

## The Credentials of Paul<sup>1</sup>

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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January 1, 2023

Text: Romans 1:1-6

Purpose: As we begin our study on the Book of Romans, we will examine Paul's condition, his calling and his commission. We too are called to the same level of commitment to follow Christ.

Over the past four years as your pastor, I have attempted to bring to you a greater understanding God's word. If you have been faithfully attending on Sunday mornings, you will have had the opportunity to understand more about the Book of Matthew, which included the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus' model prayer. We have examined the Book of Hebrews, the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation, and the Book of John. We have traveled from Creation to Christ – from the Old Testament to Christ's death on Calvary. We have examined the topics of "Why are we here?," "Investing for Eternity," "Four Fragile Freedoms," the Parables of Jesus and "Ten Steps to Spiritual Renewal (based on the Book of Nehemiah)."

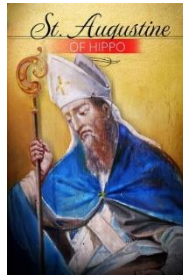


On Wednesday nights we have examined the weekly lectionary passages which usually feeds into our Sunday school lesson for the upcoming week. Up to this time, we have not really examined the writings of Paul in a systematic manner. I feel the time has come to begin on a new path of preaching and teaching.

Today I want to begin a study of what is perhaps the greatest Book of the New Testament. I know that is a big statement, however, Romans is, without question, the greatest theological work of the Apostle Paul. This book has been called “The Constitution of Christianity”; “The Christian Manifesto”; and “The Cathedral of the Christian Faith”. Without a doubt, this book has been responsible for more change in the church than any other.



It was this book that in September of 386 AD touched the heart of a North African native who was a professor in the city of Milan, Italy. As Augustine sat weeping in the garden of a friend while contemplating the wickedness of his life, he heard a child singing, “Tolle, lege. Tolle, lege.” These words from Latin mean, “Take up and read. Take up and read.” Beside Augustine was an open scroll of the Book of Romans. He picked it up and read the first verses that caught his eyes. Romans 13:13-14 says, *“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”* These verses brought about the conversion of Augustine and he became, in the mind of many, one of the greatest theologians and leaders in the history of the church.



Almost 1,000 years later, a Roman Catholic monk of the Augustinian Order named Martin Luther, who was a professor at the University of



Wittenberg in Germany, was teaching his students the Book of Romans. As he studied the text, his heart was arrested by the theme of justification by faith found in Romans 1:17. Luther said, “Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.”<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit used this verse to bring Luther to Christ in a new and powerful way and in turn bring Reformation to the world.

Martin Luther wrote that the Epistle to the Romans is “the true masterpiece of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, which is well worthy and deserving that a Christian man should not only learn it by heart, word for word, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of men’s souls. It can never be too much or too well read or studied; and the more it is handled, the more precious it becomes, and better it tastes.”<sup>3</sup>

Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, had the epistles read to him twice a week. And it was Coleridge who said that the Epistle to the Romans was the most profound writing that exists. John Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress* is said to have read and studied the Epistle to the Romans and told its profound story in his own life’s story. It is a story of a Pilgrim – of how he came to the cross, and burden of sin rolled off, and he began that journey to the Celestial City.<sup>4</sup>

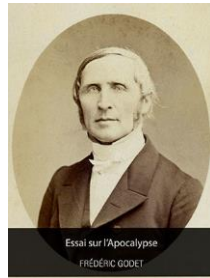


A few hundred years after Martin Luther, an ordained minister in the Church of England named John Wesley was preparing to take the Gospel to America as a missionary. Even though Wesley was a preacher



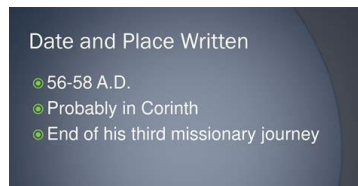
and was going to cross the Atlantic as a missionary, he was still confused about the Gospel and was seeking a genuine conversion experience of his own. One Wednesday evening he attended a Bible Study in London. While there, he heard some of Luther's comments on Romans being read and this brought about his conversion to Christ. John later said, "My heart was strangely warmed." He also recorded in his journal, "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."<sup>5</sup> After that, John and his brother Charles would be used by God to bring the great Wesleyan revivals to the world.

Frederick Louis Godet said in his commentary on the Epistle of Romans, "The probability is that every great spiritual revival in the church will be connected as effect and cause with a deeper understanding of this book."<sup>6</sup>



Over the next several months, it is my desire to preach through this great book. As I do, we will find that many of our questions will be answered about God and what He has given us in Jesus. This is a Book that is impossible to exhaust. It will captivate the most brilliant of theological minds and will bring the humblest of God's servants to tears.

Romans was written by Paul the Apostle between 56 and 58 A.D. from the city of Corinth while Paul was on his third missionary journey. The Bible tells us that



after Paul was saved, he spent 3 years in Arabia, (Gal. 1:17-18). During this time, he studied the Old Testament writings and how they speak of Jesus.

At the time Paul wrote Romans, he apparently had never gone to Rome, nor had he established a church there (Romans 1:15). Over the course of his life, he led many to Christ throughout the region and apparently many had migrated to Rome and formed a church there. Even though Paul was one that wanted to go to places where the Gospel of Jesus Christ had not been preached, he did want to go to Rome and meet with the Christians there.



Paul probably was thinking that Rome would be a good headquarters for expansion up to Spain and further west. Since we see so many names listed in Chapter 16, we can assume he knew many individuals there in Rome.

As Paul discusses himself and his ministry, he also sheds some light on our mission as we go through life. The passage of scripture we read earlier is the longest introduction to any of the New Testament epistles. It is also the richest in theological content. Today, let us examine The Credentials of the Apostle Paul.

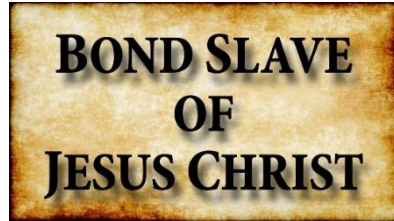
## THE FACTS ABOUT THE MESSENGER (v. 1)

### A. His Condition

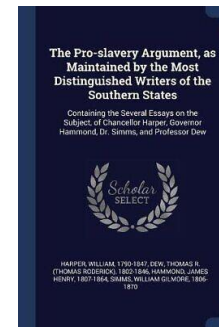
As Paul begins his comments to the Roman Christians, he doesn't begin boasting of his office. He begins by proclaiming himself to be a "servant." The word means a "bond slave." This calls to mind the "law of the bond slave" from the Old Testament. According to this law, a slave could refuse his freedom and could choose to remain with his master forever (Ex. 21:1-6). Instead of exalting himself before the Romans, Paul chose to humble himself. This was the secret of Paul's greatness! Paul knew that like a slave, he had no personal rights. His life was dictated to him by the master. He was totally sold out to the will of God. There is no doubt that this is why the Lord used Paul so greatly!

This is a lesson that Christians need to learn today. We have so many who feel that they are in control of their lives and that they have the right to do as they please and make their own decisions. We need to remember that when we were saved by Jesus Christ, we became His bond servants! He bought us, and now He owns us completely – (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

This image of slavery was commonplace to Paul's readers. However, we don't understand what it actually meant to be a slave in Paul's day.



I am totally against slavery in any form where one person owns another person. Our nation went through a tremendous Civil War 160 years ago to settle the question once and for all.

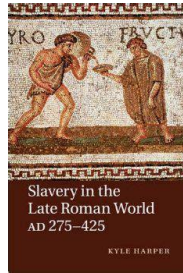


One of my ancestors, Frederic C. Dew, was injured in the Civil War as a confederate soldier. Others in my family tree may have owned slaves during their lifetime. Another one of my ancestors, Thomas C. Dew, stood in the Parliament in Virginia in 1832 and fiercely defended the institution of slavery.

Today, I stand and renounce slavery as ungodly and unchristian. My ancestors were wrong on this matter of slavery, as well as our nation. The blood of almost 625,000 people was poured out across our land settling this question of slavery for the United States of America.

In my opinion, when Paul is using the illustration of slavery, he is not making a declaration on the institution of slavery as acceptable to God, he is using it as an example of how he was so totally committed to Jesus, he was comparing it to a bondsman. To help us understand the context of slavery in Paul's day, let me share a few facts about slaves and slavery with you. As I do, I want you to let the Lord speak to your heart about your relationship with Jesus and about your own level of surrender to Him.

1. The slave was totally owned by the Master. In the spiritual sense, Jesus saw our sinful condition and He bought us unto Himself. He made us His possession, Rev. 5:9.

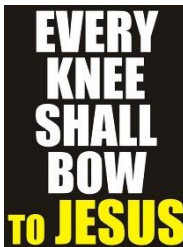


2. The slave existed for his Master. He had no other reason for his existence. He had no rights of his own. The only rights he had were those of the Master.

3. The slave existed to serve his Master. He had no other purpose in life but to do what the Master wanted him to do. He was to be at the Master's disposal any hour of the day or night. This is how Paul felt. Does that describe your relationship with Jesus? Our lives should be lived for the glory of the Lord. We are to do His will totally, and without question! (Eph. 6:6)

4. Even the slave's will belongs exclusively to his Master. He was allowed no will or no ambition outside that which his Master allowed him to have. In other words, there was to be a total surrender of every part of the slave's being to the will of the Master (2 Cor. 10:5).

5. We need to see when Paul mentions his Master, that it is none other than the Lord Jesus. A slave's life, whether it was good or evil, depended upon the character of his Master. In the case of the believer, our Master is Jesus! Therefore, instead of cringing and cowering in fear before this One we call Lord, we are servants who have been elevated to the status of priests and kings. Ours is a position of honor before the Lord. We are perhaps the only slaves in

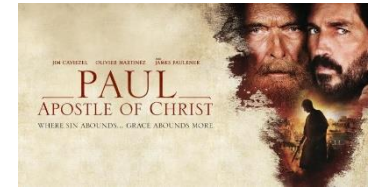


history who are allowed to sit with their Master in His throne. (Eph. 2:6)

## B. His Calling

Not only was Paul a slave to a new Master, he was also an apostle.

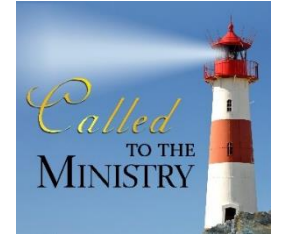
This word means an “ambassador”. This word literally means a “sent one.” He was a person sent out into another country as a representative of Heaven. Ambassadors usually carried with them all the authority of the country and the king which sent them. Paul was no exception. He was a representative of King Jesus and he operated under His Divine authority. When Paul spoke, he spoke for the Lord. When he acted, he acted as a representative of the throne of Heaven. His authority was the very authority of God Himself.



## What does all this mean for us?

1. It is worthy of note that Paul was what he was by the will of God. Notice that he had been “Called”.

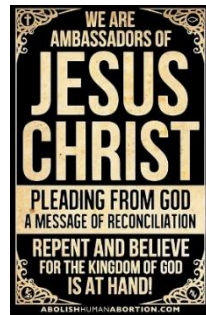
Paul did not just decide to go into the ministry, nor did friends and family persuade him that it was what he should do. He was placed in the ministry by the sovereign will of Almighty God, (1 Tim. 1:12-14). Paul became what he did by the grace of God that was operating in his life, (1 Cor. 15:10). Just as God picked and placed Paul, He also does the same for you and me. He places us in His kingdom work when and where it pleases Him, (1 Cor. 12:11,18).



2. If He could take a sinner like Paul, (1 Tim. 1:15), and make him His greatest messenger, then God can and will use your life for His glory if you will yield to Him. Never let the Devil or any other person tell you that God cannot and will not use your life for His glory. He saved you by His grace and He wants to use you to bring others unto Him. He has a place of service for you and He will place you there if you will yield to Him.



3. While we do not hold the office of Apostle, we are the ambassadors of Heaven. God has commissioned us to be His spokespersons to a lost and dying world. In fact, the Bible plainly tells us that we are the very words of God written to speak to the peoples of the world (2 Cor. 3:2-3). When the world sees you and me, they should see a people who are sold out and committed to the will of God in the world. They need to see people who are living like they are indeed the representatives of Heaven (Phil. 1:27). Like salt in a bland world, we should flavor our lives with the glory of God and create a thirst in others for the things of God (Matt. 5:13-16).



C. His Commission

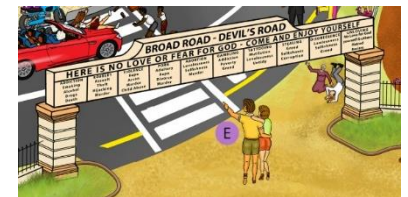
Paul's next statement tells us that he had been "**separated**" unto the Gospel of God. There are some great blessings contained in this little phrase.



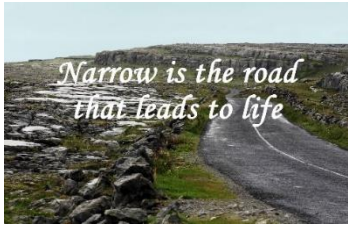
1. **Separated** - This word has the idea of being "set apart." Paul is telling us that his life has been set apart for the glory of God and for the Lord Jesus Christ. This literally means that nothing else mattered to Paul but the things that mattered to God.

People are concerned with being separated from the world. They will tell you that you have to stop doing this thing or the other thing to be perfectly separated. Their whole life revolves around what they can and cannot do. I personally believe that people like this are missing the boat. Our job is not to separate from the world, it is to separate unto Christ. If we are separated unto Jesus, then we are automatically separated from the world. I cannot be in Kinston and want to go to Greenville without first leaving Kinston. If I am living in one area, then it is impossible for me to be in the other at the same time! So, if I really want to be separate from the world, and I think that is what God want (2 Cor. 6:17), then the secret lies in totally devoting my life the Lord Jesus Christ. If I live to please Him, I will have no trouble with the world!

2. The word translated "separated" is the same word from which we get our word "horizon." The sense of this word is literally "off-horizoned". It tells us that Paul's horizons had changed. Before, he was headed toward a religious hell, living a life of legalism and rebellion against Christ. Now, his life has been changed and he is headed towards a new horizon. His is in a radically different life. So, it is with every child of God who is in the world today. We have

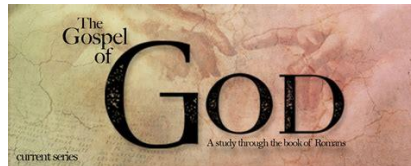


been changed forever! We are headed toward a new horizon. Before, our destiny was an eternity in Hell. Now, we have been saved and are headed to Heaven to be with the Lord forever. Before, our lives were filled



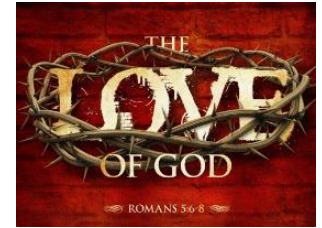
with sin and rebellion. Now, we have been called out as ambassadors of the kingdom of Heaven - the very representatives of God in the world today.

3. Paul then tells us that he has been separated to the "Gospel of God." His commission is that of carrying the "good news" of Jesus to a world trapped in sin and lostness. This Gospel is a special message.



- A. It is the Gospel of God - This message did not originate in the mind of man. It came from the heart of God. The plan that would culminate with Jesus dying on the cross and then rising from the dead was and is God's plan. It was devised long before man ever stood on the earth, (Rev. 13:8). Had man developed the plan of salvation, it surely would have included works and religious rituals. People love that sort of thing. Man would have fixed it so that he got a little of the credit. God, on the other hand, fixed it so that lost sinners could come to Him freely, by faith and receive eternal salvation by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9).

- B. It is a Gospel born in the heart of God - Why would God want to go to such great lengths to save the world and get His message to the world? The answer is that God is love, (1 John 4:8) and that He does not want to see a single sinner die without Him, (2 Pet. 3:9). His love is so great that He will stop at nothing to get the message out. He will even use people like you and me.



- C. It is the only Gospel that will save the lost - God has only one plan that will save the lost soul – *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven give among men by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:12; John 3:16.

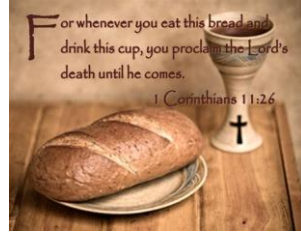
- D. We are the messengers of this Gospel in this present day - Just as Paul was separated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century to carry the Gospel to the lost, we are called to do the same in this day. The message is just as precious and the need just as great. Our duty is to submit to the Lord's will for our lives and be His ambassadors in the world. How are we doing in getting the Gospel out?



As I bring this first message from Romans to a close, I haven't really covered much territory from the standpoint of verses covered. Paul considered himself to be a slave to Jesus, an ambassador of God and a proclaimer of the good news of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you know that God holds the same expectation for you and me? His will is that we go forth into this world with His message, as His representatives in His Name and power and that we tell His Good News to those who are perishing. When we lay ourselves alongside the great Apostle, how do we measure up? Is there more we can do? Are we surrendered to the level we should be?

Today, we come to the Lord's Table as a way of committing our lives and our service to God. When we take the bread, we are acknowledging Jesus' body which was broken for us. When we take the juice, we are acknowledging Jesus' blood which was shed for the remission of our sin.



Paul told the church at Corinth, *"Follow me as I follow Christ."* (I Corinthians 11:1)



Just as Paul was a bondservant – we are to be bondservants of Jesus.

Just as Paul was called to be an apostle – we are called to be His ambassadors in the world today.

Just as Paul was separated – we too are separated unto Christ.

Just as Paul was commissioned to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ – we too are instructed to share our faith with others.

As we consider our call and our responsibility, let us come to the Lord's Supper table in remembrance of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

## LET US PRAY

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Body of sermon from The Sermon Notebook, Rom 1\_1 The Credentials of Paul the Apostle – Part 1
- <sup>2</sup> The Communicators Commentary – by S. Stuart Brisce – Romans, page 12.
- <sup>3</sup> Dr. J. Vernon McGee, Romans Introduction.
- <sup>4</sup> McGee.
- <sup>5</sup> The Communicators Commentary – by S. Stuart Brisce – Romans, page 12.
- <sup>6</sup> The Communicators Commentary – by S. Stuart Brisce – Romans, page 12.