

Paul, His Message and His Audience

Romans 1:1—7

Christ, the foundation (verses 2—4)

Previous lessons have shown Paul's authority as an apostle, given to him by Jesus Christ and verified through miracles, signs and wonders to prove his apostleship. Along with becoming an apostle came a special revelation to introduce the Mystery and the formation of the Church, the Body of Christ. This new message, which was hid from other generations (Romans 16:25—26) is grounded in Jesus Christ, who was spoken of by the prophets in the Old Testament (verses 2—4).

Paul the masterbuilder (verse 5)

Paul was called a masterbuilder, building the structure of the church with instructions given to him by the Architect, God. Paul first begins laying the foundation, who is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10—11), then builds the rest of the structure, according to the revelation he received from Jesus Christ. This structure is the special revelation of the Mystery (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:3). This is a completely different structure than what was being built by Peter. Although Peter was building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18), He was tasked with building the Hebrew Kingdom church upon Christ, not the Church, the Body of Christ (Matthew 16:18). Paul's unique and distinct "building" is highlighted in Romans 15:18—20 where Paul says he does not desire to build on another man's foundation. I believe he is speaking of not being commissioned to build on top of the foundation that Peter had been building upon, but to build a whole new structure. Paul is not told to join up with Peter to work with him in constructing the same edifice. Verse 18 makes it clear that he is only interested in speaking of those things that Christ accomplished through him, which would be concerning the formation of the Body of Christ and the introduction of the Mystery doctrine.

Unique message (verse 5)

Most people mistakenly understand that Paul is saying he does not want to preach where others have already preached before him. They see him only as a missionary going into strange lands to preach where the gospel has never been presented. However, this cannot be what Paul was saying since he did go into areas and preach where the Gospel of the Kingdom was already being preached. We see Paul preaching in Jerusalem (Romans 15:19) where Jesus and the Disciples had already been preaching. Why would Paul say he only wanted to preach where no man had preached before and then talk about preaching in Jerusalem? Because he is talking about preaching the Gospel of Grace, not the Gospel of the Kingdom.

This Gospel of Grace, that Paul was preaching, was "for obedience to the faith among all nations." The nations (Gentiles) needed to put their faith in this new message that was being preached by Paul. It was salvation by faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This was something quite different from what Jesus was preach, who taught faith in Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah and a demonstration of works to prove their faith was genuine. In contrast to our understanding of salvation, those who believed the Gospel of the Kingdom were promised a future salvation, specifically at the Second Coming (Ezekiel 36:25—28; Jeremiah 31:33—34).

Believers in Rome (verses 6—7)

Paul is obviously writing to the believers in Rome, but these believers are probably located in multiple churches. Paul does not address this book to the church at Rome, but to all (believers) that be in Rome, the saints. It appears from chapter 16 that there could have been at least 3 different house churches meeting in Rome.

Verse 6 speaks of the called of Jesus Christ, referring to the saints Paul mentions in verse 7. As saints, we are called. Believers are the ones called of Jesus Christ, however, contrary to most translations, they were not called to be saints, they were called saints. The words *to be* were added by the translators and were not in the original Greek. By saying these believers were called to be saints, it appears that God elects only a few to be saved and therefore only called certain people to be saints. The believers in Rome were called saints because they had already believed.

God's calling is not about salvation, but about service. When we become saved, we will be called into service. God does have a general call for all people to be saved, and He also calls believers to serve Him. God also tells us in Scripture what he desires from us. Ephesians 4:1 says we are called to walk in a worthy manner, followed by admonitions to live in peace with others. Philippians 3:14 shows Paul striving to live up to the high calling of God that we have in Christ Jesus. Our walk and God's call are also connected in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 and 4:7. The calling is about living a sanctified life.

Many people are confused about God's call. Some think it is a call unto salvation given only to those whom God has elected. Others are waiting for a special call to go into full time Christian ministry. They speak of a call to go into the mission field or a call to become a pastor. Applications for commissioning or ordination often have a question asking about when the applicant had received God's call for them to serve in this specific capacity. The answer to this question is that all believers have a calling, and that calling is for us to live a holy, sanctified life according to Scriptural standards. There is no scriptural support for believers receiving a special call from God (extra-biblical revelation). A person may have a strong desire to serve God in a certain capacity, but we will not hear God tell us specifically where we should go. That does not deny that God can put us wherever He wants if we are willing servants.

Grace and peace (verse 7)

Paul starts out all of his letters with the phrase *grace and peace*. Most understand this to be a lighthearted salutation with *grace* as a standard Greek greeting and *peace* as the standard Hebrew greeting. They say he did this to bring Jews and Gentiles together.

What most understand as a simple greeting is actually a dispensational proclamation contrasting Israel's prophetic program with the church's Mystery program. It was perhaps only 25 years before Romans was written that Peter was proclaiming the foretaste of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning the Tribulation, Second Coming and the setting up of the Kingdom. Those things didn't happen because Israel rejected the offer of the Kingdom and God turned to Paul with the revelation of the Mystery. Instead of the wrath of God being poured out with His declaration of war upon mankind, He declared peace. Instead of His judgment of condemnation upon mankind, He displayed His grace (Revelation 19:11). Peter declared that God's wrath was coming, while Paul declared God's grace and peace.

These great truths of Scripture are completely missed by the majority of believers because they do not rightly divide God's word. They have minimized any differences between Peter's ministry to Israel and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles by thinking Paul was merely bringing Peter's message to the Gentiles. They completely miss the dispensational changes that were occurring with the diminishing of Israel's program and the lifting up of the Mystery program as revealed through the apostle Paul. Those who do not make a sharp distinction (rightly divide) between what these two men were preaching will never understand Scripture properly. Peter had truth for God's dealings with Israel under the prophetic program, while Paul was given truth for the Church, the Body of Christ under the Mystery program. Both were truth revealed by God, but neither can be mixed together with truth meant for another dispensation.

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