

Introduction: Called to a Costly, Glorious Gospel
Romans 1:1-7

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

Introduction: If you have ever had to make a big purchase, especially for the first time, you understand the concept of “count the cost”, considering or calculating if you’ll actually be able to afford it. Can we make the payment? Is it a good investment? Should we afford it? As a family we are in the midst of these decisions about college for our daughters and the point of affordability vs. opportunity and what is reasonable to carry a debt after it’s over. Whether it’s a car, house, business, school, or marriage itself, there is wisdom in thinking before jumping in, and being wide eyed to the cost of taking on a large purchase, project, or responsibility. This, of course, was before credit cards were readily available, and now people think they can afford something if they can merely make the monthly payment. But we’ll leave that discussion for another time.

Jesus Himself taught this principle in laying out the **cost of following Him as a disciple**. He made two dramatic statements that are easy to dismiss since they seem so hyperbolic that maybe the implications are different than what seems obvious:

Luke 14:26 “Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, **he cannot be my disciple**. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me **cannot be my disciple**”*

Luke 14:33 “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has **cannot be my disciple**”

At first blush this seems a bit extreme and maybe even a bit ridiculous, or so untenable that the what is required in **impossible** for anyone to attain. But then Jesus gave two examples of real life scenarios to explain. One was a builder who would actually first sit and **count the cost** of labor and materials **BEFORE** starting the project so that he did not run out of resources before completion and become a laughing stock. The second was a **king** who would face battle as a 2 to 1 underdog with men, and if that were the case, he would be wise to sue for peace rather than get wiped off the board and lose everything. **What was Jesus’ point?** The path of following Christ is by definition costly, and the expectation is endurance and finishing the race, so anyone who wants to be or calls themselves a ‘Christian’ must consider the cost of following Him before, or become like **Demas**, who was a companion of Paul (Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24), but when the road got hard and challenging, turned from the path and left:

2 Timothy 4:10 “For Demas, **in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica**”

The implication is that **Demas** not only left Paul but left his faith because he was in love with the world, which does not fill in specifics but leaves us with a general sense that Demas was more like the rich young ruler who determined NOT to follow Christ because he was very rich and loved his material wealth more than Jesus.

What does this have to do with Romans? What Paul begins to lay out in Romans is this very reality. For Paul, there was no such thing as a casual Christian or one that calls themselves one, but when someone finds that fact out says, “*You’re a Christian?! I had no idea?*”, or “*You’re a Christian? That is surprising!*” For Paul, the gospel he understood and proclaimed was an all-in, costly, life altering, decision defining, friends dividing, priority making transformation. Remember, Paul is writing to a group of people in Rome that he had not met in person (at least most of them), to a church he did not start, and one that he hoped to partner with in reaching Spain. If they could not agree on the gospel itself, there would be no chance of achieving that goal.

A Personal Introduction: *What made Paul Tick*

When we write letters or emails today, we usually follow at least a bit of protocol: *we name who we are addressing, who we are, and what we are writing about*. Typically, the more we know someone, the less formal we get. I usually don’t get a message from John Durso saying, “Dear Jordan, this is the chairman of the elder board and former fire Captain John writing”. In fact, I get texts from young people (including my daughters) that I need a cypher to figure out: “IK this place is lowk sketch”, or use abbreviations like ‘hmu’, ‘atm’ (and its not the machine where you get cash), and ‘idc’. But Paul followed normal protocol, but also was making sure he introduced himself well, since there was NOT the personal equity.

Leads with ‘*doulos*’

In many of his other epistles, he would formally introduce himself as an apostle (In Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians), emphasizing his office and role. But to the church at Rome, he began with the identification as a servant. Before asserting the **rightful and delegated authority** he possessed through Jesus Christ as an apostle, he wanted to explain his true view of himself. Remember, before Christ, Paul would have put his **confidence in his accomplishments: a true Israelite who was circumcised and of the tribe of Benjamin; a Pharisee, a persecutor of the church, and blameless in the Law** (Phil. 3:4-6). These would have been the top of every category, both by birth and accomplishment, and he would have worn them like a fully decorated uniform.

But after Christ transformed him on the Road to Damascus, everything changed. No longer did he put confidence in the flesh but in Christ alone (Phil. 3:3). Instead of a self-made man, he saw himself as the ‘least’ and ‘unworthy’ (1 Cor. 15:9), and the ‘chief of all sinners’ (1 Tim. 1:15) who now had his identity firmly planted in Christ. One of his favorite descriptors for himself was a ***doulos***, a word that is easy to translate but hard for Westerners to understand. It gets translated “servant” because the REAL translation is “***slave***”, but there is much baggage and even offense with the second term. But ‘servant’ is too soft. We view servants out of a lens of option, someone who serves but has freedom, who can serve when they want to or feel like it, but who maintain flexibility. When Paul uses the word *doulos*, he was saying that he had **one Master. “A man can have two employers, but not two masters, for single ownership and full-time service are the essence of slavery. Paul BELONGS to Jesus and His cause.”**¹

This reality is NOT just because of the way Paul was converted or because of his commission. It is the reality of every believer. Every person is a **slave to whom they obey**, whether sin, which leads to death, or Christ, which leads to righteousness and life (Romans 6:16). This means that sin was our master before Christ, and though we thought we were free, were truly under the shackles of bondage. When

¹ Daniel M. Doriani, “Romans: Reformed Bible Commentary”, p. 16

Christ set us free from that bondage, we immediately became **slaves of righteousness** (Rom. 6:18). Salvation is about a switch of masters, and when he saves us, He owns us, which is the definition of ultimate freedom. Thus, we cannot serve God and something else (Matt. 6:24).

Case for Apostleship

Paul did not shy away from his calling, but he held it with humility and grace (1:5). **Apostles** were God's chosen instrument for the early church in its inception and were foundational in the establishment of Scripture (Eph. 2:20; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Paul viewed his apostleship NOT as authority to be wielded for his own glory but as a responsibility to be stewarded in order to accomplish the mission assigned. *But what was an apostle? Why was it important? Are there apostles today?*

There were three main requirements for Apostles – (which are NOT able to be replicated today)

The definition of an apostle is “one who is sent”, and in the case of the 12 original disciples, they were sent by Jesus specifically to establish the church and make disciples. Remember, the basic definition of ‘disciple’ is a “learner”. All Christians are learners and are sent, but only a few were commissioned to the office of Apostle.

1. An Apostle had to be an eye witness of the Resurrected Jesus

We know the original twelve disciples, who were sent and commissioned by Jesus, saw Him in His resurrection, but when they set out to replace **Judas with Matthias**, it was clear that having seen Jesus in His resurrected state was a must:

Acts 1:21-22 *“So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”*

What about Paul? He saw the resurrected Jesus in an ‘untimely’ way (1 Cor.15:7-8) since he saw Him on the road to Emmaus. But when he defended his status as an Apostle, he connected it to this all important event: *“Am I not free? Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?”* (1 Cor. 9:1)

2. An Apostle was Called by Jesus Directly

Mark 3:13-16a *“And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴And he appointed twelve (**whom he also named apostles**) so that they might be with him and he might send them out **to preach** ¹⁵and **have authority** to cast out demons. ¹⁶**He appointed the twelve***

It is clear that these twelve (with Matthias as a replacement and Paul) were commissioned to preach (1 Tim. 2:7) and have authority. They spoke through the Spirit to establish Scripture for the church, as when Peter equated OT Scriptures with apostolic teaching (2 Pet. 3:1-2). And later in 2 Peter 3, Peter refers to Paul's letters as Scripture (3:15-16). When Paul wrote 1 Tim. 5:18, he referred to a phrase in the OT (Deut. 25:4) AND the writings in Luke (Luke 10:7) with the same authority.

3. An Apostle was Given Signs of Authority

2 Corinthians 12:12 *“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works”*

Acts 5:12 *“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles”*

Why is this important? For the reason that miraculous signs and gifts were given for a specific purpose, not simply as an end in itself. They were able to cast out demons, heal the sick, and in the case of Eutychus, even raise the dead (Acts 20:9-10), but it was to affirm and help establish the early church and their authority of God’s Word. Jesus did miracles largely for the same reason in His public ministry (John 20:30-31). Now that the church and God’s Word has been established, there is no need for the office of Apostle, nor the gifting of signs and wonders. *Does this mean God does not do the miraculous?* By no means. God is not bound by the gifts He gives, and He still does the unexplainable and amazing (including every time He gives salvation and turns a heart of stone into a heart of flesh – Ezek. 36:26), but there is not the need in this age to perform signs and wonders, since we preach God’s completed and authoritative Word and have the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and clarity today.²

Commissioned for the Gospel of God

Romans 1:1-6 *“Paul, a **servant** 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 according to the flesh⁴ 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*

After establishing who he was, Paul now declares his purpose in life: **to proclaim the gospel of God**. This seems like such a simple thing, but understanding the comprehensive and expansive nature of the gospel, it is clearly a lifelong venture. Notice that the gospel is about Jesus Christ, His life, and resurrection, but it is **not a new idea**. The gospel is grounded in the promises of the OT, from the hope in the Garden of Eden of the offspring of Eve crushing the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), to the Covenant given to David (2 Samuel 7) to the promise of a Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). The prophets “inquired carefully” about the grace and what person it would be (1 Pet. 1:10-12), but God spoke with finality in the gospel.

- **Gospel’s Theme**

The theme of the gospel, like the theme of God’s creation, is **His Son**. Paul says that Jesus was both ‘descended and declared’. These are two monumentally important realities.

DESCENDED FROM DAVID – Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, the One that was Promised and hoped for. In fact, when Paul refers to “*Christ Jesus*”, it speaks to Him being Messiah, or the “Anointed One”, which is also a Title, and Jesus, His earthly name which means ‘salvation, or the Lord will save’. He came from a *human lineage*, coming from the Kingly throne of David. We studied **2 Samuel 7:12-16** that one of David’s sons would establish a kingdom forever, bringing rest from enemies and planting Himself in Jerusalem. He was from a kingly line, from human lineage, in order to save humanity from their sin.

² Of the question: “were there more Apostles than these 13 men in Scripture”, there is a case to be made that Barnabas (Acts 14:14); James (Gal. 1:19), Timothy, and Silas (1 Thess. 2:6) could have met the qualifications, but it is difficult to say these with any certainty.

Another important note on the language here is the fact that “descended” is from the word for “to become” or “come”, not to be born. That means that Jesus came from David according to the flesh. This speaks of His *pre-existence*, meaning that He did exist when He came into the world, but had always existed (see John 1:1-13). That helps us see that “the Son of Man **came** to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), which was His mission.

DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD – Some translations take this word to be “*appointed*”, seeming to infer that Jesus became the Son of God after His resurrection. But this is NOT what Paul was saying. But rather, after His death and resurrection, He was *declared, recognized, or designated as LORD!* This is the same idea as **Philippians 2:8-11**:

*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him **the name that is above every name,**¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess **that Jesus Christ is Lord,** to the glory of God the Father.*

*“The resurrection **publicly announced the rank that Jesus always possessed as Son and Lord.** He was always the Son of God; the resurrection shouted it to the world.”³*

The gospel declares that Jesus is the Son of God, from the line of David, fulfilling the promise of the OT, who is both our **master** and as a result of the resurrection, our **Lord!** Again, this shouts that to come to Christ requires full devotion, complete surrender of self, turning to Him, and believing in His death and resurrection on our behalf.

- **Gospel’s Message**

In this short section we have a complete gospel in concentrated form.

RECEIVED BY GRACE – Paul knew that it was God’s grace alone, through Christ alone, that moved him from an unworthy persecutor of the church to an Apostle. Grace was something given and shown to Paul, not something he found or earned. Grace is exactly that for us, a gift from God that is lavished on those God has placed His love (Eph. 1:8)

BROUGHT TO THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH – This is a phrase that has two implications. **First**, it has a meaning of “the obedience that consists in faith”, which is a call for the hearers to obey God **by believing** the gospel and receiving the realities of it. This is the essence of the call to anyone today to come to Christ, turning from their sin, and believing in the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross where He substituted Himself for us, and God treating Him like He should have treated us. **Second**, it can mean the “obedience that is motivated by faith”, which is where we serve and work not as a means of earning but simply pleasing Him. This is captured in **Romans 6:17**:

*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have **become obedient from the heart** to the **standard of teaching** to which you were committed*

TO ALL NATIONS – Paul was a pastor, but he never lost his missionary verve. He was a preacher to the **Gentile world**, and desired that those who had not yet heard the gospel would be able to hear it and

³ Douglas J. Moo, “*The Epistle to the Romans*”, p. 50

believe. When we lose sight of the fact that the gospel is for all *ethne*, all nations, we lose focus and perspective, trying to keep what we have and unwilling to risk what we cannot keep.

Paul concluded his letter with a formal overture of **Grace and Peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. This was to signify both their unity in the gospel and the essence of the gospel, that we are products of God's grace and peace has been made for us with God, and thus with each other.

It is clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ drove Paul, not to earn but to worship. It was his life's work, his passion, his mission, and his joy. There was no such thing as dichotomizing his spiritual and secular life, his work and ministry life, or parts of his life that Jesus ruled and parts that He did not. He was a slave with one Master, a servant with one Lord, a sinner with one Messiah. The cost was great, but the reward was greater.

This past week we were reminded of the cost of following Christ. The assassination of Charlie Kirk elicited many responses, uniting some, dividing others, and revealing ugliness in many. What struck me about his murder was not his political stances but his spiritual ones. It has been confirmed by many that there was a distinct difference in young Mr. Kirk's life over the past few years, moving from a political figure touting conservative/libertarian values to one who recognized that he needed and had a Savior in Jesus Christ. This clearly changed his message on campuses, and there are hours of examples of him openly sharing the gospel with college students. Sometimes it is difficult to separate out politics from our life in Christ, but everything SHOULD flow out of our life in Christ. Though he was opposed for political views, as a Christian he understood the nature of opposition. Paul himself was arrested, beaten, and tried for his **teachings** in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-28), not for violence. The reminder was this: **every believer seeks to please God, either by our life or death (Phil. 1:20), reaching others in the gospel brings inherent risk, and the people that oppose us are not the enemy.**

The gospel is the solution for our life, both for transformation and change, but also for purpose and mission. This is what Paul believed. This is how he lived. This is why he wrote to the Roman church. This is still the call today.