

# Fourth Sunday in Advent – Epistle

## Perfectly Free Slaves

Romans 1:1-7

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## Analysis by Betty Krafft

Romans 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Imperfectly Free, Slave to Sin

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Righteous and Free?*

The first verses of Romans introduce the themes of the letter and Paul himself. Paul, both a Jew and a Roman citizen, addresses this letter to a congregation made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul was Jewish, circumcised on the eighth day

according to the law (Philippians 3:5). He had been a Pharisee, concerned that the law be correctly interpreted and followed. Therefore, he was a “true Jew” for if you obey the Law, your circumcision has value (2:25). And he was a free Roman citizen, slave to no one. In all respects, Paul had everything going for him; he was righteous and free. Or was he?

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Not Quite***

Unfortunately, there’s a second half to Romans 2:25: but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.” And, as Paul points out, even though the Jews have the law written down and they are circumcised, they do not obey the law. “You boast about having God’s law – but do you bring shame on God by breaking his law?” (2:23). Therefore, there is no advantage to being circumcised. But what about his Roman citizenship? Paul points out in Romans 2:12 that because the Gentiles chose to worship gods of their own making, God handed them over to their own lower passions. Therefore, those who worship lesser gods become slaves to sin, Roman citizen or not.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Enslaved***

According to Paul’s evaluation, Jews and Gentiles are in the same boat—slaves to sin (3:9). In fact the law exists “so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (3:19). None of our trying, none of our works, none of our status does us any good when we come face to face with God. God sees us for what we really are, and under his stare nothing that we bring to the bargaining table survives. We slaves to sin are condemned along with our masters.

## **PROGNOSIS: Perfectly Free, Slave to All**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *The Perfect One Who Frees***

There is good news, however. Jesus Christ, the Jewish Son of David (v. 3) is also God’s Son (v. 4) Jesus died the death we

deserved, but God raised him from death. God puts humans right with himself in a totally unexpected way—not through our works, but through God’s mighty act in Christ. “But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (3:21-22). Now we are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves of Christ Jesus (v. 1).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *The Free Ones Owned by Christ***

With Jesus as his new master, Paul received a new status as one “set apart by God” (v. 1). He also received a new vocation, not as an interpreter of the law, but as an apostle called to preach the good news so that others might believe. And this new status and new vocation is not Paul’s alone, but belongs to all believers: “all God’s beloved in Rome” (v. 7) and us as well. No longer is there a division between the circumcised Jews and the uncircumcised Gentiles. Rather, all are those “God loves and has called to be his own people” (v. 7).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Free To Be Slaves***

Now we are truly righteous and free, recipients of grace and peace. No longer concerned with works and status, we are free to fulfill our vocation, to spread the good news to all. We are free to live the new, transformed life given to us in Christ. Like Paul and the Romans, we are “chosen by God,” “apostles,” “Gods beloved.” In our slavery to Christ (the right Master) we become truly free.