

A Study in the Book of Romans

2

Romans 1:1

Key Verse

“ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...”

Paul begins his letter to the Romans by giving his credentials. He does not list his academic or religious achievements, though he had every right to do so. (In **Philippians 3:3-8** he calls these achievements “dung” (KJV), “garbage” (NLT) and, as J. B. Phillips translates it, “useless rubbish,” in comparison to the glory of knowing Christ personally). Instead, Paul gives what he considers to be the greatest credentials of all:

- A slave of Jesus Christ
- Called to be an apostle
- Set apart to preach the Gospel

Introduction

The Gospel's Three Revelations

The Gospel's Three Answers

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A Slave of Jesus Christ

The Greek word that Paul uses here – *doulos* – does not actually mean servant, but slave. There is a difference between being a servant and being a slave. A servant is his own master and receives a wage for his work; but a slave belongs to someone else and has no right to a wage. A servant sells only his labor, and that for a certain time; but a slave's whole being is sold for his lifetime. A servant cares for himself, has his own will, and can make his own plans; but a slave is cared for by his master, and has no will or plans of his own.

When Paul calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ, he is meaning something even more. According to the custom of his day, if a slave came to the time when he could be set free, but because of his love for his master chose not to accept his

freedom, he then received a mark pierced in his ear. This was a sign that he was a love-slave to his master for life.

Read Deuteronomy 15:12-17

Read Exodus 21:5-6

Whenever Paul called Jesus Lord, he used the Greek word *kurios*, which means “master” or “owner,” and describes someone who has undisputed possession of a person. Paul, by his own choice, declared himself to be a love-slave of Jesus Christ.

Three Qualifications of a Slave

The three qualifications that makes a person a slave apply to us who now belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ownership

Let’s take a look at what the Bible says about God’s ownership of your life:

You have been purchased for God by the blood of Jesus Christ...

“...You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (**Revelation 5:9**).

Not with money...

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (**1 Peter 1:18-19**).

But at the price of Jesus’ life...

“God purchased you at a high price. Don’t be enslaved by the world” (**1 Corinthians 7:23**, NLT).

This price – the life of Jesus himself – is now what sets the value for your life.

“...our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (**Titus 2:13-14**).

Which was the “ransom money” of Calvary...

“...the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (**1 Timothy 2:6**).

The Message explains that “a huge sum was paid out for your ransom.” That “huge sum” was the life of Christ himself. Just think about it! Think of the high price that God put on your soul – nothing less than the life of his beloved Son!

“...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (**Matthew 20:28**).

And those bought by Christ are no longer their own...

“...You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 **Corinthians 6:19-20**).

But are slaves of God...

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life” (**Romans 6:22**).

Paul explains that Calvary set us free. In one sense, your freedom has been purchased by the blood of Christ. You have been “redeemed” from your slavery to “the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 **Peter 1:4**). You are no longer a slave, but a son of God. As J. B. Phillips translates **Romans 8:14-15**:

“All who follow the leading of God’s Spirit are God’s own sons. Nor are you meant to relapse into the old slavish attitude of fear – you have been adopted into the very family circle of God and you can say with a full heart, ‘Father, my Father.’”

But there is another sense, clearly endorsed by Scripture, that you now have the privilege to become a love-slave of Christ *by choice*. You have been given freedom, but can now choose, in that freedom, to live a life of obedience to the Lord. Paul’s words to the Christian slaves of Ephesus also applies to you:

“Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart” (**Ephesians 6:6**).

Who have been “sealed” by him

“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 **Corinthians 1:21-22**).

In historic times, a slave was branded just as cattle were branded. This branding was the mark of ownership. In the same way, in Christ, you have been branded by the Holy Spirit, who has set his “seal of ownership” upon you. **Ephesians 6:6** tells us:

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession...”

Obedience

Paul’s conversion (**Acts 9:1-19**) was not just a turning from sin. It was a complete turning to God for his purpose and pleasure (note **Acts 9:6**).

Paul not only refers to his own relationship with God as the model of a love-slave, but in **Philippians 2:5-8** he presents the Lord Jesus as our great example of

obedience. As the *New Living Translation* renders it:

“Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death on a cross.”

Provision

A slave possesses nothing of his own, but is the responsibility of his owner. His food, shelter and clothing are provided by his master. If the Lord has our total loyalty, we will not be like those who do not know him – full of worry about our daily needs. He knows we need these things and, for those committed to him, the Lord promises to prosper our work and meet all our daily needs.

Read Matthew 6:24-33

Read Philippians 4:18-19

These three qualifications of a slave – ownership, obedience and provision – are also the mark upon your life in Christ. But that’s not all Paul says, however. In his introduction to the Roman Christians, he goes on to describe his credentials with another phrase.

Called to Be an Apostle

Paul never thought of himself as a man who had earned special honor. He saw himself, rather, as a man who had been called to fulfill a task. In **1 Corinthians 9:16-19**, he wrote:

“Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”

Paul did not think of life in terms of what he wanted to do, but in terms of what God had called him to do. He was called to be an apostle. He was a man with a specific mission – to lay the foundations upon which Christ’s Church would be built. In **1 Corinthians 3:5-11** (NLT), he wrote:

“Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels? Why, we’re only servants. Through us God caused you to believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow. The ones who do the planting or watering aren’t important, but God is important because he is the one who makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the

one who waters work as a team with the same purpose. Yet they will be rewarded individually, according to their own hard work. We work together as partners who belong to God. You are God's field, God's building – not ours. Because of God's special favor to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have – Jesus Christ.”

Read also Ephesians 2:19-22

The call of God comes to every individual believer. God has a specific function for each of us to fulfill. The call of God defined Paul's life, and God's intention is that his call should define your life also.

In the Bible, the great men of God were men who heard and answered the call of God. His call will interrupt your life in the same way it did all those he has called. Just take a look at these famous characters from the Bible story:

- **Abraham** – In Ur of the Chaldees: “Leave your country...” (**Genesis 12:1**).
- **Moses** – A shepherd in the desert: “Go – set my people free...” (**Exodus 3:1-12**).
- **Samuel** – A boy serving in the tabernacle: “Wake up – speak for me...” (**1 Samuel 3:1-19**).
- **Ezekiel** – A captive in a foreign land: “Stand up – I am sending you...” (**Ezekiel 2:1-7**).
- **The Disciples** – Businessmen, fishermen: “Come – follow me...” (**Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:27-28**).
- **Paul** – An enemy of the Church: “Go – I'll tell you what you must do...” (**Acts 9:1-9**).

But this is not where Paul ends the list of his qualifications to write to the Romans. He goes on to finish his self-introduction with one more phrase.

Set Apart for the Gospel

Paul had once set *himself* apart. He had been a Pharisee (**Philippians 3:5-6**). The name “Pharisee” means a “Separated One.” They were a sect who set themselves apart to the study of God's Law, and deliberately separated themselves from other people. They would not even let the skirt of their robe brush against an ordinary man. They looked upon the Gentiles as “fuel for the fires of hell,” and it would have been inconceivable to them that God could offer his love and salvation to non-Jews.*

This had once been Paul's thinking. He had felt himself set apart in such a way as

* Pharisees did allow conversion of proselytes (non-Jews who became Jews) through circumcision, but this conversion meant that the Gentile become a Jew.

to have nothing but contempt for all ordinary men. With this background, we can understand how dramatic his conversion had been. Now he knew that he was truly set apart, but now it was to give himself totally to bring the “good news” of God’s love to every man of every race.

Becoming a Christian always separates us; however, it does not separate us for honor and self-glory, but for service and love for all men. Paul was conscious of having been “set apart” by God three times in his life:

He was set apart from birth

In **Galatians 1:15**, he wrote:

“...God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles...”

God has a purpose for every man and woman born into the world, but it is up to us to respond to his call for it to be fulfilled in our lives. When we respond to God, we step into the call that he has for our lives.

He was set apart at conversion

When Paul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus, his first interaction with the Lord set him apart for the purposes of God. In **Acts 9:5,15**, we find the story of this encounter.

“‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’...But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’”

When you came to the Lord, you stepped into the plan that God has for your life. This plan is unfolded more and more to you as you grow in Christ.

He was set apart by the Church

There came a time in Paul’s life when the Church set him apart for the ministry call they recognized upon his life. This event is recorded in **Acts 13:1-3**:

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

God has designed for each Christian to be released into the full expression of God’s call upon his or her life through the ministry and encouragement of the Body of Christ. As **Ephesians 4:15-16** describes it:

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who

is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Three Aspects of Paul’s Calling

In his introduction to **Romans**, Paul lists three aspects to the call that was upon his life:

- ☞ **The general calling** – a love-slave of Christ
- ☞ **The special calling** – called to be an apostle
- ☞ **The particular calling** – separated to the Gospel

In the same way that Paul had three aspects to his calling in ministry, so do you!

The general calling

First of all, you are called to be a love-slave of Jesus Christ, just like Paul was. You have given up your rights as a free agent and have received a new Lord.

This is the beginning point of all ministry. Regardless of the specific area of ministry that God eventually calls you to fulfill, you will *always* be a love-slave of Jesus Christ.

The special calling

Upon the foundation of your obedience as a love-slave of the Lord, God will begin to move you into the second area of your calling – the special calling he has upon your life. This special calling is according to the mix of gifts that God has placed with you. For Paul, it was the calling to be an apostle. In **1 Timothy 1:1**, Paul describes himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,” and in **2 Timothy 1:11**, he explains:

“And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.”

For you, your special calling is something that God has foreordained – a special contribution that you will make to the Body of Christ and to the world, through the anointing of God’s Spirit.

The particular calling

Finally, within each special calling there are particular expressions of that calling. For Paul, this was the calling to be “a herald and an apostle and a teacher” *to the Gentiles*. Paul describes this particular calling in **1 Timothy 2:7**:

“And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and *a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*”

Read Romans 11:13

The precise expressions of ministry (as well as the field to which that ministry is called) varies from person to person, even for those who share the same special

calling. As Paul expressed it in **1 Corinthians 12:4-6** (NKJV):

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”

For example, Peter and Paul were both apostles, but Peter was the apostle to the Jews, while Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (**Galatians 2:8**). They shared a common special calling, but their particular callings within that special calling differed.

Your life in Christ is a journey of discovery in the call that God has on your life. As you prove yourself in the first dimension of ministry – your calling as a love-slave of Christ – God will move you into the second and third dimensions of your ministry. For we must learn to be wholly under the authority of Christ before we can be *sent* by him.