

Stewards of the Gospel**Romans 1:1-17**

MAIN POINT

As God's people, we are called to leverage our lives for Jesus Christ and His church.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In one sentence, how would you describe your life purpose? What are you willing to do or sacrifice to live out that out?

Of all the people, causes or movements you are passionate about, which do you most desire to live for? Which would you be most willing to die for?

Romans 1:1-17 provides a breathtaking introduction by the apostle Paul to a church he had never visited. Before going to Rome, Paul wrote to share His life calling and to proclaim the good news of the gospel—a message built on the foundation of God's revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures of Israel, and fulfilled in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul is identified by his commitment—to God's calling, to people and to the gospel, stewarding his entire life for the furthering of God's kingdom and purposes through the Roman people and throughout the earth.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Read Romans 1:1-7

The first title Paul uses to identify himself is "servant." Given that he easily could have chosen a more impressive or authoritative title, what does this indicate about his motives? What does it look like to serve Jesus by speaking and ministering to others?

The second way Paul describes himself is as an apostle, often defined as "one sent on a mission." Does this suggest that Paul saw his mission work as being a part of his life, or his very identity?

What does it mean to be "set apart for the gospel of God" (v. 1)?

As a believer in Jesus, do you believe you are set apart for the stewardship of His gospel? What difference would it make in your life if you daily reminded yourself of this truth?

As Paul indicated, the gospel from start to finish concerns "Jesus Christ our Lord." He brought together in these verses a masterful yet succinct description of the essential characteristics that proved Jesus is the one Person who alone could accomplish God's plan of salvation.

What truths about Jesus Christ does Paul proclaim in this passage?

Read Romans 1:8-15

Word of the Roman Christians' faith spread throughout the ancient world. How can we steward our resources, time, and talents to the work and relationships that help other people see Christ?

How do we "serve with [our] spirit in the gospel of His son" (v. 9)?

How do we mutually encourage one another with our faith (v. 12)? In what way can that utilize our unique talents to impart a spiritual gift that strengthens others (v. 11)?

What does it mean to reap a harvest among others (v. 13)? Is this a harvest we should seek in this world, or the next?

As a servant who is called and set apart (v. 1), Paul was under obligation not only to God but also to those who would hear the message. Paul's sense of obligation to carry the message of Christ was not a burden. To the contrary, he was "eager to preach" to those who were in Rome.

Read Romans 1:16-17

According to these two verses, what is the great news of the gospel that we tell?

Where might we be today if Paul had been ashamed of the gospel? Why might we be ashamed of the gospel?

There was no lack of philosophies in Paul's day to capture people's interest. Some of these belief systems took seriously the matter of trying to live a so-called virtuous life. However, the gospel message that Paul preached did not centre around self-improvement through

stringent self-discipline. Rather, the good news was about putting one's faith in a unique Person—Jesus Christ. God's grace alone can save, and is the best and only pure motive for eternal good deeds, and the proclamation of His gospel to others.

What are you afraid of losing in proclaiming the Gospel to others? Is it more valuable than the eternal salvation of those you love?

From Romans 1:16-17, what can you conclude is the purpose of our lives as believers? How does this change the way God calls us to steward our resources, time, and talents?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What would be the identifying characteristics of a church for which the stewardship and spread of the gospel were the top priorities?

If the gospel is indeed "the power of God," how should that power be demonstrated among those who have embraced the gospel message? What should be the evident distinctions from those who have not?

As believers, we often view personal evangelism as a daunting and forced task, for which we are under-prepared and unqualified. In reality, how can this become a natural part of everyday life?

Consider the person or people who first shared Christ with you. What about your relationship or conversation with them persuaded you to trust and listen to them?

PRAY

Pray for the faith to believe that the news of the gospel is as good as it is, and that the eternal work and rewards of that gospel—in our lives and those of others—are more valuable than anything we might lose in our efforts to make it known. Pray that the goodness and urgency of this message will compel us to faithfully, joyfully, and selflessly proclaim it by stewarding our resources, time, talent, and very lives to making it known.

COMMENTARY - Romans 1:1-17

1:1. Paul calls himself a slave. The Greek word "doulos" is mistranslated in most Bibles as "servant" or "bond servant." A slave was owned, was bought for a price, received no wages, and could not quit. A servant could quit, got paid, and was a free person. Jesus Himself took the form of a slave (Php 2:7), and Paul reminded Christians that "you are not your own, for you were bought at a price" (1Co 6:19b-20). Paul was an apostle by the call of God. In God's summons of Paul from his previous way of life, He commissioned him as an apostle (Ac 9). "Gospel" is an old English word meaning God's good news. Paul had been assigned by God to proclaim and teach this good news about Jesus.

1:2. The good news is the fulfillment of the OT prophecies, and the OT is not correctly understood apart from the NT.

1:3. Jesus is God's Son in a different sense than are Christians, who are called "sons" due to spiritual new birth (Jn 3) and adoption into God's family (Rm 8:15). Jesus is God's Son first by being the eternal Son and Second Person of the Trinity (Isa 9:6; Gal 4:4), and second by being the virgin-born incarnate Son, conceived as the Spirit came to Mary (Lk 1:35). Jesus was also the messianic Son who came in the family line of David (2Sam 7:12-16; Ps 2:6-7; 89:26-29,36). Flesh here means the real human nature of Jesus.

1:4. Jesus in His humiliation was despised and rejected (Isa 53:2) and had the form of a slave (Php 2:7). He spoke as the Son of the Father (Jn 5:19-23), but He was persecuted because "He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (Jn 5:18). At the cross, His sonship was called into question (Mt 27:39-43). But the Spirit of holiness (another title for the Holy Spirit) raised Jesus from the dead. This event set Him apart as God's unique Son exalted over death and Satan, and invested with all power (Mt 28:18).

1:5. The obedience of faith (cp. 10:16; 15:18) is best understood as the faith that issues in obedience. Paul's ministry sought to bring all the nations to obey Jesus and His Father.

1:6. Christians belong to Jesus by calling. This calling is not a bare invitation. It is instead a sovereign summons that results in salvation as people respond in faith to God's summons. By this language Paul reminded the Roman believers that God took the initiative in saving them.

1:7. Called as saints does not mean called "to be" saints, as if this is something Christians might become in the future. Neither does it signify an honorary title or an unusually holy person. Rather, all Christians are saints by the sovereign call of God. They have been set apart just as the nation of Israel was set apart (Lv 11:44; 19:2). A Christian is a person who has the forgiveness of sins and is sanctified by faith in Jesus (Ac

26:18) and therefore is a "saint" (1Co 1:2). The Christian belongs to Jesus and is set apart from the world.

1:8. It was common in ancient letters to begin with a prayer. Paul adopted the form, but his prayers were never just formal. As there is joy among the angels at the conversion of one sinner (Lk 15:10), Paul rejoiced over the fact there were house churches in the capital city of the Roman Empire. He was thankful for the spread of the faith.

1:9-10. Paul continually prayed for the Roman Christians in his spirit. Though too often perceived as otherwise, prayer is just as necessary as teaching or preaching in Christian ministry. Paul had wanted to come to Rome, but God was in control of all his circumstances. The believer must seek God's will in his activities (Jms 4:13-17).

1:11-12. Paul was certain he would bring certain benefits or blessings as he taught among the house churches of Rome. The spiritual gift mentioned here was not the special gift(s) in 1Co 12-14 which were given by God (1Co 12:11) but gifts that Christians gave to one another. Paul was certain that the Roman Christians would minister to him since every part of the body of Christ has useful functions in relation to other parts (1Co 12:12-27).

1:13. How is it that the most important city in the world had not yet had a visit from an apostle? Why especially had the "apostle to the Gentiles" not come? Paul often planned to come, but these plans had not come to fruition. In the mysterious providence of God it all worked out for the best. After all, Paul's delay in fulfilling his trip to Rome caused him to write this wonderful letter. Furthermore, he eventually went to Rome as a prisoner (Ac 25:10-28:14-16), spending two years in the city preaching the gospel "without hindrance" (Ac 28:31). Believers must learn that God works out events in ways we could never imagine (Rm 8:28).

1:14. Paul's conversion placed a special commission and obligation on him (Ac 9:15; 13:47; 1Co 9:16; Gal 2:8-9). The revelations granted to him gave him greater responsibility. His training and Roman citizenship equipped him to reach all varieties of pagans, including the educated and the barbarians. These barbarians included people from Spain and Asia Minor (Ac 14:11-18).

1:15. Paul was eager to fulfill his obligation because he expected God to do great things through his ministry.

1:16. Why might someone be ashamed of the gospel? On the surface, the gospel seems like a very strange message. It is about a Jewish carpenter and teacher who was put to death on a cross by Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea in a.d. 26-36. The message says that this man Jesus was raised from the dead and is now Lord—the kurios. This title was used of God in the Greek Bible and was applied to the emperor by some Romans. Paul himself wrote that this message seemed foolish to Gentiles (1Co 1:23) and was a stumbling block to Jews. A crucified Messiah seemed to be a contradiction in terms to the Jews. A crucified Jew seemed like foolishness to the Romans, who despised Jews in general. Anyone who was crucified was considered among the lowest members of society. Paul had no confidence in his rhetorical skills to overcome the

human objections to the message, but he knew the power of the Spirit to change the lives of people as they heard the good news about Jesus' death and resurrection. People are saved by faith, but faith is not the cause of salvation. The cause of salvation is the grace of God, the will of God, and the Spirit's power working through the message.

1:17. God's righteousness was the core of Paul's message. Luther came to better understand God's grace as he studied this verse in the original Greek rather than in the Latin translation. It forever changed his view of God. God's righteousness can be understood in several ways. First, God always does what is right and can be said to have righteousness as one of His attributes (Dt 32:4; Ps 119:142). Second, since God always does what is right, His actions or activities are sometimes identified as His righteousness (Isa 45:8; 46:13; 51:5-6,8; 56:1). Third, God's righteousness is as a gift from Him to us, justifying us in His sight. "Justification" is a courtroom term signifying that a judge declares a person to be "right" or "just." Augustine wrote "the righteousness of God is that righteousness which He imparts in order to make men righteous" (Spirit and the Letter, chap. 16). In the gospel, God reveals His righteousness (His nature, His activity, and His gift of right status) by faith. In the course of this letter, Paul will explain how God is able to declare sinners to be righteous because of Jesus' work on the cross. From faith to faith emphasizes that the entire process of being declared righteous comes to us from start to finish by faith.