

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

I am always struck with awe when I stand behind this sacred desk and allowed to minister the Word of God to God's people. It is my great joy and my great privilege.

And I would invite you to take your Bibles now and turn, once again, to Romans chapter one. Last week we had an introduction to this marvelous epistle and today we will begin to look at it much more closely.

I have entitled my discourse to you this morning, "The Exalted Gospel." And this will be part one.

Here in the first seven verses Paul gives us a greeting. He gives a salutation. And as we look at this we see that the inspired apostle provides a synopsis of all that is going to follow in this letter. It is as though he can't wait to provide a concise overview of this concentrated truth before he systematically discloses the amazing words that God has revealed to him with respect to our salvation. These are truths that exalt the gospel or the God who has provided it for all who will believe to the praise of his glory.

Let me read these first seven verses to you.

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Before we look at this I would like to remind you of something, something that I did not understand until a few years ago when my dear wife struggled with a particular issue at the very core, the very center of her brain.

The pituitary gland is an endocrine gland about the size of a pea. It weighs 0.02 ounces. And it is merely a tiny little protrusion off the bottom of the hypothalamus at the base of the brain, the very center of your head. And it rests on a small little boney cavity.

Medical scientists, I was told, for many years really didn't understand what this small little gland did. In fact, they did not have equipment to be able to even measure the infinitesimal amounts of chemical hormones that it produced. And so, therefore, many physicians didn't feel it was all that important. It is so small. It is lost in everything else. It surely can't be that important.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:1-7.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

Well, later on they found that this tiny little gland secreted chemical hormones almost too small to even measure, but yet it is a gland that is absolutely crucial in regulating virtually every aspect of the body's functioning.

In fact, it is nicknamed the master gland. In effect, the gland functions as our thermostat that controls all of the other glands that are responsible for hormone secretion.

So naturally failure to understand this tiny little gland, even though it gets lost in all of the other organs there, especially the brain in the head, failure to understand it would be a fatal mistake.

But, dear friends, I believe that many times when we approach the Scriptures we tend to overlook and minimize certain passages like the greetings of the New Testament epistles. They are like the pituitary gland once was.

I would ask you how much time have you spent studying the first seven verses of Romans one? Better yet, how much time have you spent studying the very first verse of Romans one?

We assume that these greetings are not all that important. We want to hurry on to get to the good stuff inside the letter, right? Because we think that, many times we overlook some very, very important information. And that is what we are going to see here in these first seven verses. In fact, this morning we are going to look primarily just at the first verse.

So I want you to join me. First of all we are just going to look at the big picture of the seven verses and then we are going to take out a magnifying glass, maybe, better yet, a microscope and look at the very first verse and we are going to see that like the pituitary gland, the very first verse is very important in regulating our understanding of everything that is going to follow.

Now, by way of introduction, if we look at the big picture of these first seven verses, this greeting of Paul, you first must understand that Paul here is about to explode with excitement. He is absolutely on fire with the good news of the gospel and his privilege to proclaim it, to write about it. He has received divine revelation from God himself and he cannot wait to share it. And it is as though here in these first seven verses he just has to give you an overview real quick. I have just got to tell you what I am going to tell you and then we are going to get into it in detail.

I mean, if we look at verse one we see that he introduces himself as God's servant, commissioned to speak on his behalf.

In verse two he speaks of the ancient promises that have now been fulfilled of which he is about to set forth in great detail.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

In verses three and four he speaks of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then in verse five he speaks of the unmerited favor of saving grace that they have received and the submission to the Lordship of Christ that will always be the inevitable result of saving faith.

Then in verses six and seven he reminds them of this staggering truth that God himself called them to belong to Christ and that they are loved by him, that they are set apart from sin unto himself and that all the benefits of his grace and the blessings of his grace including being at peace with God, at peace from his wrath is now over. And now they can enjoy God's grace to the fullest.

Is there any wonder why Paul is excited? He is thrilled and we should be, too.

I want you to also think of Paul as I believe we should. He was not some monotone theologian. And I have been there in those classrooms and you may have, too. I have heard some of them in focus. I have heard preachers that are exceedingly boring. And I hope I am not that way for you. At times I am sure I am, but I try not to be.

But Paul was absolutely on fire. He was not a boring preacher. Shall we say there was fire in the furnace? And if you are going to be a preacher of the gospel there needs to be that fire. And this is what we have here. He is the preacher of the gospel, the most incredibly good news on the planet. And so he is quite hot with zeal to proclaim it and to protect it.

And as we read in Paul's epistles in the New Testament we see over and over again that he never ever lost sight of the pit of sin from which he was delivered.

Most people scoff at the notion of sin these days. And therefore they see no need for salvation. And obviously they are not going to share any excitement about the gospel.

You tell people, "Jesus saves."

And their response is, "From what?" They don't see their sin.

How often do you hear the topic of sin discussed in public discourse? Well, when you do it is typically just in jest.

Every day we witness human beings doing things that are absolutely inconceivable to one another. We have shocking images of brutality and lawlessness that bombard our senses every time we turn on the news. Over and over again we see child abuse and substance abuse and rape and incest and assault and theft and corruption even in high places, murder, terrorism.

And in an effort to prevent all of these things we see that most parents, for example, try to discipline their children and instill some moral and ethical values in them in cooperation

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

with our government and educational institutions. But nothing every changes. In fact, it gets worse.

I was thinking the other day. I cannot remember until maybe the last few years of ever hearing of people being beheaded. Can you? And now we are hearing about it all the time, even in the United States.

Why do the vast majority of people consistently act in their best interests despite the harm they cause to others? Why is it that in every region of the earth regardless of culture or of influence there can be found every imaginable form of selfishness and greed and pride and deceit and envy and jealousy and violence and so forth? Why is that?

There are no internal limits of conscience to restrain man's cruelty. His capacity to do evil has no boundary. All you need to do is look at Auschwitz or 9/11 to see this.

And as we examine the Scriptures we learn very quickly that man does not act wickedly because of nurture, but because his very nature is evil. And Paul is going to expand upon this over and over again so that the good news is, indeed, good news when contrasted with the horrible news of sin's power and penalty.

He will tell us in Romans chapter five and verse 12 that because of Adam's sin the entire race was plunged into sin. And therefore every child is conceived in sin and depravity and has within him the capacity to do every imaginable form of wickedness. He will tell us in Ephesians chapter two that we are by nature children of wrath, that we are dead in our trespasses and sin. Sin can be defined as man's innate inability to conform to the moral character and desires of God.

Even here in chapter one and verses 29 through 32 he is going to paint a vivid picture of depravity, people, he says:

Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.<sup>2</sup>

And because of this Paul will tell us in verse 18 of Romans one that, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:29-32.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 1:18.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

That is, they know the truth that God is the Creator and the one whom they should worship and serve. And they also know that he is their judge. But they resent it and they will suppress it and, instead, worship a myriad of false gods and serve themselves.

Just think about it. Before we became a new creature in Christ we were selfish, we were self-willed, we were self-centered, self-absorbed, self-indulgent. We were self-serving, totally ruled by our lusts, the lusts of the flesh, seeking self-satisfaction. And, of course, even as new creatures in Christ we still struggle with those things. But unregenerate man is never satisfied. He is never content because of sin. He is never really, truly happy. His joy is solely dependent upon his circumstances. And because of his rabid commitment to self he destroys relationships, he destroys his body. He destroys everything around him. He lives in rebellion to God and he knows it. He suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. Down deep he is filled with guilt and fear, but he spends most of his life blaming other people.

I have been at the death bed of these kind of people, people that try to anesthetize the reality of their sin and its consequences through all manner of things. I have been with their families in those hospital rooms. I have seen the anger and the depression and the hopelessness. In their heart they know that the wrath of God is upon them even as Jesus said in John 3:36. “The wrath of God abides,” he says on all those that refuse to trust in him.

I have been to the death bed of a number of people who are unbelievers and probably at least a dozen times I have tried to present the gospel to them and I have had them literally grind their teeth and growl at me in response. That is the power of sin, dear friends.

But the good news of the gospel is that God’s grace can break over all of that and allow people who are spiritually blind to see the truth of their own sin and the glory of the cross that we have just sung about. But sin can be forgiven. It can be defeated. There can be meaning and purpose and joy in life, joy that is not just linked to circumstances, but a joy and a real hope that can be there come what may in our life.

Paul understood this and he was thrilled with it.

You will recall in 1 Timothy he described God’s marvelous work of grace in his life. In verse 12 he said, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

He went on to say:

Even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement,

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 1:12.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.<sup>5</sup>

So for this reason, because of this profound conviction Paul could sing the great hymn that we sing so often, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a...” What? “A wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind, but now I see.”

So here in these first seven verses he basically summarizes the exalted gospel which he is going to continue to address. We will examine that more closely next week.

Well, let’s move from the big picture now and zero in here on the first verse of his introduction. And here the real focus is on the preacher of the gospel. If you want a heading in your notes, use that. The preacher of the gospel.

We are going to see that God here reveals three things about him. He is, first of all, a bond servant of Christ Jesus. Secondly, called as an apostle. And, thirdly, he was set apart for the gospel of God.

So let’s look at these three powerful truths and see how they regulate everything is going to follow.

First he says, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus.”<sup>6</sup>

Now, beloved, the order speaks volumes here about his character. What is first in order is first in priority. It is the primary way he views himself, the primary way he wants to be known by his readers here in Rome, many of whom he has never met. He wants them to know that he is a bond servant, a *doulos* (doo’-los) in the original language. It could be just translated “a slave of Christ Jesus.”

Now I ask. Is this the foremost way in which you see yourself? Would others define your character in such a way? Is this how you wish to be known? I hope it is.

You know, he could have begun by boasting of his academic prowess, of his credentials, a former Pharisee trained by Gamaliel himself the most celebrated scholar in all of Jerusalem. He could have started like that.

He could have began by saying, “Paul, the one who was caught up to the third heaven, caught up into paradise to be with God who heard things that cannot be told which man cannot utter.” That would be true. He could have began by saying, “Paul, a man who saw Christ, the risen Christ and was led by God into the wilderness to receive direct revelation from him for three years.” That would have been true, too.

But where does he begin? He begins by saying, “Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus.”

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 1:13-15.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:1.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1-7

In Acts chapter 20 you will recall in verse 18 he said to the believers there, “I was with you the whole time.”<sup>7</sup>

And in verse 19 he says, “...serving the Lord with all humility and with tears.”<sup>8</sup>

“Serving” comes from that same root word *douloō* (doo’-los). It has the idea of carrying out the duties of a slave, to serve as a slave. This was Paul’s perspective of himself.

You see, he understood that Jesus is lord. He is the *kurios* (koo’-ree-os), meaning the master and we are the *douloō* (doo’-los), the slave. All right? He understood that. This is the essence of Christianity. And so for this reason he reminded them in Acts 20 that he served the Lord with all humility. In other words, he was unpretentious. He was self effacing. That was his behavior. He was totally submitted to the master’s will. He was the Lord’s slave. He was not the man’s slave.

In fact, in Galatians 1:10 he was talking about how he was not trying to please men because, quote, “If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a [slave] of Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

Now the metaphor of slavery was very powerful in the minds of the early saints. The imagery was quite profound. Those of a Jewish background would have understood it according to the Old Testament Scriptures, according to their culture. And in the Old Testament the word “slave” was used in the context of the Mosaic law and there was a provision there that allowed an indentured servant to voluntarily choose to serve permanently as a bondservant a particular master that they loved and desired to serve.

We read in Exodus 21 verse five:

But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.<sup>10</sup>

So the Jewish believers in the churches there in Rome would have understood that. Those from the Greek background would have also understood what Paul was saying according to their culture. In fact, Rome was filled, the Roman Empire was filled with millions of slaves.

If you were an ancient slave in that day you would be a person who, first of all, was bought with a price. You would be one that was solely owned by your master and you would bear the mark of that ownership on your body. You could not be owned by another. You were not allowed to serve two masters. You had to be controlled by him.

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 20:18.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 20:19.

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 1:10.

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 21:5-6.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

You had to obey his commands. You were to seek to do only his will, not the will of anyone else. You give up all of your rights. Your agenda is completely out. You are singularly devoted to that master. You had no purpose in life but to make him happy, to seek his good. Your ambitions are out. You elevate him, not yourself. You are loyal only to him. You seek to honor him in all things.

And, interestingly enough, you were utterly dependent upon him to provide and protect.

So when they heard Paul say that he was a slave of Christ Jesus they would have run it through that particular filter.

Now, for all who serve the master, the Lord Jesus Christ, we understand the parallels there of the ancient slave with that of our loving submission to Christ. In fact, in 1 Corinthians four and verse one Paul said, “This is how one should regard us,” referring to apostles. As servants, literally slaves of Christ and stewards of the mystery of God.

“Servants” there is an interesting form of a slave. It is *aperetho* (hoop-ay-ret'-ace) in the original language and it was used to describe an under rower or a subordinate rower. It was a term that was used to define the lowest of all of the galley slaves that were chained to a bench in a Roman ship and had to row their life away. That is how Paul saw himself. That is how he wanted everyone to see the apostles.

Now there is a big difference, of course, and I will not elaborate on this much, but obviously our master is gentle and kind and we serve him not out of duty, but out of desire. We serve him with great joy, not with sorrow.

Now while Paul never demeaned in any way his position as an adopted son, a child of God and even, as we are going to see, an apostle of Jesus Christ, he always saw himself, first and foremost as a willing servant or slave of his master.

As I think about this, this is totally contrary to the modern gospel today, isn't it? The gospel of neo Evangelicalism that would have people believe that Christianity is all about Jesus serving you, not you serving him, that God exists for you. You don't exist for him. That he loves you so much he just can't wait for you to get on his team and that type of thing.

Well, Paul constantly refuted that blasphemous notion. For example, 1 Corinthians seven verse 22. He says, “For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman,”<sup>11</sup> meaning that he has been freed from the bondage of sin. “Likewise,” he goes on to say, “he who was called while free,”<sup>12</sup> that is not a slave in a social sense, “is Christ's slave.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:22.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

Then he says, “You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men,”<sup>14</sup> and idea of reverting back into the bondage of sin in the world.

Then he says, “Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”<sup>15</sup>

And what is that condition? In a spiritual sense we have been made slaves of Christ Jesus in salvation.

Dear friends, this must be your mindset as a Christian, as a believer. We exist to serve the Lord, not man. We are to fear him, not man. We exist for him.

You see, the Christian life is all about God and his glory, not you and your needs. But that is a huge paradigm shift for most of what is taught today in evangelical circles.

But I want you to notice. Paul was not the slave of some religion, not the slave of some tradition, but of Christ Jesus. You see, from the outset, Christ Jesus is given the preeminence. Paul gloried in the fact that he was merely the slave of Christ Jesus. He is the center of gravity around which his life would orbit. He is the central theme of the gospel. In fact, this is mentioned five times in these seven verses of introduction.

Christ is a title, not a name, *crīstos* (khris-tos’) it means the anointed one. And Jesus, as we know, was specially commissioned by the Father to be the Savior, becoming Messiah and King. And often Paul adds a second title when speaking of Jesus. He would call him the Lord Jesus Christ. A gain, Lord is *kurios* (koo’-ree-os) meaning master or owner.

Paul could have written many pages describing himself, boasting in his accomplishments. But the theme that was most precious to him was that of Christ Jesus. All of the honor, all of the glory belongs to him.

Beloved, I would ask you. Is he the theme of your conversations? Do you look for every opportunity to speak of Christ? Would this be how you would begin your letter if you wrote a friend?

Let me put it to you a little bit differently, were you not liberated from the bondage of sin? Were you not bought with a price? I ask you. Were you not redeemed with the precious blood of the Lamb? Is that not true? Has not God delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you into the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom you have redemption and the forgiveness of sins? Is that not true? Do you not belong to him? Are you not captivated by his love? Then why do you speak so much of you rather than of him? And why do you say, if you do—and I hope you don’t, but many do—“Well, yes, he is my Savior, but I am not yet ready to make him Lord. I am not really ready for him to be the master of my life. After all, I still have some wild oats to sow”?

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:23.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:24.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

Martyn Lloyd-Jones addressed such a ridiculous and rebellious notion this way. Quote, “As Christians we are not free. We were bought by Christ. We belong to him. He is our master, our Lord. This idea that you can believe in Christ first as your Savior only and then, perhaps, years later go on to take him as your Lord, is a denial of Scripture. From the moment he sets you free he is your Lord. We do not decide to take him as Lord. It is he as Lord who buys us out of the market and liberates us and we belong to him. We are never free. We were the bond servants of Satan. We are now the bond servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. If only we always remembered that, if we only always lived in the light of this glorious truth.”

Then he closed by saying, “May God give us grace ever to remember it and ever to live accordingly,” end quote.

Well, certainly the apostle Paul understood this. So that is where he begins. Now this fired up preacher of the gospel goes on and he not only wants them to know first and foremost that he is a slave of Jesus Christ, but, secondly, he says, “called as an apostle.”<sup>16</sup>

Two very powerful terms here. Called, which means divinely selected or appointed and apostle from *apostolos* (ap-os'-tol-os) in the original language. And it literally means a messenger or one who is sent forth with orders.

And in the New Testament it is used specifically to designate 13 men being the 12, Matthias being the one who replaced Judas and then the apostle Paul.

Now all of these men were chosen and commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ himself to be his authoritative messenger, to proclaim and protect the truth of the gospel in the nascent church. And all 13 apostles were personally called by Jesus and were witnesses of his resurrection including the apostle Paul who saw him in the ineffable brilliant light of the Lord's shekinah on the road to Damascus.

And each apostle was empowered to heal and cast out demons. Each of them received direct revelation from God which they were to proclaim with authority. And, of course, all of that was validated by the signs and the wonders that they performed.

Now, will you notice the ascending nature of the designations that he used to describe himself? Yes, he was the Lord's bond servant and all believers are that. But unlike all believers he was different in that he was called as an apostle. Literally it could be translated “a called apostle.”

And who called him? Who commissioned him? Well, the answer is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

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<sup>16</sup> Romans 1:1.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

You will recall your history in Acts. Recall when Saul was blinded on the road to Damascus by the risen Christ and the Lord sent him to Ananias and he said to him in Acts nine verse 15, “He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”<sup>17</sup>

And then later on Ananias communicates these truths to the apostle Paul in Acts 22 verse 14. He says this.

The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.<sup>18</sup>

Now, in one sense all of us have been commissioned to proclaim the gospel. But while the specific commission and empowering of apostles ceased when the canon of Scripture was completed, it is important for you to understand as a footnote here that God does continue to specifically empower evangelists—which are missionaries—and pastor teachers as we read in Ephesians 4:11.

In fact, by God’s grace my calling in verse 12 of Ephesians four as a pastor teacher is for this purpose, “For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”<sup>19</sup>

And he goes on say how that what we are called and empowered, gifted to do is to help you grow up, to prevent you from being “children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,”<sup>20</sup> and all of that. We are to speak the truth to you that you might grow up and mature and become like Christ.

And sadly there are many men today and women who call themselves pastors. By the way, any time you see a woman in a position of church leadership, it is always a mark of defection. It is always a mark of defection.

But we see many people today who are self appointed. They have not been called by God. They are nothing more than entrepreneurs trying to make a buck, men and women who have not been gifted by God to be the authoritative shepherds of the flock, the Church.

And I might also add, especially those of you who are listening to me in other places around the world, if you have a pastor who claims to be your shepherd and his life and his message does not square with Scripture, you have a false shepherd that is leading you.

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<sup>17</sup> Acts 9:15.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 22:14-15.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 4:12-13.

<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 4:14.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

He is a wolf in sheep's clothing and you need to run before you are devoured by false teaching.

I know of so many people who, because of relationship or whatever, have sat under the teaching of this kind of a person. They have been banished to an island of spiritual infancy as it were. And many times they have forfeited blessing on their life. It is a sad and dangerous thing.

Well, the same was true in Paul's day. There were many false apostles, many self appointed apostles. And, of course, many of them as you read the New Testament denied Paul's apostolic authority. They thought he was a phony, that he had appointed himself. So it was important for Paul to clarify this from the outset.

So he says that I am a called apostle. I, therefore, speak for the one who has sent me. I carry the authority of God himself. In fact, it is an authority, he said in 2 Corinthians 10:8, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you.

As I was thinking about this I was reminded of so many things that I have read and heard where people deny the authority of Scripture. They deny especially the authority of Paul because he was so controversial.

I remember I was in a Christian counseling seminar a number of years ago and a very well known speaker and author was reading something that Paul had said and I will never forget the quote. I wrote it down, but I could never forget it. He said, "You know, I think Paul was on to something."

And I thought to myself, Paul was on to something? What are you talking about? Paul was God's spokesman. This was literally God that is speaking through an inspired apostle. He didn't just kind of come up on something. And how many times I have encountered Christian feminists who insist that Paul's teaching about wives, for example, being submissive to their husbands, is really based on his Jewish bias towards women and that he is a chauvinist and all of that needs to be disregarded.

How different from the saints in Thessalonica of whom Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "We also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."<sup>21</sup>

So this preacher of the gospel introduces himself, first, "I am a slave of Christ Jesus. I am called as an apostle. I am not self appointed. I am divinely commissioned."

And, thirdly, he says, "Set apart for the gospel of God."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 1:1.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

Now, beloved, this final designation is the pinnacle of his commissioning. And here the ascent of his introduction is complete. Set apart, e also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Set apart, *aforizw* (af-or-id’-zo) in the original language. It means to mark off or to separate by a boundary. It is a fascinating term. If you look at the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament you will see that it is used to describe God setting apart of consecrating certain things like he sets apart the nation of Israel. He sets apart the first born child. He set apart the tribe of Levi for his service, the first fruits of Israel’s crops and so forth. The chosen people of God, the Jews were set apart from all other people. They were to be consecrated to the Lord.

Now this is fascinating. Paul was once a Pharisee. And in Hebrew Pharisee means a separated one. You see, they were not set apart by God, but they were set apart by their buddies and by each other according to their own self imposed standards of legalism.

If they saw somebody, if you were walking towards a Pharisee and they saw you, they would walk to other side of the road because they were set apart from you. They didn’t want to be defiled by you.

In fact, they were careful that their skirts would not ever touch anybody else lest they become unclean. They would have nothing to do with publicans and sinners and all of that type of thing.

But I find it interesting here. Paul, who was formerly a Pharisee of the Pharisees and he was no longer wearing that as a badge of honor, but a badge of shame, he is saying now, “Hey, I have been set apart for the gospel of God.”

Now it is fair to ask the question: When did this happen and by whom, this setting apart?

Well, Paul answers this in Galatians one in verse 15. He was set apart by the Lord Jesus Christ. It says that “He who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace.”<sup>23</sup>

Isn’t that fascinating? Catch the flow of this. If I go back to Galatians one beginning at verse 13, here is what Paul says.

For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.  
But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and

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<sup>23</sup> Galatians 1:15.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1-7

called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.<sup>24</sup>

Now God has done this before. You will remember when Jeremiah introduced himself in Jeremiah one verses four and five he spoke of how God set him apart before he was born. He said:

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."<sup>25</sup>

It happened also with John the Baptist. You will recall that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

Now, beloved, don't miss this. Paul is saying, "I once set myself apart as a self righteous Pharisee. But I didn't know it, but in reality God had set me apart from my sin unto himself in eternity past before I was even born. Yes, I am a slave of my master who purchased me and who owns me and I am also a man who has been called by the Lord Jesus Christ to be the authoritative messenger of the gospel of grace. But that gospel of grace and my joy of being a preacher of the gospel was set into motion before I was even born."

My friend, you cannot escape the sovereignty of God in salvation and in sanctification. This is a much despised and maligned doctrine. I want you to notice that Paul sets it forth from the very first verse of Romans. He is going to build up on it over and over again.

You see, Scripture repeatedly speaks of this inscrutable mystery that God separates those that he chooses for salvation and for service. Our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. When? Before the foundations of the world. He saved us before time began, 2 Timothy 1:9.

We will see this all through the epistle, all through the New Testament. Remember in Romans 8:29 he says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined."<sup>26</sup>

Foreknew means he foreloved.

In verse 30 he says, "And whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."<sup>27</sup>

In Romans nine and verse 13 he is going to say what God has said, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Galatians 1:13-16.

<sup>25</sup> Jeremiah 1:4-5.

<sup>26</sup> Romans 8:29.

<sup>27</sup> Romans 8:30.

## The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

Well, when did that happen? Before they were born, in their mother's womb. Verse 11 tells us

For though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."<sup>29</sup>

Aren't you glad that we serve a God that we cannot understand? I mean, we can understand enough that he has given to us, but aren't you glad that we serve a God that has ordained the end from the beginning?

So this great servant of Christ was not called by man. He did not appoint himself, but by God who set him apart, set him apart, notice, for the gospel of God, the *euaggelion* (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on), the gospel, the good news that sins can be forgiven, that the bondage of sin can be broken, that the burden of guilt can be relieved, that we can have the hope of eternal life.

Indeed, this is the gospel of God. He is the source. He is the substance.

So with this magnificent introduction the preacher is now going to build upon these truths in his epistle.

May I leave you with these thoughts this morning? May I challenge you, dear friend, even as the Lord loved Paul before he was born and separated him unto the gospel from his mother's womb, realize he has done the same for all who have placed their faith in Christ. What an incredible mystery. Won't you praise him this week for his sovereign purposes in your life? Praise him that in his sweet providence he is orchestrating all of the events in your life to accomplish his purpose in your life. And, dear Christian, won't you set aside some time this week to contemplate this great doctrine, to think that his omniscient eye and his omnipotent arm, his eye is on you, his arm is around you and he is leading you and caring for you? Won't you celebrate that this week? I pray that you are not fighting him because if you are, he will certainly chasten you as any good father would do.

Let's close together with prayer this morning.

*Father, thank you for these eternal truths. I pray that you will cause us all to share the enthusiasm of Paul, that we will catch his zeal for the gospel so that at the end of our life we might be able to say with him, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Be pleased to show yourself powerful in each of our lives. And we thank you for your grace in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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<sup>28</sup> Romans 9:13.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 9:11-12.

# The Exalted Gospel – Part 1

Romans 1:1–7

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We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell's messages, please visit [OliveTreeResources.org](http://OliveTreeResources.org).

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