

Introduction

Paul studied Scripture in context, making certain that nothing he believed contradicted a single word (or phrase, or verse, or chapter, or book) recorded in God’s letter to man. Thus, he could say to the elders from Ephesus:

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. (Acts 20:27 KJV)

This *Advancing in Romans 1-8* study contains much deeper theology than its predecessor, the foundational *Romans 1-8* study, which I thought necessary due to a theological shift within Christendom that classifies contradiction as “mystery” in an attempt to justify its error. Since writing the original foundational *Romans 1-8* study, I have written several books and Bible studies. While generating and teaching these materials and, at the same time, observing major theological changes engulfing Christendom, I sensed a need to produce this present work. I trust that your passion for the God of truth, Who never contradicts Himself, will be stimulated by its content.

To take the full counsel of God’s Word and expand the foundational *Romans 1-8* course will be adventuresome indeed. To observe how flawlessly this new input meshes with previously studied truths will validate, to an even greater degree, the consistency and non-contradictory nature of the Scriptures.

If you are a passionate student of God’s letter to man, this journey should be extremely intriguing—regardless of your theological background. Even if you should disagree with our findings, they will serve as a profitable use of your time—for passionate students of the Word welcome all arguments against what they believe. Otherwise, they become isolated and unteachable, injuring themselves and those who follow in their footsteps.

Recently, while teaching on the topic of faith, I asked if the faith required prior to salvation originates with man or with God. Much to my surprise, many of the students answered, “with God.” Some who said, “with God,” had even completed the foundational *Romans 1-8* study (written over twenty years ago), which made me realize the need to expand the subject matter.

I wrote in that original work: “Several years ago I saw my need for a Savior. When this occurred, I just basically made a choice to look up and God did all the rest. He (at that moment) granted me “*repentance*” (2Timothy 2:25; Acts 11:18), gave me “*faith*” (Romans 12:3), and then justified me.” I have been intrigued by the number of students who, as a result of these words, have misunderstood my beliefs regarding faith. If you are one of those students, I apologize for not writing more clearly concerning the subject. I assumed that the statements, “Several years ago I saw my need for a Savior” and “When this occurred, I just basically made a choice to look up and God did all the rest,” communicated that the repentance and faith I exercised prior to spiritual regeneration (and while depraved) originated with me. Of course, once I exercised personal repentance and faith while depraved, God granted me “*a measure of faith*” (Romans 12:3) to function within my particular spiritual gifting—for every New Testament believer receives a spiritual gift (1Peter 4:10) in conjunction with being placed in Christ and made new (2Corinthians 5:17). The gift of faith of Romans 12:3, therefore, is not equivalent to the personal faith we exercised in our depravity prior to being made new (a subject covered in depth later).

“Depravity” points to our spiritual state before we were spiritually regenerated/saved. In other words, to be depraved means to be lost. Yet, the depraved are capable of exercising personal repentance and faith. Remember this fact as we continue, for the terms “depravity” and “depraved” are used throughout the study. The *God’s Heart* series addresses this subject in great detail.

When teaching God’s Word, I no longer assume that the student’s definition of a theological term is equivalent to mine. This mindset has served me well in the present postmodern era, which denies absolutes and disregards contradictions. I have discovered, in fact, that when a system, regardless of its label, redefines words for the sake of preserving a preconceived notion, truth is viewed as inferior to the system. Hence, pragmatism takes precedence over truth, and truth takes a backseat to man’s ideology. In such cases, pragmatism rules, and the system billed as producing life produces agonizing death. Compromise of this sort has inundated our society, even the church. Therefore, our only hope is to know truth based on its context, allowing definitions to remain as they were when God penned His infallible letter to man. As a friend of mine

states: “Proper Biblical interpretation is dependent on one thing only—context, context, context.” We will attempt to abide by this guideline.

In order to link the truths from the foundational *Romans 1-8* study to this advanced study of the same Scriptures, I have simply added additional input to the original study. Three goals will be accomplished: (1) We will address new subject matter and blend it with previously studied materials; (2) We will review the foundational *Romans 1-8* series, which is normally needed after a student’s first trek through. In fact, more than half of the participants in our annual *Romans 1-8* Retreat have taken the foundational course multiple times. (3) Should a person choose to forego the foundational study and engage himself in this study alone, he will have access to the entire body of truth.

No one can scuba dive without first learning to swim on the water’s surface. We learned to swim in the original *Romans 1-8* study; time has arrived to observe the wonders of the deep. In the Gulf of Aqabah, off the coast of Elat in southern Israel, I discovered the fascinating world of the depths of the sea. I was forever changed by that experience! In fact, that one glimpse of an unfamiliar portion of God’s creation made Him, in my mind at least, even more sovereign and omnipotent. My prayer is that your awareness of God’s awesomeness will be enhanced through our diving into the depths of *Romans 1-8*!

Take time to read all Scripture references. You will be glad you did. Scripture text is taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) unless otherwise noted. If you do not own a copy of the NASB, it might be wise to obtain one. I have used this version for years and found it to be a wonderful resource for Biblical study. Of course, you can use the version you have, but pay special attention to the NASB rendering of the passages provided in this work.

Much of the new material in this commentary has been added due to a resurgence in the popularity of Reformed Theology. You will find a discussion of its various tenets woven throughout our study; although for brevity’s sake we keep it on a basic level. If you desire to dig deeper into this topic, our *God’s Heart* series is available. This series contains four volumes: *God’s Heart As It Relates To Foreknowledge – Predestination*, *God’s Heart As It Relates To Sovereignty – Free Will*, *God’s Heart As It Relates To Depravity*, and *God’s Heart As It Relates To Election–Atonement–Grace–Perseverance*.

Advancing in Romans

Introduction

Note: For emphasis, specific words or phrases are sometimes underlined in selected verses. Comments are also inserted within brackets [] for the sake of clarity.

Romans 1

We know that Paul wrote this epistle in Corinth while on his third missionary journey (Romans 16:23; 1Corinthians 1:14), for he delivered the contribution, mentioned in Romans 15:25-26, to Jerusalem at the end of that third journey. Then, he was arrested and eventually sent to Rome (Acts 20-28). Phoebe, who was in Cenchrea (near Corinth), delivered the letter to the Roman believers (Romans 16:1-2). Since Paul had not yet visited his readers, he addresses the fundamentals of the gospel in more detail than in his other epistles. He not only defines the gospel, but also explains its energizing effect as we enjoy the adventure of faith.

Romans chapters 1-8 may very well be the most important section of the entire Word of God. No portion of Scripture has marked my life like these eight chapters. Your in-depth study of this book should: (1) Result in a deeper understanding of Christ's sacrifice on the cross; (2) Give you a greater desire to love Him with all of your heart. After all, "faith" can only work effectively "through love" (Galatians 5:6).

Profound theological truths pack this first chapter. Paul, a "bond-servant" (Romans 1:1) of Christ, after having been set free by his Master, chose to remain with and serve Him for life. This mindset greatly impacted Paul's perception of his relationship with the Lord (read Exodus 21:5-6 and Deuteronomy 15:12-17 for additional input). Jesus had set him free, but Paul chose to submit to Christ the remainder of his days. As we learn more about our freedom in Christ, we too, if we aren't already, will desire to become His bond-servants.

Paul was "called as an apostle" (Romans 1:1), "apostle" meaning "one sent forth."

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (Romans 1:1)

To be an "apostle" one had to have seen the resurrected Lord (1Corinthians 9:1), a prerequisite Paul fulfilled according to Acts 9:3-5 and Acts 22:6-8. Paul compared his apostleship "to the uncircumcised" (the Gentiles) with Peter's "apostleship to the circumcised" (the Jews) in Galatians 2:7-9 and urged the Corinthians to acknowledge his office in 1Corinthians 9:2 and 2Corinthians 12:12. Paul was an "apostle" (Romans 1:1) who had been "set apart" to share the "gospel" with the Gentiles.

According to Galatians 1:15-16, Paul was "set...apart" to his apostleship "from" his "mother's womb":

But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles,... (Galatians 1:15-16)

God desired "to reveal His Son in" Paul as he preached the gospel "among the Gentiles." This truth ties in perfectly with Romans 1:1, which confirms that Paul was "set apart" as an "apostle" to take the good news of the gospel to non-Jews. Thus, Paul was not only "called" as an "apostle" (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:15), but was "set apart" as "an apostle" (Romans 1:1). This fact is also substantiated by Acts 13:2:

And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)

Paul was “*set apart...for the work to which*” he had been “*called.*” Combining Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:15, and Acts 13:2, Paul was “*set apart*” for a specific “*work*” that God would perform through him as he yielded to Christ’s indwelling presence. He was not “*set apart*” for salvation, as some theologians wrongfully suppose.

The boldness to “*persuade*” men came with Paul’s apostleship:

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:4)

And Agrippa replied to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.” (Acts 26:28)

And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. (Acts 28:23)

Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, ... (2Corinthians 5:11)

If the depraved are incapable of understanding truth, as some have incorrectly concluded, why would Paul have attempted to “*persuade*” the depraved (the lost)? Persuading an individual who is incapable of believing is impossible! Also, should God have chosen (elected) certain persons to salvation from eternity past (a popular, yet incorrect teaching of our day), Paul would have been disobedient in offering salvation to those who rejected his gospel. Yet, he offered salvation to all his listeners throughout his missionary journeys, many choosing to remain in their sin. Because the depraved are capable of understanding truth, Paul attempted to persuade them with the truth. He understood well the power of God’s Word, for the depraved (when convicted by the truth) can choose to exercise personal repentance and faith. This fact is verified by Acts 26:16-18, where Paul quotes Jesus’ words while presenting his testimony before King Agrippa:

‘But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’ (Acts 26:16-18)

Jesus “*appeared*” to Paul for the purpose of appointing him as a “*minister and...witness.*” Jesus did not appear to Paul for the purpose of appointing him to salvation. Even those to whom he would speak were required to “*turn from darkness to light,*” proving that the depraved can make a choice to repent and believe—note the word “*turn.*” Although the depraved (lost) live in “*darkness,*” they must “*turn from darkness to light*” before they can receive God’s salvation, as also confirmed by 2Corinthians 3:16:

but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
(2Corinthians 3:16)

Once man “*turns to the Lord*” in the midst of his depravity, the “*veil is taken away.*” Reversing this sequence, or order, simply will not work! God is not required to spiritually regenerate the depraved (lost) and give them the gifts of repentance and faith before they can “*turn*” (repent), believe, and be saved (Reformed Theology’s view). They can “*turn*” to Christ in the midst of their “*darkness*” (Acts 26:18) and receive God’s salvation.

Some theologians use John 6:70 in an attempt to prove that God’s choice, not man’s, determines man’s destiny:

Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70)

Jesus chose “*the twelve.*” “*Chosen*” and “*election*” are synonymous, as verified by 1Peter 1:1-2 in the NASB and KJV:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. (1Peter 1:1-2 NASB)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (1Peter 1:1-2 KJV)

Therefore, to be chosen is to be elected, allowing the NASB to use “*chosen*” while the KJV inserts “*elect.*” Let’s again read John 6:70:

Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70)

All the disciples were chosen (elected)—note the words, “*the twelve*.” However, one of “*the twelve*” was “*a devil*,” confirming the impossibility of the disciples being chosen (elected) to salvation. We also know of Judas’ betrayal, Jesus calling him “*the son of perdition*” in John 17:12. Thus, to be chosen (elected) doesn’t point to being chosen (elected) to salvation from eternity past. It can point to being chosen (elected) to a particular office within the body of Christ, as was the case with the twelve, including Judas, who alone declined the offer and betrayed the Savior. Paul replaced Judas as the twelfth apostle, allowing him to write:

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, (Romans 1:1)

and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1Corinthians 15:8-9)

Paul was “*called*” and “*set apart*” to be an “*apostle*,” not “*called*” and “*set apart*” to be saved. In fact, nowhere do the Scriptures teach that God selects some of mankind to be saved. Man determines where he will spend eternity by the exercise of his will while depraved.

Jesus was “*chosen*” (“*elected*”) to an office, which is confirmed by Isaiah 42:1:

“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. (Isaiah 42:1 NASB)

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. (Isaiah 42:1 KJV)

Jesus was “*chosen*” to office, the office of Messiah. He was not chosen for salvation, for He has always been the perfect second Person of the Trinity. Neither we, nor any other person, were chosen to be saved.

This truth explains Jeremiah’s calling as a prophet as described by God’s words in Jeremiah 1:5:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5 NASB)

The word “*knew*” (Jeremiah 1:5) points to God’s infinite knowledge of Jeremiah as a person. Jeremiah became a person at conception, “*Before*” he was “*formed...in the womb*” (Jeremiah 1:5)—conception precedes the formation of a child in the womb. God, in His infinite foreknowledge, knew (from eternity past) that Jeremiah would be born and serve as a prophet; He did not know Jeremiah as a person until conception. Even God can’t have a relationship with an idea; He has relationships with people. Thus, “*knew*”

(Jeremiah 1:5) does not point to his chosenness as a prophet, although he most definitely was chosen to be one (“*I have appointed you a prophet to the nation*”—Jeremiah 1:5)—a position (office) he could have rejected had he desired. Rather, “*knew*” (Jeremiah 1:5) points to God’s infinite knowledge of Jeremiah as a person once he was conceived in the womb.

Yes, “*before*” Jeremiah was “*born,*” and while he was in his mother’s womb, he was “*appointed [as] a prophet*” to the southern kingdom of Judah, an office he could accept or reject—as verified by Judas’ response to his calling as an apostle. He was not appointed to salvation, as some have incorrectly assumed.

Even Jesus was “*called...from the womb*” (Isaiah 49:1) to function as Messiah, confirming that His calling was to office rather than salvation:

...The LORD called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me. (Isaiah 49:1)

Isaiah 49:2-7 verifies that verse 1 is speaking of Jesus, who was “*called*” to offer redemption to the Jews and Gentiles alike. He was not called to salvation, for He was never lost.

Conclusion: New Testament believers are “*called*” to a special office once they are placed in Christ and made new—after having exercised personal repentance and faith while depraved. This fact will be verified to a greater degree when we study Romans 1:6.

Understanding Paul’s definition of “*the gospel*” (Romans 1:1) is imperative. In 1Corinthians 15:1-8, the gospel refers to Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. However, these truths do not reveal the entire story. The gospel also includes the fact that Jesus is seated “*at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Acts 1:11; Hebrews 1:3) and now lives in every New Testament believer (Colossians 1:27; Galatians 2:20). New Testament believers also live in Him (2Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:6). What exciting news!

This reality applies to our everyday experiences in that our Father desires that Christ live His life through us, since He lives in us—instead of us working for Him. This concept is supported by the fact that Christ is the only Person (He is also “*God*”—Hebrews 1:8) Who has lived void of sin.

The gospel was “*promised beforehand through [the] prophets*” (Romans 1:2). Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 speak of a suffering Savior. In fact, much of the Old Testament points to Christ. Genesis 3:15 tells of the “*seed,*” Who is “*Christ*” (Galatians 3:16), Who would usurp Satan’s authority through submitting to the unfairness of the cross. Satan bruised “*him on the heel*” (Genesis 3:15), pointing to Jesus’ crucifixion; His resurrection allowed the “*gospel*” to become a living reality—an event that transpired in space and time. These facts explain Paul’s words in Romans 1:2: