

(Romans) Paul's Calling

by Brian Brodersen

Paul's background and qualifications made him uniquely equipped to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and his desire to be a bond servant of Jesus Christ is a model for all Christians.

Duration: 38:57

Scripture: Romans 1:1

Topics: "Spiritual Calling", "Gods Purpose"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing the spiritual world that exists alongside the physical world we live in. He encourages listeners to become bond servants of God, surrendering themselves to His will and purpose for their lives. The speaker shares his own journey of discovering his calling as a pastor and teacher, highlighting that God has a unique plan for each individual. He then turns to the book of Romans, specifically focusing on verse 1, where Paul introduces himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle. The speaker concludes by affirming his belief that God has a specific plan for every person and encourages listeners to seek and fulfill that purpose.

Transcript

Let's open up to Romans chapter 1 tonight, and we're going to jump right into this epistle to the Romans. Tonight we're going to concentrate primarily on verse 1, but I want to read to you verses 1 through 7. It's Paul's initial introduction. And so he introduces himself, Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God, which he promised before through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.

Through him we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ. To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. So this is an epistle that was written by Paul to the church in the city of Rome.

Paul had never been to Rome. He had not visited there. Many of the churches, of course, that Paul did write to in the New Testament were churches that he actually established himself.

And then there were others that he didn't establish, but he had visited them. He had not yet visited the church in Rome, and he'll go on to talk about that a bit later. But, you know, here's this church in the capital city of the empire of that day.

And it was a great church. It was a thriving church. And Paul was anxious to get there.

And, you know, Paul did have a bit of a strategy when he went about, you know, ministering and planting churches. It wasn't exclusively, but quite often he would go to the main population centers within the Roman Empire. And going to those main population centers, of course, you know, his goal would be to establish something in one of those population centers that it might grow and then expand out beyond that particular city.

And, of course, if you could see a great work of God established in the capital city of Rome, I'm sure Paul in his mind just thought, oh, the potential to get the gospel out to the world through that work there in the city of Rome. So Paul wanted to go there, and he wanted to make his contribution to, you know, build the church up as much as he possibly could. And he's going to talk about that a bit later as we move on.

But as we begin tonight, and Paul as he begins this epistle, he introduces himself. And, you know, I learned a long time ago not to take anything for granted in regard to what people know or don't know about the scriptures. You know, there have been times when I have gone into a teaching situation, and I just sort of assume that everybody sort of knows what I know.

And, you know, then you find out afterwards that people don't know much of what you're talking about. But I had this illustrated for me so amazingly. A few years ago I was talking to a guy right out here in the courtyard, and he was telling me this story about how when he first came to this church, he was always hearing Chuck talk about Abraham.

And, you know, he'd listen, and he'd think, that's interesting. And, you know, but quite often Abraham would come up, and he said at one point he just, you know, he stopped and he thought, you know, I never knew that Abraham Lincoln had so much to do with the Bible. He was dead serious.

This guy, he didn't know who Abraham was. The only Abraham he had ever heard of was Abraham Lincoln. So he just assumed that that's who was being talked about.

So we're talking about Paul. We're not talking about Paul Bunyan. We're not talking about Paul Simon.

We're talking about Paul the Apostle here. And so we need to know a little bit about this man, the Apostle Paul. And I think in knowing a little bit about him, you know, sometimes, you know how it is sometimes with a person, you might know him a little bit, and you kind of know him as a Christian.

But, man, when you hear their testimony, then it just, it brings a whole new dimension to things. And that's surely the case with the Apostle Paul. We, of course, as Christians, we know him as the great Apostle Paul.

But do we know what his background was? And once we discover that, when we find out what his testimony was, oh, it's a powerful testimony. His testimony, in and of itself, is, you know, one of those great proofs of the validity of the Christian faith. So this man, Paul, his background, what was his background? Well, in Acts chapter 22, in the third verse, he actually sort of gives an outline of his own background.

You don't have to turn there unless you want to. I'll read it to you. He said there, I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, that was Jerusalem where he was making these statements, at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our Father's law, and was zealous toward God.

So Paul, he's a Jew. He's part of that chosen race, that people that God has set apart and made a covenant with them and promised that through them, he's going to bring salvation into the world. But he says he's a Jew born in Tarsus.

Now, Tarsus, if you were to look on a map today, Tarsus would have been located in the southeastern part of what we know today as Turkey, coming close to the Syrian border. And so that's where Paul had come from. And Tarsus was a great city in the Roman Empire.

It was a city of culture. It was a city of education. It was a city of commerce.

It was, you know, it was a pretty happening place. And that is the place where Paul was actually born. It was in the province of Cilicia.

But he says that he was brought up in this city. Now, he's stating these things there as he's giving his testimony before his own people in Jerusalem. So he was brought up in the city of Jerusalem.

At a certain point in his life, apparently, it would seem that his parents sent him to Jerusalem to be educated in the Jewish rabbinical tradition. From another place where Paul gives a testimony, we find out that he was a Pharisee, but he was the son of a Pharisee. So his father was actually part of that elite group of spiritual leadership.

And so Paul was in Jerusalem from the time of his youth, and he was sitting at the feet of Gamaliel. Now, in Israel during the time of Christ, there were two great rabbinical leaders. And basically, as a Jew, you would sort of either belong to one denomination or the other.

That was, you know, what it was more or less limited to, unless you were of the Sadducean party, which was a whole different thing. But the two leading rabbis of the day, one man was named Shammai, and the other man's name was Hallel. And Shammai was known as the more strict interpreter of the law.

Hallel was a little more liberal. Hallel was by far the more popular leader of the day. And Gamaliel is the grandson of Hallel.

So he's one of the great leaders within Jewish rabbinic history. Paul was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and he says that he was taught according to the strictness of our father's law. So Paul was a Pharisee.

There were only 600 Pharisees during this period of time. It was a very small group of men who wielded a great amount of spiritual power over the Jewish people at the time. Paul was part of that elite group, and he says that he was zealous toward God.

Now, in another place, he describes his zeal. In the 26th chapter of Acts, verses 9 through 11, this is what he said regarding his zeal. He said, Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priest. And when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme.

And being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. This is the man who became the great apostle to the Gentiles. This is a man who wrote the majority of the New Testament.

This is his background. Later on in life, toward the end of his life, Paul would say that he considered himself the chief of sinners. And he said that Jesus Christ set forth in him an example so that all people could know that salvation is possible for anyone.

In other words, Paul said, basically, Hey, I'm living proof. If God can save me, he can save anyone. And, you know, throughout the long history of the church, we have seen those kinds of testimonies.

You know, the last person you would ever think could have or would have become a Christian, somehow, amazingly, they come to Christ. But that whole thing began back with this man, the apostle Paul. Of course, we know, I think most of us do at least, somewhat about his conversion.

He was on the road to the city of Damascus, and he had received authority from the high priest to go to that city and to bring back captive to Jerusalem any who were believing in Jesus Christ. And it was on the road to Damascus that he was confronted by the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his glory, and he was cast to the ground. And that voice from the Lord spoke to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And then, you remember, he said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you persecute.

And Paul astounded, amazed, and stunned. He got to his feet and, you know, got to a place and the whole process of God's work in his life began there. But Paul, interestingly, although he has this amazing background in Judaism, he is called by God to be the apostle, not to the Jews, but to the Gentiles.

It's really interesting the way God does things sometimes. He does do them quite often just the opposite of the way we would think that things ought to be done. Now, you would think that if you wanted to see the Jews get saved, here's what you do.

You get a Jewish rabbi saved. And he's going to be able to have such a great impact because of all of his knowledge and his great understanding and all of that. But here the Lord, interestingly, he takes Paul, who is a renowned Jewish rabbi, and he saves him, but he doesn't really give him a ministry to the Jews.

There's a limited ministry to the Jews. All of Paul's life he has this longing to minister to his people. Every time he attempts to do it, he finds himself in some kind of trouble.

But primarily God's call is for him to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to the Jews, God sends none other than Peter. Now, Peter was a common man. Peter was a fisherman.

Peter was a Galilean. The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, particularly, they completely despised the Galileans. The Galilean region was a mixture of all kinds of paganism and Gentiles and all of that.

So to them, the whole Galilean region was just an unclean place. And the last place the Jewish leadership from Jerusalem would really want to find themselves, the last place that they would anticipate any kind of a prophet coming from. As a matter of fact, when it was known that Jesus had come from Nazareth, they

mocked and they scoffed and they said, There's no prophet that comes out of Galilee.

Search the scriptures. You'll never find anything like that. That was their attitude of disdain toward the Galileans.

So God takes this Galilean fisherman who is uneducated as far as the rabbinical traditions go and he makes him the apostle to the Jews. And he takes this great rabbinical mind and he says, Now, okay, I'm going to send you to the Gentiles. So all of that to say, don't assume that just because you have a particular background that that is necessarily the realm in which God is going to use you.

Now, it might be. And sometimes it's our very background itself that God sort of prepares us through and then uses us in that context. But not always the case.

And I remember for some time in my life, when I was younger in the ministry, I had this thing in my mind that because of my cultural background, this was going to be the area that God was going to primarily use me in. And I was always trying to move into ministry in that particular realm. And I found that time and time again, the Lord would just sort of slam the door in my face.

And I would think, But Lord, I know these people. I grew up with these guys. I know how they think.

I can connect with them. Lord, I can impact them. And the Lord would give me a little bit of ministry, a limited ministry there.

But I remember one time the Lord spoke to me so clearly and said, Brian, if that's what you want your ministry to be, okay, but it'll radically limit what I want to do in your life. Because this is a very small segment of society. If that's the segment that you want to spend your life ministering in, that's okay.

But you'll greatly limit what I want to do. And through that, the Lord showed me that I needed to begin to look beyond my own background and my own little subculture that I was involved in and realize that there's a much bigger world and He wanted to use me in a different way. And so with Paul, he might have been in many ways very effective in his ministry to the Jews, but God had a much bigger mission for him, actually.

Now, Paul was, believe it or not, he was uniquely equipped to be the apostle to the Gentiles. We would think he was uniquely equipped to be the apostle to the Jews, but he was really equipped by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles. And for these reasons, number one, as a Jew and as a Pharisee, he would be able to successfully defend the new faith from Judaism's attempt to destroy it.

You know, the great opposition to the early church was from Judaism. And they did everything in their power to try to destroy this new movement. Paul, who comes from their world and understands all of their arguments and all of their position on all of the different things, he's able to stand up now as a great defender of the faith and a great champion of the gospel among the Gentiles because of his background.

Being born in Tarsus, he understood the Greek culture, and this would bring him some advantage in his ministry to the Gentiles. See, many Jews were very isolated. Now, there, of course, was a whole segment of Jewish culture that was very, what you call, Hellenized.

They had adapted quite a bit to the Greek culture. But then there was another segment of Judaism that was repulsed by the Hellenistic culture, and they completely avoided it. They were, to a large degree, they

were very isolated.

And it would have been difficult for a person from that background to make the cultural transitions to ministry among the Gentiles. But Paul has this interesting upbringing where he grows up in Jerusalem, but he's also got this background in Tarsus. He's also got this background in Greek life and culture.

And then thirdly, being a Roman citizen, he would enjoy many privileges that would enhance his ability to proclaim the gospel. Paul was a Roman citizen. And on many occasions, he would sort of, you know, he would pull out his passport and say, Is it legal to beat a man who's a Roman uncondemned? Oh, you're a Roman? Oh, pardon me.

And he would take advantage of that. On one occasion, maybe you remember there in the book of Acts, as they're about to give him a flogging, he asked them that question. He says, Is it lawful to do this? And the guy says, You're a Roman.

Paul says, Yes. And then he says, Oh, with a great sum of money, I obtained my citizenship. And Paul says, I was born a citizen.

So these were the things that really equipped Paul to be the minister to the Gentiles. And it is true, kind of going now to the other side of the coin of what I was saying a moment ago, it is true that there are definitely things in our background that God will use. My point earlier was simply not to limit God to that.

But certainly God uses our background. Paul looked at himself, although he wasn't converted until obviously, you know, sometime later in life, he could speak of himself as being separated from his mother's womb for the gospel, because he could see all of his background and all of the things that had transpired. They were all going to make a contribution later in his ministry to the Lord Jesus Christ and for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So he then says concerning himself, he says that he is a bond servant. He is a bond servant. Now, a bond servant was different than just an ordinary slave.

In that, a bond servant was a person who had made the decision to be in that position. A person who had willingly given up their freedom to serve another. They loved the master.

They wanted to dedicate their life to serving that particular individual. And it was an act of their will. They had chosen to do so.

Paul refers to himself as a bond servant. The apostles referred to themselves as bond servants. They were men who had willingly given up their lives in the service of another out of love for him.

Another definition of a bond servant, and I like this one, is one whose will is swallowed up in the will of another. That's a bond servant. A bond servant is a man whose will is taken up in another's will.

You know, it's possible to be a Christian. It's possible to be a servant of Jesus Christ. But you could be both of those things and not actually be a bond servant.

You know, you're a Christian. You've received Christ by faith. And he's working in your life.

And, you know, you've got an idea. I want to be of service to God. And you've got a few things that you think, well, yeah, I'd like to do this.

I'd like to do that. But yet you haven't come to that place yet where your will is swallowed up in the will of another. You're ready to, you know, step out a little bit here and, you know, maybe give up a few things over there.

And, you know, you'd like to do something for the Lord, but it's sort of under your conditions. Lord, you know, I'll do this for you, but this is what I need you to do for me. And, you know, you're sort of in that place where a lot of time you're bargaining with the Lord and that.

A bond servant doesn't do any of that. A bond servant is a person who just simply has surrendered their will to the Lord Jesus Christ. Just saying, Lord, I have no will.

My will is to do your will. Jesus, of course, was the great bond servant. He came to do the will of the Father.

He did not at any time ever exert his own will in, you know, opposition to God's will. His will was always in harmony with the will of God. And this is where God wants to lead each and every one of us.

He wants to lead us to that place of being not merely Christians and not even merely servants, but He wants to lead us to that place of being bond servants. Now, I will tell you guys, honestly, there have been years in the ministry where I have looked and realized, you know, I've been a servant of Jesus, but I don't know that I could say I've been a bond servant. I've been seeking to do His will, but there's still a lot of my will involved in my life.

You know, there's still a lot of things that I want to do, and there's still a lot of things that I'm pursuing after, and I still have an agenda over here that I'm trying to get accomplished, but there's something glorious. There's something beautiful. There's something that just takes you into a whole other dimension when you come to a place where you just say, Lord, I give it all up to You.

I surrender it all. That's the goal. That's where God wants to lead us to, and I pray that, you know, through this study and through whatever else God's doing and working in your lives, that that's where we all end up, that we, each and every one of us, could speak of ourselves in these terms, that we are the bond servants of Jesus Christ.

Our will is gone, and we're living for His will. Paul says that he is a bond servant of Jesus Christ, and he's called to be an apostle and separated to the gospel of God. So Paul was an apostle.

An apostle is one chosen and sent with a special mission as the fully authorized representative of the sender. An apostle is like an ambassador, one who has been sent and who has all the authority, then, of the one who sent him. So Paul, this was his calling.

This was God's purpose for his life, that he would be an apostle. Now, real quickly, I just wanted to touch for a moment on the whole, just, apostleship itself. The scriptures tell us five things about apostles.

Not everybody is an apostle. And we're going to see in a moment that apostles can actually be divided into two categories. But in category number one, there's an exclusiveness to this type of apostolic ministry.

Actually, only 12 men in history had this ministry. And the five things that marked an apostle were these. Number one, they were appointed by the Lord himself.

God appointed them. Jesus, he appointed them. He chose them himself.

Secondly, they had to have seen the risen Lord. They had to have seen the risen Lord. Thirdly, they had authority to perform miracles.

Fourthly, they had power to impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And then finally, they were commissioned to write the scriptures. That was the exclusive calling of these men that we know today as the apostles.

The church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Now, people ask the question, are there apostles today? In that sense, no, absolutely not. It was an exclusive group.

But in a secondary sense, there are apostles today. Because even in the New Testament, you have men that were not part of that group of 12 who were referred to as apostles. You have Barnabas being referred to as an apostle.

You have Silas being referred to as an apostle. You have Timothy being referred to as an apostle. None of them were in that group of that original 12 that Jesus had chosen.

But they were apostles in the sense that they had a ministry of establishing, pioneering, and establishing the church of God. You know, somebody put it this way, and I think this is a good way to see it. God the Father had one apostle, Jesus Christ.

God the Son, Jesus, had 12 apostles. And they're, of course, listed for us in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit has many apostles.

And an apostle today would be a person who has been appointed by God, who has been called by God to a specific location, to sometimes an entire region, to pioneer God's work into that region, to establish the church. That was really the primary task of the apostles. It was to expand the kingdom of God.

And we think of people in more of the modern setting, somebody like a Hudson Taylor. He was the apostle to the Chinese, no doubt about it. He pioneered the church, really, into the nation of China and into the Chinese culture.

And although he passed off the scene in the late 1800s, his ministry is still felt today in that land. That's an apostolic ministry. And there are men today that God raises up, gives a vision for a people, for a place, and he sends them there, and he gives them authority, he gives them power, he gives them grace to establish his work.

So that is the apostolic ministry that is currently happening today. I think one of the things that we need to do in our present time is we need to reestablish an understanding of the fact that there are apostles and prophets in the church today. In some ways, we've sort of limited the ministry to pastors and teachers and evangelists, but if you look in Ephesians 4, there's also apostles and prophets.

And that was originally, like I said, that exclusive group that laid the foundation of the church, but we still have apostles and prophets today in as much as men are still being sent out, men still speak with authority beyond the local church and speak to the larger body of Christ. That would be kind of a definition of a prophet for today. But then Paul says, and this is our key point here tonight, Paul says that he was called to be an apostle.

And this is the important thing in life, to really get a grip on the call of God. What am I called to be? Now, I can't be something that I'm not called to be. And I shouldn't even try to be something that I'm not called to

be.

But we do do that at times. We get a misunderstanding in our minds, we think that, oh, if I'm really going to serve God, this is what I've got to be. So we try to put ourselves in something that God hasn't really called us to do.

You guys have probably heard Pastor Chuck's stories about how he wanted so desperately to be that evangelist. And all of the antics, you know, and all of the things that, you know, the handkerchief, wiping the sweat off the brow, you know. And, you know, he'll tell this story every semester in the school of ministry, and he'll talk about, you know.

Kay said to him one time, you know, Chuck, you're just not dynamic enough, you know. You know, watch Billy Graham and look at these evangelists. And so he, you know, he did that.

He studied Billy Graham. He thought, okay, when he makes his point, he points to the air and he, you know, raises his voice. And he, you know, Chuck goes on to tell the story about how he struck the pose and forgot the point, you know.

And then through, you know, a process, he realized, you know, I'm trying to be something that God hasn't called me to be. And then he began to discover that calling, that calling of being that pastor, of being that teacher. But God has a different call for each and every one of our lives.

And some of us are called, like myself and others, we're called to minister right, you know, in the context of the church body in that position of leadership. Others are called as part of the body and members of the body to have an impact out in the world at large. And that calling is just as important as my calling.

You see, the highest calling that you can possibly enter into is the calling that God has for your life, whatever that is. And so don't aspire to a particular thing that you think is the ultimate calling. Rather, aspire to discover what God's call is for you, what it is that he has planned for you to do.

That's how Paul understood life. He didn't think of life in terms of what he wanted to do, but in terms of what God meant him to do. That's the big question.

And for me, that's what I want to know. God, what are you calling me to do? You know, even, and I know in a general sense what my calling is, but I have, you know, I have many things that come my way on a regular basis. And even a lot of times with those things, I do not assume necessarily that I should just go out and do those things.

I often will sit back and give it some prayer and say, Lord, are you calling me to do this? Because I don't want to run out and just, you know, be trying to find things to do for God. I want to be doing those things that God has actually called me to do so I know that I'm going to be effective at doing them. A lot of times people call and ask, you know, they say, hey, we need a guest speaker.

Can you come and be our guest speaker? I just tell them, you know what? I'm not a speaker. There are lots of guys that are great speakers. I'm just a pastor, Bible teacher guy.

If you want that, I'll be happy to come. If you want a speaker, then here, let me give you a couple of suggestions. I'll just, you know, I'll direct them somewhere else because I know that's not my calling.

And that's the thing. God, what is your call upon my life? And, of course, the call of God, it kind of comes to us in a process. You know, it sort of comes one step at a time.

But a lot of times we're wanting, you know, we want to know the call of God in its ultimate sense. We want to know the call of God in the big picture. But we forget that there's a lot of small steps that one must take to get into the ultimate call of God.

It starts with just simply being obedient to what God's called you to do today. And we're talking about that in our session tonight, you know. And somebody brought that point up.

It's a great point that Jesus said if you're faithful in the small things, then you would be made ruler over greater things. But he that is unfaithful in the small things will be faithless in the greater things as well. So the calling of God begins, of course, with the call to salvation.

That's where it all starts. You can't even begin to go anywhere in regard to the call of God until you come to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. That's where the call of God starts.

And from there, the call of God goes into sanctification. Sanctification is a life that's set apart to God's will, a life that is seeking to live obediently to his word. Sanctification is a separated life.

And then as we walk in that sanctification, God begins to open up areas of service for us. And he begins to show us those things more specifically that he has called us to do. And so tonight, that's what I want to leave you with.

And that's what I want to encourage you with. That you would, like Paul, think of life in terms of a calling. And I'm absolutely convinced of this.

I am absolutely convinced that God has a specific plan for each one of our lives. I'm totally convinced of that. Anywhere and everywhere I go in the world, I tell people that.

God has a plan for your life. He made you with a purpose. He had something in mind when he created you.

Paul said that his goal, he would say this later to the Philippians, he said his goal was to apprehend that for which Jesus Christ had apprehended him. He understood that Jesus laid hold of him with a purpose in mind. Paul said, my goal is to experience that, to fulfill that purpose for which Christ saved me.

And even further back, that purpose for which I was created. And guys, that's when life gets beautiful. That's when peace begins to guard our hearts and mind.

And that's also when life gets exciting. You know, the Christian life is the most exciting life you can possibly live. Man, the life of God.

It's so wonderful. You know, and you look in the Bible and you see that here's this whole other world here in the Bible. This world of God working, God speaking, prophets and miracles and angels and all of this stuff.

And you know that world exists right in the middle of this world that we live in. But so often because we're distracted by the world we live in, we miss out on this world right here. God wants us to see that our calling is right in this world here, the world of the Spirit.

And that we would, like Paul, commit ourselves to being bondservants. And as we do, then we will really discover. That's the key to discovery in regard to the will of God.

You want to know the will of God? Become a bondservant. Just say, Lord, here I am. You made me.

You purchased me with your blood. And so, Lord, you have a plan for my life. Take me.

And as you do that, God will begin a process in your life that will lead you down a road that you'll never regret that you got on. It'll be the greatest adventure that you can ever imagine. And so may God help us to do that.

Father, we thank you that you have a plan for our lives. And, Lord, we want to be in the center of that plan. Lord, like Paul, you apprehended him.

And you had a purpose in mind. And so, Lord, here we are. We want to discover more and more as time passes what your purpose is.

So use, Lord, these times in your word. Use the times of fellowship that we have with one another. Lord, to help us discover more and more clearly with each passing day what is that good and perfect will of God.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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