

# Up Close and Personal

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now we're going to spend a little while this morning looking at our study which we've began last Sunday morning and is going to take us we're only going to do the first five chapters of Romans but that's going to take us up to the summer so we're looking at in some detail okay and last week we looked at the introductory section of Romans chapter 1 which is on page 9 3 9 of your pew Bibles if you don't have a Bible we didn't get one when you were coming in or if you want to look at a Bible then there's some at the back and you can put your hand up and any of the ushers will take it to you but we're going to read from this time from Romans chapter 1 and we read to chapters to verse 6 last week by way of introduction and now we're going to read from verse 7 to the end of that next section which is verse 15 which is again an introduction to this letter that Paul writes to the church in Rome 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 first I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world for God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you for I long to see you 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 both yours and mine I do not want you to be unaware brothers that I have often intended to come to you but thus far have been prevented in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians both to the wise and the foolish so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome okay so we're gonna look at this for a while this morning and then we'll celebrate the Lord's Supper together and it's really an introductory sermon again before we kind of plunge into the whole of this letter that Paul has written to the church which is inspired by God which has remained part of the Bible and is inspired for us to learn from and what we have here and the elders and the deacons here and the leaders will gulp when they read this section and I do because it's a great example of biblical and Christian leadership and it's a challenge to us and I'm gonna say a few things to us as elders and preach to myself today it challenges us about what is true of us as Christians and also what's true of us as Christians together in the church and what we should be becoming by way of understanding who we are and remember that this this this letter is written to ordinary people please bear that in mind this is not a theological treatise for the academy on its own or any specific group rather it is for a church which included all kinds of people from all different walks of life who left the reading of this letter to them and went to their everyday jobs please remember that they had day jobs this wasn't for professional Christians if there was ever such a thing this is for people in their day-to-day lives because what Paul is or God is trying to get across to us is what we are in Christ what we are as Christians changes us to the very core of our being elders deacons people in the church whoever we are because this book is about the doctrine of salvation and it's saying how important salvation is and what it does in our lives so before revealing theology before beginning to teach about this doctrine of salvation what salvation is Paul reveals himself okay before he starts revealing theology he reveals himself and that's a great challenge to you and to me I think in our Christian lives so I asked the question of you this morning are you a closed book are you a closed book spiritually do people know the real you the person who is kind of peeled back under the layers that the real individual that you are do people know you elders and deacons do people know who you are do you give of yourself and do you expose your inner heart and your life and who you are your very core being it's not enough to use your culture or your personality as a reason for remaining private and unknown to anyone in the Christian community there's this great reality that the Christian is someone who is at many levels I know no it's at different levels because we're all different

personalities but with an open book what we say is what we are okay and Paul as he reveals himself in this passage he also reveals who the church is who we are as a church the family of God because he's just naturally just drip feeding information about what a gospel community looks like and that it's core to our being not peripheral I think it shakes us to our very core because graced by its nature it shuns an isolationism and an individualizing of our faith alone not faith alone but individualism alone there's there's a there's a community aspect that is important and we're gonna sit the Lord we're gonna sit at a table but we're gonna participate in the Lord's Supper together leaders and people under Christ and this passage helps us to understand a little bit more about who we are and why unity together as we celebrate the Lord's Supper is very important so I'm only gonna look I'm gonna look at two areas this morning briefly and I hope it's okay to do so the first is leadership and the second is lady so we're gonna look at what Paul says in terms of being an example of leaders and what that means in terms of relationship with our people and also just as people what it means to belong to the church and be Christians so leadership firstly and Paul is a great example of Christian leaders now you will have received something in the email this week about new elders so please remember as we think about electing new elders new leaders in the church and please pray for them and please consider what we're saying today and examining about ourselves and also about our role because the characteristics of leadership will also apply to all of us to a greater or lesser degree so one or two things about Paul is a great example of how to lead in the church and his character in leading in the church and the first I'm only gonna say a couple of things about him in each case the first is he had a boat he had bone marrow faith okay he had bone marrow faith what I mean by that I mean that his faith was a part at the very core of who he was it wasn't peripheral it wasn't professional it wasn't extra it was at the core of who he is in verse 8 he says I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in the world and he goes on to say for God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit or whom I serve in my spirit or in my soul or whom I serve from my heart it could be all of these things that it could be translated in all of these ways and he's basically saying he's a servant of God he's a Christian he's a believer he's a leader from the soul out from his very inner being out from his spiritual bone marrow as it were right out he that's who he was you know and that's what he's saying he's saying this is what you see is what you get is what he's saying he's saying I have I've no identity crisis I I have met with the living Savior and I've known the spiritual rebirth I've been born a new born afresh and in my inner consciousness in my ego in my very self in my very being I am in union with Jesus Christ there's no for me there's no keep out signs he's saying there's no saying you can come thus far Christ and no further Christ is at the very core of who he is is his identity as a child of God he's not a Jekyll and Hyde character he doesn't do one thing on a Saturday night and another thing in a Sunday morning and he doesn't act outwardly as a believer or an apostle and then inwardly he's a raging maniac for sex or for drunkenness or for whatever my idolatry of one means that another he wasn't a hypocrite he was someone who God was his God my God and he served him from his soul out he'd been one by the love of God he'd been changed by the love of God I'm not speaking about romance and a softness here I'm speaking about his life he recognized his need he was a sinner who actually was out to destroy the church and he recognized that he was fighting against the living God and God met with them with that famous Damascus [ 9 : 58 ] Road and his self understanding and his self love was transformed it was dethroned and he understood the gospel so he could say my God and my serve in my spirit from my heart with my soul it was it was it was body and soul to him you know and it wasn't peripheral and it wasn't perfunct it's a great word that isn't it perfunct today he didn't just go through the motions for him I hope nobody's going through the motions in their faith today I can't stand that because it's so it's so destructive of who we are if we're simply going through the motions and we're not really we're not impressing anyone we need that absolute rip roaring honesty in our hearts with who we are what about our hearts who who hold your bone marrow who's got who's got your very heart and soul to whom do you give your life and your allegiance who is it that you're willing to say my God to I serve my God with my heart and soul or are you closed a closed book are you known by people who knows you who knows who you are you a completely different person here to who I am as you go into your working life and who's to whom are you known because Paul was he wasn't flash and he wasn't trying to impress he was simply exposing who he was as a person that is very heart and soul that he belonged to the living God so that's a very important part of his life he had a bone marrow faith and we can learn from that as leaders we need to learn from that we need to learn the

importance of exposing our hearts and our lives and who we serve and all the inadequacies that we have to our people but along with that so the second thing and it can apply to us all of course is bone marrow faith but he also had an outward looking heart yet an outward looking heart and that's the paradox really isn't it of of this passage we're looking at because I've just said that his faith was intensely personal it was right at the heart of his soul of his being that he believed in Christ he served Christ he loved Christ he lived for Christ his identity was in Christ absolutely individual but interestingly interestingly it didn't make him private in his faith it didn't make it simply a personal faith ironically it made him hugely self-forgetful that his life wasn't bound up in his own relationship with Christ and it all matters all about him and Jesus and nobody else mattered wasn't like that for him rather this having this foundation of Christ who he served in his soul gave him a tremendously outward looking heart and was made himself forgetful just like anyone who has the love of Christ in them and in our lives we see others when we are right with God through Jesus Christ we see others not as a threat not as people we need to compete against not as an inconvenience especially in the household of faith can't be bothered with anyone else but we see them as Christ sees them we see them as people who are to be loved who are to be served so what we have with Paul is the greatest example of servant leadership he was someone who was able to express powerfully who he served in his heart and that gave him a great heart for people it gave him a quote what the

Bible calls meekness which is a great word because it's related to the word for controlling a horse you know that a horse that is broken you know used to many young ones will and will know this but when I was young used to watch cowboy films and there was always a horse that was mental and there was always a great hero cowboy that could just get on the back of that horse and break it somehow so it stopped being wild and it became a useful servant horse in technical terms I'm sure there's another way of explaining that but that's what meekness means it means the controlled strength of a horse that is bridled and reigned and can will go where it's it's bidden it's bidden to go and meekness is often in our society associated with weakness but that is not what we have at all in Paul and in Christ we have meekness which is controlled strength channeled love and Paul reveals that in this introduction in the way he speaks about this people he never visited them he never actually been to see them we know that from the letter he does we do know that he knows some of them because he he gives his greetings to some of them at the end of the letter some of them would have traveled and ended up in Rome and he knew them but he didn't know them all but this letter is powerfully filled with his love and compassion for the people he longs to go and meet so he's thankful for them in verse 8 I thank my God for all of you for because your faith is produced in all the world so he recognizes immediately that he has a debt for the family he now belongs to the family of God and he's thankful for them now was he thankful for them because he didn't know them maybe he's gonna be thankful for people you don't know and for churches you've never been to but if he really knew the church he'd probably be just pulling his hair out well no that well there may be an element of truth in that but he was very thankful for the church in Corinth and we know the kind of battles and difficulties and struggles that were in that church it wasn't perfect but he was grateful and in being grateful he was self-forgetful he was able to be thankful for them and give thanks and express that thanks to them now his elders and his deacons and his leaders in the church what is our default position for our people very often for us we're critical very often we're finding fault very often we're thinking more about ourselves and what what what they should be doing and how they should be acting towards us maybe you're worried and leading maybe you're resentful you thought my goodness not again do I have to do they have to do and we can have that attitude and it cannot be one of thankfulness because we've lost sight of the grace that belongs to us by God's gift he was thankful as he looked outwardly he was also prayerful in verse 9 he says for God is my witness who my serve my spirit without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers and goes on to explain what he says and earlier on he he gives a benediction to them in verse 7 he says grace and peace to you from God my father so he was he was prayerful as he looked out and as he served he he can he was concerned this is broader isn't it just in leaders isn't it I hope you're not sitting back there all kind of here are getting a hard time today because it applies to all of us in many ways and we should all be prayerful but particular as leaders praying for grace for ourselves and our people that is to know that we are more sinful than we ever believed and yet more loved than we ever dared hope and praying not just for grace but also for peace what does that mean I think and I'm not going to spend time on this I think the best description of it shelter in the storm it's not a kind of soft gentle life without stress and

hassle and then difficulties it's saying that as Christ's we can know shelter in the storms of life in the battles in the difficulties in the struggles not just praying for everyone to have a great time but it's recognizing the need for that foundation which gives us shelter in the storm and Paul prays without ceasing for those people he prays for their strengthening he prays that they will grow you know and that's an amazing thing I don't know how he did it I don't know how time for anything else because all his letters all as an apostle all his letters say I'm praying for you I'm remembering you in Galatia remembering you in Ephesus and remembering in Rome I'm remembering you I'm remembering Timothy I'm remembering the leaders I'm praying for all of these people you this incredible prayerful ministry and yet he was probably one of the most active leaders that has ever been known to the world the Christian world elders deacons are we praying for our people are we praying kingdom prayers are we sacrificial in our prayer times are we making city groups our people a priority in prayer so thankful humble prayerful briefly also he's humble we recognize that as he expresses his prayer to them and says that he longs to come to them but that he's dependent on God allowing him to do so because he's long to be with him in the past and hasn't been able to come he wants to strengthen them and impart a spiritual gift and to be mutually encouraged isn't it great he's really humble because he's saying look he's not demanding of God he recognizes that up till now he's not been able to get to them and he sees God has had other purposes for him up to this point and ironically his prayer is answered he does get to them but he gets to them in chains he gets to them with Roman guards because he has to go and meet Caesar not how he expected I don't suppose that prayer to be answered he is both strong because he sees that he is something to offer them he is gift spiritual teaching and learning and encouragement but he's also needy because he needs to be mutually encouraged by them great great great leadership so he goes to the Corinthian church and he says I come in weakness and fear and in much trembling so there's a vulnerability in his strength and a vulnerability that matches his humility that we need to stop giving the impression of spiritual invincibility we need to stop thinking that we've got all the answers or stop giving the impression that we have all the answers this is a dual where it's a corporate sense of mutual encouragement between leaders and people and you need to encourage your leaders as well as us encouraging you and being encouraged it's a kind of backward and forward thing together so let's stop pretending we're invincible and let's stop pretending that we don't need one another as Christians and then lastly we see about him and then I'll speak briefly about the loyalty his kingdom centered he's he recognizes that they have a calling they have a calling under Christ I'll say a little bit more about that again that there is a harvest that he's eager to preach the gospel that he's obligated to them all and he sees himself as part of the kingdom answer he's longing to be used in God's kingdom and his service so that's Paul okay briefly and finally we'll look at the laity what he says here really and explains about the Christian church of which we're a part as well I think sometimes maybe you want a how-to isn't it we all want a how-to we want to know the steps have been a better Christian what what can I get practically that will help me tomorrow when I go out of here and what we find often is that the Bible isn't like that it's it's not a it's not primarily a moral guidebook while it is that it's primarily is deeper than that it's more foundation it's not a how-to seven steps to eight things you should do nine things you should avoid eleven things you should practice it's not it's it's not a self-help book it's a book that introduces you to the living God and that's what Paul prioritizes here in the doctrine of salvation the first eleven chapters then he speaks about how you go and live your life and so I hope that you find the truth that you get through the word and through preaching it's something that you take as these people to enter their day-to-day living so that people a couple of things here very briefly first is they were saints okay they were saints grace and peace to you to called to be saints in verse seven he says okay these were ordinary people they were absolutely ordinary people he knew some of them and they were going about their everyday lives but they were saints so you could you could you could re translate this if you want to bring up and today I say to all those in Edinburgh and St. Columba's who are loved by God and called to be saints because it's the same truth for ourselves called to be saints could maybe it's not the best maybe not the best translation it could be you could it could be who are loved by God or beloved of God called comma saints it's not called sometime in the future to be saints or not called you'll be saints when you die or you'll get a sainthood one day but it's called and we're saints it could might be better translated saints by virtue of having been called so everyone who is a Christian is a saint that's what we believe that's what the Bible teaches all of us because being a saint simply means to be set aside set apart to serve and it's used 67 times in the New Testament this word and in all but one of its

instances it's used in the plural so it's the church it's all the saints everyone's a Christian every believer you've been made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ and you're called to be holy to be set apart to serve in the same way that Paul speaks about it's bone marrow stuff again in other words and that's why he wants them to understand the doctrine of salvation in this book because it's so important to understand that we are saints that we are set apart you know it's not Saint [ 25 : 03 ] Derek set apart and everyone else does their own thing now I'm sure Colombo was a gray guy but he's no saint compared with everyone else we're all the same together so you could be Saint Martha and you can be Saint Don and you can be Saint Annie and you can be Saint Neil we're all saints here together because we're all set apart we're all bought with a price we're all called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ so all the saints and that's very important beloved he says are loved by God now let's grasp that that God's love for you as a Christian it precedes it accompanies and it follows after your love for him you're engulfed in it before you were born as elect children your love by God is a purpose and a calling and a work for you to do how many was strong I think a lot of us struggle with that particular truth in Christ your loved you've always been loved you always will be loved how hard is it to understand that that circumstances will not make a difference to his commitment to you as a believer that he loves you and he continues to love you how much does it change the way we act when we know we're loved but accepted with adopted how much does it change our self-worth our security our stability our attitude to others when we know we're loved I got a book for Christmas called humans of New York I probably told you that already I don't read very much but when I read I enjoy them and this was a great book it's a book that is written by a guy who has gone out and interviewed lots of people in the streets of New York and a lot of them in their lives of it all kinds of difficulty and hardship many of them are dysfunctional in where they've arrived and 99% of them say well immediately almost in the first or second set sentence of their interview say that their parents didn't love them that they were rejected that they were thrown out or that they were abused or battered or whatever it happens to be because so much of our lives can be molded by that sense of not being loved as a child not belonging not being cared for and however that can manifest itself in our lives in Christ it can be redeemed and renewed and we can know that we are loved in this remarkable way so we're saints and then lastly we see that we're saints together we're saints together Paul makes that clear when he speaks to the church twice he says to all he says to all in

Rome that is all in the church and then he goes on again to say it all of you first of all I thank my God for all of you not just for the leaders not just for the special few I thank my God for all of you and the letter is to all of them and then in verse 14 he goes on to say his obligation is to Greeks to barbarians to the wise and to the foolish he doesn't he doesn't differentiate that there's this great saints and saints together that he recognizes as the truth of the gospel that he's been given by God and that's a great challenge to us in our Christian life unity in diversity so challenging for the Christian church for you as a Christian as part of this church to recognize unity and diversity and there's a lot of now I'm going to be controversial here because there's a lot of missional studies missiology that examines and looks at churches and looks at how churches grow and and how things develop and many of them say that generally churches grow and and plants will grow church plants will grow along socioeconomic lines so that mainly they will grow because you know you speak to your friends about the gospel and your friends are in the same socioeconomic group as you and so the law will grow that way so that since he's primarily you know we're an educated middle-class professional sometimes highland kind of flavored church and that's basically what we are and if you go to Nidra it's different it's a working-class scheme community church that that sees people coming to faith from that community and it's this homogenous at that level we're homogenous at our level now okay I'm being radical maybe it's true of course it's true and to a degree it's to be expected because you're gonna reach out to those who are closest to you aren't okay be what you work with the people your neighbors with and and that's that's absolutely normal however I think at another level it's profoundly disturbing to only accept that because true grace isn't selective like that and it's not just for my friends and for my social circle and oh they'll be great to be converted because I like them anyway and they're the people that I got on with the gospel works against natural snobbery and inverted snobbery because it can work both ways and we don't believe in reaching out only to the elite of society with the gospel because they're the ones that will affect the rest of society in some kind of drip down spiritual economics we don't believe that because that's that is not how God works gospel communities and these churches changed the

world because they broke down the divisions and there was Greeks and barbarians there was wise and foolish all together sitting on the eldership there was there was there was people who swept the streets and there was people who did the economics for the society who were leaders together in the church families of educated uneducated rich and poor together and it confounded the world and it changed the world of their day they were reputed for their faith their faith in Jesus Christ which brought them together and which brought them together in a Christ motivated love it was big news and that I think is challenging for us that our grace is something we share and live with with whoever happens to be our neighbor the people that we come across so within that we see a paradox a paradox of a strong church that their faith was being proclaimed in all the world but one that sensed its own weakness and the threats the theological threats that it was under that Paul goes on really to address Paul could see that you could see that in their own life in his own life and in theirs he needed strengthening and they needed to come together and they need to learn the doctrine of grace and they needed to forgive and care and love together as a people and he wanted that reputation to continue because their faith is proclaimed in all the world I wonder as

I close what's our reputation as a church what part do you play in enhancing that reputation of the church of Christ in St. Columbus here what do you see you're calling as as part of the church of Jesus Christ here what's your relationship to this body of people as well as your relationship to Jesus Christ do you have one now I want to finish with an encouragement for you okay sometimes the preaching you can be just wagging the finger and I was sorry I didn't mean to wag my finger okay it wasn't the finger of wagging it was the finger of encouragement kind of okay but I want to finish with a real encouragement for you because I got a letter this week beautiful letter I've asked for permission from the person who wrote it to read it but the person never got back to me but I'm gonna read it anyway okay because it was really to the whole congregation it wasn't just to us as a family you might guess who it is

I'm not gonna say who it is and one of the words will certainly give away where he comes from okay this past fall okay autumn if he was only educated this past autumn we launched a community group through our church with a vision for providing a meal every week to those who come at the very first meeting I told our group a story about how he came to know the Lord for the first time in an intimate way in a church in Scotland the dinner is both a symbol of the church as the gospel envisions it and a weekly reminder on all those meals you and members of St. Columba's provided to the spiritually and physically hungry to people like me or any number of those street walking souls who might be tempted to keep walking always rather than find peace among a beautiful imperfect community of God's people whatever they're found what you do and the spirit with which you do it is nothing short of a miracle such an acute expression of the love of God that there's part of me worried I'll be blinded if I stay too long among the amazing people of St. Columba's remember that and be encouraged and keep going and serve Jesus Christ from the soul out from the bone marrow of your life out because it transforms some people's lives not as many as we want we want to see this place filled to the rafters but maybe that'll come by God's grace and by God's favor I've gone on longer than I said I would today so we are very shortly going to celebrate the Lord supper which is a great way of concluding our worship here and remember as we celebrate and as we participate that you're a saint as a Christian remember you're set apart because of what he has done for you and meditate on that for the few minutes of quiet that we do have and the eaten bread eat the bread and drink the wine is saints together that's one of the reasons that in the setup that we have now that we take the bread and the wine and we go back to our seats and then we do it together we eat the bread and then we drink the wine together because it's a sign of unity together and consider what place grace plays in your relationship with the church I'm going to give thanks for the bread and the wine and for the Lord supper and we remember the privilege that we have of celebrating that together before I do so I'm going to read that's another this is actually the passage that I was reading for today from the Bible in a year and it's just the in many ways the institution that we are given in Mark's

[ 36 : 18 ] Gospel when they'd sung of him they went out to the Mount of Olives and Jesus said to them you will all fall away for it is written I oh no sorry 14 years 22 it's the section before sorry as they were eating he took bread and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them and said take this is my body and he took a cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them and they all drank of it and he said to them this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many truly I say to you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God so

we're going to pray together and then I'll explain a little bit of what we're going to do Father God we thank you for this day we thank you for your word we thank you for the Lord supper for this visible practical experience of eating and drinking remembering your death your body and blood which you shed and remembering it because you're risen because on this first day of the week we worship a crucified and risen Savior for whom life is gifted to us as we come in forgiveness and faith so may we know your presence in a very powerful way as we celebrate the Lord's supper together in Jesus name amen