

ROAMING THROUGH ROMANS

“The Doulos”

Introduction and Romans 1:1

Turn with me if you will to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans.

We have been in the Old Testament for awhile so your New Testament might be a little stiff! I am so looking forward to studying this book together. Like so many before me, this book has been very instrumental to my Christian walk.

At our orientation at Bible college, the administrator at the school, Pastor Brad Lambert, told us that if there was one book we needed to sink our teeth into, it was this one. Of course, he was the teacher. But he was right. It has been said that no single book of the Bible is more responsible for transforming the lives of men than this epistle. Let’s begin by looking at some of the people this book has touched.

In 386 AD a North African scholar named Augustine was teaching in Milan, Italy. One day, under conviction of his sin but not yet a believer, he sat in the garden of a friend weeping. Then he heard some children on the other side of the fence singing, “Take up and read.” So he did. He picked up a scroll and guess what he opened it to? Romans. Romans 13:13-14 to be exact. Listen to what it says:

¹³Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

The Hound of Heaven was hard upon Augustine. This passage spoke of exactly who he was at this time and what in life was his greatest need. Later in life he would write of this day: “Instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.” Such is the power of this book.

But not only does the letter to the Romans have the power to change one’s life ...

Its study has also led to revival. And not just once. It was the Book of Romans that spoke loudly to an Augustinian monk who was caught up in the severe legalism of the Roman Catholic Church. He so desperately wanted to please God that he would crawl up the steps to the church on his knees. He would stay in a cold room without heat in the dead of winter (in Germany, nonetheless!). More than once he flogged himself trying to be rid of the flesh. That didn’t work, and later in our study of this book we will find out why. This man’s name was Martin Luther. The Holy Spirit spoke to him through Romans 1:16-17. Paul wrote:

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For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

God did not want Martin’s works. He wanted his faith and love. That’s what He wants from you as well. And “**just**” like that (*pun intended*) the Protestant Reformation was born. He tacked his 95 theses (questions) to the door of the church in Wittenberg and the world was never the same.

Two hundred years later, John Wesley formed a “Holy Club” at Oxford University in England. Like Luther, he was striving to live a life that was pleasing to God by doing good works. Having returned from a stint as a missionary in Georgia, he wrote this in his journal: “I went to America to convert the Indians; but Oh! Who shall convert me?”

Both John and his brother Charles had met a group of born-again believers called Moravians on the boat home. They were facing a severe storm, and Wesley believed he was going to perish that day (as did many others on the ship). While seeking shelter, he went to the bottom of the ship; and what he saw astounded him. There were the Moravians praying and singing hymns (think Paul and Silas in the prison). They were placing their fate in the hands of God. Wesley knew that they possessed something he needed.

When he got back to England, he attended one of their worship services at a church on Aldersgate Street in London; and his question was answered. Listen to how Wesley described that life-changing moment:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

The result was the great Wesleyan Revival that swept England and transformed the nation.

A little closer to home, Donald Grey Barnhouse, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Philly, began teaching Romans on his radio show. Eleven years later, he finally finished. What was born out of that was a four-volume commentary, which should be in the library of any serious Bible student. And this wasn’t just an East Coast thing.

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The book also touched a pastor in a Foursquare church in southern California. While teaching verse by verse through Romans, Chuck Smith learned all about the grace of God; and it changed his world. He took this newfound wisdom to a little church called Calvary Chapel in Cost Mesa, CA. A few years later, he and his wife began teaching the Bible to a bunch of hippies; and the Jesus Movement began.

Countless others have been touched by this wonderful letter.

So I pray that our hearts will be mightily changed by our study of the book as well.

The theme of the Book of Romans is pretty simple and yet unbelievably complex at the same time. Almost all would agree that it is found in verse 17 of chapter one. We read this verse earlier when talking about Martin Luther, but it bears repeating. Paul writes:

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

What is this righteousness that Paul speaks of?

It is the means by which God could declare sinful man saved and still maintain His perfect Holiness.

It is “revealed” in this book like no other, but it is by no means a new idea.

As we shall learn all throughout the Book of Romans, it is the only way God has ever saved. In developing this theme, Paul will establish that God’s holiness demands that sin be punished by death — eternal death. And he will conclude that all men have sinned (and fallen short of the glory of God).

But then he will explain that God, in His love, provided a substitute to take man’s place. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us, receiving the punishment we deserved. He then raised Jesus from the dead, accepting the perfect sacrifice that He made in our place.

So the demands of a holy God have been met. The penalty for the sins of the world has been paid in full. And as a result, God can save any and all who trust in the work Jesus did on the cross.

This righteousness is activated “**from faith to faith,**” meaning from first to last, or beginning to end.

Jesus said from the cross, “**It is finished.**”

We do not, or cannot, work to earn or deserve our salvation.

We can only receive it by faith.

But it doesn’t just stop there.

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Those who, by faith, receive this free gift are declared righteous and free from guilt or punishment from God. The Bible uses the term “**justified**” to describe this transaction. It means that God sees you just as if you had never sinned. He literally sees you just as if you had died with Jesus on the cross. But this is just the beginning of our salvation.

In Colossians 3 we are told that at this very moment of our conversion, we are hidden with Christ in God. That means that our place in eternity is secure. One day we will receive a glorified heavenly body in which we will live for eternity. This is called “**glorification.**”

But what about in between the time of our salvation and our glorification?

What happens then?

Philippians 1:6 tells us:

being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

This good work that God is doing is called our **sanctification.**

It is a progressive work that the Holy Spirit does in our lives, transforming us from who we were into who we are called to be. In other words, He makes us more and more like Jesus.

Paul will delve deeply into these three aspects of our salvation.

Some other topics he will hit on will be the “flesh versus the Spirit,” “law versus grace,” and the difference between the “Church and Israel.”

So what we have here in Romans is something different than Paul’s other letters.

They were all written to churches that needed comfort or correction.

But this letter is written, not to a church, but to the “saints” in Rome. There is no doubt that there was a church in Rome and probably more than one. But Paul’s intent was to ground the believers in sound theology, not correct mistakes that were made.

He desperately wants to go there and teach the believers, but he can’t. So he does the next best thing. He writes this letter to them to share what he would teach them in person if he could. That is why it is so important to us. Listen to this quote from H.A. Ironside, a great Bible teacher from years ago:

In Romans, we have the gospel taught to saints, rather than the gospel preached to unsaved sinners...(I)t is very important to see this. In order to be saved it is only necessary to trust in Christ. But in order to understand

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our salvation, and thus to get out of it the joy and blessing God intends...we need to have the work of Christ unfolded to us. This is what the Holy Spirit has done in this precious epistle. It is written to people who are already saved to show them the secure foundation upon which their salvation rests: namely, the righteousness of God. When faith apprehends this, doubts and fears are gone and the soul enters into settled peace.

If you were like me and got saved later in life, you probably knew very little about what a Christian believes. That is why this book has had such a profound effect on my life. I thought I was going to Bible college to be polished up to be a pastor. But I found out that I first needed to learn to be a bond slave of Jesus Christ. I found that out here in Paul's letter.

Romans is one of those books that dramatically reveals all a Christian needs to know about his or her walk with God. And it all begins like this (verse 1):

Paul,

Almost everyone agrees that Paul was the author of this epistle. I don't have a problem with it because it says here he wrote it; and if he didn't, the Holy Spirit would have said so. He did, however, use a secretary named Tertius (16:22) to write it on a scroll.

The letter was penned from Corinth, probably sometime around 56-58 AD. This would have been just around the time that Paul was preparing to go to Jerusalem with the gift he had collected for the poor in the church there. A woman named Phoebe, who was from a port city near Corinth, is believed to have carried the letter to Rome.

We will find out that it was Paul's desire to head there after his ministry in Jerusalem was complete. Then he wanted to go to Spain. Little did he know that he would go to Rome, just not in the way he expected. He thought he would go as a missionary, but he ended up being taken there as a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

We don't know for sure how the church started in Rome. Most likely it was the result of people who got saved at Pentecost and then returned home. Paul mentions his friends Priscilla and Aquila in chapter 16, so we can surmise they had a hand in church planting there. And by the time Paul wrote this letter, there were Jewish believers, but the church was predominantly Gentile.

So that is our background.

But who was this Paul?

What was his name when we first meet him in the Bible?

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Saul (of Tarsus).

He was born of Jewish parents in Tarsus, a town in Cilicia, in modern-day southeast Turkey. His parents gave him the name Saul (one who hears). This was probably after the first king of Israel, who was also of the tribe of Benjamin.

Does anyone remember what his occupation was?

Paul was a tent maker, but he was also a Pharisee. We'll talk about this a little more later.

And what was he doing?

He was zealously persecuting the church. Acts 8:3 tells us this about Saul:

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

He was also there when Stephen became the first martyr of the church, going so far as to watch the garments the men who stoned him took off.

So what happened to Saul that so changed his life that he would go on three missionary journeys, plant many churches, and write a large portion of the New Testament?

He became a bond slave of Jesus Christ.

Look what it says next in verse 1:

a bondservant (slave) of Jesus Christ,

Saul (Paul) became a bond slave of Jesus.

But when and where did this happen?

It at least began on the road to Damascus. Turn with me to Acts Chapter 9 so we can look at the conversion of Saul. Beginning at verse one we read:

¹Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

This man, Saul, was sent by the high priest to round up those who were of “**the Way.**” That is what the early Christians called their newfound faith. He was commissioned to go to Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem for prosecution.

But it was not believers that Paul met on the way — *it was their Lord.*

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Look at verses 3-5:

³As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

⁵And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

Does anyone know what a goad is?

It is a sharp stick or pole that a driver used to urge his oxen along. He would poke at the back of their legs to keep them moving.

So why was Saul kicking against the goads?

He was trying to please God but in the wrong way. His zealousness, *his religion*, was not getting him closer to God. It was moving him further away.

That is what all religions of the world do. They teach that men can reach up to God by doing good works.

But *the WAY* teaches us that it is God who reaches down to man. Jesus was reaching down to Saul here. And he was listening.

How do I know?

Listen to his next question (verse 6):

⁶So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

I believe this was the moment Saul became Paul. You see the name Paul means “*little*.” Now many have said that this name was given to him because he was short in stature. And that may be true.

But I think that this bold and zealous religionist, at this very moment, became a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He was knocked down from his pedestal of religiosity and given a new heart.

At the time Paul wrote this letter there were millions of slaves in the Roman Empire.

And these people were considered property. They owed their masters exclusive and absolute obedience. Their work did not earn them any thanks or profit. They were just slaves. And many of them were Christians.

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But the bond slave, or “*doulos*” in the Greek, was different.

Listen to how Exodus 21:2-6 explains the bond slave from a Hebrew perspective:

²If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. ³If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he *comes in* married, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. ⁵But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ ⁶then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

Like Peter in John Chapter 6, Paul now realizes that Jesus has the words of life and that he has nowhere else to go. So he has his spiritual ear pierced and vows in his heart to serve the Lord forever. And then he does what we all should do as disciples of Jesus Christ.

He asks the Lord, “What do you want me to do?”

Now remember, this is Saul the Pharisee. He studied under a Jewish rabbi named Gamaliel. Listen to one of Gamaliel's prayers that has survived as a record from antiquity:

Let there be no hope to them who apostatize from the true religion, and let these heretics, how many so ever they be, perish in a moment. (From Pastor Skip Heitzig's notes)

Evidently, Saul took this very seriously.

But God...

On the road to Damascus, the Lord literally brings Saul to his knees. He makes him blind for a season (three days) so that he could see.

And Paul surrenders.

He willfully accepts the gift of grace God has to offer, gives his life to Jesus, and the rest is history.

Saul has been freed up from the bondage he was in to the law and made a bond slave of Jesus.

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And now, here in his letter to the Romans, he is going to impart to us all the Holy Spirit has taught him about this freedom we have.

Yes, I said that Paul became a slave so that he could be set free.

As I said earlier, *doulos* should be the title of every single Christian.

What are you?

Do you call Jesus Lord?

Is He your Master?

Then you are His servant.

But are you a *doulos*?

There is a difference.

Listen to what John MacArthur has to say about this word. (By the way, he wrote a whole book about it because it is so important to the Christian life.) Here is the quote:

The word is doulos. In the Greek, that word means “slave,” never means anything but “slave.” It doesn’t mean “servant,” it doesn’t mean “worker,” it doesn’t mean “hired hand,” it doesn’t mean “helper.” There are six or seven Greek words that mean “servant” in some form. Doulos never means “servant.” A servant is someone hired to do something. The slave is someone owned. Big difference, huge difference, and yet all through the New Testament the word “slave” is masked by the word “servant,” or some form of the word “servant.” Truly a remarkable thing.

Most English translations translate *doulos* as “servant.” This is most likely because the word *slave* has such negative connotations. But as MacArthur says, a slave is what *doulos* means.

The thing I want us to understand here is that we were all purchased out of the slave market of sin. Jesus paid the price for us with His blood. And our freedom can never be taken away.

So we can be content to serve out our time here on earth following Jesus. We can be His servant.

Or, we can become His willing slave.

Are we a “*doulos* for Christ?”

Are we sold out for Him, or are we just serving?

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Are we zealous for the good works He prepared for us?

Or, are we content to come to church on Sunday and attend all the social events?

That is something we all have to work out in our relationship with Christ. And it's not easy. Charles Ryrie said it well when he described the bond slave like this:

To literally become His slave is to be bound to Him of your own will. The believer who voluntarily takes the position of being a slave to Christ has no rights or will of his own. He does always and only the will of his Master. For His part, the Lord binds Himself to the care of His servant.

I certainly have not attained the “doulos” standard yet. I often wake up in the morning thinking “today is the day, Lord. I want to give You my all.” Then someone cuts me off in traffic, or a customer gets grumpy with me. And for a moment, I get in the flesh. Then I get back in the Spirit — that is, until something else bad happens.

But this is not how the bond slave thing works.

Being His slave means that you absolutely surrender all to Jesus. And the key to being a doulos, I believe, is found here in Romans. All of the knowledge and wisdom that the Master has given to Paul is contained here.

So my hope is that we can all learn together how to fully give our lives to the Lord. And the first step in this process is to find out what God has called us to do. Look at part three of verse one:

called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

After the Lord put Paul on his knees, He told him to go to Damascus and wait for instructions. A few days later, Jesus sent a man named Ananias to share His calling for Paul.

This was what the Lord called Paul to do (Acts 9:15-16):

¹⁵Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”

The Lord sent Paul to the Gentiles. In other words, he was called to be a missionary.

And that is one of the two meanings of the word “apostle.” Strong's defines this word like this:

Apostle grk: apostolos; a messenger, on a mission, a task, by order, one who is sent by another or others.

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That is what Jesus' disciples did. They fulfilled His "Great Commission" to them by going forth sharing His message: the gospel. More about that in a moment.

So what we have is two-fold:

In the first centuries there were men who held the office of an apostle. These men saw the risen Lord and were commissioned by Him to establish the foundation of His church on earth.

But since then, it could apply to anyone who serves as a missionary.

The office is different in our time but still exists as people go out into the world to reach the lost for Jesus.

Now what I find interesting about Paul here is what he put first. He calls himself a slave before he lets us know he was an apostle. I love this about Paul.

He knows that his greatness comes from his relationship with Jesus and not his calling.

You see, there is a difference between who you are separated to and what you are separated for.

This is how it went for Paul.

First, he was a bond slave of Jesus, set apart to do whatever the Lord would have for him.

Second, the good work that the Lord had for Paul was as an apostle, a messenger sent to the Gentiles.

And third, the message that he was to bring was the gospel of God.

By the way, that is true of all of us as well.

Paul was called to be an apostle. I am called to work at Lowe's as a salesperson. John Adam is called to own a heating and air conditioning business. Destiny is called to be a student right now, and work in health care later.

But we were all separated to the gospel of God.

And I think this is where, at least for me, the difference between the servant and slave most often comes into play.

I struggle with being a salesman set apart unto the gospel of God. At times it is hard to accept that Lowe's is the mission field that God has for me. But think about this:

Our Lord Jesus Christ became a bond slave for us.

Does anyone know where it says this?

Philippians Chapter 2. Beginning in verse 5 Paul writes this:

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⁵Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

Think about this — *let this mind be in you.*

Jesus, very God, became very man and took on the form of a slave. He humbled Himself and became obedient heading to the cross for us.

But guess what?

We were there with Him.

Listen to Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Many have called what Paul did here the “*exchanged life.*” And it is not easy.

To actually allow Jesus to live in and through us takes supernatural strength.

But this is how God sees us in Christ. And He gives us all that we need to live for Him. We just have to ask Him for it and walk in it.

Paul is going to develop this concept of the *doulos* for us over these next few months and give it boot leather. Next time we are going to talk about being separated unto the gospel.

Read ahead and see what the Lord shows you.

Let’s pray.