

**Not Ashamed
(Week 1)
Romans 1:1-7
“Allow Me To Introduce Myself”**

Introduction

No one is really certain of just how the church at Rome really began. Oh, the Roman Catholics claim that the church was established by the Apostle Peter, and that he was in fact its first Pope. There is nothing, however, in the actual historical records to substantiate this claim, and while Peter may have indeed visited Rome sometime before the end of his life, he most certainly was not the “first pope” of the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that Paul desperately longed to go to Rome suggests that the fledgling church there had not been started by any of the other apostles. For it was Paul’s standard operating procedure not to try and have any substantial interference with churches that had been founded by other apostles:

“My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, Those who were not told about Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.”

Romans 15:20-21

So you see, it is highly unlikely that Paul would have wanted so desperately to go to Rome had that church been established by any one of the other Apostles. Paul wanted to make sure that the doctrine they had been given was sound, and therefore, that is why every ounce of Christian teaching that he could possibly impart to them can be found in this letter we now know as “*Romans*”. Had the church of Rome been established by any of the recognized apostles, Paul would not have been concerned regarding their doctrine.

Some scholars actually believe that the letter started out as a “letter of recommendation” for a Godly woman named Phoebe, who was being sent as an emissary from the church in Cenchreae (**Romans 16:1-2**). It is quite possible that as he wrote this letter, intended as a mere introduction, he was inspired by The Holy Spirit to record in detail the complete tenets of the Christian faith. Whatever his reason for writing, we are eternally grateful for the book of *Romans*, for in it are the very foundations of our faith in the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. *The New Testament* would be sadly incomplete without this treasure trove of the faith. While the book of *Ephesians* tells us who we are in Christ, *Romans* tells us what we believe in Christ. The book is the very essence of what we, the Church, stand for. To understand its content is to be empowered and unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we look today at Paul’s opening statement in the letter, we actually see the very theme of the book come to light before our very eyes.

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — which He promise beforehand through His prophets in The Holy Scriptures — concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our LORD, Who was descendant of David according to the flesh and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to The Spirit of Holiness by the resurrection of the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the Gentiles, including you who are also called by Jesus Christ.”

Romans 1:1-6

In short, Paul is saying what we all should be saying, if we belong to Jesus:

“I am a **Bond-slave**, called and set apart to **Bring** the good news, that was promised **Beforehand** so that others might **Belong** to Jesus Christ.”

Bond-Slave (Set Apart and Sent To)

Paul begins his letter by describing himself as a “servant” of Christ Jesus. The word that he uses here is “*doulos*”, and it simply means bond-slave. At the time of this writing, there were estimates as high as 60 million slaves throughout the Roman Empire. These men and women were afforded no rights whatsoever and were considered as the mere property of their owners. Paul’s use of this word to describe himself would have been especially appealing, for among the first century church were many of these bond-slaves who had believed in the message of the gospel. One of most beautiful aspects of the gospel message is that it has been designed to reach those that the world has deemed unfit. We must always be reminded that it is the humble and the lowly that are enabled by The Spirit to receive God’s amazing grace. Paul was no exception. He, who had once thought so highly of himself as he persecuted the early church, had himself been brought low by the revelation of Christ on the Damascus road.

His name had been Saul, which means “*desired*”, but after his encounter with Christ, he became Paul, which means “little”. You see, when we are humbled in the presence of a Holy God, we go from what we think we are (desirable) to what we really are (very small). Show me a Christian who is impressed with themselves, and I will show you someone who is deceiving themselves by believing that they have truly been born again. Those who have met Jesus... know better.

When Paul calls himself a slave, he is actually referring to a different kind of slavery that would have been unknown to Roman culture. You see, Hebrew slavery, and Roman slavery were quite different. Paul is referring to what was commonly known in *The Old Testament Law* as a “voluntary slave”. Please allow me to explain. If a Jew owed a debt that he could not repay, then he could be forced into slavery to repay that debt. But after six years of indentured service, the law required that he was to be set free. If, however, the slave had come to love his master and had also come to realize that he was actually much better off while in the service of his master, he then could pledge himself to his master as “a servant for life” (***Deuteronomy 15:16-17***)

These slaves were then taken to the doorpost of the house, and a their ear would be pierced through with an awl, and they became part of that “household” forever. This is actually what happens to the believer, who surrenders his or her will to Christ Jesus as LORD. We give up our rights, because we love our Master and realize that we are so much better off by giving ourselves over to Him than we ever were on our own. This is the very essence of Christianity. So, when Paul calls himself a “bond-slave”, he is in essence saying, “I am small and insignificant. But my Master is everything to me.” If we, the church, would ever truly get a hold of that mind-set, if we were willing to make ourselves nothing in order to serve our Master and King, oh, what we could accomplish in the name of Christ! Sadly, the church is much too full of folks trying to be somebody, rather than concentrating on being nobody. God uses people who are willing to surrender their selfish ambitions to achieve a greater good. Jesus is our perfect example.

“Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when He had come as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death — even to death on a cross.” ***Philippians 2:5-8***

Pretty much says it all, doesn’t it? Do you really want to make a difference? Stop trying to be somebody and make yourself a nobody. Then you will be able to say like Paul:

“From now on, let no one cause me trouble, because I bear on my body the marks (slave piercings) of Jesus.” ***Galatians 6:17***

BRING (The Good News)

Paul tells the Romans that he was not only a slave of Christ, but a slave with a purpose. And what was that purpose? He had been called to be an “apostle” (apostolos in the Greek), meaning one who had been sent as a messenger. And what was his message? The gospel or the “good news” of Jesus Christ.

Paul had a mission, and it was the only thing that he was concerned with. He, as a bond-slave of Christ, had committed himself fully to spreading the message of his Master, and that message was to be of **“good news of great joy that shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10)**. Now, when we hear that quote, we think of the birth of Jesus, but in truth, He was born... to save us from our sins! That is the very essence of the good news. And, as Believers, it should really be all that truly matters to us. We live in a world where people are used and things are loved. When in all honesty, it should be the other way around. We have the greatest message that this world has ever known:

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” **John 3:16**

Paul tells us that not only had he been called as a messenger of this good news, but that he had also been “set apart” for it. The word he uses for *set apart* is actually where we get our word horizon. Paul was saying that he had left everything else behind him, and that Jesus and His gospel was all that lay before him. Think of it this way, when you travel, your destination is on your horizon, and what is in your rearview mirror is what you have left behind. We have been called by Christ Jesus to leave it all behind and have Him as our only horizon. He is all that matters. Can you imagine what the Church would be like, if all we were truly focused on was the mission of Christ?

I have been in the ministry for quite some time now. And I remember back in the day, when churches ran everything by committees. Can I get a witness? I was even at a church once, where we had a committee that oversaw all of the committees! It was always so much fun (sarcastically speaking of course), when we went around asking other folks to serve on such and such committee. One of the responses we often received was, “Well... who else is on the committee?” What these dear and loving saints of God were actually saying was, “If so and so is on that committee, then I won’t serve, because I won’t work with him/her.” If you truly looked at yourself as a “nobody”, then shouldn’t you really be able to work alongside pretty much anybody?

Just imagine for a moment, if we all truly were to empty ourselves and to literally see ourselves as “little”, just mere bond-slaves of Christ. And then imagine, if we all, as these little nobody bond-slaves, left everything else behind; our self esteem, our ambitions, our selfish desires, and all of that other excess baggage. What if we just left all that stuff in the rearview mirror and decided that our entire horizon, as it were, will be filled with nothing but Christ? Just how effective would we become in bringing the good news to all of the world? Our purpose in life is *not* to flaunt our spirituality, so that all the world will know that we are God’s favorite (He doesn’t have any favorites by the way, so if that’s what you are striving for, you are wasting precious time). Our PURPOSE is to go and make DISCIPLES. I’ll bet that we would get really good at it, if it became all we were really passionate about! We know that it was all that mattered to Paul. Jesus was his entire horizon. I suppose that is why thirteen of the books that make up our *New Testament* were written... by Paul! Maybe we should follow his example and live like we have been set apart and called to be the messengers of God sent out to BRING the good news of Jesus Christ! In the end, nothing else really matters, now does it?

(Promised) Beforehand

I just love it when I hear preachers say, “We are a *New Testament* church.” What that usually means is, “We think that *The Old Testament* is filled with nice stories, but it has no relevance in the church today.” WRONG! *The Old Testament* is just as much about Christ as is *The New Testament*. The Prophets, like Isaiah and Zechariah (to name only two), spoke about Jesus at length. Every *Old Testament* sacrifice pointed to the Messiah, Who would come and die for the sins of the world. There are

also over three hundred specific prophesies concerning Christ in *The Old Testament*, and they were ALL fulfilled in the Person of Jesus. Not to mention all the “types and shadows” that point to Him.

The message of the gospel was first told in *Genesis*, Chapter three, when God said to Satan:

“I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike His heel.” **Genesis 3:15**

This is, of course, a reference to Satan’s failed attempts to destroy The Christ, by not only trying to have Him executed at birth (**Matthew 2:16-18**), but also by temptation (**Matthew 4:1-22**). The devil certainly “struck the heel” of The Savior, but he himself was dealt a crushing death blow at Cavalry and the subsequent resurrection. The message of the gospel is interwoven in all of scripture. And the resounding message? Christ is coming, Christ has come, Christ is victorious, and Christ is coming back for His own! No wonder it is called *euangelion* (yoo-ang ghel’-ee-on) in the Greek, meaning “*the good tidings*”.

Paul reminds the church at Rome of Jesus’ heritage “The Son of David”, which speaks of His humanity and kingship. As well as His Origin, “The Son of God”, which speaks to His eternal deity. These truths were confirmed by The Sprit of God at the resurrection:

“— concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our LORD, Who was a descendant of David according to the flesh and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to The Spirit of Holiness by the resurrection from the dead.” **Romans 1:3-4**

For you see, it was the resurrection that proved beyond any shadow of a doubt the Jesus was indeed The Promised One that *The Old Testament* prophets had been talking about. He is the One Who was promised **Beforehand**. We are not simply “a *New Testament* church”, we are in fact The Church of Jesus Christ that was predestined before the world began.

“For He chose us in Him, before the foundation fo the world, to be holy and blameless in love before Him. He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He lavished on us in the Beloved One.” **Ephesians 1:4-6**

(So That Others Might) **Belong**

Paul reminds the Roman church that because they have believed (**vs 5-7**), they too belong to the same family as he. In **verse 7**, he tells them that they have also been “**called as saints**”, which means, like he, they have been set apart for a holy purpose. Notice that he does not say that they are called to “become” saints, but that they **are** saints. For the moment that anyone receives Christ, in that moment they are set apart and sealed by The Spirit as saints of the living God. Are you a saint this morning? The reason that we preach this gospel is that we are set apart as:

Bond-slaves of Christ, **Bringing** the Good News that was promised **Beforehand**, so that others might also **Belong** to Him.”

Paul’s life was about bringing others into the Church of Jesus Christ. This is the highest honor for us all, to bring glory to His Name! I am not asking you this morning if you simply believe in Him, I am asking if you belong to Him. Are you His bond-slave. For this is what it truly means to be born again, to make ourselves small in the vast horizon of His greatness, so that others may see and hear of the marvelous grace of Jesus!

And let all of God’s bond-slaves say... TRUTH!