

When in Rome: Paul's Four Views

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for the Sunday, April 19th. My name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here.! Just out of curiosity, has anybody listened to the Easter Sunday message either on the website or when I was on the phone line?

Anybody? No. That's okay. This is not about guilt. This is about me doing a survey of how much did you hate it in terms of the audio quality was abysmal. So we did our best. I ended up recording a little disclaimer at the beginning and saying, hey, this sounds terrible, but enjoy it because I think it's important to hear it and you can hear it.

So if you're ever curious about the Easter Sunday sermon, it's on the website. This morning, we're continuing in our new sermon series, When in Rome.

Last week, we started with an introduction and we considered a few things. We learned that Romans and 20 other sections of the Bible that we recognize as books, that's what we call them most often, they were originally what? Or epistles. Excellent.

Messages that were intended for a specific audience and with a specific purpose or purposes in mind. The church in Rome at that time, we recognize, was in conflict.

[1 : 21] There were disagreements between Jewish and non-Jewish or Gentile Christians. And Paul wrote his letter to the Roman church to seek to unify those groups.

Also to gain their support for helping Paul to extend his mission into Spain. So we also got some confirmation that historians and even evidence within the letter itself identifies the Apostle Paul as the writer.

Then as we don't, we don't know with pinpoint accuracy, as we talked about, when the church in Rome began. But we identified some hints that we found in the book of Acts when we studied Acts. We're also reminded that Paul admired the Roman Christians for both their faith and their obedience to God. And that Paul had wanted to visit them for some time.

We recognize that Romans was likely written while Paul was in the city of Corinth between approximately 57 and 58 AD. The powerful theological insight and messages of Paul's writing were intended to help Christians in Rome to defend the gospel against those who either sought to pervert it or distort its message.

[2 : 38] And then we wrapped up our time last week by briefly considering the structure of the book. Maybe you mentioned that. We looked at two different options for that, two different perspectives. Our passage for this morning is Romans 1 verse 7, which says, Romans 1 verse 7, if you want to flip there and I'll read it for us as well.

Romans 1, 1 to 7. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures regarding his son.

Who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David and who through the spirit of holiness was appointed the son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through him we receive grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

And you are also among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people, grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 00] Have you written an email that had an introduction like that lately? Maybe not. So I flipped my slides, so we're going to go here now. Our sermon this morning is titled Paul's Four Views.

And we're going to be considering the important information that we've just heard Paul convey right out of the gate. Paul is not a word mincer. He is a cut to the chase kind of guy.

And so in our passage for today, Paul communicates his views on four important subjects. Paul conveys himself, the gospel, his commission or calling, and his view of the believers in Rome. So let's start with Paul's view of himself. Paul conveys so much in his very first opening sentence. As I said, he doesn't mince words.

He cuts right to the chase there. And what strikes me most about it is Paul's humility. Paul's reputation would have been widespread by this point in his ministry.

[5 : 06] In some ways, he was probably even like a celebrity of sorts. And as well known and popular as he may have been with some, we know that he would have had opponents and even enemies who would have loved to end his ministry and ultimately even many of them end his life.

Paul's first point of self-identification is also as a servant of Christ Jesus. The master who had modeled humility and servanthood had clearly impacted Paul's perspective on his own life and ministry.

I wonder, is the same true for us? Do we view ourselves as servants or do we seek to be served? Do our lives reflect the life and ministry of the one who we claim to follow?

So from identifying himself as a servant and a follower of Jesus, Paul transitions to his calling. Paul says that he has been, let me stay there for a minute.

Paul has said that he's been called to be an apostle. He clearly takes that seriously, this calling of his. And he's adopted it as a core part of his identity.

[6 : 27] It's interesting to me too that Paul uses consistent messaging when he writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1.11, saying, And of this gospel I was appointed as a herald and an apostle and as a teacher.

Having just spoken about the gospel, Paul declares that he has been appointed. This is no casual assignment for him, right? This isn't a part-time job.

He's been appointed, assigned to be a herald. Someone who boldly declares the gospel of Jesus. As an apostle, part of that inner circle tradition.

And then also as a teacher, ensuring that the gospel is communicated clearly. And that all people have the same opportunity to come to Christ.

Paul also uses the language of being set apart. I don't know if you noticed that. So in a sense, that is being in the world, but not of the world.

[7 : 32] And we know that's the message for us. Paul also speaks in Galatians, making it clear that he has been, here's the quote, Sent from, not from men, nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

Identification, gospel message, super powerful. So do you see that gospel-centric declaration of both his calling and his commissioning there?

He knew who had sent him. He knew why he had been sent. And he was willing to go and serve. What about Paul's view of the gospel? Well, you know, Paul loved the gospel.

Well, Paul's self-identification there is humble. And it points to Jesus. He doesn't linger there very long in our passage from this morning. Before his love for the gospel, love for the gospel of Jesus, comes to the forefront again.

Paul identifies the gospel as originating from God. But then he also makes it clear that scripture points to Jesus. From Old Testament prophecy to Jesus' earthly ministry and message.

[8 : 57] And then the redemptive power of his death and resurrection. Not many verses here, folks, but they are packed. It's interesting, too, that Peter also made this prophetic connection and significance of that clear in his preaching.

You might remember it from Acts 10, verse 43. Or not, but here it is. Peter said, All the prophets testify about him, Jesus.

That everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Gospel clarity. Then Paul also, in his comments, makes this lineage connection between David and Jesus very clear.

It shows Jesus' human nature. And then Paul also declares the lordship of Christ through his resurrection. Then, Paul shows how the gospel reveals Jesus' divine identity as the Son of God. Super clear. What a great teacher. What about his view of his commission? Well, we explored Paul's conversion story and his subsequent calling in our sermon series in the book of Acts.

[10 : 19] And as I said then, Paul's story is likely the most dramatic conversion account in all of Scripture. As we know, Paul went from being one of the fiercest persecutors of Christianity to likely

its greatest, most passionate, most vocal advocates and defenders.

So it's important to note that after introducing himself and then declaring the lordship of Christ and then the power of the gospel, Paul makes it clear then that his passion for the gospel includes a deep love for Gentile people who don't know Jesus yet.

Receiving Jesus' commission to go into all the world and beyond with the gospel, Paul was driven to act on that calling. Paul also recognized that his commission and calling were from Jesus, through him, and for Jesus, ultimately.

He took no credit. Just as he had received God's amazing grace, Paul was passionate that all people would recognize and receive grace in their own lives as well.

Every single person. So recognizing the power of God at work in his own life, the power of God at the core of the gospel itself, Paul was passionate about calling people to obedience and ultimately repentance.

[11 : 56] We've talked about Paul's desire to be with the church in Rome, his love for them, based on some of the characteristics and qualities they exhibited. And as we talked about in our last week in our introduction, again already this morning, Paul was deeply focused on the Roman church.

He admired them. He wanted to be part of their ongoing discipleship and encouragement. So we get some great insight, I think, into Paul's thinking about his fellow believers in 2 Thessalonians 2, verses 13 and 14.

Paul says there, But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul loved the gospel.

He loved Jesus and the Father. But he also clearly cared about his brothers and sisters. I believe he cares deeply about us, fellow Christians who are no less valuable to God than he was.

[13 : 21] Looking forward to meeting Paul? I am. Looking forward to feeling like I have no idea what I'm talking about when I speak with him. Yes. But looking forward to sharing that brotherhood.

In Paul's view, anyone who was called by God and chose to follow the teachings and example of Jesus quite simply were part of God's family. Not only were fellow believers called, just as he was, they were also loved by God in Paul's view.

So having been welcomed into God's family, pardon me, and deeply loved by God, that meant that they were called to be saints. Are you worried about where I'm going to go with this?

Saints. What a loaded word for us, isn't it? Saints. It often bears more negative connotations, I think, at times, than positive ones.

Saints are often viewed as people who view themselves, potentially, as better than others, passing unfair and even inappropriate judgments with a holier-than-thou attitude.

[14 : 40] The term saint really, in case you didn't know, isn't meant to reflect a special or exclusive tier of Christ followers.

Is that a shock? People who have been identified or selected as special for something that they have personally done. Now we can get into church traditions, Christian traditions, where there is a veneration of saints.

Right? People are identified for what they have done, personally done, how they have been set apart, and how they are special and a different tier than the rest of us.

But that's really not something, any kind of picture, we should really have when we hear believers identified as saints or called saints.

Because the term saint actually comes from the Greek word hagios, which means holy one, set apart, or consecrated.

[15 : 44] Guess what? You have been all three. It's important to clarify that saints, as scripture uses the term, aren't somehow some kind of super Christian.

Paul used that term saints in places like 1 Corinthians 1 verse 2 and Ephesians 5 verse 3 to refer, friends, to everyday Christians.

Any believer in Jesus Christ defined not by moral perfection in some way, but by being set apart or sanctified by God for his purpose.

That's all of us. And as unsaintly as you and I may feel at times, we need to reclaim that perspective, I believe, that every follower of Jesus, everyone who has been chosen and set apart

by God is a saint.

Our role is being set apart for God in but not part of what the world represents. The world represents. It's a serious calling.

[16:55] And actually, as a directive from God, as we read in 1 Peter 1 verses 15 and 16, you can turn there, but I'll read it. 1 Peter 1, 15 and 16 says, But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all that you do.

For it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. Peter actually quotes God's words to his own people from Leviticus there.

God is speaking to his own people and Peter is quoting the Lord. So at the end of our passage for this morning, Paul does something else in his role as one called by God.

Someone who has been called to teach, to proclaim the gospel to others, and most of all, to encourage other believers. He closes this opening section by proclaiming a blessing over his readers.

All the, in my opinion, I'm biased, but some of the greatest, if not all of the greatest benedictions in Scripture were written by the Apostle Paul. You've heard me use them before because they're so amazing.

[18:18] As God's called apostle and gospel minister, Paul shows care for the believers in the Roman Church in his desire for them to experience two things.

I didn't put them on the slide. Any guesses? No, that's okay. They are common words Paul uses in benedictions and blessings.

Grace and peace. Paul declares these gifts from God over and for the Roman Christians, just as he had received them in his own life.

Just as anyone who seeks the Lord in their life also receives. My friends, God wants all of us to experience his grace and peace.

And peace. Which we can never find on our own. Have you been trying? But that he freely pours out on us.

[19:19] In being welcomed into God's family, we can all receive his grace. And I encourage you to receive it. Remember, a transaction of giving and receiving doesn't always work if the recipient doesn't receive the gift.

Don't minimize the value of God's grace to you. Don't worry about whether you deserve it or not. Because truthfully, you don't.

I don't. But no matter what your sin looks like, no matter what you think your weaknesses or shortcomings might be, God has got you.

Your Heavenly Father loves you more completely and unconditionally than you can ever wrap your head or your heart around. And it's through that amazing grace that we can also receive God's peace.

Are you anxious today? I think there's a 100% fair certainty. We have some anxieties in our lives about something or another.

[20:34] are you hanging on to things that God never intended for you to slap into your backpack and carry around with you? Friends, don't let fear or anxiety rob you of the joy, the grace and peace that are yours in Christ.

The amazing ladies choir can probably come up now. I told them this morning when I was listening to them practice. That's a very hard act to follow, literally and figuratively.

One of my favorite passages of Scripture, which also speaks powerfully to my own heart, which can often be anxious, is Philippians 4, 6, and 7.

I have it on the screen. These are, again, the words of the Apostle Paul. Read it with me if you would. Do not be anxious about anything. But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.