

## **THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part two**

Sunday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2072

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### **WHAT DOES THE GOSPEL DO WHEN IT'S RECEIVED IN FAITH? (Romans 1:1-15)**

- 1) **THE WRITER (1) "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God..."**

Paul describes himself with three very important terms: "**servant**", "**called**," and "**set apart**". All of these words help Paul establish his credentials to a group of people he has probably never met. In a world of false teachers Paul wanted to establish his direct commissioning by Jesus Christ.

This common opening in Paul's epistles wasn't common in his understanding. The contemporary church leans lopsidedly toward the forgiveness received in the gospel leaving the expression of the life unmolested. Paul, while grateful for forgiveness, predominantly saw himself, not **cleansed** by the gospel, but **claimed** by it. He was as free to live life on his own terms as is a slave. When Christ saved Paul He separated him from everything else.

Now as then, there is no other kind of gospel offered. True, there are no longer apostles called as Paul was called to be an apostle. But this same Paul declared clearly we were not owners of ourselves and we were not possessors of what we had - **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** - "**Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.**"

We are given only two chances to prove we understand this truth - the use of our **time** and the stewardship of our **money**.

- 2) **PARENTHESIS ON THE GOSPEL (2-6) - "...which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, [3] concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh [4] and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, [5] through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, [6] including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ..."**

As soon as Paul mentions "**gospel**" in verse one, he can't help but expand on **four facts** about it:

- a) ***He says the events of the gospel were predicted*** - 2 - "**...which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...**" This was not some last minute idea in the mind of God. It was "**promised beforehand**" by the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

This means we know how to read out Old Testaments. We know those sacrifices weren't a mistake, which is now the common bandwagon many writers are jumping on. We know they were designed to illustrate and **explain** what Christ's death on the cross was all about.

- b) ***He says Jesus Christ became fully human*** - 3 - "**...concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh...**" Paul says Jesus was "**descended from David according to the flesh.**" Jesus' flesh was like yours and mine. He was really, fully one of us. The Christian message isn't a myth or a philosophy. It isn't a value system. It can be verified in solid history.

- c) ***He says Jesus Christ is fully divine - 4 - "...and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...."***

Jesus wasn't "a" son of God as many cults believe we all will one day become. Paul says He was "the" Son of God. He wasn't growing in divinity. He was fully and completely God. He was and is as much God as the Father. The proof of this is His "**resurrection from the dead**".

- d) ***Paul says Jesus Christ is the founder and Lord of the church - 5-6 - "...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,[6] including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ...."***

The Apostles received their message and mission from Christ. They didn't make it up or receive it from angelic visitation. Christ is the one to whom all must account. This accountability is crucial when one considers the way Paul here defines faith, not in *intellectual* terms, but as "**the obedience of faith**." The only Biblically sustainable definition of faith is devotion that aligns itself daily to divine precept and practice.

Obviously, Paul had this brief overview of God's Gospel on the tip of his tongue at all times. Have you formalized it that clearly in your own mind? Could you share it that neatly in a few minutes?

- 3) **PAUL'S READERS ARE IDENTIFIED (7) - "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."**

Because the gospel is defined as a work God has done rather than a system of thought mankind adopts Paul quickly headlines the  **blessings**  received and the  **source**  from which those blessings come. The  **blessings**  received are " **grace and peace** ." And the  **source**  from Whom those blessings come is " **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** ."

Notice that God's  **peace**  always follows His  **pardon** . The peace described must be had on God's terms because Paul isn't writing about  **inner**  serenity or  **peace of mind** . He is speaking of the objective  **making**  of peace in which the broken relationship with God is propitiated - where God's  **wrath**  against everything vile and sinful is satisfied and our eternal future is secured.

**Saving**  grace, not to be confused with  **common**  grace - health, life, food, family, etc. -  **saving**  grace, as we shall see more fully as our studies proceed, can only be had through God the Son, Jesus Christ. Man's religious attempts, however sincere, can never achieve peace with God.

- 4) **PAUL'S THREE-FOLD ATTITUDE TO THE ROMANS -(8-13) - "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. [9] For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you [10] always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. [11] For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— [12] that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. [13] I want you to know, 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."**

Remember, Paul had never physically met these Roman believers. But a Christ-stamped character shines through his attitude. Briefly, it can be summed up in three headings:

- (a) **Thankfulness - 8** - “**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.**” Paul was thankful for their steadfastness in Christ Jesus. They were **markers** of God’s grace. They made Jesus Christ look magnificent above all. And Paul loved them for that.
- (b) **Prayerfulness - 9-10** - “**For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you [10] always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.**” Paul must have had quite a prayer list. Remember that these were people whom he had never met. No wonder God blessed his ministry.
- (c) **Longing for fellowship - 11-13** - “**For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— [12] that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. [13] I want you to know, 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.**”

Here we see Paul’s concept of **fellowship**. It rises high above a mere **get-together**. Paul’s emphasis really isn’t **social** in that sense, but a **sharing of spiritual life**. He couldn’t live long without it. His dominant concept is Christians are better **together** than **apart**. And this was owing to more than just physical companionship, as important as that obviously is. The full experience and expression of the life of Christ depended on Christians being together.

**Are you known for your faith?** Apparently these Roman Christians were (see **verse 8**). How about your prayers for other Christians? Are you all bound up with just your own needs? Does it bother you when you miss out on fellowship with God’s people? Do you long for this the way Paul did? These are important questions.

- 5) **THE REASONS FOR PAUL’S WRITING - 14-15** - “**I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. [15] So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**”

The philosophy for Paul’s life style is found in two important phrases:

- (a) **“I am under obligation” (14)** - The same Gospel that made him a **saint** made him a **debtor**. Unlike many Christians today, Paul knew he had received more than just **forgiveness** from God through Christ. Both the **upper class Greeks** and the **lower class barbarians** were those to whom Paul owed the gospel.

It’s surprising to read Paul describing his reception of **grace** putting him under **obligation**. We usually think of grace as **freeing** us from obligation. Grace and obligation are opposites as a rule. But perhaps the next point helps clear this up:

- (b) **“I am eager” (15)** - Paul’s life was full of spiritual momentum. He was always on the stretch, ready to move. He would instantly drop his agenda to do God’s bidding (isn’t that what a servant does?). For more on this see **Ephesians 6:15** - “**...and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.**”

When Paul says he was **“eager”** to minister this message of grace he clearly means this new-found obligation was also his greatest **joy**. He **was** obligated. But this obligation was now a **joy** because of the transformation of his ambitions by the grace he had received.

This is much like the way I have an **obligation** to be exclusively devoted to my wife. It **is** an obligation of sorts, to be sure. But because she is the greatest love of my life this devotion is also my greatest delight.

Paul felt he was as ready as he would ever be to reach out to others with the love of Jesus. He refused to procrastinate. The deeper your experience you have had of God's grace, the quicker your feet should be to share it with others.

How deeply do you feel your actual indebtedness to the lost? Does it motivate you in terms of how you use your time? Does it change the way you spend your money? Does it shape your prayer list? Do you feel this indebtedness to the bad and ugly people of this world as well as the good and lovely?

More on this next week.