

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS & MAN’S REBELLION – Chapters 1-3

LESSON 2 – UPFRONT INFORMATION

The Rome of Paul’s day was a mixture of people from every class, condition and country. Hundreds of thousands of the two million or so residents were slaves. These slaves were owned by citizens who were themselves ruled by an often corrupt class of military and political leaders.

At the time of Paul’s letter to the Romans, the emperor Nero was about twenty-five years old. Nero became one of the cruelest persecutors of the early church...even killing his own mother.

This was the environment of wickedness to which the Gospel was introduced. Paul’s words of salvation must be a stark contrast to the norm found in Rome. In the first seven verses of chapter 1, Paul lays a foundation for all that is about to follow in his letter to the Romans.

What Paul Says About His Apostleship

Since he had never been to Rome, Paul had to establish his credibility. In the first verse he uses three words to describe his relationship with God and to the ministry.

He Was a Servant

It has been estimated that at the time of Paul’s letter to the Romans, there were approximately six hundred thousand slaves in Rome. When Paul used the term “servant” describing himself, he knew that he would be understood. The term servant implied obedience and allegiance to one’s master...Jesus in Paul’s case.

This word servant used by Paul to identify himself was also used to identify many of the great men of God in the Old Testament. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah and the other prophets were all called servants of God. As a servant, Paul was in good company.

He Was a Sent One

Paul’s next word of description is “apostle.” He makes it clear that he did not initiate his apostleship but that it came from God. God called the man who had been one of His greatest enemies and equipped him to be one of His greatest messengers.

He Was Set Apart

Paul was set apart for the Gospel at three different times...before (Galatians 1:15), at the time of (Acts 9:15) and after (Acts 13:2) his conversion.

Donald Grey Barnhouse said this about the modern day idea of separation...

“At time people ask me if a Christian must be separated from the world. I always answer that it is not necessary to look at it from that point of view. If we are separated unto Christ, we are automatically separated from all that is opposed to Christ.”

What Paul Says About His Assignment

The Gospel that Paul was set apart to preach was more than a philosophy. It was not a religious formula for people to follow or an impersonal set of facts. The Gospel was a Person! Paul says three things about the Person of the Gospel...Jesus.

Jesus Is the Promised One

Paul says in verse 2 that God promised the Gospel “beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” The Gospel was not an afterthought that God provided after we fell into sin. The Gospel is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The Old Testament message points to Jesus.

Jesus Is the Perfect One

Paul says in verse 3 that Jesus was of the house of David. If He had not been from the lineage of David, He could not have been the Messiah. Then in verse 4, Paul introduces us to the other side of Jesus’ nature...His deity.

Anything less than a full recognition of Christ’s deity and humanity removes Him from the picture as redeemer. If Jesus was not wholly God and wholly man, there is no Gospel.

Jesus Is the Powerful One

Jesus was appointed “Son of God in power” and this power was demonstrated at the Resurrection. His power is demonstrated in two ways...

- Power over sin’s pull

“He has absolute victory from the moment He first drew breath in that Bethlehem barn until the moment He closed His eyes in death on the cross of Calvary. He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness.” – John Phillips

- Power over sin’s penalty

When Jesus came out of the tomb alive, He destroyed death’s power. He took the stinger out of death and rendered it inoperative in the believer’s life. Jesus said in John 10:18, “I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”

What Paul Says About His Authority

Paul moves from the content of the Gospel to the mission of the Gospel. In verse 5 he says that through Jesus he received grace and apostleship. There are two statements about Paul in the New Testament that can appear contradictory. First, he was the “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15) and second, he was a “chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15-16). Grace is that place where God’s unconditional love meets our human unworthiness.

Paul had nothing that would reconcile him with God. God poured out apostleship by grace upon him. Any authority he had as an apostle had come by grace from God and was validated by Paul’s obedience.

What Paul Says About His Audience

Their Calling...Called of Jesus

In the New Testament epistles, only those who have heard and obeyed the call of Jesus are referred to by this expression. This is reference to those who are saved.

Their Connection...Beloved of God

No other word in the New Testament expresses more kindness than the word beloved. This word is reserved for those who are in Christ. Paul uses it at least five times in Romans to refer to his friends who were fellow believers.

Their Commission...Called Saints

Verse 7 says that we are called "saints." We are not called because we are saints...we are saints because we are called. The word saint never refers to a spiritual condition but always to a spiritual position.

You are not a saint because of your exemplary behavior but because of God's love and call. We may not always act saintly but regardless we are saints in God's sight.

Their Charter...Grace Followed by Peace

Paul's greeting to the church at Rome consisted of the cause (grace) and effect (peace) of life in Christ. Even in the worldly environment of Rome the believer's charter was to stand in the grace and peace of God.

In these initial seven verses of Romans, Paul touches upon many of the themes of the rest of his letter. If we look closely, we can see them and the lessons they teach.

What We Learn From The Apostle Paul

Be Caught Up in the Person of Christ

In these first few verses, Paul demonstrates that his heart has been captured by Jesus. He mentions Him by name five times in these first seven verses.

Be Committed to God's People

Paul's words to describe believers shows that the Gospel is about God's commitment to His people...bondslaves, called, beloved and saints.

Be Concerned About Holiness

Paul talks about the Holy Scriptures, the spirit of holiness and the saints or holy ones of God. Paul knows that holiness is fundamental to the Christian life.

Be Compelled by the Great Commission

Paul can't go many verses without mentioning that the Gospel is for everyone. As a sent one, he knows the beauty of the Gospel.

Be Captivated by God's Grace

Paul receives grace in verse 5, and by verse 7 he is already sharing it with others. Are we doing the same?