

Romans 1

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

Servant

Paul begins his letter with a signature. We don't do that today unless we are writing a business letter or using letterhead. But when you are an apostle and you want people to listen to your letter it is a good way to start thing off with your signature.

Paul gives his title and a description of who he is; based not on his many achievements but based on his identity as a Christ follower. Look at the first word he uses to describe his role as a Christ follower. He uses the word servant first. First and foremost Paul is a servant of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated servant is Doulos, which refers to a slave. A slave is one who is subject to the will and wholly at the disposal of his master. The New Testament teaches that a true leader is first a servant.

Our first identity is as a servant or slave belonging to Jesus Christ. In our humanistic world we always hear about believing in ourselves and trusting ourselves and doing what we really want to do. The problem is that we were not created to live for ourselves.

WHOSE LAWN MOWER IS IT?

That would be like your lawn mower trying to decide what grass to cut. You bought this lawn mower and you get to choose the time and path to cut the grass. The lawn mower can't decide it will cut only the neighbor's grass and not yours. The lawn mower does not belong to itself. It is in control of the owner. Well, unless you have a stubborn one that is just plain busted and won't do anything. This attitude of belonging to ourselves' infiltrates many churches as well.

After belonging to Christ our next point of identity is to belong to one another looking out the interests of other people.

Called

Do you remember the day God called you to salvation? Do you remember the power of the Holy Spirit working on your conscience in such a way that you could no longer deny Him? Let's talk about Paul's calling as an apostle. His calling occurred when he saw the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). His calling came directly from "Jesus Christ and God the Father." His calling was an assignment. According to Galatians 1:16 he was responsible to teach the good news of salvation to the gentiles.

Paul is one of very few Christians who could speak of being literally called by God. (Kletos is the Greek for called). Paul heard the literal voice of Jesus calling to him on the road to Damascus.

Set Apart

Paul uses the term "set apart". Let's look at this a little bit closer. In Galatians 1, Paul speaks to his being set apart, not on the road to Damascus, but from birth.

Galatians 1

¹⁵But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles

Paul was not set apart on the road to Damascus. God set apart Paul from birth. God's plan was revealed to Paul on the road to Damascus, but God has a plan for us from birth. What was God's plan from the birth of Paul? First, to be called by his grace and second to preach Jesus Christ among the gentiles.

Let's hone in on verse 16. Why does God call us to salvation? Why did God call Paul to a specific mission to the gentiles? It was to reveal his Son in Paul. That is what this is all about; to reveal the Son through us and in us. God has set each of us apart from birth to a specific job and a specific place to live and with specific friends to reveal the Son through us. From the day you were born until the day you and I die the plan of God is to reveal the Son of God through us.

²the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures

GOSPEL PROMISED IN OLD TESTAMENT

Did you know that the gospel of salvation is clearly revealed in the Old Testament? Let's take a peek. This is helpful information to witness to those who only believe in the Old Testament.

Genesis 12:3	The messiah would come from Abraham's line, and through the Messiah "all peoples on earth will be blessed."
Psalms 16:10	The promise of the resurrection given to David: the Messiah (the Holy One) would be resurrected.
Psalms 40:6-10	The messiah would "desire to do your will, O my God," and would accomplish that will so completely as to die on the cross.
Psalms 118:22	The Messiah would be rejected by his own people, but would become the "capstone," the most important part of the church.

Isaiah 11:1	The Messiah would be the “Branch” that will “bear fruit” in the form of believers. “The Spirit of the Lord will be on him.”
Isaiah 49:5-6	The Messiah would gather Israel and be a light for the Gentiles.
Zechariah 9:9-11	The Messiah would come to his people “riding on a donkey,” which he did in his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.
Zechariah 12:10	The Messiah would “be pierced” on the cross, and many would mourn his death.
Malachi 4:1-5	The Messiah’s arrival will be heralded by one like “the prophet Elijah,” who was to be John the Baptist.

The Good News was promised by God and was not a new religion made up by Paul or anyone else. It was rooted in God’s promises in the Old Testament to his people through his prophets. The gospel that Paul preached was in perfect harmony with God’s earlier words in the Scriptures to his people, Israel.

Paul reminded the Roman Christians that he was not casting off Moses and the law in order to embrace Christ. Rather, the prophets in the Old Testament announced the coming fulfillment of God’s grace in Christ.

MARTIN LUTHER QUOTE

Martin Luther said; *“Here the door is thrown open wide for understanding of the Holy Scriptures, that is, that everything must be understood in relation to Christ, especially in the case of prophecy.”*

If you are reading a prophecy you have to ask the question; “how does this relate to Jesus Christ?”

³regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verses 3 and 4 are either part of an early hymn sung by the church or part of a confession of faith. In Greek the verses form a sort of parallelism that is common to hymns or confessionals.

Let’s talk about this for a few moments. Verse 3 says; “Regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David...” Why is it important and part of a confession of faith that Jesus Christ was a descendant of David? Because in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, God prophesied that David, a man after God’s own heart was promised a kingdom without end. In the birth of Jesus Christ, the eternal King of kings, that promise was fulfilled.

Let’s look at the phrase; “and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead...” The word “declared” (horizo) in the Greek is better translated “appointed”. This verse means that Jesus was moving into a new phase of activity. He became the Son of God in power.

In the resurrection Jesus Christ worked it out to give out power to his church, and power over death to those who believe in Him for salvation. So these two verses show the phases of the ministry of Jesus Christ. He moved himself from a ministry of humility and lowliness to one characterized by power. So these two passages do not speak about the phases of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

⁵Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

How did Paul receive grace and apostleship? Through him. Why did Paul receive grace and why do we receive grace? It is for his namesake. Jesus Christ saves us so that we will reflect the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6). We are not saved primarily because Jesus felt like being nice to us. We are saved to rise up a banner of glory for His namesake. Our salvation and our Christian life are not about us. It is about Jesus Christ and His glory coming through us. All we do is done by Him, for Him, through Him and to Him. Getting saved and calling people to salvation is all about reflecting the glory of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE CONCERT AND THE BRAGGARD

I remember talking with a friend of mine about a concert that he attended. He talked about trading tickets with someone and getting into the front row. Then he talked about the fight that broke out. And then he talked about the lighters and the tee shirts and the stuff that the attendees were doing.

After listening to him brag for quite a while I asked Him about the performers. He said he was too drunk and things were too crazy to focus on the band.

Here is the point. Without a band there is no concert. Without the main actors the arena would be closed. Many times we talk about our activity in the church. And we talk about what other people are doing and what we did and what other people should do that it distracts us from the main actor, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is as though we are too drunk on human activity to focus on the main actor.

Without Jesus there is no church. Without Jesus there are no spiritual gifts. Without Jesus there is no salvation. Without Jesus there is no grass, or trees or sky or air or jobs to do or money to spend or relatives to care about. The concert of life is about watching what Jesus does and applauding Him and pointing to Him and lifting up His name. Everything else is a distraction and is not the main point of life.

⁶And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is that word “called” again. We see the calling of Paul and the apostles and Christian leaders and we are amazed that God could call people like this into his service. But we cannot forget that we also who are Christ followers are called. In verse 6 Paul says; “And you also are among those who are called (Kletoi) to belong to Jesus Christ.” And in verse 7 Paul says that we are called (Kletois) to be saints.” We will deal with this in depth in Romans 8.

The mission of Paul was to be not only faithful, but also fruitful as a servant of His master. But we must remember that we too are called into the master’s service. We are called to belong to Him. And we are called not to venerate other people like Paul as saints, but to live like we too have a calling on our life. If you believe in Jesus Christ for salvation you were born again into a new family and a high calling.

Heaven is not the calling; it is the reward and the gift. The calling is to live today as a servant of our great God. Every moment of our lives belong to Him. Not us.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Did you know that your first identity as a Christian is to be a servant of God and people? How does that play out in your life right now?
2. Have you ever acted like the lawn mower that wanted to chart it's own course? How does that illustration relate to the command to keep in step with the Holy Spirit?
3. Did you realize that Jesus Christ is the main actor in the universe? Without him there could be no activity of any kind. What does that do to your perspective of life and the meaning of your life?
4. Did you realize that you could use the Old Testament prophecies to explain the gospel message? What does it do for your faith knowing that the entire bible, from front to back cover points to Jesus Christ?