

Sermons through

Romans

The Master's Conspiracy

Romans 1:6

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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Romans 1:6

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; ⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Romans 1:1-7).

Introduction

During the infamous O. J. Simpson trial, one of the many theories was the notion of a conspiratorial effort by the LAPD to convict an innocent man. I recall reading one attorney's response to the folly of the theory in light of the other accusation of how poorly the LAPD handled the crime scene. "One would have to believe that the LAPD are master conspirators, while at the same time bungling investigators."

Conspiracies are intriguing, yet (I am told) very difficult to prove. I have little doubt that there are great and sinister minds working in concert (wittingly or not) to dismantle all that is good, right and true – whether in the church, family or society in general. I also believe people should be savvy to this darkness and the effect it will have on our souls and the souls of those we love.

But we also must rest assured that the true and living Triune God has His own worldwide conspiracy¹ – The Father sending His Son (John 3:16), the Son honoring and glorifying His Father (John 17:1-4) and the Spirit through His word and power convicting the world of the truth of this great

¹ I realize conspiracy has a negative connotation, but etymologically the word (con=with & spire=breath) simply means to breath together as an orchestra might with wind instruments.

redemption (John 16:8). It is a glorious and gracious conspiracy. It is a conspiracy which will not fail (Matthew 16:18).

Review

In quick review we see Paul a Bondservant – no longer a slave of sin leading to death but a slave of Christ leading to eternal life. Paul had the office of apostle – an office that is not perennial, that does not extend beyond those specific individuals, chosen by Jesus who were witnesses of the resurrected Christ.

Paul was set apart for the gospel of God promised in the Scriptures – even the Old Testament Scriptures – containing propositions upon which we trust our souls, graciously deposited in His word – a message from the beginning of history – a message “**concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord,**” Christ meaning *Messiah* (anointed) and Jesus meaning *Savior*.

Jesus was born of the seed of David – the long awaited Messiah who would bring redemption to the world – and declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead indicating that though fully human, He was also fully God and what He would accomplish on David’s throne would first and foremost be the victory over sin and death.

Paul then explained how he received grace and apostleship which could be understood two ways: that Paul was an apostle by grace since he didn’t initially fit the requirements (being hostile to the faith) and that he was dependent upon God’s grace to do the job. The grace and apostleship was for “**obedience of the faith for the sake of his name among all the nations**” – that is, the call to faith should not merely be viewed as an invitation but as a moral obligation to yield to a legitimate authority – keeping before us that the yielding to this authority is the source of untold and eternal blessings. Paul then continues his salutation:

...among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; ⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be saints*: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6, 7).

Paul had mentioned in verse five that the gospel was not confined to some specific territory, but the call to obey the gospel (Romans 10:16) was to be extended to “all nations” leading to these words in verse six

...among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6)

A Broader Undertaking

All the church was under the authority of apostles (Ephesians 2:20). Today that translates into all the churches being under the authority of Scripture since, as we have pointed out earlier, all apostles have since been received into glory (i.e. died). This is not to say the church (those of faith) are not under the authority of God, but as many would deign to speak for God without warrant, God has protected His honor, His glory, His word and His people by committing His message to the written word.

In particular what I would like for us to consider in these few words, i.e. “**among who you also are...**” is how (especially in today’s context of many Christian churches and denominations) we should view ourselves as part of a broader undertaking – two points here:

Other Churches

First, we must recognize that God is at work in other Christian churches. There are certainly disagreements among Christians. And there may be a level where a church so departs from the law and gospel of Christ that the Lord removes its “**lampstand**” (**Revelation 2:5**) entirely. And rather than a church of Christ we may see a “**synagogue of Satan**” (**Revelation 2:9**). But the Lord endured with great patience those churches which struggled for truth as should we – especially since, at some level, that includes us all. In time it becomes readily apparent which churches no longer hold to what can be considered a true form of biblical Christianity.

Nonetheless God was doing a marvelous work in very imperfect churches – churches that were engaging in doctrines and behavior which would raise eyebrows in any era – such as the churches in Galatia and Corinth which were embracing false gospels and puffed up in its tolerance of sexual immorality (Galatians 1:6; 1 Corinthians 5:1).

So even though we have a responsibility to “**study**” the word (2 Timothy 2:15), ever repent in the face of “**correction**” (2 Timothy 3:16), “**contend for the faith**” (Jude 3) that we all may “**excel still more**” (1 Thessalonians 4:1). We must also recognize that the Master’s holy and glorious conspiracy to redeem the world will not be quelled by human weakness.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

So we should be encouraged and encouraging when it comes to God’s work in the body of Christ of large.

The ‘You’ Who is Called

Secondly we must recognize that even though God is at work in other churches in our wider church (our denomination), our regional church (our presbytery) and our local church (the Branch of Hope) there is a danger in getting lost in the plural “you” *hymeis* of this verse because a plural ‘you’ is necessarily made up of a collection of individual ‘you(s)’ – all those individual ‘you(s) that God has “**called of Jesus Christ.**”

Charles Hodge observes that this word ‘called’ is “**Never in the epistles applied to one who is merely by the external call.**”² It is the effectual call – it is a call which will transform the human heart from “**stone**” to “**flesh**” (Ezekiel 36:26). And how does one know if they are “**called**” “**chosen of God?**” Paul elsewhere writes of the blessed assurance of knowledge of God’s election. It is the God-given response to the gospel accompanied by faithful fruit:

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,³ remembering without ceasing your work

² Charles Hodge Commentary on Romans; p. 23.

of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. ⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake (1 Thessalonians 1:2-5).

No Redundancies in Christ

God is performing a grand work of redemption throughout the world and we, to a person, are to view ourselves as integral elements and active instruments in His mighty hand. In business they have a term – *redundancy*. It means having more than one resource to perform an activity or function. If you're redundant you're likely to be downsized. There is no redundancy in the kingdom of God. There is no redundancy in the body of Christ.

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12:17-26).

If you are part of Christ's church, then you are a necessary part of Christ's church and should view yourself as such. I pray there is not a person in this room or who might hear this message that would not, first and foremost, obey the gospel to eternal life and subsequently see themselves as a vital limb or muscle in the body of Christ. I pray we might all have eyes to see the spiritual death by which we are surrounded – the dead bones:

Dry Bones and Chariots of Fire

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 37:1-6).

Even the driest of bones – those who appear long dead in their souls – can be made alive when hearing the "word of the Lord." Perhaps we've been seduced into forgetting and neglecting our neighbors. Or maybe we underestimate the power of God in the gospel, especially today, in the face of its many detractors.

Again, I appeal to an event where God pulls back the veil, that we might not be deceived by a supposed impotence of God's mighty hand. When the king of Syria sought to shut the mouth of God's prophet, Elisha, he sent horses and chariots and a great army by night and surrounded Dothan, the city where Elisha slept (2 Kings 6:14). We begin our reading with Elisha's servant waking up, having a look at the armies by which they were surrounded and responding, understandably, with fear.

When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?”¹⁶ He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17).

The Syrian king came with horses and chariots, the Lord provided horses and chariots of fire. The glittery machinations of man have no power over the glorious conspiracy of a God who is short of neither love nor power. It would appear sometimes that the only lacking element is our own abbreviated perception – which, sadly, can be paralyzing. Calvin aptly heralds the source of our life and the continual provision of our heavenly Father:

...for he means, that they were by calling made partakers of Christ. For they who shall be heirs of eternal life, are chosen by the celestial Father to be children in Christ; and when chosen, they are committed to his care and protection as their shepherd.³

Conclusion

The Father, Son and Spirit have, if you will, breathed together the great plan of redemption and have graciously included us, as the ESV translates, **“including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”**

There is no greater joy or purpose than to honor God with our lives and words, recognizing God has called us to this glorious task. And there is no greater power than that message – **“the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16)** – that there is a God in heaven who has sent His Son to die for sinners. Let us turn the meditation of our hearts toward that as we come to the Lord’s Table.

³ Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: Romans* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 1:5). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Questions for Study

1. Are there dark and evil minds working against that which is good, right and true? Can you think of examples? What should our response to this be (pages 2, 3)?
2. Review the first five verses of Romans 1 (page 3).
3. At what point do you think a church is no longer a church (page 4)?
4. How should Christians view their relationship with Christians from other churches (pages 4, 5)?
5. What does it mean to be “called” of Christ (page 5)?
6. What is a redundancy? Are there redundancies in the church (page 6)?
7. Discuss the meaning of the dead, dry bones and chariots of fire. How is that applied to our lives today (pages 7, 8)?
8. Has God included you in His work (His conspiracy)? If so, what does that mean in your life (page 8)?