

Sermons through

ROMANS

Paul I Recognize, But Who Are You?

Romans 1:1

With Study Questions

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Romans 1:1

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God (Romans 1:1).

Introduction

There might not be a more humorous story in all of Scripture than an account given in the 19th chapter of Acts where some "itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of Jesus over those who had evils spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus who Paul proclaims.'" The evil spirit's response was "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"

After this the "man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (Acts 19:13-16).

I should hesitate to make light of this since this, no doubt, would have been a terrifying event to observe. In fact, Luke records that "fear fell upon" all the residents of Ephesus "and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled" (Acts 19:17).

It is no small thing to speak for God. Those who do so ought to do so with quivering lips.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness (James 3:1).

How much greater judgment on those who might recklessly claim to have the office (not merely of teacher) but of prophet or apostle! For prophet or apostle was not merely one who wrestled with the meaning of God's word (the way we all might), they spoke God's word as if they were an extension of the lips of God itself.

As we set sail on our voyage through Romans the first thing we're greeted with, in the English and Greek, is the name of its author, Paul. Along with his name, we're given a couple of titles.

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle (Romans 1:1a).

Paul

I won't labor the history of Paul and his conversion—matters well known by Sunday school children. Suffice it to say he (as Saul—his Jewish name) was a fierce persecutor of the church, beginning with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) followed by his wreaking “havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:3).

While “still breathing threats and murder against the disciple of the Lord” (Acts 9:1) Saul journeyed toward Damascus where he had an encounter with the Lord (or should we say the Lord had an encounter with him.) Saul, who heretofore would be called Paul (Acts 13:9) was, at his very conversion, given marching orders by Jesus:

But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me' (Acts 26:16-18).

This is the ordination of Paul as an apostle. Unlike the ordination of elders and deacons throughout the course of history, Paul's

ordination was **“not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead”** (Galatians 1:1).

What we will be studying in this letter is perhaps Paul's greatest effort in fulfilling the appointment to open eyes that men might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God...receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus.

What kind of herald would God use for this glorious task? What kind of person would you pick and by what title would you have him present himself? By all accounts Paul was small of stature (the meaning of the name Paul) and physically unimpressive (1 Corinthians 2:3). And his first designation is not “vice regent” or “archduke” but “bondservant”.

Bondservant

Bondservant was a word to describe a slave in a culture where slaves were common. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 7:21 that many slaves had come to faith in Christ. Paul would seize this cultural phenomenon (not necessarily approving it as some mistakenly suppose) as an instructional tool.

Those bondslaves who had come to faith in Christ should view themselves as the Lord's **“freedman.”** And those who were free when called to Christ should recognize they are now a **“bondservant of Christ.”** One of Paul's recurring themes throughout Scripture is that you will be someone's slave (Romans 6:15-23). To the Christian he finishes the above thought, **“You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men”** (1 Corinthians 7:21-23).

There is a certain advantage a culture rife with slavery has over our current western fantasy of autonomy. The bondservant had an idea of who their master was. The prospect of being traded would be accompanied by thoughts of who their new master might be and what effect that might have on their lives.

Today we're surrounded by slaves who don't know who their masters are and live under the fiction that they are not slaves at all. They're like prisoners in a cell, barking epithets at those walking free, not indulging the thought for a moment that they might be on the wrong side of the bars, unaware of their tiny cell.

Like the priest in the Count of Monte Cristo they spend years digging in search of an answer only to find their tunnel has lead to a yet smaller cell. One will be a slave of righteousness in Christ, which leads to eternal life or a slave to sin which leads to death. It is a worthy pursuit for one to discover who their master is and where this master will lead them.

Paul does not shrink back from the title of bondservant. One might say he rejoiced in the role.

As the Christians used it, the term conveys the idea of complete and utter devotion, not the abjectness which was the normal condition of the slave. Paul is affirming that he belongs to Christ without reservation. ¹

It would be the slave who, if given the option to choose to leave, would stay. The master might say to this slave, "I set you free." The wise slave then surveys all other masters, recognizing that it is the necessary condition of a created being to have a master. The wise slave then, by the grace of God, turns and explains, "I'll stay." The world is comprised of a host of harsh taskmasters.

Paul may have seen his role as a bondservant as a sort of succession in a long line of bondservants. God Himself applies the term to Abraham (*Genesis 26:24*) as He did to Moses (*Joshua 1:2*). It is a title given to David as well (*Psalms 18:1*, title). Similar to these Old Testament saints (see also *Amos 3:7*; *Isaiah 20:3*), Paul knew who his master was. He was a bondservant of Jesus Christ; more on that in a moment.

¹ Morris, L. (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans* (36–37). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

Apostle

Distinct from other believers, who should all rejoice as bondslaves under a wise, good, serving and sacrificial Master, Paul was called to be an apostle. Paul almost always uses the word "call" in an effectual way. It was not merely an outward call, as in "many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14) but a call that would assuredly bring about its purpose.

For Paul his call to faith was concurrent to his call as an apostle. Although this happened on the road to Damascus, Paul understood this as something ordained by God from eternity past.

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone (Galatians 1:15, 16).

Yet another testimony to the sovereignty of God over the events of creation!

The word 'apostle' in its basic form simply means "messenger" or "one who is sent" in contrast to "disciple" which means "follower" or "to follow." Apostle would become a unique office, an office not given to all the disciples/followers of Jesus.

And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles (Luke 6:13).

Anyone who deigns to convey the deep, hidden, mysterious and absolute truths of reality ought to have weighty credentials. Rock stars, movie producers and comedians fall short. Even the sheepskins of modern academia haven't a shingle worthy of the devotion of the human soul.

And what of the cleric?

The pastor, priest, reverend, guru, minister, rabbi, imam et al are only value to the extent that they accurately convey the word of God contained in the sixty-six books of Scripture, delivered to humanity first by the prophets, then the apostles—the very foundation of the church (Ephesians 20:20) Christ Jesus himself the cornerstone.

When Paul identifies himself as an apostle, he sets himself apart as one who is delivering the word of God itself (see 2 Peter 3:16). The conditions for this office exclude anyone beyond the age/era of the original twelve. Even Paul found himself defending his own station!

**Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen
Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord
(1 Corinthians 9:1)?**

A prerequisite for this office, among other things, was a personal encounter with the **“Lord Jesus...a witness of the resurrection” (Acts 1:22)**. It was perhaps for this reason people questioned Paul's apostolic authority. Paul explains that Jesus had appeared **“last of all”** to him **“as to one untimely born” (1 Corinthians 15:8)**.

But it wasn't the mere assertion on Paul's part. He also explains to the Corinthians:

**The signs of a true apostle were performed among you
with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty
works (2 Corinthians 12:12).**

The signs which “bore witness to the word” (Acts 14:3) given by Paul were public and numerous. Not the least of which was healing the sick (Acts 28:8) and raising people from the dead (Acts 20:9, 10). Beyond this God was

...doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them (Acts 19:11, 12).

...an event which lead to the "I know Paul but who are you" episode!

I labor this issue because we live in a culture—even a Christian culture—which has lost its foundational sense. I was early on confronted with this when a man in our church (many years ago), when asked what his ministerial desires were, answered: "I want my shadow to heal people." This taken from Acts 5:15 where Peter's apostolic authority was affirmed. And if ever there was a context where a healthy, skeptical/discerning, "Paul I recognize, but who are you?" is appropriate, it is in the matter of "the gospel of God" concerning Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ

Paul was an apostle for the gospel of God and a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Christ means Messiah and Jesus means Savior. As we shall see in the verses ahead, Jesus Christ is the Messiah—the long awaited, anointed One that God had promised would bring deliverance. It is the gospel—the good news.

But we shall see that Romans is more than an extended tract, informing people on steps to salvation. Remember, it is a letter about God. We shall soon discover that the good news is also a proclamation that God has kept His promise. The King has come and men are called to the "obedience of faith." An issue we will take up in our next meeting.

Questions for Study

1. Why should teaching the things of God be approached very cautiously (pages 2, 3)?
2. How was Paul's ordination as an apostle different from the ordination of elders and deacons in today's church (pages 3, 4)?
3. Why do you think God might pick an unimpressive person to be His herald (page 4)?
4. What is a bondsman? Are there people who are not bondsmen? Explain (pages 4, 5)?
5. Why might Paul rejoice in the notion of being a bondsman (page 5)?
6. Discuss the different meanings of the word "call" (page 6)?
7. When was Paul set apart by God (page 6)?
8. What is an apostle? Do they still exist today? Why or why not? Why is this important (pages 6-8)?
9. Who is Jesus Christ? What is the meaning of His Name/Title (page 8)?

