
“Called to Belong”

ROMANS 1:5-7

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BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

What does the movie Toy Story have to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Turns out it has a LOT to do with it! Identity matters. Knowing who you and whose you are makes a world of difference in living faithfully. We are called to belong to Jesus. What does that language imply? There’s much to unpack.

INTRODUCTION

In 1995 Pixar Studios released what would become a blockbuster movie and series of movies called *Toy Story*. In it, the main character, Woody, was the cherished and favorite toy of his owner, Andy. Woody even had Andy’s name written on his boot, which he wore as a badge of honor. He knew he belonged to Andy! Knowing his identity brought Woody a great deal of confidence and security. Until, that is, Andy’s birthday when he received a new toy, Buzz Lightyear, and wrote his name on Buzz’s boot. Woody immediately grew jealous of Buzz and in a fit of frenzied chaos, accidentally knocked Buzz out of Andy’s bedroom window. The rest of the toys accused Woody of doing it purposely. Woody, assuring them he did not mean to do it mounted a rescue mission that would ultimately lead to Buzz’s reunification and deliverance from Andy’s neighbor, Sid’s demented bedroom.

It was not until Woody could point to Buzz’s boot and remind him that Andy marked him because he prized him and wanted him back that Buzz was lifted out of his despair and depression. Once Buzz came to understand who he was and whose he was, he found the will to fight and make his way home.

In today’s passage, Paul tells us that Christians are called (by God) to belong to Jesus. We are His prized possession and His responsibility. This should bring us great hope and security. But it also implies that we who belong to Jesus, belong to Him and not to ourselves. This is slave language, Paul uses. Have you considered that you, being called to belong to Jesus, are a slave of Christ?! Let’s explore this more.

ROMANS 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and 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, 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,** ⁶**including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,** ⁷**To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

GRACE OF APOSTLESHIP

⁵**through whom we have received grace and apostleship...**

The calling of grace and apostleship came **through** Jesus Christ our Lord. The Greek structure could actually mean *gracious apostleship*, but I agree with FF Bruce who understands Paul to mean the “grace of apostleship.”¹ Read what Paul said in Romans 12:6, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith...” And again in 15:5-6, “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God...”

We have received... Paul could be talking about himself or about himself and his colleagues. Usually when first person plural “we” is found in Paul’s letters, it refers to himself alone. It’s rhetorical device called a literary plural. Here Paul has to acknowledge he was part of this, he’s the apostle after all, but he does so in the most humble way.

His whole aim in this letter as in life is ascribing all glory to God. In no uncertain terms he shouts, “Everything came from God! There’s nothing I can claim!” Paul described himself as a slave of Christ, says he was called and set apart for the Gospel. Now he refuses to even say “I” received the grace of apostleship because he doesn’t even want to put those words in the same sentence. He was who he was because God is who He is: infinitely gracious!

OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

The purpose of his receiving the grace of apostleship was to **bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name**. Paul’s task and purpose, His mission, was to make Jesus’ name famous! To make the name of Jesus Christ our Lord known and not only known, but known in authority. That people would come to **obedience of faith**. That’s an interesting coupling of words – obedience and faith. Paul wrote to the Galatians that we are saved not by works of the law, but by faith.

“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Galatians 2:16

What then do we make of **obedience of faith**? Simply put, it is the obedience that is based on faith in Christ. There are two elements to this obedience that is based on faith in Christ and we must be careful not to separate them. They are like two sides of the same coin.

Paul will appeal to both the belief and the obedience elements of faith in his letter. He says in 6:11-18 that true obedience comes from the heart, not mere behavior modification. Genuine salvation motivates obedience. And in 10:16-17 he indicates that faith in the gospel is obedience to the gospel. Jesus said in John 6 that by believing in Him, we do the will of God, which is another way of describing obedience.

Faith begins when we believe in Jesus, but to imagine that believing in Jesus initially is all there is to this life of faith is foolish.

Al Mohler comments on this obedience of faith, saying, “Ongoing obedience is the outworking of our salvation. It is not a subsequent thing—a consequence of faith; it is faith in its concrete expression.”² Obedience to Jesus is how our faith is expressed our entire lives, or “worked out” in Paul’s language. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” (Philippians 2:12)

Notice Paul did not say, “Work *for* your salvation.” This is not works-based salvation, but rather faith that works.

When we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our lives are changed. It’s inconceivable that a person has been born again but habitually refuses to obey Jesus. Listen to the Apostle John, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”(1 John 3:9)

Faith *in* Jesus inherently leads to obedience *of* Jesus. As Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will obey me.”

FOR THE SAKE OF HIS NAME

This whole thing – the Gospel being promised, being fulfilled, being delivered to Paul for him to take to **all the nations** is **for the sake of His name**. Whose name? Not Paul’s, but Jesus’s name! Jesus is glorified every time a sinner is saved by grace through faith. Every time a person who was dead in sin is made alive in Christ, Jesus is glorified and magnified!

Lest we spend too much time soaring among the heights of generalities of **all the nations**, Paul brings it back to the individual level. He said in **verse 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ...**

The message of the Gospel is for the nations. It's for taking to Tribes and Hindus and Chinese and Muslims and Buddhists (THUMB) and all over the 10/40 window. It's for giving your life to take it to people who have never been told of Him and have never heard.

The Gospel is for all the nations, but it's also for you! It's for far and wide, but it's also for near to home and close to the heart. It's for your spouse and it's for your children; it's for your parents and it's for your friends. And your coworkers and the cashier and the buddy at the gym and the stylist and, well the list is inexhaustible because it's for all people, **including you!** You who are **called to belong to Jesus Christ.**

CALLED TO BELONG

R.C. Sproul says, "Every believer is called out of the world, out of bondage, out of death, and out of sin, and into Christ and into His body." Paul is not the only one called to belong to Jesus Christ. You are called to belong. I am called to **belong to Jesus Christ.**

In the Greek this word **belong** carries a possessive quality, not associative. You can belong to a club in an associative way. But your vehicle belongs to you in a possessive way. It is in the former manner that we belong to Jesus. We are His possession. That is slave language.

You and I, like Paul, are servants of Jesus Christ. Slave is more appropriate language per the Greek *doulos*. We are slaves of Christ. When you were dead in sin, Jesus says you were enslaved to sin. (cf. John 8:34) Praise the Lord, we have been set free from the bonds of sin and death! Amen?! Great, but in Christ, you're set free from the death-causing slavery to sin and you're yoked into slavery to Christ.

John MacArthur teases this out almost to the point of absurdity in order to highlight the great disparity between what the bible teaches about faithful living and what we are likely to hear in the modern evangelical church. He phrased the invitation to come to Christ like this, "I would like to invite you to become a slave of Jesus Christ. I would like to invite you to give up your independence, give up your freedom, submit yourself to an alien will, abandon all your rights, be owned by, controlled by the Lord." He says, "That's really the gospel. We're really asking people to become slaves."

Pastor, are you sure Paul had slave language in his mind? Read what Paul wrote to the Corinthians. "For the one who was called in the Lord as a slave, is the Lord's freed person; likewise the one who was called as free, is Christ's slave." (1 Corinthians 7:22) (NASB) So a person who was literally a slave, whether they were set free from slavery or not, should consider themselves a freed man in Christ. But watch this, a person who was free should consider themselves a slave to Christ.

I hate using different translations of the New Testament, but on this point it was necessary because the ESV translates *doulos*, which clearly means slave, as bond-servant. It means the same thing, but it softens the blow and in doing so, reduces the impact.

SLAVES OF CHRIST

Bond-servant has a slightly more noble ring to it. It hints at the possibility of expressing your own will. But slave is a term that has resonated with people in every culture in history. At no point in time has the term slave meant anything less than total subjugation, total ownership, total obedience. In saying we called to belong, Paul is using slave language.

We see similar language in Revelation. There the saints are marked with the name of the Lamb on their foreheads (Revelation 22:4). Trust me, that's a mark you want on your forehead. It will signify you belong to Jesus.

I go back to *Toy Story* and Woody, who had his owner's name written on the bottom of his boot. I think without knowing it, Pixar captured the essence of the Gospel. The child owner, Andy, selected Woody based on nothing Woody did to deserve it and he put his name on him, embracing him as his very own precious

possession. We are **called to belong to Christ**. We have His name on us, even if only preverbally speaking. We're marked by Christ.

Just as Andy's name on Woody's boot brought him incredible comfort as his identity was secure knowing to whom he belonged, so you and I would do well to drive this truth deep into our hearts – you belong to Jesus.

And because you belong to Jesus, He's never going to give you up. It's the Father's will that Jesus never lose you. You are not just His possession, but also His precious responsibility. He is the Good Shepherd who cares deeply for the sheep and provides and protects them. We *serve Him* because we belong to Him. And He'll *never forsake* us because we belong to Him.

Verse 7, Paul wraps up the salutation. **To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:**

BELOVED SAINTS

Beloved, saints of God. Is that how you conceive of your identity in Christ? In the New Testament all Christians are called saints, which means 'sanctified ones, set apart ones, or holy ones.' I appreciated last year when one of our men approached me to challenge why I call people in the church sinners when the bible calls everyone in Christ, saints. He was right! There's no doubt we are saints who still sin. But, there is something about knowing who you are that helps you in the fight! You are a beloved saint of God whom God has called, set apart, and made holy.

Ah, Pastor, you don't know me! You don't know the meditations of my mind, the tone and tenor of my words, the glances of my eyes, and the works of my hands.

Ah, it is *you* who do not know yourself. You have not been called out because you are a saint. You are a saint because you have been called out. Brother or sister, do you know who you are in Christ? Do you know that in Christ you are a new creation?

The bible tells us that we have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6)! We are more than conquerors. We are bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. We are redeemed. We are made righteous. We are valued. You are **loved by God**.

So, act like it. This was Woody's message to Buzz as he languished in agony in Sid's bedroom, thinking he'd never escape and never see Andy again. Seriously, stop living like you're worthless. Stop thinking and acting like you're powerless over the flesh. Stop speaking like the wellspring of your heart is still poisoned. You are **called to be a saint** and you **belong to Christ**. You have been set apart by God for His purposes, do be His people, and to do His will. Do you really grasp that?

GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE

What you really need to know is not so much yourself but this wonderful Savior who was sent so that we can say with Paul, **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Grace and peace, brothers and sisters, grace and peace. Notice the collocation of Jesus with the Father. Grace and peace come from **God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

Grace is the unmerited favor of God. We don't deserve any good thing that comes from God. That's why it's grace! When we experience the unmerited favor of His grace in our salvation, when we hear and believe the Gospel for the first time, peace rushes down upon us like a river!

God's peace is not like the peace the world gives, Jesus said (John 14:27). The world can only promise peace in the absence of chaos. So we can have peace talks but there can only be peace on the battlefield if there's a restraint from war. We can have financial peace in this world only so long as we have more than we need. We can have marital peace but only if we can deal with the external stressors.

God's peace comes whether we're in the storm or not. In fact, it's felt most palpably in the storm. It's the calm assurance that even though we endure the gale-force winds of hardship, our ship will hold together because it is being held in His hands.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Church, imagine what it would be like if every Christian thought the way Paul thought. If every born-again follower of Christ reckoned his life as no value at all, but rather willingly laid it down as a living sacrifice. Imagine if the church was full of Christians eager to achieve the purposes of God in the world by uniting their time, talents, and treasure together and from a posture of slaves belonging to Christ declared, “Here we are, Lord, send us.” Use us. Lead us. Show us. Imagine if those people saw the whole world and everyone in it as their mission-field, and their greatest task as preaching the resurrected Jesus Christ. Imagine if we all truly believed that everything we have is a gift of grace and we oriented all of our lives around the greatest truth of all time: Jesus died, He rose again, and He’s coming back in power.

What might a church be able to accomplish if such were the case? Perhaps the better question is what could it not?

What joy to be called to belong to Jesus Christ!

Blessings, Wildwood.

¹ Bruce, F. F. (2008). *Romans: An introduction and commentary*. Inter-Varsity Press.

² <http://thebriefing.com.au/2009/02/the-obedience-of-faith/> (Last accessed September 12, 2022)

³ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-321/slaves-for-christ> (Last accessed September 12, 2022)