

Romans – Be a Holy Servant

09/01/24

Peter makes an interesting claim in 2 Peter 3: 15, “And remember, the Lord is waiting so that people have time to be saved. This is just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him – speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do the other parts of Scripture – and the result is disaster for them. (NLT)” Paul’s letters in the New Testament does create some challenges when trying to read them and that is part of the problem. Paul’s letters have to be studied, not just read. Paul was given Godly wisdom and the Spirit guided Paul to write the Letter to the Romans. Paul hadn’t been able to visit the Roman Church yet. So, he wrote them a letter. Since Paul was the leader of the Gentile Church, Paul wanted to make sure all the churches were on the same base on theology. Maybe this is a reason why Paul is hard to read – because the letter is heavy in theology or we can say basic theology. If you want basic knowledge of theology, Romans is the place to start. So, what is theology? It is the study of the nature of God and religious belief (Oxford). This sounds like a simple definition, but we’ll find that the study of theology requires the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is why so many give up on the study of Paul’s writings. However, if you hear teachers teach theology and it sounds unsound, you can always turn to Romans to get the basic teaching of Biblical theology. So let’s get started.

Let’s turn to Romans 1: 1 – 17 where we read this through the Spirit:

¹ Paul, a servant^(u) of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David^(u) according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Longing to Go to Rome

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,[Ⓜ] that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,[Ⓜ] both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,[Ⓜ] as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith (Biblegateway – NIV)."[Ⓜ]

Paul starts his letter by giving the Church in Rome his introduction. He is called to be an apostle and set apart for the service of God. More than this, Paul gives us a glimpse into how he viewed being a Christian really meant. This is important because it helps us to better understand Paul's theology. Paul does this by describing himself as "a servant (or slave) of Christ Jesus". We may think this is no big deal, but Paul sees himself more than just a servant of Jesus. The Greek term used by Paul for "servant" is "doulos" which also means slave – being bonded to something (AMG). Paul was bonded to Jesus Christ. So, he was more than just a servant of Jesus. Paul was a slave and bonded to Jesus Christ. What is important here is to understand that Paul is only following the example of Jesus. What do I mean by this? Paul makes this statement in Philippians 2: 7 when he talks about Jesus, "But made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. (KJV)" Paul uses the same Greek term for "servant". Jesus set the example for us by taking upon him the form of a servant. We often think Paul is just telling us that Jesus came to be servant to us.

This is not fully correct. God states this through Isaiah the prophet in the Old Testament when God makes the prophesy about His Son Jesus, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations (NIV)." Jesus is a servant to His Father. In Hebrew, servant also means being in bondage and being a servant. So, Jesus is bonded to His Father first and He is a servant to us as well. Jesus sets the example that Paul followed and what we are to follow. Not only are we to serve people as a servant as Jesus did, but more importantly we are to be a servant to Jesus and to His Father. We can go further and add we are to be bonded to His Spirit as well. Jesus serve His Father by doing the will of His Father and the example of this is going to the cross. We follow His example by allowing Jesus into our heart and allow ourselves to be bonded to His Spirit. We become His servant and like Paul, we should do this gladly. This is an important element we must keep hold of as we study Paul and the theology he teaches us through the Holy Spirit. It will make more sense to us to realize how Paul saw his relationship with Jesus. Paul only taught Jesus' theology, but through his language through the Spirit. Paul saw himself bonded to Jesus. Paul was all in on Jesus. Jesus was his life. Boy, do we need more Christians today bonded to Jesus. Paul is a servant to Jesus – this sets the tone for this letter to Roman Christians. Jesus stated in John 14: 26, "All those who want to be my disciple must come and follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And if they follow me, the Father will honor them. (NLT, 1651)" Are we bonded to Jesus or to this world? We can't serve both.

We must also include that Paul lets us know that he had been set apart to preach the gospel message to the Gentiles (verses 1 and 2). This is why he is writing this letter to a Church he hadn't visited yet. Even though he hadn't visited them yet, Paul wanted to make sure they knew the gospel message that Jesus had preached earlier in its correct form. There was much false teaching going around at this time. So, Paul, a servant for Jesus, was sent to preach the Gospel message.

Now, Paul address the Roman Church in verse 7 after he has given his credentials, "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ (NIV)" This letter was written to help the Church to be the same wave length as the other Gentile Churches. So, after he calls himself a "servant" of Jesus, now he switches gears and now calls the Roman Church "holy" people (NIV

translation). The KJV has “saints” instead of holy people. The Greek term Paul used here is “hagios” which means: holy (moral quality), consecrated acceptable to God, holy people, saints (Strong’s Concordance). Paul wanted the Gentile Church to be a holy people- saints. However, Paul is only pointing out what Jesus Himself wants from His Church. If you study Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, that is holy living and Paul was big on this. He mentions being a holy people in some of his other letters as well. This is not a term that was invented by Nazarenes. God has stated this from the being. God wanted this in the Old Testament way of life as well as the New Testament way of life which includes us. The term “holy” is used more in the Old Testament than the New Testament. A good servant to Jesus is someone who has good moral quality and are consecrated to Him. Consecrated means something that has been made or declared sacred. In other words, we want and have made ourselves available to Him to be made a true servant to Him. We are bonded to Jesus which He will make us “holy” and consecrated. I love the definition of “bonded”: joined securely to another thing, especially by an adhesive (Oxford). Paul is reminding the Roman Church that they are to be a holy people – bonded to Jesus and the adhesive is the Holy Spirit. This is the only way you can be a true servant of Jesus is by being “holy”. They go together. Peter, another leader in the Church, states this in 1 Peter 1: 15, “But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God – who chose you to be his children – is holy. For he himself has said, ‘You must be holy because I am holy.’ (NLT, 1998)” To be a servant of Christ, we must want to be “holy”. The problem with this is it causes conflict. Our human nature wants its own way and it must be fed. So, we try to meet in the middle. We’ll give Jesus some of our time – when it’s convenient. We’ll give a little money – when it’s convenient. We’ll do little work for the church – when it’s convenient. We’ll give part of ourselves - when it’s convenient. Peter tells us we must be holy in everything we do. If not, we are not a true servant of Jesus. The Church today in America and in other places are suffering because this type of commitment is not longer wanted. We rather be part time Christians – it’s easier on us. If Paul and Peter were here today, they would be very harsh with us this morning. If Jesus was standing here, I think it would be much worse. “You don’t love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again and work as you did at first. If you don’t, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. (NLT, 2040)” “Now wake up!

Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is at the point of death. Your deeds are far from right in the sight of God. Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again. Unless you do, I will come upon you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief. (NLT, 2044)” “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! But since you are lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I advise you to buy gold from me – gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference. (NLT, 2045). All of this Scripture is from Jesus in chapter three of Revelation – Jesus is talking to His Church. These letters to the Churches are still true today and we are in the same position as these churches I’m afraid. We are not really a good servant as we think we are. We may not be as Holy as we wish we were because we are not as true servant as we think we are. We must examine our life and make sure we allow His Spirit to do a spiritual check because if not, we’ll not realize how far we have drifted away from being a true holy servant for Jesus.

I’ve never thought about this before, but this Scripture from Paul came into my mind this week while doing this sermon. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Church, he makes this statement to human slaves and how they were to treat their human masters because slavery was a real issue during the New Testament days. Paul states this in Ephesians 6: 5, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. (NLT, 1882)” Other translations use “obedient” instead of serve. The Greek term used is “hypakouo” which means to be obedient, obey and to answer (Strong’s Concordance)”. Paul is telling human slaves that they are to treat their human master the same way as they would Jesus because they are a slave or servant to Jesus. They are to serve sincerely, work hard, with enthusiasm, and be obedient to their master. This is the

same job description for the servants and slaves of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us through the Spirit that as servants to Jesus, we must do the will of God with all our heart. This is holy living as a servant of Jesus Christ. When we don't do this, we become like the churches in chapter three of Revelation.

Paul is reminding us today that we are to be servants of Jesus and we are to be a holy people. Paul lived this through the Holy Spirit and this was why he was able to preach the gospel message with boldness. Next week, we continue to look at this Scripture and talk about "righteousness" because this was a very important ingredient in Paul's theology and has to be in ours as well. So, this week, allow His Spirit to do a check on your relationship with Jesus Christ. Are you a real servant of Jesus or have you allowed your selfish human nature to guide your life instead of the Lord's Spirit. Plus, do you really want to be a "holy" people as Jesus wants us to be. Remember, being a holy servant is part of the nature of our Lord. Are you really bonded (joined securely to Jesus, especially by an adhesive which is the Holy Spirit) to Jesus? Does chapter three of Revelation describe you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!!

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001