

Sermon Notes of Rev Dr Ivor J.W.Oakley (Strandtown Baptist Church 8-01-1978)

## **Romans 1:1-7**

*Additional Reading from Acts 13:1-13*

### Introduction

To preface the message with account of importance and influence of this epistle.

*William Tyndale's* prologue in 1534 edition of New Testament in English read "This epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure Gospel, and also a light and way into the whole Scripture... should be daily bread of soul of Christian man, cannot read it too often". He also said it was the key to the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Summer 386 *Augustine* of North Africa, Professor of Rhetoric in Milan. Longing to begin new life because he was ashamed of sin. Took up a scroll and read "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ". He said "Instantly a clear light flooded my heart and all darkness of doubt vanished away"

November 1515 *Martin Luther* Augustine monk and Professor of Sacred Theology at Wittenburg. Expounded on Romans to his students. Lecture preparation caused him to see Jesus by faith "I felt myself to be reborn. Whole of Scripture took on a new meaning"

24 May 1738 *John Wesley* went very unwillingly to society meeting at Aldergate Street where someone was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. "About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins away, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death"

August 1918 *Karl Barth* Pastor in Germany. Published exposition of Romans. "Reader will detect it has been written with joyful sense of discovery". He repudiated liberal theology, seeing it to be inadequate to deal with deepest needs of mankind.

Therefore there is no telling what may happen when people begin to study Romans. The source of great spiritual movements of church history. Similar things also happen to individuals when Romans comes to them with power.

Written AD58 to the church in the greatest city of the Roman Empire. Paul had never seen it but was hoping to visit. The epistle contains the most systematic exposition of Christian faith.

### The Call which Paul received

**Servant of Jesus Christ; called to be an apostle; separated unto Gospel of God (1:1)**

(a) “Servant” in AV can represent any one of 6 different Greek words. The particular one Paul chooses δούλος here is better translated as “slave”, the lowest category of servant, from the root meaning “bind”. It is the same word used for one who is bought and purchased, “chattel that breathes”, handed over completely to the rule of a despotic master. Paul is saying he has no rights or claims, he is at the Lord’s disposal, his master’s property entirely. His time, energy and family are at the service of his master. The will of another is his guide and law.

(b) Called to unique office of Apostle. One of the founders of the early church whose teaching was the foundation of Christian truth. He was called clearly and irresistibly to God. God had made his will clear to the slave.

(c) Separated unto Gospel of God. This separation occurred even before he was born: **separated me from my mother’s womb** (Gal 1:15). Then in due time separated, with Barnabas, by the church at Antioch, with prayer and laying on of hands. Formal external recognition of inward conviction and call.

Obviously dealing with a unique man. Yet principles of God’s dealings with us are similar. Do you have a sense of belonging entirely to the Master? Are you a tool or weapon in his hands? Do you have a consciousness of being in the centre of God’s will? Are you doing a task, spending time, at his beck and call?

For young people, implication of consecration. Not spoil lives by going own way, pleasing selves. Find out God’s will, and do it. Ear open for mission-field and ministry. You might love to have your own way and map out your own future, but far better to give future – all your tomorrows – to God. We are all called to be missionaries. Jesus has bought us, we are his slaves and we have no right to our own lives. Jesus is entitled to unquestioning obedience. God has a perfect plan for us, no life need be purposeless. The equipment given is grace and apostleship. Encouraging to know God never commands without giving the grace to obey.

J. MacNeill of Australia “O what a lot of the master’s time is taken up with runaway slaves”. Called not just to be his ally or friend, or even subject, but called to be a bondservant. Awful burden? No, but rather the secret of freedom and joy.

*“Make me a captive Lord,  
And then I shall be free”*

Surrender to the **Son of God, who loved me** (Gal 2:20). No plunge into cold void but arrival at seat of life and power and freedom.

### The Gospel which Paul preached

What was Paul’s message which he was commissioned to preach to all nations? Nothing abrupt or new-fangled about it. Promised in Old Testament. Prophets hundreds of years earlier had predicted the Messiah and his salvation. Part of God’s age-long plan. The Gospel is not a programme of ethics, philosophy, psychological pick-me-up with religious veneer. It is not something that Paul dreamed up. No novelty or afterthought. Rooted in God and his eternal purposes, concerns Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the centre is a person: Jesus, meaning Saviour; Christ our Lord, meaning anointed and commissioned one. The Son of God, in a unique and special sense. Also truly human, because in his humanity he had been descended from King David. After his death he had been raised again. Exalted, the Living Saviour. His resurrection shows the Son of God with power. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is proof of the Son of God with power.

This was the message Paul was to preach to all nations. A message that requires a response and obedience.

Authentic Christian message. It is the centre around which all New Testament writers gather. The heart of the New Testament. It is in the great creeds of the Church when facing heretics and Gnostics. People wonder what the Gospel is, there are all sorts of ideas. Here we have the real thing, the genuine article. It is a message of good news from God. The fulfilment of promises. Centres on person – divine and human, God and man. Alive now, as we are. When men know him, dramatic effects. He is the Son of God with power. His gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Power to cleanse and change. It has a claim upon us – requires trust and obedience, submission and surrender.

A message which transforms countless lives. Immoral and evil living men, like Augustine; seekers like Luther; self-righteous religious men like Wesley. It is a message for all of us. It doesn't want to be admired, or flattered, or obtain intellectual approval. But it does want personal entrustment to the living one who centres in the message. He is the only giver of pardon and new life. Stretching out empty hands to receive God's gift, which is free.

#### The People to whom Paul Wrote

He is writing to people he has never seen, who live in the capital city of the Roman Empire. He calls them **Beloved of God and called to be Saints** (1:7). This can be said of any group of Christians even though we have never seen them or even speak their language.

“Beloved of God”. But does God not love everyone? Obvious question to us, and obvious answer. But until Christ gave the answer, no-one knew what it was, though the question had tortured human hearts for hundreds of years. God is Love, loves all men, Jesus said it and His Cross proves it. Does God love all? 1000 times – yes. Is there a special love to believers in his Son? Equally answer is yes, there is no contradiction here. Special affection is not inconsistent with universal benevolence. Expect special affection because God is not indifferent to repentance and faith. Not all same to God whether we love and serve him or not. True that **God so loved the world** (John 3:16). Also true that his infinite love is not indifferent to character of man. **If a man loves me he will keep my words and my father will love him** (John 14:23). We are loved with everlasting love. Lets take it to our hearts for our comfort and peace of mind.

“Called to be saints”. How misunderstood. Called to belong to God. Called to be consecrated to God. Called to be separated and dedicated to God. Never think of a

saint as someone who is especially holy, with an honours degree while the rest have only a pass degree. All Christians in New Testament were called Saints, but some were very imperfect – dead, cold, inconsistent.

All Christians are called to be consecrated to him. From the moment when we are converted, we become a saint, consecrated to God and belonging to him. There is an obligation on all to obey his will, to be like him in character, to commit ourselves to him day by day. This consecration is to apply to our whole nature – heart, will, thoughts, senses. With increasing consecration we receive increasing experience of God's power. The more he has of us, the more we have of him. We are all responsible to cultivate and increase our consecration. It is our solemn obligation to be yielded to the Lord, and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.

“Beloved of God and called to be his saints” – Paul's readers. If a letter so addressed was dropped in our streets, would anyone bring it to us or to the church to which we belong? Would we be recognised as the people for whom it was meant?

### Conclusion

- Called to be slaves, messengers in the will of God.
- Gospel centred on the Person of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Lord, requiring faith and obedience.
- Beloved of God – called to be consecrated to him.