

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,² (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) ³ Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; ⁴ And declared^a to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: ⁵ By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience^b to the faith among all nations, for his name: ⁶ Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: ⁷ To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:1-7 KJV)

THE INVITATION

PREPARATION:

It is important to keep in mind that God did not give us the Bible to rock us to sleep in our errors, lull us along in our misconceptions, or encourage us in our sins. Someone has said that if you come to God's Word without getting a bloody nose, then you have not come in the way He intended. The Apostle Paul said this of the Bible: **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work** (II Tim. 3:16).

If every time you go to the Bible it says exactly what you were thinking, then you can be sure that you are not using it properly. God does not think like us. His ideas aren't our ideas. His plans and purposes are not our plans and purposes. Rather, God's Word is meant to correct our ideas and find fault in our plans and change our purposes and instruct us in the right ways. Let God's Word smack you around. Let it bloody your nose. Let it take you down for the full count. Let it turn your world upside down. Until it does this, you will never really know what God is saying to you in His Word. But if you do, watch out, the rewards are infinite and eternal.

So as we enter into our study of what God is doing today, I would like to give the following suggestions:

1. All I ask in these discussions is that you understand the reasons for what I say. I never say anywhere you have to agree with me. When you get to the "pearly gates," I do not know what questions God might ask you, but one thing I do know for sure is that He is not going to ask whether or not you agreed with me. He might, however, wonder if you agreed with Him and His Word. So if you find something here that seems to go against everything you ever learned before do not get mad. Get inquisitive. Be Bereans, who looked into the things Paul spoke of in the Bible to see if they were true (Acts 17:11). If it is according to Scripture—Let It Stand!
2. Give the site a chance. A pastor once told newcomers to his church to come 4-5 times before making any decision to stay or leave. It took that long to get a feel

a declared: Gr. determined

b for obedience...: or, to the obedience of faith

for what was going on. I plead the same thing here. Go through the steps slowly and in order to get a feel for what Paul is developing in his amazing Epistle to the Romans.

Let's get started.

Paul's New and Unique Apostleship

Romans 1:1

Introduction:

The very first question we must answer as we start out on this journey is: Who in the world is Paul the Apostle? After 2000 years of history, Christianity as a whole is no clearer on this point today than it was in the 1st centuries. Who is Paul? Why did God raise him up? Paul stands out like a sore thumb. God already had 12 hearty apostles, who were more than ready to carry out His will. Why did He raise up this 1 other apostle. We must come to grips with this problem. This is perhaps *THE* question of Christianity. Everything hinges on what we do with Paul. But Christianity as a whole has refused to come to grips with the Biblical explanation of who Paul is, so they look every where else and come up with as many theories about him as their are teachers and authors.

Go into any book store, even secular book stores, and you will find books that try to explain Paul. There is the old Paul/the new Paul, Saul the Jew/Paul and the Gentiles, Paul of Christianity/Paul of Judiasm. There is Paul re-warmed, re-newed, re-evaluated, and re-discovered. But for all the effort there is no progress or agreement. This ought to give us pause because if we can't find the how's and why's of Paul and his ministry, the problem is not with the Bible (it is very clear about Paul), but with us. We must be looking for the answers in all the wrong places. Everyone acknowledges that Paul plays a tremendous role in God's plan and purpose for today, so let's set aside every other theory we have on Paul and come to the Bible like Moses came to the burning bush--shoes off and minds open with a reverent attitude. I think you will find the effort very rewarding.

Who Is Paul?

At the very start this Epistle, we run into a very important (and, I might add, controversial) question to answer: Who is Paul? This is as much of a burning issue today as it was 2000 years ago. It has been 2000 years since Paul arrived on the scene, and we are just as baffled today as they were then about his unexpected and astounding ministry. If these first verses in Romans 1 do not hit us like a ton of bricks, stopping us dead in our tracks, then we are not reading them the way Paul intended. Who is Paul? Where in the world did his ministry to the Gentiles come from? And why should we listen to him?

Here is the problem at its most basic. In early Acts, everything revolved around Peter and the 12 and their dynamic ministry. Then we hit Acts 13 where the 12 virtually disappear and everything suddenly revolves around Paul and his dynamic ministry. What happened? Why did God set aside the 12 and raise up another apostle, the Apostle Paul? This is the million dollar question! How we answer it largely determines our understanding of all that God is doing today.

Four possible answers to this question are typically offered up by commentators and Bible teachers. One way many address this problem is to simply ignore it, pretending that the problem does not even exist. Although some say ignorance is bliss, an answer like this is not very satisfactory and will not help us in our efforts to discover what God is doing today.

More serious commentators and Bible teachers recognize that they must deal with this issue and have split between two answers. Those in the first group suggest that Peter and the 12 were operating on the basis of their sinful flesh when they selected Mathias to fill the vacancy left by the death of Judas Iscariot. The 12 rushed ahead of God, they say, and selected Mathias against His will. Instead, they should have waited on the Spirit more patiently because God intended to fill the vacancy left by Judas with Paul not Mathias.

Those in the second group go in a different direction. They suggest that God had to raise up the Apostle Paul because Peter and 12 were biased, prejudiced and bigoted Jews, who refused to obey God's command to reach out to the Gentiles. Since the 12 were stubbornly rebellious and would not obey His commands to go out unto all the earth¹, God decided to raise up another apostle, the Apostle Paul, who would carry out His will for the Gentiles.

There is one major problem with both of these answers. They do not agree with the actual biblical account of the situation in Acts.

First, the Bible explains exactly what was required of someone to be numbered among the 12—and Paul did *NOT* qualify.

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1:21-22)

To be a member of the 12, the potential candidate must have been with the Lord Jesus since the baptism of John all the way to His ascension. Paul could not have been one of the 12. He had not been with them from the baptism of John to the ascension of Jesus Christ. He was not qualified to be one of the 12 and could not, therefore, be counted among them.

Second, the Bible says the exact opposite of what these commentators say about the character and work of the 12. According to the Bible, they were spiritual and operating in complete accord with God's will. Starting in Acts 2 and going on all the way

¹ It is interesting that in all the Book of Acts Peter and the 12 go to only one Gentile, and he was a God-fearing Jewish proselyte, even though they had been given the so called “Great Commission”—Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15)

to the appearance of Paul, the Scripture tells us that the 12 were all filled with the Spirit. They were in continual prayer. They lived in perfect fellowship. They engaged daily in God's Word. They were preaching Christ and praising God. All remained steadfast in the apostles doctrine and fellowship. They were performing miracles through the power of God. They were thrown into jail—because they were obeying God! No, slandering the 12 to justify Paul just won't work.

The scriptural evidence makes it clear that the ministry of the 12 was enlightened by the Holy Spirit, faithful to God and centered on Person and Work of Jesus Christ. They knew exactly what they were doing and were doing it just the way God wanted them to. So the second view must be discarded as well. It is not the 12 who have been ignorant and disobedient. It is Gentile commentators and Bible teachers who have been. The 12 knew exactly what they were supposed to be doing and were in perfect harmony with God's will.

Since we cannot just ignore the problem, and we cannot write off Paul as one of the 12, and we cannot write off the 12 by calling them ignorant and bigoted, then what is the answer? Paul is not one of the 12. He is not God's default apostle. He is not God's pinch-hitter. Paul is God's New and Unique apostle, raised up by God to accomplish something that He had not been spoken of by the prophets—not in early Acts, not in the Gospels, and not in the Old Testament. J.S. Baxter put it this way:

“Saul's deep hatred of Christ had raised him to a high position in Israel. As he 'persecuted the church of God and laid it waste,' he 'profited in the Jews' religion above many [of his] equals' (Gal. 1:13-14). In light of all this, God must have had some very special purpose in saving him...God raised up Paul to be both the herald and the living demonstration of His grace to a doomed world.”

We will further develop this as we proceed through this passage.

Another Look at Rom. 1:1

Now let's look at Romans 1:1 again, keeping in mind that God is doing something different with this new and unique apostle.

Paul (who was neither numbered among the 12 nor replaced the 12)², a servant of Christ, a called apostle (sent by God with a message that bears the full weight of divine authority)³, a man God (on His Own initiative)⁴, had separated off or apart (from all others)⁵ for a special purpose with regard to His gospel.

² Per our discussion above.

³ Moo says,

⁴ The verb-----is in the passive tense.

⁵ See Word Studies in the New Testament

Paul's New and Unique Message

Romans 1:2-5a

Knowing who Paul is—God's new and unique apostle raised up and separated from all others--is the first thing we need to know if we are going to understand what God is doing today. That God raised up a New and Unique apostle, the Apostle Paul, shocked 1st century hearers. Jesus they knew. Peter they knew. The 12 they knew. But who in the world was Paul? Where did he come from? What was his purpose? Paul turned the 1st century world upside down, and it ought to turn our world upside down as well. The reaction to what God was doing with Paul was so strong that his detractors dogged his every step, and they do so today to those who proclaim his message.

So, why Paul? That is the second thing we need to find out.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures... (Rom. 1:1-2)

Now if the sentence stopped here, we might be excused for thinking that Paul's role in God's plan was just a continuation of what He had promised through the prophets of the Old Testament. If this were the case, Paul's message would simply be an extension of what God had been making known and accomplishing since the beginning of the world. Most Bible commentators and teachers conclude just that, which leads to the further assumption that the church, the Body of Christ, is, in reality, Israel in one form or another. Some say the Church has replaced Israel in God's plans. Others say the Church has received the blessings while Israel has received the curses. Still others call the Church spiritual Israel. However it is described, they all lead to the same conclusion: Believers today operate under the same instructions and guidelines that Israel operated under in the past.

But the critically important thing to remember is that the sentence does not end here. It goes on all the way down to v. 7, and when we read on, we see that Paul immediately limited the statement "which He had promised afore by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures" with a qualifying phrase that explained exactly what he meant.

Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning *his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* (Rom. 1:2-4)

Paul's message was in accord with the prophets in one specific sense--they both are centered on a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophets promised that God would send His Messiah, His Christ, to fulfill the Davidic Covenant by entering humanity through the line of David (the incarnation) and being raised again from the dead in power (the resurrection). And Paul says here that that same Lord Jesus Christ, whom the prophets had

spoken of with regard to the Davidic Covenant, is the same Person that his message centers on. The similarity, however, ends there.

Now we have reached one of those danger points. It would be so easy to get off track here and lose track of the thread of thought Paul has been weaving together by getting caught up in secondary topics like the incarnation or the resurrection or the covenants or the deity and humanity of Christ or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Without diminishing the value of each these important subjects by one iota, we must keep in mind that they are not Paul's primary subject here. Paul's apostleship is. For those readers well-versed in the Bible, this passage should sound familiar because Peter said something like it in his sermons in early Acts. There, referring to the words of the Old Testament prophet David and speaking to the men of Israel, Peter said:

Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David...Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne...This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost...For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:29-36)

And he said this to the men of Israel in Acts 3:

And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses... But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:15, 18-21)

Does this sound similar to our passage in Rom. 1? Peter said Jesus Christ entered into the human line of David and was raised from the dead in power to sit on His throne. He expected the nation Israel to repent and accept Jesus as their Lord, their Messiah, at which time He would return to earth, establish David's kingdom, usher in the times of refreshing for Israel through His presence, and restore Israel to its rightful place as the head of the nations rather than the tail (Deut. 28:1-14).

One thing to keep in mind that will be important later is that return of Christ was very good news for believing Israel. But for unbelieving Israel and the Gentile nations, it was very bad news indeed. When Christ returned, it would be in great judgment and wrath for the unbelieving rebels of the world while believing Israel and her Gentile friends would be preserved and ushered into the Kingdom. Isaiah described it this way:

For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee (Israel) shall perish; yea those nations shall be utterly wasted (Is. 60:12). Or, Out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (Is. 63:1-6).⁶

This is why Peter pleaded so strongly with the unbelieving majority in Israel to repent and accept Jesus as their Messiah, expecting that once Israel had done that the Risen Lord would return, purge His enemies and usher in the times of refreshing for Israel and the world.

A summary of Peter's statements might look something like this:

ACCORDING TO PETER
1. Jesus Christ entered into humanity through the line of David.
2. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead with power.
3. The next thing to happen was for Jesus Christ to return in judgment and wrath to establish His kingdom on earth with Israel.

Now with this in mind, turn back to Romans 1. Remember, Peter said Jesus Christ had entered into humanity through the line of David. So did Paul. Peter said He had been raised from the dead with power. So did Paul. Peter said the Risen Lord was about to return in wrath and judgment to establish His kingdom on earth. Paul *did not*. Paul veered off in a surprisingly different direction altogether. Just when his audience might have been slipping into sleepy apathy---just when they were nodding their heads in general agreement saying, yes, Paul we know all this—we have heard it all before from others--Paul suddenly changes the ending.

By Whom (*the Risen and Glorified Lord Jesus Christ*) **we have received grace and apostleship...** (Romans 1:5a; italics mine.)

Listen carefully. Paul is announcing something earth shattering. Yes, Jesus Christ entered into the human line of David. Yes, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in power. Yes, Jesus Christ came back--NOT TO USHER IN THE KINGDOM AS PETER EXPECTED, BUT TO GIVE ME APOSTLESHIP AND A REVELATION OF GRACE! Rather than coming back in judgment and wrath to fulfill His program with Israel, the Risen Christ is now holding back His judgment and wrath *a little while longer* while He showers the world with grace and peace. Can't you hear Paul's audience falling off their chairs? God changed plans with Paul and instead of pouring out the wrath and

⁶ See also Ps. 2 and 72; Rev. 16 and 19; II Thes. 1:7-10; Is. 14, 60 and 62.

judgment the world so rightly deserved, He would hold it back a little longer while He displays His love, mercy, grace, longsuffering and peace.

The prophets never said anything about this change in plans. Peter and the 12 never said anything about it. This was something never spoken of before. This was what shook up the 1st Century world. This was what led to the constant and unrelenting persecution of Paul during his entire ministry. And, 2000 years later, this is what still shocks people today.

Now let's compare Peter's statements to Paul:

ACCORDING TO PETER	ACCORDING TO PAUL
1. Jesus Christ entered into humanity through the line of David.	1. Jesus Christ entered into humanity through the line of David.
2. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead with power.	2. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead with power.
3. The next thing that should have happened was the return of Jesus Christ in judgment and wrath to establish His kingdom on earth with Israel.	3. What actually happened next was that Jesus Christ returned to give Paul apostleship and grace.

Now we have two things that can revolutionize our lives. The first thing is to recognize the fact that Paul is not one of the 12. He is not God's default apostle. He is not God's pinch hitter. Paul is God's *new and unique apostle*, separated apart from all others for a special ministry in God's gospel. The second thing is to recognize that Paul is not just continuing the work of the 12 or finishing what the prophets started. He is the recipient of a *new and unique revelation* of grace from the Risen and Glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

Another Look at Rom. 1:2-5a

Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning (with regard to, in so far as they referred to⁷) his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. By Whom (the Risen and Glorified Lord Jesus Christ) we (Paul⁸) have received grace and apostleship (instead of wrath and judgment)...

(Romans 1:2-5a; italics mine)

Paul's New and Unique Ministry

⁷ Vines Complete Expository Dictionary says of this word—"to tie about, attach."

⁸ After discussing alternatives, Moo concludes, "But it is better, since the description of mission in the rest of the verse is so typical of Paul's conception of his own call, to view the plural as editorial." NICNT, Eerdmans, 1996, p. 51.

Romans 1:5b

If God's raising up of a new apostle, the Apostle Paul, and revealing to him a new message of grace, set the 1st Century world on fire, then the third thing we are going to learn in this sentence blew it up into a raging inferno.

By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:5-7)

So far, we have seen that God had raised up Paul and given him a new revelation of grace from the Risen Lord. In these final verses that close this sentence, we learn who this apostleship and message was given for. Paul says God commissioned him to take this new message to the Gentiles for "**obedience to the faith among all the nations.**" Why is this so shocking? Because it was something never mentioned before in God's Word. Every thing God had spoken of before in His Word (at this time this would be the Old Testament and the Gospels) always involved the nation Israel. Paul, however, says his apostleship, message and ministry was being sent out to the whole world, especially the Gentiles, without involving Israel. It was this disparity that turned the 1st century world, especially the 1st century Jewish world, upside down.

The Old Testament and Gospels do speak of Gentile blessings, but they were always related to Israel. Everywhere in God's Word, except Paul's Epistles, blessings came to the Gentiles in and through the rise of national Israel. Listen to a few examples.

And Moses, speaking of Israel's blessings in the land, said this:

The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you...You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them (Deut. 28).

Isaiah said of Israel's rise:

"The LORD shall arise upon thee (*Israel*), and his glory shall be seen upon thee (*Israel*). And the Gentiles shall come to thy light...the Gentiles shall come unto thee (Is. 60:3-5, italics mine).

Zechariah, speaking of Israel's rise, said:

“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” says the LORD. Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people...And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem (Zech 2:8).

Everything God had spoken of before of blessings going out to the Gentiles was in the context of Israel’s rise. Israel was to be blessed first and *then*, after that, blessing would flow out to the Gentiles. Recognizing this, helps us make sense of some of what otherwise appear to be odd accounts that occurred during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

Remember the encounter between Jesus and the Gentile Syrophenician (Gentile) woman? She had approached Jesus, asking Him to heal her sick daughter. At first, He completely ignored, saying to His disciples: **I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,** and **“it is not meet to take the children’s (*Israel’s*) bread, and cast it to the dogs (*Gentiles*).** Why? Had Jesus just woken up on the wrong side of the bed that day? Was He cranky and out of sorts?⁹ Or was He in complete accord with the Father’s will? Of course, it is the latter. God had appointed Israel to a place of priority in His dealings with the world. Jesus could not bless this Gentile woman on Jewish ground for Israel’s children had not yet sat at the table and been fed by God. The woman, perceiving what most people today—2000 years later and with all their supposed education and enlightenment—are unable to see, quickly changed tactics, acknowledging her Gentile position and requesting just the crumbs of blessings that fall off Israel’s table of blessing. Jesus could deal with her on that ground, and **her daughter was made whole from that very hour** (Mt. 15:21-28; italics mine).

Does this order of blessing continue after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Lk. 24:47, the resurrected Jesus charged the disciples with the responsibility of preaching **“in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem,”** and he continues that thought in Acts 1 where he writes in reference to the 12’s question about the restoration of Israel’s Kingdom:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (1:8).

Let’s be clear. The idea here is not that they were to start in Jerusalem and see what happens. If Jerusalem continued to reject Christ, then the 12 were to go on to Judea and give it a try there. And if Judea continued to reject Christ, then the 12 should give it a try in Samaria and so on. No, the idea here is that the 12 were to start in Jerusalem, the

⁹ It is interesting that when the 12 said they were to start in Israel and stay there until she received Christ at which time He would return, establish His kingdom and then send blessing out to the whole world, most commentators say they were disobedient and bigoted Jews. Here Jesus says the same thing—was He a bigoted and disobedient Jew? No, Jesus, Peter and the 12 were all in perfect accord with the Father’s plan and purpose. It is the commentators operating on the basis of Gentile arrogance who are disobedient.

capital city of the Kingdom, and stay there until she had received their witness and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. After Jerusalem had done that, then the 12 were to go on to Judea, the home of the southern tribes of Israel, and stay there until all Judea had received their witness and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. After Jerusalem and Judea had done that, then they were to go on to Samaria, the home of the northern tribes of Israel, and stay there until Samaria had received their witness and accepted Jesus as Messiah. And when Samaria had done that, all Israel would have been saved, the Kingdom would be established and the 12 could finally, after all that, go out to the entire world.

That was the plan Peter and the 12 were carrying out in early Acts. Peter said the Jews were the “**children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers saying unto Abraham, “And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed:” Unto you first, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you (Israel) ”**Acts 3:25-26.

This is why the 12 stayed in Jerusalem. This is why in the Acts record the 12 never went out to the Gentiles. As late as Acts 10 Peter still had not gone to any Gentiles. Then he was forced against his will to go to one Gentile, a man called Cornelius, who, in fact, was already a Jewish proselyte. Peter was not being bigoted and disobedient. He was confused and **doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean** (Acts 10). It went against everything he had ever been told before. This problem was not unique to Peter. The Jewish believers who had been scattered out of Jerusalem went into the various nations, and made sure they preached **the word to none but the Jews only**” (Acts 11:19)! Why did Peter and the others *appear* to fail so completely in their duty to preach to the Gentiles? The answer resides in one little phrase we read in the beginning of Acts: **beginning at Jerusalem**. Up to this time, the only known channel of blessing for the Gentiles nations was through the nation Israel. She must be converted first so that she could then go out to convert the world.

All these believing Jews could not have been disobedient, stubborn, rebellious, bigoted Jews. We saw earlier that the Scriptures just won’t allow such a conclusion. They were filled with the Holy Spirit doing exactly what Jesus Christ told them to do in perfect accord with the Father’s will. The problem was not with the 12. It was with Jerusalem. Israel’s leaders had continued to refuse their witness and rejected their Messiah. Therefore, according to the instructions God had given to the 12, they could not proceed. Their efforts were brought to a standstill right at square one--Jerusalem. No doubt, Peter and the 12 and their followers longed for Israel’s repentance and restoration so that they, along with Israel as a whole, could function as God’s instrument of blessing to the Gentiles, but Israel would not. The reason they refused to go to the Gentiles was not because they were disobedient bigots as most commentators suggest but the very opposite—*because they were obeying God’s instructions to them in every detail*.

Now we are beginning to get a perspective on the Apostle Paul and can begin to see why his ministry revolutionized the world. With Peter and the 12’s program reaching a standstill, God suddenly raised up another apostle, whose ministry was to go out to the whole world, especially the Gentiles, without the nation Israel, apart from the Law, and in accord with something the prophets had never spoken of before. You see, there is a world of difference between all the nations going to Israel to worship God and receive

blessings in Jerusalem (as the prophets spoke about), and one individual Jew going out to all the nations offering God's blessings apart from Israel (as Paul speaks about). They must be mutually exclusive. They are two different programs and when we begin to appreciate that just watch how the whole Bible opens up.

Now we have three things that can revolutionize our lives. The first thing is to recognize the fact that Paul is not one of the 12. He is not God's default apostle. He is not God's pinch hitter. Paul is God's *new and unique apostle*, separated apart from all others for a special ministry in God's gospel. The second thing is to recognize that Paul is not just continuing the work of the 12 or finishing what the prophets started. He is the recipient of a *new and unique revelation* of grace from the Risen and Glorified Lord Jesus Christ. The third thing is that he received a *new and unique ministry* to the Gentiles in spite of Israel's fall not because of her rise.

That is why this is the most important sentence in the world. In it Paul announces the fact that after Israel rejected her Messiah, God temporarily set aside His program with Israel. Instead of coming back in wrath and judgment to set up the earthly kingdom (which was the next thing to occur in Israel's program) He came back to begin a new program through the Apostle Paul, whereby He is now super-abounding, yea, avalanching His grace and peace on a lost world.

And here is the kicker. He is now inviting us, you and me, to participate in it. Romans is God's invitation of love to the world, saying, "Come and participate (Jew and Gentile without distinction) in what He is doing today." God began a new program through the Apostle Paul, and He wants to involve us in it freely on the basis of grace and faith. Not based on our own works, merit, effort or performance, but based on the work, merit, effort and performance of the Lord Jesus Christ at the Cross—that is grace. Not based on our own doing but based on the setting aside of all our own doing and relying solely on the doing of the Lord Jesus Christ—that is faith.

Paul is God's new and unique apostle (not one of the 12) with a new and unique message of grace and peace (not wrath and judgment), operating from a new and unique instruction manual that told him to go out directly to the Gentiles in spite of Israel's temporary fall (not in accord with Israel's rise). His is not the gospel of the kingdom (as was true of the 12), but with the gospel of grace. His was not in accord with what had been spoken of since the world began (as the 12 described their message, Acts 3:18-21), but in accord with what had been kept secret since the world began (Rom. 16:25).

Dear Reader

I appeal to you to let Paul be who God intended him to be. Let the Bible set the Apostle Paul free from religion (even a so called Christian religion), free from major denominations (even those that claim to go all the way back to the early church), free from the televangelists (even when they attract millions of viewers), free from man's traditions (even when they are called Christian) and free from pagan superstitions (even when they are sprinkled with Bible verses).

Let's close listening to what Paul has to say about his God-given ministry.

Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began...Rom. 16:25)

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12).

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery¹⁰; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit¹¹; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: (Eph. 3:1-9)

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (Col. 1:24-25).

¹⁰ The Greek word for Mystery is not something deep and mysterious. It was something that had been unknown before because it was kept secret (here, God hid it in Himself). But now God revealed it to Paul and Paul's commission is to make it known to the whole world.

¹¹ Note the contrast. God made known this Mystery directly to Paul. Everyone else (even the other prophets and apostles) learned of it through Paul's preaching and the teaching and enlightening ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit.