

ROMANS SERIES #2

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, September 24, 1995, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

ROMANS 1:1-4

PAUL: A MAN WITH A MASTER, A MISSION & A MESSAGE

It is very important that we understand the doctrine that is set forth in the Book of Romans. Some folks say, “Doctrine is what you give folk when they’re sick”! Well, a sick church today needs “doctoring” and “doctrine.” Doctrine really means teaching, and when we have proper doctrine we can define our faith; we can defend it against its opponents; we can demonstrate it in our own lives; and we can distribute it to the whole world. So, it is of the utmost importance that we have proper doctrine.

Now, did you know that Paul was a Presbyterian preacher? He was! Look at the simple outline of his great sermon to the Romans. It has an introduction and a conclusion, and how many main points? THREE. What more proof do you need? He was a Presbyterian preacher!

Look at his three points:

- The first section of the Book of Romans is the DOCTRINAL section (1:18-8:39). It deals with the problem of sin, and what God has done about it.
- The second section is NATIONAL, and it deals with the nation Israel (9:1-11:36). In this segment Paul explains what God’s plan is for the Jew and how the Church relates to the promises that God made to national Israel.
- The third section is PRACTICAL (12:1-15:13). It deals with practical Christian living, and how we are to surrender to these great truths — how we are to present our bodies to God, how we are to discover and use our spiritual gifts, how we are to treat one another, how we are to live as good citizens, and all of these things.

Today we will examine the first four verses of the first chapter of Romans. “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.”

Now there are three things that impress me about the Apostle Paul that I want to share with you this morning:

1. **Paul had a MASTER.** He calls himself “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.” The word in Greek really means a “slave.” In the Old Testament there was an honorable succession of

individual Israelites, beginning with Moses and Joshua, who called themselves the Lord's "servants" or "slaves." King David wrote in Psalm 116:16, "Oh Lord, truly I am Your servant." So, by calling himself "a servant of Christ Jesus," Paul is seeing himself as another in the great line of prophets of the Lord stretching back to Moses.

You know that in Paul's day slavery was an accepted social practice. Because they purchased slaves, they owned those slaves, and Paul regarded himself as the purchased slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so are you and I! Listen, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? ... You are not your own, you were bought at a price..." (1 Cor. 6:19-20) What was the price that was paid for you? It was the precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's Cross to atone for your sins and mine.

So, when you are born again, it doesn't mean that you are freed from slavery. It simply means that you have changed masters! Jesus says in John 8:44 that before we were saved, we were the bond slaves of sin. But now we are slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But wasn't slavery a bad thing? Well, it all depends who your master is! There is a lovely passage in Exodus 21:1-6. It follows immediately after the chapter which gives us the Ten Commandments. In Israel there was an underclass of poor people, and many of them, in order to survive, were willing to become indentured servants. The agreement was that they would serve their master for six years, but in the seventh year, the slave must be set free. However, it often happened that the slave became a virtual part of the family, and at the end of the six years, he did not wish to leave. Look at verse 5 — "If the servant shall plainly say, 'I love my master... I will not go out free'; then his master shall bring him before the judges. He shall take him to the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life." You see, if a Hebrew had a good master, it changed the whole face of slavery. His every need was met and life was good.

Now that is why the saints have always maintained that to be completely in the will of God, to be in perfect submission to Christ (that is, to be Christ's slave) is perfect freedom. That is why George Matheson could write:

"Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free..."

Now, what does it mean to be a slave of Christ? It simply means that by a deliberate act of personal surrender you say to Christ, "Lord Jesus, for the rest of my life I want to be and to do what You want me to be and to do. I want to be completely obedient to Your will for my life. I want nothing of sin or self to act as a dark cloud shutting me out from perfect fellowship with You." That's what it means to make Jesus Christ your Lord and Master. The awl has been driven through your ear, and you are His forever.

And then the great thing is that when you make the complete surrender of your will to Him, you can do what you want because what you want is what He wants, and what He wants is what you want! St. Augustine used to say, "Love God and do what you please"; the point of his remark being that if you truly love God, then what pleases you will please Him — you will be

doing what He wants you to do.

And so, if you would be a slave of Christ, you must say, as Paul said, “Lord, what will You have me to do?” (Acts 9:6) “Lord” — He’s the Owner; He is now in complete control of your life. Not “Lord, what will You have others to do?”; or, “What will others have me to do?”; but, “Lord, what will You have me to do?”

Let me say to the young people this morning — before you ever even consider what your life work is to be, make that complete, unconditional surrender of yourself to Christ — then you will have the assurance that since you are in unbroken fellowship with Him, He will show you very clearly what He wants you to do with your life.

So, Paul had a Master. But not only did he have a Master:

2. He had a MISSION. He was “called to be an apostle.” The word “apostle” simply means “one who has been sent on a mission.” Paul was not only “saved”; he was “sent.” Notice that Paul’s twofold designation as “slave” and “apostle” is particularly striking when these two words are contrasted with one another. First, “slave” is a title of great humility, and it expressed Paul’s sense of personal insignificance, without rights of his own, having been; purchased to belong to Christ. “Apostle,” on the other hand, was a title of great authority; it expressed his sense of official privilege and dignity by reason of his appointment by Christ. And we, as born-again believers, should always display the humility of the servant, while at the same time exercising the spiritual authority that is our birthright as those who have been called to serve the King of Kings.

Now Paul didn’t decide that he wanted to be an apostle. He was “called” to be an apostle. You see, God has a plan for every person’s life. God has a plan for your life: He has a plan for my life. Every one of us has been “called.” Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last.” (John 15:16)

Did you know that you are just as “called” as I am? You may not be called to preach, but you’re called to some specific form of ministry within the Body of Christ; and success is finding and doing the will of God. It’s not being healthy, wealthy or famous; it’s not even being happy. Life’s greatest discovery is the will of God, and life’s greatest achievement and joy is being obedient in doing what God calls you to do.

Paul was “called” to be an apostle, but God has not called everyone to full-time Christian work. I have always said to young men who lean toward becoming preachers, “Don’t go into the ministry unless you can’t stay out.” No one ought to preach unless God has called him, and if he can be happy in not preaching, then he ought not to preach.

I find great joy in preaching, but it wasn’t always so. I was dumbfounded, disappointed, and dismayed when God called me to preach. As you know, I was determined to be a surgeon, and I stubbornly resisted God’s call until He said, “All right, go your own way and mess up your whole life: Or, submit to My will and find out what it means to live a truly fulfilled life by doing what I’m calling you to do.” But it was incredibly difficult for me to make that surrender to God,

because as a young Christian I had never really asked God what He wanted me to do with my life. That's why, as I said earlier, it is so important to make the surrender first as soon as you become a Christian. You don't say, as I foolishly did, "Lord, here's what I want to do with my life. I hope You approve." You don't even say, "Lord, tell me what You want me to do, and I'll make up my mind whether or not I'll do it." What you say is this, "Lord, whatever You want me to do, I'm prepared to do it." You see, the will of God is what you yourself would choose if you had enough sense to choose it! I know that my life could not have been more fulfilled than it has been since that day in September 1937 when I said, "All right Lord, if You want me to be a minister, I will be obedient to Your call."

Now as I've said, God has a calling for everyone's life; and if you are in the will of God, what you're doing is just as sacred as what I'm doing. It took just as much of the blood of Jesus to save you as it did to save me, and God expects just as much dedication from you as He does from me. God expects as much purity from you as He does from me. He expects as much prayer out of you as He does from me. God doesn't say, "This man has to be a super-quality Christian to be a preacher." He expects us all to be super-quality Christians. It's just that God puts us in different corners of the vineyard. He gives different spiritual gifts and different callings, but each of us has been "called." Have you found your "calling" as a born-again believer?

Paul was a man with a Master, and he was a man with a Mission, and as he said himself, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." (Acts 26:19) It is amazing to me that Jesus took His greatest enemy (Saul of Tarsus) and made him His greatest spokesman and minister (Paul the apostle).

3. He had a MESSAGE. "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God." What was his message? It was "the Gospel of God." He was separated to this one thing; not to social reform, not to better housing, not to ecology, not to fighting communism, good though these causes may be. He was separated unto the Gospel of God, and we need to be separated unto the Gospel too.

Let me say a word about the biblical doctrine of "separation." This word "separated" is the same word from which we get the word "Pharisee." "Pharisee" means "the separated one," and the Pharisees were so called because they had deliberately separated themselves from all ordinary people. They would not even let the bottom of their robe brush against an ordinary man. But that is not what the Bible means by "separation." The biblical doctrine of separation is not being separated from something. Some Christians think that if they don't smoke, drink, dance, play cards, go to night clubs or buy lottery tickets, they are living "separated" lives. And these Christians can be harsh, critical, fault-finding, and legalistic, and they call it "separation from the world." But the biblical doctrine of "separation" is not a negative thing; it is a positive thing. It means separation unto something. Paul was separated "unto the Gospel," which just meant that he had a one-track mind. Nothing was really important to him except living the Gospel and communicating it to others.

True "separation" is not primarily giving up things. Nature abhors a vacuum. And some of the meanest, most ornery and obstreperous people I have ever known have been people who have lived (quote) "the separated life." But they were just separated from same thing: They were

not separated unto something.

Now let me say that everybody is separated to something. If you listen to them talk, it will not be long until they let you know what it is, because what's down in the well will come up in the bucket. But if you are a Christian, no matter what your work may be, you are to be "separated unto the Gospel of God." Now the farmer must not dedicate himself to his farming, but he must dedicate his farming to the Gospel. The businessman cannot dedicate himself to his money; but as a Christian he dedicates his money to the Gospel. Everybody who is saved is to be separated "unto the Gospel of God."

Now that to which you are dedicated and separated is going to mold your character. If you're dedicated to the world, you're going to be worldly. If you're dedicated to the Gospel, you're going to be Christ-like.

Now there are four things about Paul's message that I want you to notice: Four things about "the Gospel of God."

a. It was provided by the Father. The Gospel is "the Gospel of God." Dr. Leon Morris has written: "Romans is a book about God. No topic is treated with anything like the frequency of God. Everything Paul teaches in this letter he relates to God... There is nothing like it elsewhere." So, the Christian "good news" is "the Gospel of God." The apostles did not invent it; it was revealed and entrusted to them by God.

It is interesting to note that the word "God" occurs 153 times in Romans; the word "law" 72 times; the word "Christ" 65 times; the word "sin" 48 times; the word "faith" 40 times; and the word "righteousness" 34 times. It is not your gospel or mine: It is the Gospel of God, and therefore, we must be careful how we handle it. The "Gospel" as you all know, means "good news," good news about God, and God has called us not to be editors, but to be news boys. Our job is not to edit or rewrite the Gospel; our job is to deliver it.

I've always felt that I'm not capable of preaching anything else but the Gospel. Do you know what would scare me to death? It would be to stand up before well-educated people like you every Sunday and give a lecture if I didn't have this Book to preach from! Can you imagine me standing up here talking to people, lots of whom are far smarter than I am (not all of you, but many of you!), and serve up a 30-minute "talk" every week. I'd run out of gas in a month! I've got to have something to say that's worth listening to. So you see, I'm too dumb to preach anything but the Gospel, and I'm too smart to preach anything but the Gospel.

Now when I talk about proclaiming the Gospel, I don't just mean that "hell is hot, heaven is sweet, sin is black, judgment is sure, and Jesus saves." That's true, but there's much more to the Gospel than that. The Gospel is a very big subject. It starts in Genesis 1 and ends with Revelation 22. It's all the "good news" about what God has done for us. There are people who can preach the Gospel better than I can, but nobody can preach a *better* Gospel than I can. So, it was provided by the Father. It is called "the Gospel of God."

b. It was promised by the prophets. Verse 2 speaks about "the Gospel He promised

beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” You see, when Paul wrote this, “the prophets” meant the Old Testament. So, we believe the Old Testament. I can preach the Gospel from the Old Testament. Someone says, “Have you read the four Gospels?” I’ve read all 66! It’s all about the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has put it this way —

“The New is in the Old contained,
And the Old is by the New explained;
The New is in the Old concealed,
And the Old is by the New revealed.
The New is in the Old foreshown.
The Old is in the New full-grown.”

Abraham understood the gospel. For example, Genesis 15:6 tells us that “Abraham believed (i.e., trusted) the Lord, and the Lord credited it to him as righteousness.” Abraham was justified by faith just as surely as you and I have been.

Remember too that Jesus was quite clear that the Old Testament Scriptures bore witness to Him: That He was “the Son of man” of Daniel 7, and “the Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 53. In John 5:39-40, He had this to say about the Old Testament which was His Bible: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.” So Jesus is the theme of the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Look at John 5:45-46 where He said, “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.” On the road to Emmaus Jesus said to those two dispirited believers, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.” (Luke 24:25-27). That means that there are things “concerning Jesus” in all the Scriptures. The whole Bible is about Him!

c. This “Gospel of God” was presented by the Son. Verse 3 says that it is the Gospel “regarding His Son, Who, as to His human nature, was a descendant of David... and was declared to be the Son of God...”

Who is Jesus Christ? Well, according to His human nature, He was a descendant of David. This assures us that He was truly a human being. But then He was “declared” to be the Son of God. This speaks of His eternal deity. So in one sentence we are taught two major doctrines — the doctrines of the humanity and the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must understand Who He is because the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons, and many other false cults meet their nemesis right here. They do not understand Who Jesus really is. He was just as human as I am human. But also, He is declared to be the Son of God with power. He is wholly and completely God. He was not half God and half man. He was not all man and no God. He was not all God and no man. He was and is the God-Man. “Unto us a Child is born.” (Isaiah 9:6) — That is His humanity. “Unto us a Son is given.” — That is His deity.

So this Gospel is presented to us by the Son. Indeed, He is the Gospel.

d. The Gospel is proven by the Resurrection. Verse 4 says, “He is declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.” If Jesus Christ is still in the grave, your hope of salvation is not worth half a Hallelujah. But if He is alive, and He is, then we have a glorious message to proclaim, don’t we?

You see, if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, nothing really matters. But if He was, nothing but that really matters. He is declared, He is proven with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. So the resurrection is the turning point in the existence of the Son of God. Before that He was the Son of God in lowliness and weakness. Through the resurrection He became the Son of God with power — power to save us, sanctify us, and keep us till that day when we see Him in Heaven, and adore Him as King of Kings and Lord of lords.

Paul was a man with a Master — He was a bond slave of Christ. Are you? Have you surrendered your life, your career, your eternal destiny to Him?

Paul was a man with a Mission — He was “called,” and he was “sent.” Do you realize that God has a plan for your life, and are you saying to Him, “Lord, what will You have me to do for You and for a dying world around me?”

Paul was a man with a Message — The Gospel of God. Are you spreading the Gospel by your life and by your lips in your corner of God’s vineyard? I trust and pray that you are!

AMEN.