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Series: The Book of Romans

The Gospel and God's Righteousness

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(15)

[Romans 1:1-17](#)

(Continuation from 10/25/15)

B. Paul's Interest in the Church: Enslavement to the Gospel, [Romans 1:8-15](#)

[Romans 1:8-15 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you,

¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

¹¹ For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;

¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even 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, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

[\(Romans 1:8-15\)](#) **Introduction:** Paul had never visited the Roman church, and he had never seen the believers at Rome; yet here he is writing to them.

1. How could he best reach them and express his purpose for writing them?
2. How could he arouse their interest to such a peak that they would read what he was writing and obey it?

This is the subject of the present passage. Paul wanted the Roman believers to know his great interest in them; therefore, to the best of his ability he shared why he was writing to them. Simply stated, he said he was writing because he could do nothing else; he was compelled to share the gospel with the whole world including the capital of the world, Rome itself. **In fact he was enslaved by the gospel.**

In my past experience, in my church, in seminary, in my studies, I learned a great deal from the books I read, the lectures I heard, and the papers I wrote. And I still do today! But I learned most from the attitudes and actions of the godly men under whom I studied. While around them, I discovered their true priorities, their true convictions, and their true devotion to our Lord.

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In the opening verses of his letter to the Romans, Paul also set himself forth for his readers to see before he attempted to teach them some deeper truths of the gospel. He opened his heart and said, in effect, **“Before I show you my theology, I am going to show you myself.”**

People serve the Lord from many motives:

1. Some serve out of legalistic effort, as a means of earning salvation and God’s favor.
2. Some serve the Lord for fear that, if they do not, they will incur His disfavor and perhaps even lose their salvation.
3. Some, like Diotrophes ([3 John 9](#)), serve because of the prestige and esteem that leadership often brings.
4. Some serve in order to gain preeminent ecclesiastical positions and the power to lord it over those under their care.
5. Some serve for appearance’s sake, in order to be considered righteous by fellow church members and by the world.
6. Some serve because of peer pressure to conform to certain human standards of religious and moral behavior.
7. Children are often forced into religious activities by their parents, and they sometimes continue those activities into adult life only because of parental intimidation or perhaps from mere habit.
8. Some people are even zealous in Christian work because of the financial gain it can produce.

But those motives for service are merely external, and no matter how orthodox or helpful to other people the service might be, unless it is done out of a sincere desire to please and glorify God, it is not spiritual or acceptable to Him (cf. [1 Corinthians 10:31](#)).

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NASB)

³¹ Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (KJV)

³¹ Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

It is, of course, possible for a person to begin Christian service out of genuine devotion to God and later fall into an occasion or even a habit of performing it mechanically, merely from a sense of necessity. Pastors, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, missionaries and all other Christian workers can carelessly leave their first love and fall into a rut of superficial activity that is performed in the Lord’s name but is not done in His power or for His glory.

Even when the Lord is served from a right motive and in His power, there always lingers near a ready temptation to resentment and self-pity when one’s work is not appreciated by fellow Christians and perhaps goes completely unnoticed.

The apostle Paul was doubtlessly assailed and attacked by many temptations from Satan to give up his ministry when he was opposed, or to give up on a difficult, fleshly, self-centered, and worldly church such as the one at Corinth. But Paul was greatly used of the

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Lord because, by God's grace and provision, he always kept his motives pure. Because his single purpose was to please God, the displeasure or disregard of other people, even of those he was serving, could not deter his work or lead him into bitterness and self-pity.

In his opening words to the believers at Rome, Paul tells of his sincere spiritual motives in wanting to minister to them. With **warmth, affection, and sensitivity** that permeate the entire letter, he assures them of his genuine devotion to God and his genuine love for them.

Although Paul had not personally founded or even visited the church at Rome, he carried the heartfelt passion of Christ for their spiritual welfare and an eager desire to develop their spiritual and personal friendship. The letter to Rome reveals that Paul not only had **the zeal of a prophet, the mind of a teacher, and the determination of an apostle**, but also **the heart of a shepherd**.

When they first received Paul's letter, the believers in Rome probably wondered why this great apostle whom most of them did not know would bother to write them such a long and profound letter. They also may have wondered why, if he cared so much for them, he had not yet paid them a visit.

In [verses 8-15 of chapter 1](#), Paul gives the answers to both of those questions. He wrote them because he cared deeply about their spiritual maturity, and he had not yet visited them because he had thus far been prevented. In these few verses the apostle lays bare his heart concerning them.

[Romans 1:9 \(NASB\)](#)

9 "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you."

The key that unlocks the intent in this passage is the phrase **"God, whom I serve in my spirit"** ([v. 9a](#)). Paul had been raised and educated in Judaism. He had himself been a Pharisee and was well acquainted with the other Jewish religious set, the Sadducees, the scribes, the priests, and the elders.

He knew that, with few exceptions, those leaders served God in the flesh and were motivated by self-interest. **Their worship and service were mechanical, routine, external, and superficial**. Paul also was well acquainted with the Gentile world and knew that **pagan religious worship and service were likewise external, superficial, and completely motivated by self-interest**.

Referring to such religion, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, **"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"** ([John 4:23-24 \(NASB\)](#)). Worship that is true and acceptable to God does not involve a particular location, ritual, or any man-made activities or forms.

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During the years before his salvation, Paul himself had worshiped and served God in an external, self-interested way ([Philippians 3:4-7](#)).

Philippians 3:4-7 (NASB)

⁴ Although I [Paul] myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

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;

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

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

But now that he belonged to Christ and had Christ's own Spirit indwelling him, he worshiped and served Him in spirit and in truth, with his whole being. Paul was now motivated by a genuine, inner desire to serve God for God's sake rather than his own, in God's revealed way rather than his own, and in God's power rather than his own.

He was no longer motivated by self-interest or by peer pressure and no longer focused on Jewish religious tradition or even on self-effort to keep God's law.

He was not interested in trying to please other men, even himself, but only God ([1 Corinthians 4:1-5](#)).

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (NASB)

¹ Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

³ But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.

⁴ For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

The focus of his life and his ministry was to glorify God by proclaiming the saving grace of the gospel. He lived in conformity to the divine standard he proclaimed to the Ephesians, serving God “not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” ([Ephesians 6:6 \(NASB\)](#)).

As he reminded the elders from that church, “I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me” ([Acts 20:33-34 \(NASB\)](#)).

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Paul did not serve because it was “**fun**” and self-pleasing. “**For even Christ did not please Himself,**” he points out later in the epistle; “**but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell upon Me'**” ([Romans 15:3 \(NASB\)](#); cf. [Psalm 69:9](#)).

[Psalm 69:9 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ For zeal for Your house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

Nor did Paul serve in order to gain glory and honor from men. “**For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel**” ([1 Corinthians 9:16 \(NASB\)](#)).

In a later letter to the church at Corinth he declared, “**For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake**” ([2 Corinthians 4:5 \(NASB\)](#); cf. [1 Corinthians 9:19](#)).

[1 Corinthians 9:19 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁹ For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.