Paul is telling us that he went everywhere preaching the gospel. And, yes, Paul was focused on the Gentiles, but we know Paul also taught many Jews. And, as Acts 2:5 tells us, we know that there were devout Jews in every nation under heaven.

Many commentaries say that Paul is talking only about the Gentiles here in verse 5, and the NIV certainly thinks so, translating the word as “Gentiles.” And that may be correct, but I think the better view is that Paul is talking here in verse 5 about all nations geographically without regard to who is living in those nations. In short, Paul’s mission was to proclaim the gospel everywhere.

Why do I prefer that view? Because of verse 6, which is where we will start next week.