

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

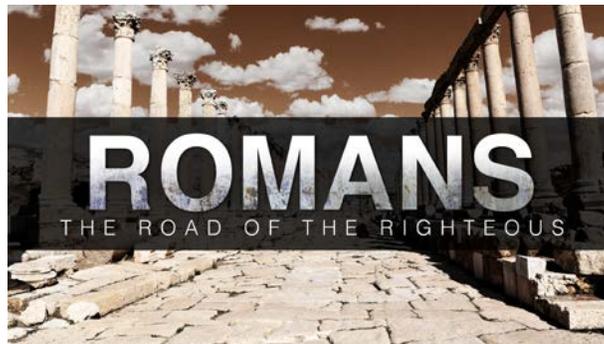
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 1:1b-2

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

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As we all know here in the Washington DC area, access to special places requires the right credentials. What is true here is true all over the country. When I served in California as the chaplain to the 1300-member Sheriff's Department in San Joaquin County, I could only gain access to the massive facility because I passed the background check and I was then placed on a master list for people approved for entrance. Hence, when I entered the facility I approached the main desk, showed them my ID, they recorded my information in a book, and I then was permitted to enter the main facility.

What was true of access to the law enforcement facility was true, in some fashion, for Paul when he desired to visit the church in Rome. Since he had never visited this church before, as we have stated, he opens his introductory letter to them by giving them his pastoral credentials. You may not be a pastor, therefore, you may think these opening verses do not possess much application for yourself; however, if this is your thinking, it is certainly not correct for Paul's credentials are in some sense our credentials as we seek to follow God's leading to the modern-day version of Rome. With this thought in mind, I invite you to come with me as we acquaint ourselves with Paul's spiritual credentials. While we consider these, I would challenge you to also be asking yourself one important question, "What does God want me to learn from the amazing life of this great missionary of God?"

What Are The Spiritual Credentials of Paul? (Romans 1:1-7)

So far, we have considered to credentials of Paul. Let's review them briefly.

- Credential #1: Paul, The Servant* (Romans 1:1a). Above all else, Paul informs the Roman Christians that he is merely a servant of Jesus Christ. He's not concerned with making a name for himself, with becoming famous, or with pushing his own personal agenda. On the contrary, he is all about humbly living for his risen Savior and doing His daily bidding. We likewise are servants of Jesus. This spiritual truth leads to a number of pertinent practical questions we must ask ourselves a continual basis: (1) "Does my life reflect that I serve Christ were serve myself?" (2) "Do I make sacrifices to advance Him and His cause or myself?" (3) "Am I content with doing the hard things in life so that other lives are touched by the love of God?" (4) "Am I more desirous of serving as opposed to being served?"
- *Credential #2: Paul, The Apostle* (Romans 1:1a). None of us biblically qualify to be apostles anymore; however, we are apostles in the sense we are all sent on various life missions for Jesus. Again, this leads to a whole host of reflective question: (1) "Who is Jesus specifically sending me to?" (2) "Why am I dragging my feet with going to the person or persons I know He wants me to spiritually touch?" (3) "Do I feel the anointing and calling of God on my life?" Put differently, "Do I sense He has saved me to do something specifically for him, and if so, am I pursuing that calling? If not, am I ready and willing to ask God to clearly call me to what He desires for me to accomplish during my earthly sojourn?" Remember, Paul went all over the known world for Jesus, touching countless lives for God and for eternity, being opposed and hated for his newfound faith, being persecuted for his love of the gospel, and in an leaving spiritual leaders to carry on his works. His life challenges us to rise to a higher level of discipleship, does it not? Indeed.

These are Paul's first two credentials, but there is yet another one worth considering:

Credential #3: Paul, The Purveyor (Romans 1:1b-2)

A purveyor is simply someone who lives to supply people with something. What is Paul a purveyor of? He tells us in the second clause of this opening verse:

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (Romans 1)

Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος ἀφορισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ . . .

“Set apart” is from the verb *aphorizo*, ἀφορίζω, which speaks lexically of strictly marking off boundaries, to excommunicate or cut off, and/or to separate for a special purpose.¹ In my neighborhood, a couple has subdivided their large lot to build two additional houses on it. Before any work began a few weeks ago, a county surveyor came out and drove stakes with colorful plastic flags all over the property to distinguish the proper boundaries. Now this land is cordoned off to be used by the owner to accomplish his construction purposes. This is how Paul sees his spiritual life and this is why he employs this unique, well-worn Greek word. Jesus, the master builder, specifically called him, saved him, and cordoned off his life for a special spiritual purpose. When, exactly did God call Paul to a new spiritual life? Paul tells us by using the same word in Galatians 1, verse 15:

But when He who had set me apart, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased.

Οτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ . . .

Paul's salvific call came before he was even born. All of this sounds very much like the call of a prophet in the Old Testament. Jeremiah's call to be God's prophet to Israel was God's idea even before he was in the womb of his mother.

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1).

Such are the ways of God. Even when you don't have a spiritual plan for your life, He does. Even when you think your current spiritual plan is *the* plan, as Paul did as a Pharisee, God has a unique way of getting your attention and showing you how your current spiritual separation unto God is a false separation and a false way into communion with Him. As a Pharisee, Paul enjoyed and took personal pride in the meaning of the term, *Perushim*, or “separated ones.” This represented the derogatory term the Sadducees used to describe the overly legalistic and consumed-with-themselves, Pharisees; however, the term stuck because they did think that they, of all men, were spiritually separated to God by their inordinate and punctilious observance of the Mosaic and the Mishnaic Law. Yes, they originally called themselves the *Chasidim*, or “the pious,” but the term *Perushim* was just as good to religiously and works-minded men like Paul. They, in turn, took the term for Sadducee, viz., *Tsaddiqim*, or the “righteous ones,” and denigrated it by altering it to *Tsadduqim*, or the “desolated ones.”²

¹ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 158; cf. also Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*.

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book III (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 323-324.

Funny how Paul left all of this erroneous religious thinking behind when he encountered the risen Messiah, Jesus. He knew at the point he needed to trade spiritual paradigms to truly walk with God. His old spiritual mindset deceived him into thinking his spiritual standing before God rested on his faith plus his perpetual works. His new spiritual mindset let him know that God is the one who does saving and the commissioning. In modern times, Mosad Hassan Yousef, the oldest son of Sheikh Hassan Yousef, a founding member of Hamas. His book *Son of Hamas* tells about how the living God who saved and separated Paul for His divine purposes is the same God who saved and separated him as a follower of Jesus, the true Christ.

Interesting, isn't it? God calls us and separates us unto His work. The lexical meaning of this unique verb shows this, and so, too, does the verbal construction. In Greek, *aphorizo* is a perfect passive participle. Grammatically, this means several things. One, the subject, i.e., Paul, was acted upon by an outside source, i.e., God. He is the one who does the spiritual separating. Two, the perfect tense speaks of a past act, viz, the divine calling, coupled with an abiding result. Daniel Wallace, author of *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, would classify this as an intensive use of the perfect to underscore uninterrupted activity.³ Ostensibly, it means this particular setting apart by God of Paul was not a one-time thing, but one meant to endure throughout his lifetime. Again, when God separates you in this fashion, it is not some point in time event, it does not just involve a couple of month or years out of your life, but it underscores a lifetime, long-term view from God's perspective. It's akin to the Marine motto: Once a Marine, always a Marine.

What did God separate Paul for? The purpose of the separation is denoted by the preposition following the verb in question.

... set apart **for** the gospel of God, (Romans 1)

... ἀφορισμένος **εἰς** εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ ...

The preposition employed here with the accusative represents the purpose of the divine separation. God specifically saved and separated Paul for one reason only: to be a purveyor of the His gospel. You might need to read that one more time. This time let it sink into your soul. God does not set you apart so can or could be a spiritual observer, but a spiritual purveyor of His glorious gospel.

Concerning this gospel, or good news, Paul speaks about, we must make two salient observations. The first one is derived from verse 1b, and the second from verse two. Both of these concepts must be understood to fully appreciate the message of a spiritual purveyor like Paul.

The Person of the Message (1:1b). Paul is quite clear he is "set apart for the gospel of God." God, here, is in the genitive case and can be classified as a genitive of possession, for those Greek students among us who are studying at Dallas Theological Seminary. Grammatically, it means that God alone is the source, the starting point, and the owner of this gospel of good spiritual

³Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 574-575.

news. It was and is His idea, not man's. The prophet Jeremiah is quite clear that spiritually fallen man would have never devised this particular gospel. His words in chapter 19 tell us this much:

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

Man's innate sinfulness precludes his desire or ability to devise a life-giving and soul-saving gospel. Man's gospel is readily seen insofar as calls for faith in God (whoever he, or she may be) wedded to perpetual obedience to certain religious rules and regulations (be what they may, given the religion in question). Charles Taze Russell, one of the founders and theologians of the Jehovah's witnesses, echoes this false faith plus works path to God when he writes,

They [i.e., the unbelievers] must be recovered from blindness as well as from death, that they, each for himself, they have a full chance to prove, by obedience or disobedience, their worthiness of life eternal.⁴

Man's way of salvation always showcases man's religious work(s).

Conversely, the gospel or good news that Jesus Christ brings to sinful man is built on grace, faith, and nothing more, and it is entirely His doing. Other scriptures substantiate this point which employ the same genitival grammatical construction warning (Mark 1:14; Romans 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 4:17). This week represents the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517 A.D. What was Luther's main concern? That the Roman Catholic Church had forgotten that salvation is based on grace and faith, not on faith plus perpetual religious works. Luther merely echoed what Paul taught 2,000 years prior.

God's gospel involved sending his only Son to be our Savior by dying for our sins and rising from the grave the third day to demonstrate that he was, in fact, the Savior and God of all life. Why did God do this when he did not have to? John 3:16 shouts the eternal answer with its opening words, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" Love moved the absolutely holy, righteous, and perfect Father to provide a plan to save the likes of you and me.

The gospel which all "separated ones" are called to deliver is God's message without a doubt, and from what we know of the Roman culture Paul had to say this, really he needed to say this, from the outset. Concerning this, the New Testament Greek scholar C. E. B. Cranfield avers:

But there is also a pagan background to the NT use of 'gospel.' For the inhabitants of the Roman Empire had special associations with the Emperor-cult, since the announcements of such events as the birth of an heir to the Emperor, his coming-

⁴Charles Taze Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures*, vol 1, p. 158.

of-age, and his accession, referred to as 'gospel.' There is thus in the Christian use of the word and implicit contrast between that 'gospel' which may truly be termed 'gospel of God' (for this phrase compare 15:16; Mk. 1:14; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Th. 2:2, 8, 9; 1 Pet. 4:17); the omission of the articles here has the effect of giving it additional emphasis in solemnity) and these other 'gospels' which represent their pretentious claims of self-important men. The message of good news Paul as to proclaim is God's authoritative Word. Its source is none other than God Himself.⁵

Satan always muddies the waters, doesn't he? Romans were taught that the gospel pointed to the news about the Emperor whom they worshiped as God. No wonder Paul clarified his words here. The gospel he is going to talk about is not any old man-made gospel, rather it is THE gospel par excellence because it is the true one from God Himself.

The Promise of the Message (Romans 1:2). Concerning the gospel, Paul adds in first to these profound intriguing words:

... which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,

... ὁ προεπηγγείλατο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἁγίαις

Eternally engraved in this verse is the whole gospel plan of God from the beginning of time. From the outset, God knew what he was going to do to redeem us from his coming wrath against sin. Therefore, throughout revelatory time, that is from the book of Genesis forward, he made the gospel about His Son's redeeming work known to man any progressive fashion. Numerous biblical texts support this fact. Here are a few to consider.

For I delivered to you as first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

The word "Scriptures" here is the same were Paul employees in Romans 1:2, and both point back to the Old Testament text, viz., Genesis through Malachi. Christ's sacrificial death, therefore, was a strict and total fulfillment of what had been foretold of Him. The Jews selfishly looked for a warrior-king-deliverer while overlooking the countless texts underscoring His substitutionary atonement first.

Here is another testimony about God's ancient gospel plan. This time it is from the lips of Peter:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:20-21).

⁵C. E. B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: Romans*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 55.

Text like these tell us that God was speaking through all the writers of the Old Testament. He guided their words, and He made sure they wrote clearly point to the saving work His Son would one day accomplish. The prophets faithfully recorded the prophetic words God gave them, couching those profound, precise words in their own personal style. But in the final analysis their words pointed primarily to the person and work of the Anointed One, the Ancient of Days, the Son of Man, Jesus, the Christ.

Jesus' post-resurrection encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus illustrates the truth of this ancient and carefully orchestrated divine redemptive plan. As the two downcast disciples discussed what had just occurred in the crucifixion of Jesus, Jesus appeared and asked them a seemingly innocent question:

What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking (Luke 24:17)?

Cleopas, consumed with sadness, proceeded to tell Jesus about what it happened to the Christ in the ensuing verses. Obviously, like a good Jew, Cleopas wrongly thought that Jesus would erect the Davidic kingdom and bring redemption to Israel; however, this had not occurred because Jesus was supposedly dead and now his body was gone.

Looking at them, Jesus replied,

O foolish man slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken? Was it not necessary for Christ to suffer these things and to enter His glory" (Luke 24:25-26)?

Is it not just like Jesus to show up in your life when you're asking a spiritual question that plagues you? Is it not just like Jesus to lovingly point you away from spiritual error and towards spiritual truth? Indeed, this is how He operates because He loves us.

After Jesus verbally reprimanded His disciples, He proceeded to talk about how Moses and all of the prophets prophesied His coming. This statement alone covered everything written in the *entire* Old Testament. Clearly, God promised beforehand to give us the gospel about the perfect life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus. Jesus knew this and Paul did as well. That is why Paul said what he said in Romans 1:2, and the way he communicates God's redemptive action is most intensive. This is seen in the preposition, *pro* (προ) meaning "before time and space," wedded to the verb to promise, viz., προεπηγγείλατο. When a word is compounded in this fashion it makes it highly intensive,⁶ thus, it is as if Paul says, "Is it not simply jaw-dropping how God developed this intricate redemptive plan from the outset? Wow!"

Regarding the Christocentric nature of the Old Testament, Augustine once remarked, "in the New Testament things are open (*patet*), and in the Old Testament they were hidden (*latet*)." Martin Luther's version of this went like this: "Enfolded in the old, unfolded in the New." One

⁶Benjamin Chapman, *New Testament-Greek Notebook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 8.

modern writer in our day put it this way, “The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed.” I like that, do you?

Dr. Norman Geisler summarizes and clarifies God's long-term redemptive plan throughout the Old Testament in his usual insightful fashion when he states,

The Bible must be interpreted Christocentrically (i.e., Christ-centered). There is no other way for a Christian to understand it . . . The moral precepts of the Old Testament are brought to perfection by Christ in the New (cf. Matt. 5:17). What the Old Testament foreshadowed, the Christ of the New fulfilled (Heb. 10:1). The ritual which prefigured Christ is done away with the reality of Christ (Co. 2:17). Old Testament types become New Testament truths. Further, the many Old Testament prophecies which foretold of Christ are fulfilled in Christ in the New Testament (cf. Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:2). Christ often appeared in temporary pre-incarnations in the Old Testament (Gen. 16); Exod. 3; Josh. 5), but in the New Testament he is manifest in a permanent incarnation (John 1:14). . . The Old Testament revelation was one of symbols, but in the New Testament God spoke directly through His Son (Heb. 1:1, 2). In short, the promises of salvation and the Old Testament are brought to fruition in the presence of Christ in the New Testament (Matt. 1:21). The thematic unity of both Testaments Jesus Christ. What the Old Testament says by way of anticipation of Christ, the New Testament says by way of realization in Christ.⁷

Let there be no doubt that God's plan to send His Son to be mankind's true and only Savior from sin is inscribed throughout the entire Old Testament period. Why did God do this? So that we would have ample reasons for leaving false gospels in order to embrace, by faith, the true gospel.

Yes, God's redemptive plan as prophetically foretold just as Paul states.

. . . through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,

. . . διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἁγίαις

The preposition “through” (διὰ) with the genitive grammatically gives us the means by which God's redemptive plan unfolded. It can through, or by means of, His prophets. Just think about the precise long-term prophesies God, who is outside of time and space, gave to these spiritual men concerning the person of and work of His beloved Son, Jesus.

- He would be virgin born (Isaiah 7:14).
- He would be the Son of God (Psalm 2:7; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; 2 Samuel 7:12-16).
- He would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2).

⁷Norman Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 19-20.

- Children would be killed after his birth in an attempt to destroy Him (Jeremiah 31:15).
- He would be the Davidic King (Zechariah 9:9; 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89).
- His ministry would be preceded by a righteous messenger like Elijah (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1).
- His ministry would begin in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1).
- His ministry would be grounded in miracles (Isaiah 35:5-6).
- He would enter His Temple (Malachi 3:1).
- He would be a stone of stumbling to His people (Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; Psalm 118:22).
- He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
- The blood money would be used to purchase a potter's field (Zechariah 11:13).
- He would be crucified with thieves (Isaiah 53:13).
- He would intercede for His persecutors (Isaiah 53:12).
- This side would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10).
- He would die a sacrificial death for man's sin (Isaiah 53).
- He would be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9).

These are just a few of the 60 exact prophecies given in the Old Testament concerning the person and work of Jesus. Concerning them, Geisler notes, "These aren't vague or general predictions-- they were detailed, and they were made centuries in advance. Some were very unusual and fit only one man."⁸ All of this, of course, logically leads to one compelling question, "What is the statistical probability that one man, Jesus Christ, fulfilled these prophecies?" Peter Stoner, writing in *Science Speaks*, breaks it down for us with this jaw-dropping analysis that the odds of Jesus fulfilling 48 of the 60 prophecies is 1 in 10^{157} . To help us realize this large figure in more practical terms, the author writes,

This is a really large number and it represents an extremely small chance. Let us try to visualize it. . . . The electron is about as small an object as we know of. It is so small that it will take 2.5 times 10^{15} of them laid side by side to make a line, single file, one-inch long. If we were going to count the electrons in this line one-inch-long, and counted 250 each minute, and it we counted day and night, it would take us 19,000,000 years to count just the one-inch line of electrons. If we had a cubic inch of these electrons and we tried to count them it would take us, counting steadily 250 each minute, 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 years or 6.9 times 10^{21} years. . . . With this introduction, let us go back to our change of 1 in 10^{157} . Let us suppose that we are taking this number of electrons, marking one, and

⁸Norman L Geisler and Patty Tunncliffe, *Reasons for Belief* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2013), 142.

thoroughly stirring it into a whole mass, then blindfolding a man and letting him try to find the right one. What chance has he of finding the right one? What kind of pile will this number of electrons make? They make an inconceivably large volume. Such is the chance of any one man fulfilling 48 prophecies.⁹

And you say you need more evidence to believe Jesus was and is the Christ? I think God has given you enough evidence to make sure your faith is not blind, but well-informed.

This is the God Paul served. This is the God Paul followed. This is the God who gave Paul the gospel to end all gospels. Just the math related to the law of probability demonstrates unequivocally that Paul had the message more Romans needed to hear, and he, of all people, certainly knew how to share it with great power and conviction. What will you do with this gospel? Is this not the question of the hour? If you've already believed in it for your salvation, then where is the Rome God wants you to take it to? And if you have not made up your mind to believe in Jesus as the true Savior, the evidence is in. No, God wants for you, by faith, to believe the evidence is true for yourself. Let nothing or no one keep you from making that eternal decision right now.

⁹Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), 175-176.