

Romans: The Good News of God

Credentials for Ministry

Romans 1:1

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Credentials for Ministry

Scripture

Shortly after I graduated from High School I went in to the South African Air Force. After basic training I was sent to Pietersburg Air Force Base, which is in northern South Africa, not too far from the border of Zimbabwe.

One night I found myself alone in the middle of the veld, miles from anywhere, guarding a small building housing ammunition.

At that time, the South African military was engaged in combating widespread terrorist activity, and I was to guard that building—with my life, if necessary. No unauthorized person was allowed anywhere near that building.

At one point, in the dead of night, a vehicle approached the building. With my heart pounding, I jumped to my feet, pointed my rifle at the vehicle, and shouted, “Halt! Who goes there?”

When the driver of the vehicle satisfied me that his credentials for entering that area were legitimate, I allowed him to proceed.

Today, I want to talk to you about credentials for ministry. In almost every area of life the right credentials for a particular situation is necessary. A police officer needs the right credentials in order to pull you over and give you a traffic ticket. A surgeon needs the right credentials in order to cut you open for surgery. A pharmacist needs the right credentials to give you medicine. An electrician needs the right credentials to wire your house.

Today, I want to show you Paul’s credentials for ministry, which are found in Romans 1:1:

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God (Romans 1:1)

Introduction

Lord Lyttleton and Gilbert West were nineteenth-century English barristers. They were not Christians, and one day they took it upon themselves to disprove Christianity.

As they discussed their project they decided that there were two main strongholds of the Christian faith. One was the resurrection of Jesus Christ; the other was the conversion and apostleship of Paul.

West decided to write against the resurrection of Jesus Christ, while Lyttleton's task was to disprove the factuality of Paul's conversion.

Since each man was not a Christian, they were somewhat rusty in their knowledge of the facts. So they agreed that if they were to be honest in their investigation they should at least thoroughly examine all the evidence.

While they were preparing their books, they occasionally met together. On one such occasion West told Lyttleton that there was something on his mind that he felt he needed to share. He said that as he had been studying the evidence for Jesus' resurrection he had come to think that there was something to it, since it was very well attested.

Lyttleton replied that he was glad that West had spoken as he had, because he had also become increasingly aware that there was some truth in the accounts of Paul's Damascus Road conversion.

Later, after both men had finished writing their books, they met together again. Lyttleton said to his friend, "Gilbert, as I have been studying the evidence and weighing it by the recognized laws of legal evidence, I have become satisfied that Saul of Tarsus was converted as the New Testament says he was and that Christianity is true. And so, I have written my book from that perspective."

West replied that in a similar way he too had become convinced of the truth of Jesus' resurrection, had come to believe in Jesus, and had also written his book in defense of Christianity.

Today, their books are found in many good libraries.¹

Few Christians are surprised by this story, but it has at least one unusual element. Since it is clear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is foundational to Christianity, it is easy to understand why a non-Christian like West would want to write a book refuting the resurrection. But the conversion and apostleship of the Apostle Paul might initially seem to be a much less important matter.

Yet here, as in many other places, first glances are misleading. Paul was not “the founder of Christianity,” as some have called him. Jesus alone deserves that title.

Yet, Paul is so important as the first and greatest of the church’s missionaries, and as the articulator and systematizer of its theology, that discrediting his conversion and apostleship would seriously undermine Christianity itself. If Paul was not converted as a result of seeing the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, and if he did not receive the gospel by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ, as he claimed, then Paul was a fraud and impostor, his writings are not true, and Christianity is stripped of its single most important teacher after the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson

And so, right at the outset of his letter to the Romans, Paul gives his ministry credentials. After all, the Christians in Rome had a right to know by what authority Paul was writing to them as he did. And so he introduces himself to the Roman church with three designations by which he establishes his credentials for his ministry. He tells them about his master, his office, and his purpose.

And, in a similar way, we learn that in order to be credentialed for ministry, we must have the right master, a specific office, and a clear purpose.

¹ Lord Lyttleton, “Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Saint Paul” and Gilbert West, “Observations on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ” in *Lord Lyttleton on the Conversion of St. Paul and Gilbert West on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (New York, NY: American Tract Society, 1929).

I. We Must Have the Right Master (1:1a)

First, in order to be credentialed for ministry, we must have the right master.

Paul was credentialed for ministry because of who his master was. He writes, “**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus**” (1:1a).

Paul could never forget the pit from which he had been rescued.

When Paul was making his defense before King Agrippa in Caesarea, he said in Acts 26:9-11, “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.”

Paul, as a zealous, young Pharisee, did everything he could to oppose Jesus Christ. He hated him and his followers. He was an enemy of Christ. He despised everything about Jesus.

But the Lord Jesus Christ, in his marvelous grace and mercy, encountered Paul on the road to Damascus. The Lord rescued Paul from his sinful hatred and opposition to himself. He took Paul out of the miry clay and put his feet upon the rock, and for him all things were now new.

And Paul could never forget that. Paul could never forget that he who had been a slave to sin and Satan had been rescued by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is impossible to understand Paul and his letter to the Romans without remembering this. That is why Paul calls himself **a servant of Christ Jesus**.

The Greek word for **servant** is *doulos* (δουλος). The word really means more than a **servant**. It means “bond-servant.” The term comes from a ceremony described in the Old Testament.

The Israelites had in their economic system laws governing a man who got into debt. He actually became the property of his creditor. In fact, he became a servant to his creditor. But that servanthood had a termination.

When the seventh year rolled around, all of the servants were set free and could leave their masters. Some of them, however, realized certain things about their own lack of ability to maintain themselves in the rugged economy of the world. They remembered that when they had been free citizens they had not eaten well.

But now, under kind masters, they were well-housed and well-fed. They looked toward their future freedom with some trepidation as they realized that they might soon be, once more, in a life of hunger and cold and deprivation.

No doubt there some who sought to escape the bondage of cruel masters. But there were others who knew the kindness and love of their master's heart.

The Mosaic Law provided a way for an indentured servant to voluntarily become a permanent bond-servant of the master he loved and respected. Exodus 21:5-6 says: "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and . . . do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life."

The servant could have gone free, but he chose to remain as the servant of his kind master. And wherever he went after that, he was known as the bond-servant of his kind master, and he carried in his body the marks of his servanthood.

This world has two masters, God and Satan, although they are not equal in power and authority. God, of course, is supreme and sovereign. And he allows Satan a limited ability to rule until the Lord Jesus Christ returns to wrap up history as we presently know it. And every single person in this world is a servant either to Satan or to Christ.

Now, no one serves two masters, as Jesus himself told us: "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and

love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Luke 16:13).

As a young man, Paul had been in the service of Satan. Of course, he did not realize that he was in Satan’s service, just as most non-Christians today do not realize that they belong to Satan and are serving him.

But God rescued Paul from Satan’s service on the road to Damascus. Paul soon realized what a cruel master Satan was. And he also realized what a kind, gracious, merciful, loving master the Lord is.

As he later wrote to the Colossians, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (1:13-14).

For the rest of his life, Paul was delighted to be known as **a servant of Christ Jesus**.

And so, Paul is first and foremost **a servant of Christ Jesus**. In other words, Paul is first and foremost a Christian. This was his first credential for ministry. Christ Jesus was his master. He no longer belonged to Satan; he belonged to Christ. He was no longer a slave to sin; he was a slave to righteousness.

Jesus recognized that there were would be impostors posing as servants of Christ Jesus with false credentials. He said in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

And so, the first credential for ministry is having the right master. Are you, like Paul, **a servant of Christ Jesus**? You will never be able to serve Jesus Christ until he is your master, and you are his servant.

Paul was credentialed for ministry because of who his master was. It was the Lord Jesus, and he was **a servant of Christ Jesus**.

II. We Must Have a Specific Office (1:1b)

Second, in order to be credentialed for ministry, we must have a specific office.

Paul was credentialed for ministry because of his office. He writes next that he is “**called to be an apostle**” (1:1b).

A better rendering of the Greek text would be “a called apostle,” which more clearly points out the fact that Paul’s position as **an apostle** was not of his own doing. He did not volunteer for that office, nor was he elected by fellow Christians. He was divinely **called** by Jesus Christ himself.

The word **apostle** translates the Greek word *apostolos* (αποστολος). It basically means “one who is sent.”

However, in its narrow, New Testament usage, the word apostle means “one who is chosen and sent with a special mission as the fully authorized representative of Jesus Christ.”

In this sense, only thirteen men (the Twelve, with Matthias replacing Judas, and Paul) are the apostles of Jesus Christ.

Now, what qualified a man to be an apostle? Two specific requirements qualified a man to be an apostle. First, to be an apostle a man had to have seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

When the disciples were waiting in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit, they decided to choose a twelfth man to complete their ranks after the treachery and death of Judas. Two men were nominated for the office of apostle: Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. As Peter explained, it was necessary for the replacement to have known the risen Lord and to have been a witness of his resurrection: “For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22b). The lot fell to Matthias, and he was chosen as the apostle to replace Judas.

Paul saw the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. Paul affirms to the Corinthians that seeing the risen Christ was the first qualification for apostleship. He said to them: “Am I not free?

Am I not an apostle? *Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?*” (emphasis mine, 1 Corinthians 9:1).

And second, to be an apostle a man had to be specially called and commissioned by Jesus Christ.

At the start of his earthly ministry Jesus chose twelve men to be apostles. We read in Luke 6:12-13: “One of those days Jesus went out into the hills to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.”

Paul met this qualification to be an apostle as well. The Lord Jesus specifically called and commissioned him to be an apostle. Paul tells us about this in his defense to king Agrippa in Acts 26:16-18 where Jesus said to him: “Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16-18).

Because apostles were uniquely called and sent by Jesus Christ to be his witnesses, they were also given unique authority, so that what they said—and eventually wrote—as apostles carried the force of divine teaching or Scripture.

This is confirmed in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, where he said, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (2:13).

Let us draw several lessons from this. First, by calling himself **an apostle** in his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds his readers that he is writing as no mere ordinary man but rather as one who has been given a message that should be received as the very word of God.

If you want to profit from a study of Romans, then you must receive it as it truly is. It is not simply a message from Paul to us; rather, it is a message from God to our hearts and minds. And because it is a message from God to us, we must obey its teaching, just as we would be obligated to obey God if he were to speak directly to us.

Second, because of the unique qualifications required for a man to serve as an apostle, there are no apostles today.

Remember, an apostle had to have physically seen the risen Lord Jesus. Furthermore, he had to be personally called and commissioned by Jesus Christ. Because of these requirements, only the Twelve and Paul were called to the office of apostle.

Those who claim today that there is apostolic succession or that they are contemporary apostles are simply wrong. There are no apostles today because no-one has seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ nor been personally called and commissioned by him to serve as an apostle.

And third, all Christians are called by God to service in the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul was **called to be an apostle**. That is a unique office in the church of Jesus Christ. The office of prophet is also unique. Paul tells the Ephesians that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (2:20). The foundation has been laid, and there is no longer any need for the extraordinary office of apostle and prophet.

Notice how Paul addresses the Roman Christians in Romans 1:7a: “To all in Rome who are loved by God and *called to be saints*.” In the Scriptures, the word “saints” always refers to *all* of God’s people, to *all* Christians, to *all* who are born again by the Spirit of God. A saint is not some “super Christian” in the New Testament. All Christians, according to Paul, are “called to be saints,” just as he was **called to be an apostle**.

The church of Jesus Christ is like an army in the sense that just as an army has a Commander-in-Chief, officers, and soldiers, so the church has a Commander-in-Chief, officers, and soldiers.

In the church, the Commander-in-Chief is Jesus, the officers are the apostles (of whom there are none today), prophets (there are also no prophets today), evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons. And the soldiers are all Christians, that is, all the saints.

In theology, we talk about the different offices in the church. There is the supreme office of mediator which is held by the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. Then there are special offices. Some are extraordinary offices, such as apostle and prophet, and are no longer in use today. The ordinary offices belong to evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders and deacons. And then there is the general office which belongs to all Christians.

Paul tells us why there are so many different offices in the church in his letter to the Ephesians: “It was the Lord who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God’s people [i.e. saints] for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*”

The point is this: God has called every Christian to service in his church. We no longer have apostles and prophets. But we do have evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders, deacons and saints. If you are a Christian, you are a saint, and you have been called by Christ to some form of service in his church.

So, Paul was credentialed for ministry because of who his master was. Second, he was credentialed for ministry because of his office.

III. We Must Have a Clear Purpose (1:1c)

And third, in order to be credentialed for ministry, we must have a clear purpose.

Paul was credentialed for ministry because of his purpose. He writes that he was “**set apart for the gospel of God**” (1:1c).

Before Paul encountered Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus he was a Pharisee. The word Pharisee means “separation” or “one who is set apart.” Interestingly, Paul uses a play on this word to describe his new-found purpose.

Before he met Christ, Paul was set apart to the Pharisaic traditions. Pharisees crossed the street rather than pass close to some unworthy sinner or vile publican. They held to strict dietary restraints and sacramental cleansings. The list of things a Pharisee would *not* do was tremendously long.

But, when Paul met Christ, a life-shattering change occurred in him. Before, he was set apart *from* all manner of things, and as a result he was self-righteous, narrow, bigoted, cruel, and obsessive. Afterward, he was set apart *for* something, for the gospel. That setting apart was positive because of his new-found love for Jesus Christ.

I remember my life before I met Eileen. I was a student at seminary. I had a bunch of good friends. We studied together, prayed together, and played together. I really loved those guys. But then, one day I met Eileen and I found myself in love with her. Nobody told me that I had to separate *from* my old friends. I gladly, willingly, voluntarily separated *for* my new love, Eileen.

In the same way, Paul says that he has been **set apart for the gospel of God**. Paul did not find it difficult to leave his Pharisaism because he had been called by God to proclaim the good news of the gospel. His new purpose in life was to preach **the gospel of God**. (We shall learn more about this gospel next week.)

God gives all Christians a new purpose when they are called by him to service. It may be as a mother, father, husband, wife, single, student, professor, artisan, professional, or whatever. God calls all Christians to glorify him in every sphere of life. Remember, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).

Conclusion

You must not think that only apostles like Paul receive a call to service in Christ's church. God wants you to live for him exactly where he has placed you. The apostle Paul was credentialed by God for service to him. But you also have been credentialed by God for service to him.

First, you must settle the matter of who your master is. If Christ Jesus is not your master, then Satan is. You, like Paul, must first become a servant of Christ Jesus. And you become a servant of Christ Jesus by repenting of your sin and allegiance to Satan, and by placing your trust in Jesus Christ alone.

Second, you must recognize that if you are a servant of Christ, a Christian, then you have been called by him to service. There are no longer apostles and prophets in the church of Jesus Christ today. But there are evangelists, pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, and saints. You are called by God to one of these offices.

And finally, God has a purpose for you in your service to him. God calls all Christians to service "so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12) and so that he will be glorified. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. We have just started studying this letter, and we see the riches that it contains.

Just as you credentialed the apostle Paul for ministry, so you have credentialed us for ministry too. You have become our Master, you have called us to a specific office, and you have given us a clear purpose. Help each one of us here today to fulfill the calling you have placed on our lives.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.