

Romans (1:1-1:10)

International Man of Ministry

Part 1 - June 6, 2004

PAUL'S GOSPEL

We're beginning a series today on a book of the New Testament considered to be the basic handbook of Christianity. It's the 5th letter written by the Apostle Paul. He may have intended to write a letter, but he ended up writing a theological masterpiece.

- Martin Luther started the Reformation because of this book.

It's said that the impetus for every major Christian movement over the past 2000 years can be directly traced to this book.

It has long been referred to as the gospel according to *Paul*. But, whereas the gospels tell the *story* of Jesus, this book perfectly defines the *message* of Jesus

Any guesses? It's the book of Romans. [This is the oldest known copy (circa A.D. 180)]

Letters in Paul's day averaged 150 words (remember 2nd & 3rd John?), papyrus and vellum were expensive. Cicero wrote a 4,500 word treatise, and everyone thought it was enormous! Paul wrote the Roman believers 7,100 words!

It is by far the most scrutinized, analyzed, and dissected, book of the entire Bible. It is a must for every believer to study.

Q: Here's another quiz; was the Apostle Paul Hebrew, Roman, or Greek?

A: Yes! He was all three.

He was a Hebrew (Jew) by race and religion:

I am a Jew ... Under Gamaliel [guh-MAY-lih-uhl] I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers ... - Acts 22:3 NIV

He was Roman by inherited citizenship:

The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am ... I was born a citizen," Paul replied. - Acts 22:27-28 NIV

He was Greek by culture; born and raised in Tarsus

Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia [suh-LISH-ih-uh], a citizen of no ordinary city." - Acts 21:39 NIV

- This is the main street of the Tarsus Paul grew up in.
- Tarsus had one of the greatest libraries in the world.

Paul was Hebrew, Roman, and Greek! This made him the perfect ambassador to take the gospel all across the divergent Roman Empire (which he did almost single-handedly).

- At this point Paul had never been to Rome (this is the forum)
- Rome was the cultural center of the world.
- The Caesar in power was the depraved Nero.

We're not sure who started the Christian church in Rome, but on the day of Pentecost (when the Apostles spoke and each man understood in his own language) look who was in the crowd:

... how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians [PAHR-thih-uhns], Medes [MEEDS] ... Egypt and the parts of Libya [LIB-ih-uh] near Cyrene [sigh-REE-nee]; [and] visitors from Rome ... - Acts 2:8-10 NIV

- These may be the people who started the Roman church.

When Paul wrote, the NT had not yet circulated in its final written form. This letter may have been the very first piece of Christian literature these Roman believers had ever seen.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and 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. Through 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. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To 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. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. - Romans 1:1-10 NIV

LITTLE SERVANT, SET APART

Paul ... - Romans 1:1 NIV

Paul's given, Hebrew name was *Saul*. He started using the Gentile name "Paul" after his conversion to Christianity. "Paul" comes from the Latin "Paulus" meaning "little". No more big-headed, arrogant, Saul ... just little Paul.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus ... - Romans 1:1 NIV

Many versions use the term: bond-servant. It's a type of slave who so loves his master that he *chooses* a lifetime commitment of service after being offered freedom. Remember, many of Paul's readers were slaves.

Then again, everybody has a master of some kind. Paul changed masters; and Paul knows that if he could, anyone can.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God ... - Romans 1:1 NIV

- Notice, he wasn't set apart *from* something, but *for* something.

When I married Shar I wasn't thinking about all the women I was being separated *from* ... the only thing on my mind was the one I was being separated *for* and joined *to*. Every believer must embrace the gospel or be doomed to a barren spiritual life devoid of joy.

Q: And, what is the "gospel"?

A: The word "gospel" simply means "good news". And now Paul points out two crucial facts about God's gospel:

... the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and 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. - Romans 1:2-4 NIV

- So, the gospel was promised and it is a person.

It was important for Paul to remind them that Christianity was not a new religion; but simply a continuation of Judaism and the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. Paul alludes to the perfect humanity of Christ (descendant of David) and His perfect deity (declared by his resurrection).

The Resurrection didn't make Jesus the Son of God; it simply revealed (declared) who he was and what He accomplished.

- The good news (gospel) can be summed up in one word: Grace
- It also makes an acronym: God's Riches At Christ's Expense

The good news is that we can now have a relationship with God through the work of His Son Jesus Christ.

Through 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. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To 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. - Romans 1:5-7 NIV

What jumps out at me here, is the line: called to be saints.

Q: Are you a saint?

Q: What does Paul mean when he uses this term?

Sainthood is not an attainment; it's a state into which God in grace calls men and women. A saint is not someone who's been *exalted* ... it's someone who *exalts* (Jesus Christ). You become a saint when Jesus Christ becomes your Savior.

- There are only two categories: the *saints* and the *aint's*.

Q: Are you a saint?

A: You are if you've responded to the "call" of God.

We're not called by a still small voice or a bolt of lightening. We're called by the gospel (to believe, receive, and obey).

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. – Romans 1:8 NIV

Rome was the "Las Vegas" of the Mediterranean. It was the original "sin city"; they even had a Caesar's Palace! Believers got excited to hear there were Christians there. Like us hearing about "The Passion" coming out of Hollywood. It's unexpected and exciting.

Q: But it got me thinking: What is being reported about us?

- The church in Rome was known for its faith.

And we'll be known (in our community) for whatever is happening in our lives outside these walls. We are the church. I don't want us to be known for our building, or music, or teachings, or programs. I want people to talk behind our backs and say, "Wow, what faith, what love, what peace, what joy." "They serve the Lord with their whole heart!"

Q: What's being "reported" about you?

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. – Romans 1:9-10 NIV

Paul wanted to go to Rome "by God's will" and he finally went:

- As a prisoner bound in chains (*Acts 27:1*)
- Shipwrecked in a storm at sea on the way (*Acts 27:41*)
- Bitten by a poisonous snake when he made it to shore (*Acts 28:3*)

Q: Do you think Paul thought this was in or out of God's will?

- We're too quick to rule God out when things don't go our way.