

LifeGroup

resource guide

for the week of March 26

I was wrong. Four weeks ago I shared on a Sunday morning that we began Romans in January 2014. We actually began our study of Romans on September 29, 2013! I can already hear the groans… In light of Pastor Benji’s message this Sunday, I thought it would be good to go back and reflect again on Romans 1.1.

*Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. (Romans 1.1)*

We have frequently observed over the last 3 ½ years, Paul’s letter to the Romans is not a theological treatise... but it is theological. Romans is not a systematic theology... but it is an orderly presentation. Romans is first and foremost a letter that expresses the testimony and experience of Paul, the rabbi from Tarsus, whose life has been thoroughly “ruined” by the invasion of Jesus in his life. In fact, the opening words of this letter reflects this complete disruption when he calls himself a “slave of Jesus Christ” rather than a “teacher of the Torah.” These two titles reflect very different self-perceptions!

Paul had two identities. These two identities were established by what he believed during two different periods of his life. The first was his “Torah-Teacher” (rabbinic) identity—servant of God, a champion of the Torah, teacher, and zealous protector of Israel’s heritage that led him to persecute the earliest followers of Jesus.

His second identity was his “Jesus-Teacher” (apostolic) identity that stands in contrast to his pre-Jesus identity—a slave of Christ Jesus, a champion of the Gospel, a herald of good news to the Gentiles, and a builder of Christ’s Church.

How do we account for this identity change? The answer is simple: Paul encountered the person, power, and promising grace of God in Jesus. A Jesus encounter changes our lives, challenges our beliefs and, together, shapes our identity. Since Paul had not met the Roman believers, he wanted them to know who he was, not simply what he believed. Romans 1.1 is Paul’s personal calling card upon these house churches that transparently introduces us to a man whose former life was “ruined” by the love and grace of God in Christ Jesus.

In Romans 1.1, Paul is introducing himself to fellowships he has not met before. He chooses his words deliberately so that they may gain insight into who Paul is… his identity, his heart, and his faith. In Romans 1.1 we meet (again) a man whose life has been set free by becoming a “slave of Christ Jesus.” Paul was an “apostle of the heart set free” and may we all discover the same vibrant freedom he did.

Enjoy your LifeGroup!



Getting to know one another better…

How did you feel the first time you felt taken advantage of? What were the circumstances?

Romans 1.1: revisiting what it means to be a “slave”…

*Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. (Romans 1.1)*

It’s interesting to note that the translation of this verse has a little history to it. The Greek word, doulos, had always been translated into other languages by the word meaning “slave”. It wasn’t until 1550 with the translation of the Geneva Bible. This Bible was the first mass produced Bible, complete with study aids, in the English speaking world. Slavery had already been eradicated once from Europe and so, the word, “slave” was not popular. Furthermore, after the Renaissance and the Enlightenment it was again to use the word, “slave” in cultures that were promoting freedom and rights and so “servant” or “bond-servant” became the more frequent translation. But there remains one fundamental difference: a servant has a “say” and the slave does not. A slave was a person who was "bought, owned, and ruled".

Why do you think he chooses to introduce himself with these words?

What do we know about Paul's experience and convictions that he refers to himself as a "slave of Christ Jesus" rather than the Jewish self-understanding of "slave of God"?

Paul considers himself a "slave of Christ Jesus". Do you think that is an identity that every follower of Jesus should have? Why or why not?

Paul had 2 names. His Hebrew name, “Saul”, means “prayed for”. His Latin name, “Paul” means “modest, humble, or small”. Why do you think Paul never refers to himself by his Hebrew name, Saul in any of his letters?

We live in a nation that treasures freedom and independence. How do you feel about thinking yourself a slave? If you are uncomfortable with the word, “slave”, what words do you use to describe your Christian identity and understanding?

What words/examples can you give to describe your faith and surrender to God?

Is there anyone in your life who is a good example of what a "slave of Christ Jesus" is? What is it that you admire about her or him? What do you see in her or him that you do not see in yourself?

In this letter, Paul shares his convictions regarding the world's need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ… Can you prayerfully write down the names of up to 5 people that God may be indicating He wants you to share Jesus with? Begin praying with your LifeGroup for these pre-saints that God wants to reach through you… Then let's keep them before our "eyes" personally and as a group and see what opportunities God creates in the coming weeks… Don't be anxious: if you pray you will see the opportunities God WILL create… perhaps that is a good reason for anxiety?!

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for…)

Praying for my group…