***The Apostolic Mission
RO03-01***

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We're looking at Romans 1:5. Paul, the bondslave of Jesus Christ, has the divine mission of bringing the gospel to the gentile world. He is the apostle particularly designated for dealing with the gentiles. So, for this reason, Paul writes the book of Romans to the gentile Christians in the city of Rome. This is in the form of a formal explanation of the gospel itself. The gospel of the grace of God deals, of course, with the person of the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we pointed out last time, Christ was born physically in the royal line of King David, through David's son Nathan, to the mother of Jesus who descended from the Nathan line. We have this line of descent recorded in the book of Luke. But Christ was also related to the royal line of David through David's son Solomon and through the Lord's foster father, Joseph, who was in Solomon's line. That genealogy we have in the book of Matthew.

**The Hypostatic Union**

The Lord himself was a unique person because He was true humanity, and He was true deity. He had what we call a hydrostatic union of two natures. Christ was established as a deity by several things, one of which we read of in verse 4: "By the resurrection from the dead," the last phrase in verse 4: "He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." And this expression, "by the resurrection from the dead" is literally, we pointed out, "by resurrection *of* the dead."

**"We"**

In verse 5, we have the mission of the apostle Paul, and we begin this by looking first at his authority. Paul says, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship." "By whom" refers to the resurrected Jesus Christ. In the phrase "we have received," the word "we" there is an editorial "we;" that is, Paul is actually referring to himself. This is common in the New Testament for an individual to refer to himself in the plural form. This is actually very frequently used by royalty. A king does not say to his subjects, "I want you to do this for me." He says, "We desire that you should perform such-and-such a task." He's not talking about a group of people. He's simply talking about himself. But he's using this plural form. This is common in the New Testament. So, when Paul says, "By whom (that is, the resurrected Christ) we have received," he means "I, the apostle Paul have received."

**Received**

The word "received" is the Greek word "lambano." "Lambano" means "to receive." It is in the aorist tense, which refers to the fact of the point of time when Paul was on the road to Damascus, when he received the particular things that he is referring to – the expression of the grace of God, and he received his gift of apostleship. It is active, which means that Paul, with positive volition, responded to this grace and to this apostleship. It is in the indicative mood, declaring to us a statement of fact. The apostle Paul, at a point in his experience, received something which was given him by the Lord Jesus Christ. That something is twofold.

**Grace**

It is, first of all, grace, which is the Greek word "charis." It is the grace of God that took a bitter enemy of Christianity, in the form of the apostle Paul, and made him the prime spokesman *for* the faith. Grace is what Titus 3:4 calls "God's kindness and love." It is the grace of God, the kindness and the love of our God, that freed the apostle Paul from the darkness of religion under Judaism, and brought him into the liberty of faith in Christ in Christianity.

**Undeserved**

There are some things that I trust, at this point, are fairly clear in your mind concerning the subject of grace. You should by now understand that grace is what God is free to do for undeserving mankind on the basis of the cross (2 Corinthians 8:9, Galatians 2:20). It is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ that has turned the kindness and the love of God free to act in our behalf. Up to that time, God could not express His complete grace toward us. It is what the cross has enabled Him to be free to do for us. That means that it is not something that is dependent on what we deserve, nor on something that we do, nor on something that we amount to.

**A Free Gift**

Another thing to remember is that the opposite of grace (or the idea of something you don't deserve) is something you do deserve. It is merited reward (Romans 4:4). On the one hand, it is something that you do not deserve. As a matter of fact, it is exactly the opposite of what you deserve. You deserve something bad, and God gives you something good. The opposite of that is to get something that you have worked for; something that you have coming; or, something that you have earned. That is the opposite of grace. Grace is a gift. The opposite of grace is something that you have coming to you because of reward for something that you have done. Grace is something that you cannot earn, and you cannot deserve it. Therefore, it is absolutely free. Romans 3:24 and Romans 5:15 tell us that.

**Human Works Frustrate Grace**

Another thing to remember about grace is that human works, when substituted for grace, will frustrate the blessings of grace. Several Scriptures tell us that: Galatians 2:21; Galatians 5:4; and, Romans 11:6. God is ready to perform a very wonderful, gracious blessing upon you. But if you insist on incorporating human works to secure God's blessings, then you will frustrate what God will do for you by grace. So, the next time you are interested in playing your game of human works, just remember how costly that can be over what God is willing to give you.

**Grace is Only Dependent upon God**

Another thing to remember about grace is that grace is dependent on who and what God is, and what He does. It is not dependent on man's character or actions (Titus 3:5-7). God is going to treat you in grace whether you deserve it or not. That's the point of grace. It is dependent on what God is. God does not treat us in grace as long as we behave ourselves. His method of dealing is always gracious.

**Grace Came by Jesus Christ**

Another thing is that grace, as a way of life, came by Jesus Christ, even as Law, as a way of life, came by Moses (John 1:17, Hebrews 12:18-24). Grace is not only something that God bestows upon us, but it is a way of life. That's the contrast with all the Law system. Unless you understand that the Law was a way of life for the Jewish people in a certain dispensation, then you will frustrate the grace of God for yourself, because you will not live under the way of life distinctively different for you as a believer, which God has designed for this age.

This has expressions in many ways. It has expressions, for example, in the way you give your money. You may be under a system where somebody is hounding you, and threatening you, and cajoling you to hand over a tithe. Now, that is all right to do. We're not leveling any objection to that. But the tithing system was a requirement in the Old Testament. It was part of their way of life. They had no option. Yet, how many people never learn the blessing of grace giving? The number one blessing in grace giving is that God says, "First of all, I want to know your intention. I want to know the attitude of your heart. Are you ready and willing to give Me of your material things?" God says, "That's the first thing that I'm interested in. That's the first step of grace blessing." What you give, and how much you give, is secondary, because God can take a paltry sum in a church offering box and do monumental things with it. God can also take a very large sum of money that may be given in a church offering, and cause it to be frittered away, and very little to come of it.

So, grace, as a way of life, is what Jesus Christ introduced as Law was introduced by Moses.

**Grace Freely Justifies the Worst Man**

Another thing you should remember is that grace freely justifies the worst man (1 Timothy 1:15, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). On the other hand, the Law utterly condemns the best man (Philippians 3:4-9). The world's number one sinner is justified just as freely by grace as the world's least sinning sinner. But the Law completely condemns the best man.

**God's Beseeching and Bestowing**

Another thing is that grace is God's beseeching and bestowing (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). That's the attitude of grace – the appeal. But what is the Law? Well, the Law was God prohibiting and demanding (Exodus 20:1 and Exodus 20:17). Grace beseeches; Law demands. Grace makes an appeal; the Law tells you, "You better do it, or else, mister." It's a totally different appeal.

**Grace is Offered by God to Everyone**

You should know that grace is offered by God to everyone (Romans 11:32). It is offered to the worst of sinners as well as to the best. The grace of God is received by faith (Ephesians 2:8). This is not something you work for. You simply accept it. You simply believe it. Don't come up and ask me, "What kind of feelings should I have so that I will know that the grace of God is operating?" Don't ask: "What feeling should I have in order to secure it?" You just accept the fact that this is how God is going to deal with you – because He said so. Grace is the only way that a person can be saved (Ephesians 1:6, Ephesians 2:8-9). You cannot be saved through any kind of a works system. Grace gives the believer the power to conquer his sins, because it gives him the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:21, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Corinthians 6:19). The Old Testament people did not have God the Holy Spirit living with them constantly.

**Help Through Trials**

Grace will help you in the time of your trial (2 Corinthians 12:7-9, Hebrews 4:16).

**The Guiding Principle**

Grace is the guiding principle for life during the church age. Every issue is to be decided according to the grace principle (Romans 5:1-2, Romans 6:14). Therefore, in your dealing with people, it should be from the frame of reference of treating them in grace. A lot of bickering and a lot of cutting down of Christians by one another would be precluded if they were obedient to this principle that grace is our way of life. Grace is the basis upon which we deal with people. Therefore, we would not be running around demanding our rights, nor would we be imposing on people what we think they should be. We would graciously respect their privacy and their priesthood as we would expect them to respect ours.

**God's Motives in Grace**

Another thing I trust you understand now is that God's motives in grace told us are threefold. Why does God act in grace? Well, first of all, because of His love for man (Ephesians 2:4-5). Then He does it in order to show His exceeding riches to all intelligent creatures (Ephesians 2:7). God does this by giving us something like 36 different things that automatically become true of every one of us at the point of salvation. It is God's way of showing the exceeding riches of His blessing. Also, He does it, in the third place, to enable the redeemed to produce divine good (Ephesians 2:10, Hebrews 12:28). You and I could not produce one ounce of divine good service if it were not for the grace of God.

**Coexistence with Grace**

There's one more thing that I want you to remember. That there are certain principles that cannot coexist with grace. These cannot go with grace.

1. **Human Guilt**

One is that there can be no recognition of human guilt to restrict God (Romans 3:23-26). You cannot say that God's blessing is going to be withheld because of how bad somebody is. That is never true. The grace of God is never restricted by the fact of somebody's guilt else of sin.

1. **Human Repayment**

Secondly, there can be no recognition of human obligation to repay God (John 10:28, Romans 6:23). For that reason, we cannot appeal to you to finance the tape ministry has an expression of repayment for God's grace. The minute you try to pay God for His grace, you've lost grace, and you've worked against yourself. You cannot pay God for His grace. Don't ever suggest that you're ever doing something because you want to repay the Lord for what He has done for you.

1. **Human Merit**

A third principle that cannot exist with grace is any recognition of human merit that deserves God's blessing (Romans 3:9, Romans 11:32). At no time can we say that there is something that we deserve, and that merits, therefore, the grace of God taught us.

**Apostleship**

So, this is what is involved in this word when the apostle Paul says, "By whom the Lord Jesus Christ, he has received two things." One, he has received the grace of God – this grace, which has made out of the worst of sinners, the chief of the apostles. And that's the next thing that he gets. He says, "He has also received the "apostole." The grace of God has provided Paul with a very high rank in the spiritual life – the rank of apostleship. This was one of the temporary spiritual gifts. We don't have this gift anymore.

**An Apostle**

Let's take a look at the business of an apostle for a moment. What do we mean by an apostle? The Mormon Church says that they have twelve apostles. Do they have twelve apostles? Is that a true statement? Ephesians 4:11 tells us that one of the gifts is this gift of an apostle. The word is "apostolos." It comes, as you can see, from two words. This little preposition "apo" means "from;" and, the verb "stello" means "send." So, it means someone who is sent out, or a messenger. The word "apostle" sometimes simply carries the connotation of messenger.

There are three uses, as a matter of fact, of the word "apostle" in the New Testament.

**The Twelve**

As you know, first of all, it would refer to that group we usually think of as the apostles who are called "the twelve." We have this in 1 Corinthians 15:5. These were a special group of apostles: twelve; and, no more. They had to accompany the Lord during His earthly ministry. It had to be somebody who was one of the official twelve disciples, or else he was generally in the company of the Lord and His group. Acts 1:21-22 explain that to us. To be one of this official contingent known as the twelve, it had to be somebody who was with the Lord during His earthly ministry.

Also, he had to have seen Jesus Christ alive after he had seen Him dead on the cross. That was very critical. An apostle had to be a person who saw Jesus Christ on the cross; taken down; and, put into the tomb. He had to see that same Jesus Christ completely alive, back out of that tomb. We have this told us also in Acts 1:22.

So, for this reason, the apostle Paul did not exactly qualify to be this kind of an apostle. In 1 Corinthians 15:5, the apostle Paul says, "And that He (Jesus Christ) was seen of Cephas (that is, Peter), then (what he refers to as) 'the twelve.'" And he is referring to a contingent (a group) called "the twelve." However, notice that in verse 8-9, he says, "And last of all, He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time." And he adds himself as someone who is in addition to the twelve. For he says, "I am the least of the apostles, that am not fit to be called an apostle," and so on. He was an apostle. He viewed himself as something apparently that was distinct from this group of the twelve, because the apostle Paul did not walk with Jesus Christ while He was here on this earth. He did qualify in having seen Him alive from the dead, but He did not qualify as one who lived and moved day-by-day with the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry.

So, for this group of apostles (the twelve), we cannot have anybody like that, because nobody is now living who has seen Christ in His earthly ministry, and who moved with Him through that ministry.

**Paul and James**

However, we do have a couple of special apostles such as Paul and James. That's the second category of apostles, and I think that this is the best way to think about the group of apostles. We have, in Galatians 1:19 and 1 Corinthians 1:1, these two men who are presented as apostles.

You remember that James, who was the Lord's brother, was an unbeliever all the time that his brother was on the earth ministering. He did not become a believer until after the resurrection, but he did see his brother die on the cross. He did see Jesus dead, and he did see Him alive. The critical point was to have seen Christ alive, and to have been able to identify Him as Jesus of Nazareth. That was the crucial part of the requirement.

Well, the apostle Paul, as you know, had this experience on the Damascus Road. When he was struck down, he looked up; he saw the heavens open; and, he saw Jesus Christ standing there. He actually saw the Lord Himself. So, he knew that Christ was alive. He knew in that moment that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead. He may have stood at the very cross and seen them crucify Him. Now he saw this Christ alive. So, he knew that what the other members of the Sanhedrin had told him, and had spread around about the body being stolen, was a lie. For he saw the Lord physically alive in heaven.

Also, the apostle Paul tells us that he had the mark and the authority of an apostle. You have this in 2 Corinthians 10:8; 2 Corinthians 13:10; and, 2 Corinthians 12:12. But this is the second group – specialized apostles, with as full authority as these twelve had, but not in this specialized group of the twelve.

**Messengers**

Then there was a third use of the word "apostle" in the Bible, and this is in the sense of messengers. We might not quibble with people today if they wanted to use the word "apostle" in this sense. You have this in 2 Corinthians 8:23. The exact term is "messengers of the churches." This is in contrast to these which are called "apostles of Jesus Christ." Categories one and two are apostles of Jesus Christ. Category three are referred to as "apostles of the church;" that is, they are messengers sent out by the churches. This is a non-technical use, and these messengers neither accompanied the Lord in His ministry, nor did they necessarily see Him in His resurrection. We have perhaps this kind of non-technical messenger today.

Barnabas was called an apostle, for example, in the sense of a messenger in Acts 14:14. It is not said that Barnabas ever saw Christ in His resurrection. He was an apostle of the church, not an apostle of Jesus Christ in the technical sense of that word.

However, when we come to the apostle Paul here in the book of Romans, when he says that he has received apostleship, he is talking about the fullest, most complete concept of apostolic authority.

Another man with this messenger concept was Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25. He was a messenger of the church.

So, the word "apostle" simply means one who is sent. It is used of anyone who is sent on a mission by a local church.

These apostles had, of course, a very specific ministry. The twelve apostles laid the foundation of the church, and they led the early expressions of the church. The qualifications that we have pointed out to you of having seen Christ in His resurrection make it impossible for anybody to be an apostle today.

You will notice that in the passage here in Romans 1:5, that Paul says that he received this apostleship from the Lord Jesus Christ. "By whom" refers to Christ. It is Christ who has appointed him as an apostle. God is always the one who gives a spiritual gift. Whatever your spiritual ability is today, you got it from God. It was not given to you because somebody came and made a declaration upon you. Somebody did not lay his hands upon you and say, "I'm now going to confer upon you the spiritual gift of teaching," or, "the spiritual gift of ministering in some way," or, "the spiritual gifts of healing." You cannot be given a spiritual gift by people, nor can you be given the gift of apostle by the laying on of somebody's hands, and so on.

The apostle, as you know, had supreme authority over the local churches, particularly those in the area of his work where he had brought these churches into existence. He could go from one church to the other, and he was absolute law. He was the final Supreme Court authority in any church that he went into.

This is not true today. No pastor can walk into Berean Memorial Church and have a party within this church without the approval of this congregation. It's a totally different setup. The apostles were primarily, of course, the instruments of divine revelation. That's why we had them. We had the apostles as we had the prophets, which we do not, again, have today. We had them primarily to receive the revelation which was then written down, and became the Scriptures of the New Testament.

There were apostles before Pentecost. They were announcing the Messianic Kingdom. After Pentecost, they laid the foundations for the church, and these are two different ministries that they had.

**By the Grace of God**

You notice the Paul says that his apostleship was by the grace of God. This is particularly stressed by Paul himself in the fact that he refers to himself as the worst sinner that ever lived. So, all of you can breathe a sigh of relief. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul says, "This is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief."

**The Worst Sinner who ever Lived**

Paul says that he is the worst thing that ever lived. Now, what do you think he meant by that? Normally when we read this, we think, "Well, he was just being modest. He was just saying that he's not so hot. But he didn't really mean that he was the worst sinner ever lived." Well, I think he did. I think the apostle Paul had enough of a spiritual maturity structure developed in his soul that he didn't have to go around putting on airs. He didn't have to stand up in testimony meeting, and then proceed on the basis of his openly declared humility to give his testimony.

**Zealous in Religion**

But why would he say that he was the grossest of sinners? Does this mean that he was a very sinful man? Well, when we began reading about him in Scriptures, we find that the title that he assumes for himself seems to be contradicted. For example, in Galatians 1:13-14, he says, "You have heard of my manner of life in times past, in the Jews' religion – how that, beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God and wasted it, and profited in the Jewish religion above many of my equals in my own nation; being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." Well, this first tells us that he was very religious. He was very devoted to the Ten Commandments. From what Paul says, we would think that he spent his time breaking the Ten Commandments all the time, and that he broke them better than anybody else. But what we read here is that he profited in the Jews' religion above all others who were his age – those who were his contemporaries, he outshone all of them in his religious practices. As far as religion went, and as far as the ceremonies went, and as far as the ritual went, and the obedience to the rules of the Old Testament, Paul says, "I was without equal. No one was as zealous for the Word."

**Religious Heritage**

And he says, "For the traditions of my fathers" – for the traditions that had arisen among his group as a Pharisee. He was zealous for the whole bit. Yet he says that he was the worst of sinners? 2 Corinthians 11:22: "Are they Hebrews? So, am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I." He has an outstanding religious heritage. The very fact that he can claim this kind of a religious background shows that he was not ignorant of the Bible.

In Philippians 3:4-6, Paul refers to himself again when he says, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinks that he has reasons for which he might trust in the flesh, I have more: circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the Law; (now notice) blameless." Now, that's saying something. Most of us would be pretty hard pressed to say, "Now, when it comes to the Ten Commandments, I can declare to you that I'm blameless." The apostle Paul says, "Touching the moral Law (touching the requirements of the Law), I am blameless." And yet, he says that he was the worst sinner that ever drew breath on the face of the earth.

Well, obviously he was not grossly sinful, as we think of that. He was very religious, but not grossly sinful. Why do you think he said that? Well, what kind of an attitude do you think a person would have about himself as a Pharisee? You know what Pharisees were like in their attitudes toward their righteousness. What kind of an attitude do you think must have characterized a man who could say, "I'm blameless toward the Law?" Well, he had an attitude of self-righteousness like you have never seen. And a startling thing then evolves.

Do you know why Paul was the worst of sinners? Because he had the most monumental case of self-righteousness that ever existed on the face of the earth. Nobody has ever been as self-righteous as the apostle Paul. And thus, he could say of himself, "I am the worst of sinners," because this monumental righteousness led him to do one very horrendous act that he was always deeply conscious of. And he knew that it had stemmed from his smug self-righteousness as a Pharisee.

We read about this in Acts 8:3, where we read, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hailing men and women, committed them to prison." Paul was bringing sorrow and heartaches to believers. He was he was persecuting them because they were worshipers of Jesus Christ. He considered this blasphemy, and he was charging into the homes of people. He was breaking up families. He was pulling husbands or wives or both out, and putting them in prison. Why? Because he was self-righteous. And as he was doing this kind of a cruel, mean, reprehensible thing to families, he believed that God was so pleased with what he was doing.

However, it was worse than that. That was bad enough. But he did even something more than that. We read about that in Acts 26:9-11. Paul says, "I verily thought within myself that I had to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; which thing I also did in Jerusalem. And many of the saints that I shut up in prison (as we have just seen), having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were put to death (there's the other part of what he did), I gave my voice against them, and I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme." That meant that he put them to torture. He took women and he took men, and he put them under torture. He said, "Now you curse the name of Jesus Christ, or you die." For all we know, there were thousands of Christians who may have died at the hands of the apostle Paul. He was no doubt a monumental murderer in terms of the number of people who died because they said, "No, if you kill me, I'm going to heaven. I will not curse the name of Jesus Christ."

"He compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceeding mad against them." He was a raging bull against these Christians: "I persecuted them even unto foreign cities," which is where he got struck down when he was on the way to Damascus. He said, "I was so self-righteous. My self-righteousness was so great that it propelled me not only to bring misery to the Christians who lived in Jerusalem, but I got authority from the Jewish leaders to go out to countries and cities around about, and to search out the Christians even there.

This is the condition concerning himself that he looked back on, and was the reason, I'm sure, why he would call himself the worst of sinners, because it caused him to strike at Christians. That was bad enough, but the horror of what he was doing didn't come to him until the moment he was saved.

Look what he was doing. He was torturing; he was breaking up families; he was barging into people's personal conscience and privacy; and, he was taking their lives. That was bad enough, and that was crushing enough. That was ground enough for being the worst sinner that ever lived. But the worst part came as a result of one thing more that was true because of what he was doing.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9, we read, "For I am the least of the apostles, and am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God," as we have seen. What was so bad about that?

Well, Acts 9:1 explains it to us. We read, "And saw, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord (murdering Christians) against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that he found any of this way (that is, believers in Christ), whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and he heard a voice saying unto him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'" And there's the stinger.

He looked up into the heaven, into that brilliant light that caused him subsequently to go blind for a number of days. He looked up, and there he saw Jesus Christ in all of His full glory, and saw Him as the physical person that perhaps he had even seen on this earth. And the Lord said to him, "Saul, why are you doing this to me?" And in that moment, the horrendous realization struck home to the mind of Paul, that all that he had been doing, he had been doing against God Himself. For in that moment, he had realized that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah. In that moment, he believed, for the next verse says, "And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'"

The Lord confirmed, "I am Jesus of Nazareth (whom you're looking at), and I am the one that you've been persecuting all along." And it was like a man trying to kick against the sharpened goad that they used to get the animals to move.

So, Paul realize that everything he had done, every Christian he had murdered; every bit of suffering he had brought in the families; and, every bit of torture he had inflicted upon believers, he had done to Jesus Christ. Do you see why we tell you that Satan cannot get at the Lord now, and thus you have become, in the angelic conflict, the target of the satanic attack? That's why Satan is constantly seeking to bring misery into your life. That's why he is constantly seeking to discourage you; to cause you to be crushed; and, to cause you to fall into sin. And that's why you have to constantly maintain that spiritual maturity structure so that while there is raging around you the attack of the demonic world, there is within your soul a millennium that is able to go right through the whole thing. For you are the object of Satan's attack. All he has to do is read this Scripture, and he'll know that if he hits a Christians, he has struck Jesus Christ, for we are His body.

So, God's grace is brilliantly highlighted by the chief of sinners in the fact that God took the chief of sinners and made him the chief of the apostles. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul says, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And His grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain. But I labored more abundantly than they all; yet, not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Paul says, "Once I switched sides and joined the Christians, I was as zealous and on the job for them and for the Lord's sake, as I was before under my religion of Judaism, when I thought I was serving God, and, in effect, I was striking at God and serving Satan. Religion had turned the apostle Paul into a monster.

So, how does it strike you when you hear somebody get up in church and give a testimony? And as so often, especially public religious leaders, they like to look back upon their past life, and they like to say, "I want to stand up before you tonight, folks, and tell you that there was a time in my life when I was gay. I'm happy in the Lord, and I went from gay to happy." And you can see how you can play that. Or they detail for you their gross sins. And the audience sits on the edge of their seats. Then he looks at his watch, and says, "We're running out of time. We'll continue tomorrow." And boy, they run home, and run out tomorrow night because they want to hear the rest of this sorry story of his past life.

Somebody advertised himself for a meeting, and I've seen it many times. Here's the poster. It lists his credentials of evil so that you will come out and listen to him, because he is a trophy of the grace of God.

I want to tell you, folks, that the worst thing that ever lived has already been on the scene. You will discover that he does not refer very often to his gross past. He touches it only to demonstrate and to illuminate the grace of God. If you want to demonstrate how gross a sinner you were in the past, then get up and give us the testimony of all the people you slandered; of all the times that you misrepresented what somebody has said; of all the times that you've had the attitude of misinterpreting what other people have done; of all the times that you were pushy and competitive; and, of all the times that the mental hatreds and the mental antagonisms were exercised toward people.

**The Tongue**

This is what is really gross. Why? Because the thing that made Paul the chief of sinners was not his murders; not his tortures; and, not his invading a family life. The thing that made him the chief of sinners was one step back from that: his self-righteousness. The grossest sin is the sin of self-righteousness, and that's what every unbeliever walks into the Christian life with. Every one of us came out of a background in some degree of being very pleased with what we were and how we were. And there is no point in your standing up and telling people all of the vile sins that you once used to practice, because the worst thing is that evil of the tongue.

It is James that tells us that the tongue is a fire that we cannot quench. And it is one of the worst things within our being. James 3:5: "Even so, the tongue is a little member, and boasts great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles. The tongue is a fire: a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beast and birds and serpents and of things in the sea is tamed, and have been trained by mankind. But the tongue can no man tame. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. With it, we bless even God the Father, and therewith curse we men who are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

If we do it still as Christians, it is even the more horrendous. It is understandable that we did this in our unsaved days, and that's what is gross sinning. It is gross sinning in the unbeliever; and, it is equally gross, if not more so, when the believer is doing it.

So, we've got a lot of smug Christians who say, "Oh, I'm blameless of an open violation of the commandments," but their self-righteousness is the thing that is a stench in the nostrils of God.

So, Paul, in Romans 1:5, says, "By whom Jesus Christ, through the grace of God, I was made an apostle. This was done for the obedience to the faith;" that is, in order that faith might be obeyed, and here faith stands for the body of doctrine – in order that Bible doctrine might be obeyed. Paul's mission in life was to tell the gospel, and then to teach the converts the full counsel of the Word of God.

By the way, it is not your business to teach your converts the full counsel of the Word of God. It is your business to do the work of an evangelist – to get them converted, and then to set them in motion in a situation where they will be taught the Word of God in the local church under a pastor-teacher. You may approach that through tapes or some other means, but that is the thing to which you ultimately are directing them. You may give some initial instruction to get them rolling in the direction of getting into a church where they can learn the Word of God. Don't fall for these systems that tell you that your converts are your babies for you to train and for you to rear, because that's not true, and that is not scriptural.

So, he says that: "He received this gift of apostleship in order to bring obedience to doctrine among all nations" (or "gentiles" would be a better translation of the word here, specifically in reference to Paul. And it says, "For His name." That means in behalf of His name, meaning for His glory.

The apostle Paul, the worst sinner that ever lived on the face of the earth, was converted by the grace of God, and was changed from the chief of sinner to the chief of the apostles, and was the instrument of God to bring many people to obedience to the Word of God. We may follow him not in apostleship. We may follow him in preaching the gospel, and in proclaiming the means to eternal life. We may also follow him in introducing people to the full counsel of God. May that be our practice.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1975

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