

The Apostle Paul had longed to visit the church in Rome. It comes up several times in his writing (Romans 15:23). He tells us that he planned to go on from there into Spain. Though he had never been to Rome, he knew a number of the believers there, having met them in other cities. I see the great missionary heart of Paul longing to see that this most central city have a church that was solidly grounded and able to influence the world for Christ. As Paul longed to go to Rome (Romans 1:11), I've longed to preach Romans. Until now I had always sensed that it was not time. Perhaps I was not ready, or we as a church were not ready. But the time has come.

Romans is a life altering letter! The other letters of Paul are all addressing an immediate situation. The letter to the church in Rome is Paul's gospel. It is Paul being sure that church in this important city knows the theology of true Christianity. Its uniqueness is seen in its effect on the world. Next to the Gospels, this is the most influential book of the Bible. It was the catalyst for the transformation of such influential men as Augustine, Luther and Wesley. It was the background of Bunyan's classic, Pilgrim's Progress. More than any other letter or book it sums up the essential faith of the early church. MacArthur goes so far as to say that Romans is behind most if not all the great revivals and reformations of history.¹

It has been said that Romans will delight the greatest logician and captivate the mind of the consummate genius, yet it will bring tears to the humblest soul and refreshment to the simplest mind. It will knock you down and then lift you up. It will strip you naked and then clothe you with eternal elegance.² So as we begin, let us come to this study with reverence, humility, and expectation. Let us pray that God will open our hearts and transform our lives as He has with so many before us that have meditated on the words of this letter (Romans 12:2).

¹ *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,* Romans 1:1 (ESV) Paul calls himself a servant of Jesus. His favorite way to reference Jesus is Lord. The Greek word means master. His term for himself is slave. Paul is saying he is a slave of his master, the Messiah, Yeshua. Some of his other letters begin in the same manner (Philippians 1:1). To get the full effect of this, we have to remember Paul's past, *how* he was called to be an apostle.

Paul was born Saul of Tarsus. It was a city with three of the greatest Greek universities. He was born a citizen of Rome and probably educated at one of these great universities. He was also educated in Jewish tradition by Gamaliel, the grandson of the greatest of all rabbi, Hillel. He most likely was a leader in one of the synagogues of Tarsus when

Commented [notes1]: Romans 15:23 (ESV)
²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you,

Commented [notes2]: Romans 1:11 (ESV)
¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you -

Commented [notes3]: MacArthur New Testament Commentary Introduction to Romans

Commented [notes4]: MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Romans 1-8.

Commented [notes5]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)
² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Commented [notes6]: Philippians 1:1 (ESV)
¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

heard of the Christian movement. Like many Jews, he saw it as a perversion of Judaism and sought to eliminate it. He went to Jerusalem and Judea hunting down Christians and having them tried, but that was not enough for him. He sought permission to go to Damascus to persecute the Christians in that town of 150,000 residents (Acts 9:2). There were numerous synagogues there, so he asked for letters to each to assist him in rounding up these renegade Jews who, in his mind, were perverting Judaism.

Commented [notes7]: Acts 9:2 (ESV)

² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

After about a six day journey he was almost to the city of Damascus when a light shone from heaven and blinded him. This was his calling that he is referencing in the first verse of Romans. The light asked, "Saul why are you persecuting me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, lord?" Now, I suspect the Holy Spirit was already convicting his heart. In his head he knew that these Christians were not in line with the Jewish leaders. In his heart he couldn't understand why they acted with such grace. He may have even questioned whether he was the one in the wrong. When the light responded, "I am Jesus who you are persecuting!" (Acts 9:3-5). Paul's world was turned upside down.

Commented [notes8]: Acts 9:3-5 (ESV)

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

He had already heard the arguments in Scripture for Jesus being the Messiah, now he would start proclaiming those same arguments that he resisted and come up with many more from his own deep knowledge of the Old Testament (Acts 17:2). This was an immediate and total reversal, an overnight transformation!

Commented [notes9]: Acts 17:2 (ESV)

² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

It still happens today. We've seen it in our own church. One day they are arguing why there is no God, the next they are arguing for His existence and His grace expressed to us in Jesus. One day they can't miss their meth fix, and the next they want to find their calling in ministry. One day all they live for is their comfort and security, and the next they are ready to go on mission trip to the third world. **We are all called to leave lives of emptiness to a life of eternal purpose.** We are all called to be slaves of Jesus (Romans 12:1)!

Commented [notes10]: Romans 12:1 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Paul writes that he was set apart for the gospel. As an official representative of Jesus, he was called as an apostle to the Gentiles. In Ephesians he describes this being set apart. *⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* Ephesians 3:7-8 (NIV) Notice that He gives all the glory to God and even goes so far as to say he is the least of God's people. It is grace that calls us. It is grace that works through us. It is God's power and not our own (Philippians 2:13). I think God delights in using the most antagonistic toward the Gospel, because then you know it is a miracle of God. Then you can see for certain it is all of grace.

Commented [notes11]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

In some ways, Paul's calling as an Apostle is unique. As an official Apostle of Jesus, he would write much of the New Testament. Though he never met Jesus personally during Jesus' three years of ministry, he would meet with the Apostles and learn of Jesus' life

from them (Galatians 1:18). He also received direct revelations from Christ Jesus (Galatians 1:12). As a scholar of the Hebrew Law, he would see ways Jesus was a fulfillment of the Law. He would be one of the best preachers to Jewish synagogue gatherings. If anyone could relate to them and share what they had missed, it was this former persecutor of Christians. There are twelve Apostles that were to convey Jesus' message to the world, and as Paul declared, he is like one untimely born (1Corinthians 15:8). He didn't come on the due date. He arrived late, but he did see the risen Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:17).

We have heard of a modern day version of this. Our brother in a closed country was beaten severely and in the hospital for a month. The Imam that ordered the attack was arrested. When our brother forgave the man so that he could be released from prison, this Imam's curiosity led him to talk to believers. Eventually he came to Christ and now witnesses to other Imams. Who better to lead them to Christ?

When we read of these men of God in Scripture, it's like reading about super heroes. We long to be like them. Well, we'll never write anything that has the authority of Scripture, but we can be a slave of Jesus Christ like Paul was, set apart for Jesus' use. Paul had been a Pharisee, which comes from the same Aramaic word meaning to set apart. They wore special robes and didn't want to be touched by ordinary men. They thought they were set apart for holiness and to obey the Law, but in most cases it was set apart to arrogant pride. Now Paul is set apart for something the world despised, the gospel. We are set apart for the gospel in that we are to be lights shining in this dark world too (1Peter 2:9).

Some of your elders recently attended a training session with a Billy Graham Association representative. This coming November, at the age of 95, Billy Graham is going to do one last televised evangelistic effort, My Hope America. The association is providing materials to help equip us to participate in it and we are praying about how we might be a part. The thing I really respect about how they are going about it is that they are encouraging each church to use the event and the material as they see applicable in their local church. I would like to ask you to pray about participating. It is relational evangelism which is the only kind that I've seen to truly be effective and the type that we encourage you all to do. It begins by asking God who He wants you to build a relationship with. Who in your life does not know the Lord? Look around you and think about who God has been bringing you in contact with. It may be a relative, an exercise buddy, someone you keep meeting by chance, or a neighbor.

The second Great Command is to love our neighbor as our self (Matthew 22:39). **How can you show them God's love?** Pray for them. Invite them over. Get to know their needs, their dreams, and their struggles. You will probably find it natural to ask if you can pray for them. The time will come when you will be led to share your story of the difference Christ has made in your life. And then there will be the opportunity to ask

Commented [notes12]: Galatians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

Commented [notes13]: Galatians 1:12 (ESV)

¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes14]: 1 Corinthians 15:8 (ESV)

⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Commented [notes15]: Acts 9:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Commented [notes16]: 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Commented [notes17]: Matthew 22:39 (ESV)

³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

them if they would like to receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord. The Billy Graham Association can help you with great training material for each stage. And if they do receive Christ, there are four basic lessons you can share with them to help them get established in the faith. They may accept your invitation to come to church, or they may not. They may say they aren't ready to make the decision. What matters is continuing to show the love of Jesus.

The BGA calls this being a Matthew. What did Matthew do when Jesus called him? He invited all his friends to a big party and introduced them to Jesus (Matthew 9:10). He shared with those people with whom he had a relationship about how his life was changed.

In the end of Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone. (Mark 16:15) But as someone has said, "People don't care about how much you know until they know about how much you care." It is so easy in our world today to get so busy and become so selfish with our time that we forget about the world around us that desperately needs Jesus. Those people that came to mind have problems like we all do. I often say, "I don't know how others deal with these things without knowing the Lord." But who is going to tell them about the Lord if we don't? Would you pray about whether the Lord wants you to be a part of this training, to become a Matthew to those who the Lord brings to your mind?

We aren't going to ask you to do anything you don't want to do. We are going to equip you to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit and give you suggestions as to how you can create opportunities to share Christ. It can be the most exciting experience of your life. It does cost time, and it is a commitment. You can't enter into it with the idea that you are going to save 'em or leave 'em. People can spot that kind of agenda and feel used. It has to be genuine love and concern that continues by the grace of God.

Mankind is so selfish and sin sick that they don't even realize it. We hide it pretty well, but then when push comes to shove, it is every man for himself. It is this selfishness that isolates us and wounds others. We live in a world of hurting people that wear "everything is OK mask". Our addictions drive us to destruction. Many don't like their jobs because they see it as a necessary burden to get the things they desire. Guilt burdens the soul. Meaninglessness weighs on the psyche. The gospel is good news because it offers a solution to the enslavement to selfishness and sin. It offers freedom from guilt and meaning to life. It's becoming a slave to Jesus like the Apostle Paul.

That is one reason people often reject the good news. They think their enslavement to sin will be more fulfilling and pleasurable than becoming a slave of Jesus. They don't know what they are missing. That is partly because they haven't seen Christians live in the fullness of it or don't know any believers well enough to notice the difference. Some believers that they do see don't appear to have joy because those believers' minds still

Commented [notes18]: Matthew 9:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

Commented [notes19]: Mark 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

need to be renewed by the Word of God. There is a winsomeness about the man or woman who has let go of the perpetual seeking of self-satisfaction and is genuinely concerned about others. There is a deep joy that comes from knowing you are an instrument of Almighty God involved in eternal things. **When we trade selfishness for selflessness, we find what Jesus meant when He said that if you lose your life you will find it (Matthew 10:39).** We find our burden of guilt is lifted, our life has meaning, and hope for tomorrow.

Commented [notes20]: Matthew 10:39 (ESV)

³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Before his conversion, Saul was trying his best to advance himself among his peers. He was selfishly pursuing a name for himself, all the while thinking God was pleased with him. It was when His focus became obedience to Jesus because of the grace he had received that he became selfless and offered himself with abandon to God.

The Messiah had come, but He didn't tell us the one rule to keep. **He told us the one rule we couldn't keep, loving God with our all and our neighbor as our self.** (Luke 10:27-28). Then He lived it for us and died for our sin debt. That was not what Saul had been taught. But when he saw it by revelation, and then confirmed it in the Scriptures, selfishness became selflessness, guilt was lifted, purpose and hope filled his heart (Ephesians 1:18). He was empowered by the Spirit to do what he could not do even with his best efforts (Romans 7:18).

Commented [notes21]: Luke 10:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

Commented [notes22]: Ephesians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Commented [notes23]: Romans 7:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Commented [notes24]: John 1:12 (ESV)

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

Commented [notes25]: John 12:46 (ESV)

⁴⁶ I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, Romans 1:1 (ESV) We may not be called to be an apostle, but we are all called to be God's children by faith in Jesus. (John 1:12) We may not be set apart to write the New Testament, but we are all set apart from the world to offer hope and light to those in darkness (John 12:46).

What if we tweak that verse a bit so we can apply it to our own lives. **(Your name), a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be a child of God, set apart for the gospel of God.** Put your name in there and lets all say it together...

Commented [notes26]: Galatians 5:24 (ESV)

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Are you a slave to Jesus or to your passions? It's one or the other (Galatians 5:24). Have you heard Jesus' call on your life? Are you set apart for the good news of God or are you wallowing in the bad news of the world. Have you moved from selfishness to selflessness? Has your burden of guilt been lifted? Have you gone from meaninglessness to purpose and hope? If you have, then you have something others desperately need. If you want the training and material to help you be a Matthew to others, please let me know or call the office so that we can equip you.

If you asked the Apostle Paul who he was, he would say, "A slave of Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." **If I asked, "Who are you?" What would your answer be?**

Questions

- 1 Why is the letter to the Romans so important?
- 2 Who was Saul?
- 3 What transformed him?
- 4 How does he describe his calling?
- 5 How was Paul set apart before and after his conversion?
- 6 Why was it strategic for God to choose Paul?
- 7 What is one way to be a poor witness?
- 8 Why does the world need Christ?
- 9 Why are people afraid of submission to Christ?
- 10 Describe the heart of the obedient believer.
- 11 Who are you?