

Romans Chapter 1

It is well known that the epistle to the Romans is one in which Paul lays down for us the doctrine of the gospel. We read about the righteousness of God but we also learn of how we as sinners can become righteous before God.

Verses 1 to 16 in chapter 1 gives us an insight into the life and work of Paul himself while verse 17 onwards starts to reveal to us the guilt of men who have abandoned God despite what they once knew about Him.

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

He begins by calling himself a servant. The word for servant is DOULOS which means a bondservant or a slave. Paul, great man though he was, was willing to take the place of a bondservant. It is illustrated by the words of the centurion in Matthew chapter 8 who said to the Lord, "I say to this man 'go' and he goeth, and to another 'Come' and he cometh, and to my servant, 'Do this' and he doeth it". If such were the obedience of servants to their earthly masters, then how much more should it be true of us? We have a master in heaven who has bought us. We are not our own: we have been bought with a price (I Corinthians chapter 6).

The master whom Paul served was also willing to take this place. Philippians chapter 2 tells us that He took upon Himself the form of a servant.

It is noticeable that Paul does not call himself a bondservant when he wrote to the Corinthians and the Galatians. These 3 epistles are very much written to correct the errors of the believers. Not only this, many of the Corinthians denied Paul's claim to be an apostle and would have belittled him. Paul was not going to humble himself before men like these.

Verse 1 continues, "Called to be an apostle". The words "to be" are not in the original text, and with good reason. "Called to be an apostle" would suggest that he was not an apostle at the beginning but that he would become one at some later date. This was certainly not true of Paul. The true meaning of the expression would be, "An apostle by divine calling". There are three requirements before a man could be called an apostle :

1. He had to be sent by the Lord
2. He had to have seen the Lord
3. He had to carry out the signs of an apostle.

1. Sent by the Lord

There is no doubt about the calling of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. These 12 men all were met one day by the Lord who said, "Follow Me". "I will make you to become fishers of men". They each had a distinctive call from the Lord Jesus. Paul had his own experience of being called by the Lord – in Acts chapter 9. The Lord said to Ananias, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me". He would bear the Lord's name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

2. To have seen the Lord

Many at Corinth questioned Paul's apostleship. In his defence, Paul argues in I Corinthians 9:1 :

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

It goes without saying that the 12 apostles had seen the Lord. After the defection of Judas, Peter told the company of believers that they had to choose another to replace Judas. One basic qualification that is stated is the man had to be a witness of the Lord's resurrection. The lot then fell upon Matthias. Paul had also seen the Lord, not in the days of His flesh, but rather he had seen the risen man in glory. It was this vision that was to characterize the ministry of Paul from the very beginning.

3. The signs of an apostle.

Many men had seen the Lord during His lifetime but few had the power that so marked the apostles in their ministry. The 12 apostles had the power to heal the sick, to cast out demons, and even to raise the dead. Such power was conferred upon them by the Lord.

But Paul also had such powers as he often demonstrated in the book of the Acts. And what of his critics at Corinth? He writes thus to them in II Corinthians chapter 12:

12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

Some would claim to be apostles today. There were very few men in the first century who could have fulfilled the above three conditions. Beyond the first century, it was impossible to do so.

Verse 1 concludes with, "Separated unto the gospel of God". This separation of Paul to the gospel took place in Acts chapter 13, when the Holy Spirit spoke to the leaders of the church at Antioch:

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Paul therefore had no doubts as to his calling. Is this always true for us? We can err sometimes on both extremes. There are those who have received a divine gift but fail to use it. Paul even had to encourage his young friend Timothy to stir up the gift of God that was in him, and not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. Still more perhaps engage in activities for which they have not received a gift eg in preaching the gospel or in teaching the scriptures. Paul had no such problems in either direction.

Returning to Romans 1:1, the phrase the "gospel of God" reminds of its source – it was not a doctrine of man's invention. It had come from God. Verse 3 will tell us of the subject of the gospel – "Concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord".

Verse 2 tells us how this gospel had come from God :

Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures :

Paul defines his gospel in I Corinthians chapter 15:

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

The operative phrase is "according to the scriptures". This reminds us that the gospel was not of any human invention. As we approach the last few hours before the cross, the fulfillment of OT scripture is amazing. The defection of Judas took the disciples

totally by surprise but the Lord quoted from the Psalms when He said , "He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me". The prophet Zechariah predicted how much money Judas would receive for his act of betrayal – 30 pieces of silver. He went even further when He prophesied about the money itself. It would be cast unto the potter in the house of the Lord. The manner of Christ's death was also foretold. "They pierced My hands and My feet".

Isaiah chapter 53 tells us that the Lord would not be alone at Calvary for "He was numbered with the transgressors". And what about the activities of the soldiers? In their cold callous indifference to their victim, they only fulfilled the scriptures which had been written about Him. Thus the soldiers cast lots for His vesture, not knowing that in so doing, they were fulfilling Psalm 22. One of the soldiers had been charged with breaking the legs of all three victims. He did so with the two thieves, but when he came to the Lord, he found that He was dead already. Exodus 12 had said, "Not a bone of him shall be broken". But in his cruelty, the soldier laid aside his cudgel and instead takes up his spear and thrusts it into His side in an apparently random act. But it wasn't a random act for Zechariah had written, "They shall look upon Him whom the pierced". The gospel of God then was "according to the scriptures".

We move on to verses 3 and 4 :

3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

Paul underlines both the humanity and the deity of the Lord Jesus in these verses. But He is not just the seed of the woman here – He is of royal seed. He is the heir to David's throne. In order to become a Saviour, He first had to become a man. I Timothy 2:5 tells us :

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus".

Christ came to reconcile humanity with deity. Thus He is also the Son of God and He was declared so with power – by the resurrection of the dead. The AV suggests this is His own resurrection here, in that it says "from the dead". But the word "dead" is plural and the literal meaning is the resurrection of dead ones. The Lord raised three people from the dead – the daughter of Jairus, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus. Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath – he had just died like the daughter of Jairus. Elisha raised the son of the Shunnamite woman – he had died that day, like the widow of Nain's son. But Lazarus had been dead for four days before the Lord raised him. Even Martha thought this was too much for the Lord. "By this time, he stinketh". But the Lord is going to prove something by raising Lazarus. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby". This explains the two-day delay in the Lord returning to Bethany. He wanted to make it doubly difficult for Himself, that He might show Himself to be the Son of God. Thus Elijah and Elisha each raised one person, but the Lord raised three, and one of them after 4 days.

Even apart from the Greek, would it make any sense that He is declared Son of God by His own resurrection. Lazarus was raised from the dead but he is not the Son of God – neither was the widow of Nain's son. But we can understand how the Lord's ability to raise the dead proved that He is the Son of God. We quote the Lord Himself in John 5:26:

"As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself"

The ability to raise the dead is an evidence of His deity. John chapter 1 tells us, "In

Him was life, and the life was the light of men". He is the source of all life, the giver of eternal life. The gospel of God is about the promised seed of David as far as flesh is concerned, but also proved to be the Son of God by the resurrection of the dead. The verse also adds the comment, "According to the spirit of holiness". I believe this is not the Holy Spirit but that spirit in which the Lord acted.

Verse 5 continues :

By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

Paul is still considering the origins of his ministry here. Who made him an apostle? It was certainly not a self appointment. It came from the Lord Himself. By Him, Paul received this "grace and apostleship". Grace, as are often told, is the undeserved and unmerited favour of God. Paul looked upon his service as a grace conferred upon Him by the risen Christ. Thus he writes in Ephesians chapter 3:

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Paul's ministry brought him into many perils and hardships that would make many ask, "Why me? Why have I had to suffer such things?" But Paul even looked upon his sufferings as being due to the grace of God.

What was the purpose of Paul's ministry? Verse 5 tells us – "for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:" Men did not only have to hear the gospel – they had to obey it. Indeed it was more than just the obedience to the gospel – it was obedience to "the faith". This is the whole body of truth revealed in the Bible. Anything less than obedience to the whole word of God is a falling short of God's purpose in the gospel. Paul adds also the sphere of his ministry. What was his parish? It was "among all nations". Paul was declared by Peter in Acts 15 to be an apostle to the uncircumcision or to the Gentiles. And who would get the glory in all this? It was "For His name". It was all done for the glory of Christ.

Verses 6 and 7 apply this last thought to the saints at Rome in particular :

6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:

7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It would appear from the list of names in Romans chapter 16 that while there were undoubtedly both Jews and Gentiles in the church at Rome, the majority of the saints were Gentiles. So they were saved from "among the nations". Just as Paul had been called of God to be an apostle, here were people who were saints by divine calling. Down the ages, churchmen have canonized men to become saints. These are men and women who had been deemed to be outstanding amongst men. But throughout many of his epistles, Paul uses the term saints on a regular basis to describe all the Christians that he is writing to. This even included the Christians at Corinth, some of whom were acting in a less than holy way. I Corinthians chapter 1:2 is written to the following :

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

Notice how Paul writes to these people. It is not to the "Church of God at Rome" in the way that he writes to the Corinthians, "To the Church of God at Corinth". The church that has its headquarters at Rome would have loved to have had this accolade, but in the wisdom of God, it was not given them. Instead the Church of Rome today claims to have been established by Peter and that Peter was its first bishop. We need hardly

say that there is no record of any such thing in the bible. Indeed in Acts 15, Peter describes himself as the apostle to the circumcision and his two epistles are written to the 12 tribes scattered abroad. As far as the Bible tells us, in Galatians chapter 2, Peter never got any further than Antioch.

But Paul also had no hand in establishing this church. Of its origins we know nothing. But being at the heart of the Roman empire, it seems logical that Christians would eventually settle there and share the gospel with others. This would include people like Priscilla and Aquila who are described as having lived in Rome. Certainly when Paul landed in Italy as a prisoner on his way to Rome, he met the brethren and was comforted.

Verses 8,9, and 10 tells us of Paul's prayer for these believers. It also tells us much about Paul himself :

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

Paul had never met the majority of these saints yet he was on his knees praying for them. His prayer was one of thanksgiving. Do we thank God for the believers in our assembly? Or do we only pray for them as the need arises? How often did Paul pray for them? Was it an occasional occurrence? In verse 9, he uses the expressions, "without ceasing" and "always". "Always" tells us that each time he prayed for them, he could thank God for them. "I might pray for someone once every year, and always in my annual prayer, I would thank God for them. But "without ceasing" tells us about how often he prayed for them. It was an incessant prayer. He never stopped praying for them. On those occasions when he was praying for them, he never failed to give God thanks.

And what gave rise to this prayer of thanksgiving?

Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Rome was the centre of the Roman empire. All eyes looked towards Rome, and what happened here was soon reported elsewhere in the Roman world. Many had come to hear of the faith of these saints. These men and women were not just at the centre of an empire, they were also nearest to the centre of Roman judgment. When persecution did arise, these saints were directly in the firing line.

The Roman saints were much therefore like the Thessalonians in spreading their faith. Paul writes to the Thessalonians in I Thessalonians chapter 1:

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

But we must add a few more comments before leaving verse number 9. First of all, Paul calls upon God to witness his next words. Was he making a very bold statement about the frequency and consistency of his prayers for them. After all, prayer is in the secret place – Paul could not call upon men to substantiate his claims. However, Paul writes, "God is my witness". He is so sure about what he claims that he says, "I Could stand here and call upon the God to whom I pray that what I write is true".

Paul uses this expression "God is my witness" in a number of other situations where he is making claims about believers. For example, in I Thessalonians chapter 2, he writes about the methods and the motives for his preaching. He did not speak with

flattering words, nor was he ever seeking financial gain. God was his witness.

4 But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. 5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness:

At Corinth, many were imputing wrong motives in Paul with regards to his absence from them. In their pride, some may have thought that Paul was afraid to come to them. But see how Paul refutes this claim in II Corinthians chapter 1:

23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.

In Philippians chapter 1, Paul is saying about the Philippians that he has the same feelings in his heart towards them as were the feelings in the bowels of Jesus Christ ie that he loved them as Christ also loves. It is a bold statement but again he can call upon God to bear witness to the truth of his words.

We often make bold claims about ourselves – could we call upon God to verify that our claims are true?

One final comment about verse 9. Paul says this about God:

whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son

“To serve” in this phrase is the word used for religious service. Paul’s work in the gospel was an act of worship on his part. It was part of Paul’s spiritual devotion that he served in the gospel. He did not serve with his spirit, but “in” his spirit.

Paul has similar thoughts as he considers those gentiles who had believed in the gospel through his preaching. Did Paul glory in his success? Rather he looked upon these converts as being an offering that he could give to God. So he writes in Romans chapter 15:

16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

Now in verse 10 of Romans 1, Paul prays for something that would bring himself into contact with these saints :

Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

It was Paul’s great ambition to visit the Christians in Rome. He was praying for a prosperous or successful journey by the will of God. Paul had known much of God’s guidance in his service. In Acts 16, he received what has come to be known as the Macedonian call. A man dressed as a Macedonian saying to him in a vision, “Come over and help us”. Paul answered this call, although we might have questioned the call if we finished up, like Paul and Silas, bruised and beaten in a jail in Philippi. But God has never promised us an easy road. Paul was to find this out again as God answered his prayer and took him to Rome. He went as a prisoner on a ship, and he became a prisoner in Rome. But Paul went to Jerusalem, after his third missionary journey, fully aware of what would happen to him in Jerusalem. Prophets like Agabus had warned him that bonds and affliction were awaiting him, but Paul never flinched from the will of God. So often, we just drift through life with no divine guidance. Not so with Paul although God would not speak to us through visions and prophets. Paul did arrive in Rome a few years after this epistle was written. God sent him to Rome – but the devil paid the fare!!

In verse 11, we read of why Paul had this great desire to see Rome. He didn’t wish to go as a tourist – he wished to impart to them some spiritual gift.

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.

This spiritual gift was not the gift of teaching or preaching to be given to individuals – that was the prerogative of Christ, the head of the church – but rather to give them the benefit of his own gift. We see here the purpose of all spiritual gift – “to the end ye may be established”. Paul defines this purpose further in Ephesians chapter 4:

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

There are several outcomes from the ministry of these gifted men.

1. For the maturity of the individuals

We need to be taught, and the result of this teaching would be “the perfecting of the saints”. A few verses further and we read of “that which every joint supplieth”. Ministry should galvanize us into action.

2. For the building up of the assembly

Paul writes, “For the edifying of the body of Christ. As each Christian begins to grow, so the whole company grows with him.

3. For the unity of the assembly

Many think that the unity of a church is best preserved by forgetting whatever doctrinal differences there may be. But that is not unity – it is simply a compromise towards divine truth. The unity of the faith (the whole body of revealed truth), in which we would all think the same way and act the same way is achieved by adding in new revelations of the word of God.

But in verse 12, we learn that Christian fellowship is not all one way. While Paul would delight in imparting some spiritual gift to them, he anticipated receiving a blessing in return, through their mutual faith.

Some at Rome may have wondered why Paul had taken so long to come. After all, Rome was the center of the empire.

13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

Paul would re-assure such that it had long been one of his spiritual ambitions to pass on some ministry. He had been hindered up to this present time of writing. His desire was to have some fruit amongst them. This fruit had several possible outcomes. One would be in the salvation of the lost: the other would be fruit produced in the lives of the Lord’s people.

It is perhaps mainly the gospel he has in mind in the next two verses. Paul looked

upon gospel preaching, not as option, but as an obligation. He calls himself a debtor – it is something that he owes to mankind, and he is not satisfied until he has discharged that debt.

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Greek was the language of culture throughout the Roman empire. A barbarian was simply someone who did not speak Greek. He would be considered to be uneducated and uncouth. But Paul preached his gospel to all, to the wise and to the unwise. His parish knew no bounds as far as humanity was concerned.

What gave Paul such assurance in his preaching? Why was the gospel a suitable message for all kinds of men? Verse 16 is the answer:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

The gospel is not a message of weakness. It is the "power of God unto salvation". It is God's means of blessing men today. It went out first to the Jew, and then to the Greek.

To the world, the message might seem a foolish one – how can the death of a man 2000 years ago take me into heaven. But those who mock it do so at their peril as stated in I Corinthians chapter 1;

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Verse 17 goes on to tell us what is in the gospel :

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith

We might think that the love of God is revealed in the gospel. This is no doubt also true, but the great thought here is the revealing of the righteousness of God. The definite article is omitted here. "righteousness of God" has been revealed throughout the Old Testament under the law of Moses. The righteousness of God then revealed could only condemn the sinner, but in the New Testament, "righteousness of God" justifies the guilty sinner but on a righteous basis. It is revealed on the principle of faith to faith. It is revealed by faith or on the principle of faith, in contrast to what has been revealed before under law. And it is revealed to faith (ie to those who believe), as indeed is all of God's revelation today. This would correspond to the words of Paul on the same subject in Romans chapter 3:

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe:

Romans 1, verse 17 ends with a quotation from Habakuk chapter 2: 14:

The just shall live by faith.

This phrase is quoted on three different occasions in the New Testament. Apart from Romans chapter 1, it is found also in Galatians 3:11 and in Hebrews 10:38. A different part of the phrase is emphasized each time it is quoted. Thus in Romans 1, the subject matter is the righteousness of God, hence the emphasis is on the word "just". In Galatians 3, the immediate context is about living as verse 12 indicates:

11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

In Hebrews chapter 10, verse 38 is just two verses before the start of chapter 11, the great chapter of faith. So, in this third occurrence, the emphasis is on "by faith".

But the God who justifies by faith through the gospel is the same God who has revealed His wrath :

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

This wrath I presume is not the wrath of God in the Tribulation period or in eternity, but the wrath of God which He has made known today in His word. But do men have an excuse that would save them from the wrath of God? Can they plead ignorance of God to save them? Verse 20 tells us that God has made known His eternal power and deity by means of creation. Scientists would tell us that the universe came about from a "big bang" ie that all mass was centred in one place until a huge explosion caused it to be fragmented into the billions of stars that we can see today. But one thing that marks the universe is its order and regularity. If we take the solar system alone, the planets revolve around the sun with amazingly consistent regularity. Comets come and go at known intervals. Normally explosions cause total chaos and disorder yet here is the greatest explosion of all, according to the scientists, and it has produced undeniable order.

Another question that has to be answered is "Even if there was one single mass of material, where did all the matter come from?" One of the fundamental laws of science is that matter cannot be created or destroyed. This leaves us the choice – do we believe in the eternal God or the eternal "lump"?

Men have devised their theories because they have denied the very existence of God. But the fact that there is an ordered creation is the most basic proof of the existence of God. Because of this, men are without excuse.