

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS – Studies in Romans Seeking Common Ground (Romans 1:1-7)

“Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name’s sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

One of the best ways of establishing a positive connection with an individual is discovering what you both have in common. Paul’s initial remarks are an attempt on his part to do just that. In seeking to appeal to the Jewish brethren in Rome who had heard of the apostle’s missionary outreach, he begins by identifying himself as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ; reminiscent of Exodus 21:2-6, describing a servant’s life-long commitment to his master. It spoke to the Gentile readership as well, in expressing Paul’s dedication to his Savior and the ministry to which he had been called during his conversion experience (Acts 9:1-16). But this would only be the beginning of the apostle’s efforts in establishing a positive Jewish connection, in providing three chapters of content (Romans 9-11); explaining God’s plan for Israel in light of the nation’s spiritual failure in rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. So, in v2, Paul informs every Hebrew convert to Christ in Rome, and any Jewish non-Christians as well, that he is no traitor to his Jewish heritage. His life and ministry are nothing other than a microcosm for the fulfillment of God’s promise to provide His chosen people with their Messiah and the entire world with a Savior (Acts 26:1-23).

This is why in v3, Paul emphasizes Christ’s person, His deity as God’s Son, and His humanity, as a descendant of David; validated by means of His resurrection from the dead (v4). To anyone reading this letter, in first century Rome or twenty first century America, the apostle Paul wants all Christians in every generation to know that Jesus Christ is our common ground, the solid rock upon which we stand. Sharing that allegiance with mere sinful men for short-sighted political purposes, forces us to place one foot on sinking sand while keeping the other on the solid rock of our Savior. Such divided devotion can cause us to lose sight of what we have in common as Christians; creating divisions within the body of Christ. In other words, if your spiritual condition as a Christian is that of a divided devotion between following Jesus Christ and participating in a political movement which idolizes mere men, then you will be a source of divisiveness within the body of Christ; hindering rather helping to advance the cause of Christ in our world.

Furthermore, our common ground in Christ is capable of breaking through any barriers that might exist among us. Paul was living proof of that. As a former self-righteous Pharisaical Jew, he was used of God to reach the pagan Gentile world of his day (v5). On a human level, this was a far greater challenge than convincing fellow Hebrews that Jesus was their Messiah. But ironically, Paul had more success in reaching Gentiles with the gospel than in any of his attempts at evangelizing his Jewish brethren (Romans 9:1-5; 10:1-4). So, in closing these introductory remarks in vv6-7, Paul establishes common ground with both Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome, identifying them all as the “called of Jesus Christ” and “called as saints.”