

## Paul: A Slave

This lessons starts the journey through the text of the book of Romans. It may take a while to get through the first verse. The first seven verses sets the context in time and in theology or doctrine. So it is a must to understand them before jumping into the rest of the book of Romans. Paul is the apostle to the “gentiles” (Acts 9:15, Romans 11:13). He felt an obligation to go to Rome. But Rome was not his final destination, in his mind. He was determined to go to Spain, to the ends of the earth (Mark 16:15-16).

**Romans 15:22 For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you;**

**Romans 15:23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you**

**Romans 15:24 whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—**

**Romans 15:25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.**

Since he had never been to Rome, even if the Roman Christians were familiar with his name and ministry, he had to introduce himself and his ministry and the theology of this new dispensation, the Church Age.

**Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

**Romans 1:2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,**

**Romans 1:3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,**

**Romans 1:4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,**

**Romans 1:5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,**

**Romans 1:6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;**

**Romans 1:7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Verse 1 will be the topic of today's lesson. However, the first seven verses comprise the first sentence of the book. It will take some time to thoroughly cover all that is in those verses. It is an extended introduction.

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Paul has never been to Rome and he wants to introduce himself as well as the topics he is going to cover in this “letter/essay.”

**Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

**Paul.** Who was Paul? He needs to be placed into context among the other apostles, but also in context to Jewish history since he himself makes a point of saying he is a Hebrew of Hebrews (Philippians 3:5).

**Philippians 3:2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;**

**Philippians 3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,**

**Philippians 3:4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:**

**Philippians 3:5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;**

**Philippians 3:6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.**

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Saul was Paul's Hebrew name. He mostly used "Paul" when referring to himself. But Saul was his Hebrew name. This invites a comparison to king Saul, the first king of Israel authorized by God. There are several passages and concepts in the New Testament that are mirrored from the Old Testament. Saul is one of those that has interesting parallels.

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Category	King Saul	Saul of Tarsus (Apostle Paul)
<b>Born of the Tribe of Benjamin</b>	ISam 9:2,21	Phil 3:5
<b>Father a man of valor</b>	ISam 9:1	Paul inherited Roman citizenship from his father (Acts 22:28). ?A man of valor?
<b>“Little”</b>	“Little in your own eyes” ISam 15:17 ISam9:2 “...a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.”	“Paul” = little in Latin Eph 3:8, 2 Cor 10:1, 10, 2 Cor 12:9
<b>Persecution</b>	Persecuted David I Sam 18:29, I Sam 20:1,31, I Sam 20:42, I Sam 22:16-19, I Sam 26:18	Persecuted the Church/Jesus Christ Acts 9:4 “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Acts 8:3, Acts 9:1-2, Acts 9:5, Acts 9:13-14, 21, Gal 1:13, Phil 3:6; 1Cor15:9 (Paul persecuted the Church)
<b>Leadership</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> King of the Jews I Sam 8:5, I Sam 10	(Last) Apostle to the Gentiles 1Cor 15:8-9
<b>Evil Spirit</b>	From the Lord I Sam 16:14-16	Thorn in the flesh from Satan 2 Cor 12:7
<b>Talked with dead</b>	Samuel I Sam 28:13-20	Jesus Acts 9:4-6
<b>Prophesied</b>	ISam10:5-11	2 Cor 12:2
<b>Appointment during a journey</b>	First King I Sam 9 - 10	Last Apostle Acts 9:3-6
<b>Both sinned by performing religious action</b>	ISam 13:8-14 (Per Ryrie “Saul was disobedient to God’s spokesman. Rather than waiting on Samuel (10:8), he offered a burnt offering to unite the people and prepare for war. He resorted to situation ethics rather than biblical ethics, and then offered excuses for his conduct but no valid reasons (13:10-12).”	Acts 21:10-26
<b>Beheaded</b>	I Sam 31:4 Saul fell on his sword (i.e. he committed suicide); 31:9 the Philistines cut off his head	Tradition says Paul was beheaded. As a Roman citizen he could not be crucified.
<b>Life</b>	Saul started out as good but became evil	Paul started out bad (killing Christians) but became good.

### Comparison of the “two Sauls”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This table was developed by Kit Sheehan.

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Paul provides three descriptions of himself in relation to God<sup>2</sup>:

**Romans 1:1 Paul,**  
**#1 a bond-servant of Christ Jesus,**  
**#2 called as an apostle,**  
**#3 set apart for the gospel of God,**

1. **His master:** bond-servant/slave of Christ Jesus
2. **His office:** apostle
3. **His mission:** gospel of God

### **I. His Master**

**Bond-servant.** The Greek word is *doulos*. The common translation of this word is slave or bond-servant. It has a spectrum of uses.

Certainly it is used of slaves in the Roman empire. This might grate on the ears of the Roman Christians listening to Paul's letter to the Romans. They may have known that he was a Roman citizen who was free. So to call himself a "slave" would be something they might question. It would certainly get their attention. An obvious question is, How can Paul, a free man as a Roman citizen call himself a slave? The answer is immediately given—a slave of Christ Jesus. Paul is referring to the spiritual realm.

The Hebrew equivalent, *ebed*, was used in the book of Judges for slavery, but it was also used as being a "subject" of a king. The king could command a subject to work for him in various capacities from raising taxes to fighting in the military. Refusal to obey the king could result in a death sentence.

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<sup>2</sup> Based upon comment from Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Romans*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, page 228; also Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT)*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, page 40

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Let me go on a tangent about slavery at this point. Slavery is something that has existed throughout history. Even today, there is slavery. Even in the USA today, there is slavery.

**Definition from Wikipedia:** “**Slavery** is the ownership of a person as property, especially in regards to their labor. Slavery typically involves compulsory work with the slave's location of work and residence dictated by the party that holds them in bondage. **Enslavement** is the placement of a person into slavery.<sup>3</sup>”

The Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, acknowledges the existence of slavery. Something that people today do not realize is that slavery used to be a way of declaring bankruptcy. In some cases, slavery is voluntary.

“Although slavery is usually involuntary and involves coercion, there are also cases where people voluntarily enter into slavery to pay a debt or earn money due to poverty. In the course of human history, slavery was a typical feature of civilization, and was legal in most societies, but it is now outlawed in most countries of the world, except as a punishment for a crime.<sup>4</sup>”

The State Department keeps statistics, as well as other agencies in the US Government. Here is a report from last year: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221020-2022-TIP-Report.pdf>

“As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign national victims in the United States, and traffickers exploit victims from the United States abroad. Human trafficking cases have been reported in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. Individuals who entered the United States with and without legal status have been identified as trafficking victims. Victims originate

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3 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery>

4 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery>

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from almost every region of the world; the top three countries of origin of victims identified by federally funded providers in FY 2021 were the United States, Mexico, and Honduras.” (Page 582).

But, there is a spiritual usage as well. That is the emphasis here in Romans 1:1. Paul is not the first to be labeled as a slave of God. There were spiritual leaders in the Old Testament who were called *ebed*.

**Abraham:**

**Psalm 105:42 For He (God) remembered His holy word With Abraham His servant;**

**Moses:**

**2 Kings 18:11 Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and put them in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes,**

**2 Kings 18:12 because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded; they would neither listen nor do it.**

**Joshua:**

**Judges 2:8 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten.**



**David:**

**2 Samuel 7:4 But in the same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying,**

**2 Samuel 7:5 “Go and say to My servant (It is God saying this.) David, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?”**

Other references include Amos (Amos 3:7) and Zechariah ( Zechariah 1:6) as well as a Psalmist (27:9; 31:17).

So, from man’s perspective, it is a demeaning status in life, from God’s perspective, a servant of God, and in this case a servant of Christ Jesus, is a position of great responsibility and perhaps great intimacy with God. Commands come directly from God.

As a pastor once said, we should all seek to be like “doulos” toward God. If our current time on earth is boot camp preparation for serving in the Millennium, we should take our relationship to God the Father very seriously. Future rewards and responsibility in the Millennium depend upon it. Someone who we think is a quiet person in church may be a great believer “working” by faith today as a prayer warrior or exercising his or her spiritual gift properly according to God’s standards. There may be some preacher who taught living by works of the law who will be embarrassed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God has a warehouse full of eternal blessings for each believer waiting to be claimed. Don’t forfeit those rewards by squandering your time on earth. Walk constantly by faith. You each have an individual mission tailored to your situation and your spiritual gift.

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Slavery has been pervasive throughout history throughout the world. Even today, there is slavery. Sometimes it goes under the banner of “human trafficking.”

Rather than quote from Fox News or Breitbart News, let me delve again into US Government documents. Each year, the State Department issues a report on human trafficking. I was surprised to see such a report there. I expected to find the statistics from the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) when I did a search on the internet. I am sure that statistics are there, it is just that I found what I was looking for quickly on the State Department website. Below are links to 2022 and 2023 (probably incomplete) reports on human trafficking.

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221020-2022-TIP-Report.pdf>

[https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Trafficking-in-Persons-Report-2023\\_Introduction-V3e.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Trafficking-in-Persons-Report-2023_Introduction-V3e.pdf)

So before you think to wave off slavery as a thing of the past, understand it exists today in the USA and many other nations in the world.

The church at Rome was likely started by Jews who had believed in Jesus as savior. Acts chapter 2, the beginning of the Church Age, tells us:

**Acts 2:5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.**

**Acts 2:6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered**

**because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.**

**Acts 2:7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?**

**Acts 2:8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?**

**Acts 2:9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,**

**Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,**

**Acts 2:11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”**

**Visitors from Rome.** So there were “visitors” or sojourners or people temporarily living in Jerusalem from Rome. It has been speculated that some of these believed, returned to Rome and established churches there. There is no Biblical reference to Peter having traveled to Rome. It is unknown for sure who established the first church in Rome.

**Mighty deeds of God.** Some have emphasized that speaking in tongues was primarily to evangelize the Jews. However, here in Acts chapter 2, the purpose was to speak of the “mighty deeds of God.” Mighty deeds is a single word, an adjective in the plural. Literally, the “mighties” or the “mighty things.” Mighty deeds is a smoother translation. The NIV says

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“wonders of God.” This phrase is unique in the New Testament. But it is used in the Septuagint for the Exodus and wilderness events (Deut 11:2), and other “mighty” works in general (Psalm 71:19). God used the Exodus event in Judges and in the Prophets to remind the sons of Israel of what God did for them. Amazing things. God continues to accomplish amazing things today, even in our individual lives.

Back in our Romans 1:1 verse, Paul is a “slave” of Christ Jesus. Jesus tasked him with his life mission. After Paul’s encounter with Jesus Christ on the Damascus road, God gave a man named Ananias instructions to meet Paul in order to give him his sight back. Ananias expressed his misgivings about Paul since Paul had authority from the chief priests to “bind” Christians.

**Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;**

**Acts 9:14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”**

**Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;**

**Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”**

Paul says he was a bond-servant of Christ Jesus. He places “Christ” before Jesus. Remember that Christ is just a transliteration of the Greek word for “anointed.” The Greek word is a translation of the Hebrew word

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for “anointed.” That is the word for “Messiah.” So Paul is saying literally, “Messiah Jesus.” And “Jesus” means “the Lord saves.” So Paul is servant of Messiah the Lord Saves. To Christian ears, Christ Jesus does not have the punch that “Messiah Savior” has to a Jew. The Jew understands that the name indicates that the Messiah has already visited the earth as savior/deliverer. For an unbelieving Jew, this can be a gut punch. The responses from Jews are varied. Some, determined to prove that Jesus is not the Messiah study the Scriptures and end up becoming believers. Others become very anti-Christian.

Before finishing, let me go down a rabbit trail to answer a question that I found interesting.

There is speculation that Paul, as a young man, met Jesus face-to-face. Robby Dean makes the case:

“Paul was born somewhere between AD 4 or 5 on the one hand, and probably 15 on the other hand. The first place that Paul is mentioned is at the martyrdom of Stephen at the end of Acts chapter 7. He is mentioned there as a young man standing by holding the garments of those who are stoning Stephen. He is called a young man. That is not a technical term. He was probably between the age of eighteen and thirty, we don’t really know exactly how old he was at the time but there are some hints that do give us these parameters in Scripture. It is indicated that based on where he was when he left Jerusalem, when he left Damascus and who was ruling in Damascus that he would have to have left Damascus before AD 40. Then if Jesus was crucified in AD 33, and most scholars in chronology place the stoning of Stephen somewhere around AD 35, and if Paul is a young man, say eighteen, that would mean that he was born somewhere around AD 17. If he was twelve years older then he would have been born somewhere around 5. He came to Jerusalem when he was fourteen to study under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He would have arrived approximately at the time when Jesus began His public ministry. If he

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was a little older he would have already been in Jerusalem for maybe seven or eight years before Jesus began His public ministry. It is probably a fair deduction to say that with all the things that were going on around the ministry of Jesus, all of the discussion, John the Baptist's ministry—Luke tells us that everyone went out to the Jordan to be baptized by John—and when Jesus began to teach the same thing, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” there were people saying “Who is He? Is this the Messiah?” These questions were being raised, so it would almost be unrealistic to think that Paul being in Jerusalem during this time would not have been aware of the presence and the teaching related to Jesus. We can't prove it but it is a fair deduction based on the chronology.”

Donald Coggan wrote an interesting book on Paul. In it he says...

“We need not doubt that young Saul of Tarsus, son as he was of devout Jewish parents, would also have visited the Temple at Jerusalem probably several times before he went there to undertake serious study at the feet of Gamaliel – study which may have involved him in some years of residence. Put these two series of probabilities together, and is it not possible, indeed highly likely, that the young teacher from Galilee and the young Pharisee from Tarsus would have looked into one another's eyes, and that Saul would have heard Jesus teach? And who could so see and hear without some deep impression being made? That the impression may have elicited resistance is, at the moment, neither here nor there. The important point is that an impression was probably made on Saul at an age when such impressions go deep and have about them an element of permanence.<sup>5</sup>”

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5 Donald Coggan, *Paul Portrait of a Revolutionary*, New York: Crossroad, 1985 page 34.