

Paul's Priorities
Romans 1:1–7

December 8, 2002

SERMON NOTES

- A. Introduction: Pastor John Piper: "God is an I_____ P_____"
- B. Priority One: The Triune God
 - 1. the Bible presumes G_____; Romans presumes the T_____
 - 2. all B_____ flow from our Father God
 - 3. the Son of God has A_____ and majesty as our Lord
 - 4. the Spirit of Holiness W_____ God's will in our lives, linking us to the power of the resurrection as He did in Paul's receiving grace and apostleship — God's will for his life
- C. Priority Two: Paul's (and Our) God-Given Ministry
 - 1. Paul's title of bond-slave shows
 - a. his H_____ in belonging to Christ
 - b. his D_____, honoured to be used by Christ
 - 2. Paul's rank (office) in God's service was to be an A_____
 - 3. Paul recognized that his ministry was at God's C_____
 - 4. Paul could only exercise his office through God's G_____
 - 5. at stake in Paul's ministry and ours, the R_____ of Christ
- D. Priority Three: The Gospel
 - 1. it has priority because ... it is the Gospel of G_____
 - 2. ... it is the P_____ of the prophets and message of the Bible
 - 3. ... it is established by the Holy S_____, not oral traditions
 - 4. ... it explains the I_____ (the birth of Jesus Christ)
 - 5. ... it bears God's signature, the R_____
 - 6. ... it gives believers a new, holy position before God as S_____

E. Conclusion: I want to change my priorities by ...

References pertaining to this message:

Bible presumes God: Genesis 1:1, God is One: Deuteronomy 6:4 God the Father source of all blessings: James 1:7; Christ's birth announced to the shepherds: Luke 2:10-11; Explanation of Jesus' name: Matthew 1:21; God's pre-ordination: Jeremiah 1:5, Galatians 1:15–17; Glory of Jesus' name: Philippians 2:9–10; Bible's message is Jesus: John 5:39; Marks of apostleship: John 20:21, 1 Corinthians 9, 2 Corinthians 12:12, Galatians 1:1, 11-12; Centrality of Christ to the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 2:2, 2 Corinthians 1:20, 5:14, Ephesians 2:8–10; The importance that Jesus is the Son of Man: Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 4:2–3; ... the Son of God: John 10:30, Matthew 16:16, 22:2, John 20:31, Acts 8:37, 9:20; Peter and Paul's preaching of the resurrection: Acts 2:24–36, Psalm 16:8–11, 110:1; Acts 13:28–39, Psalm 2:7, 16:10

Scripture Reading Romans 1:1-7 NAS: "1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,³ concerning His Son, [AV puts here: Jesus Christ our Lord] who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,⁴ 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,⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about [the] obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake,⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;⁷ 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."

A. Introduction

1. In one his sermons, Pastor John Piper made this comment —{2}.

"I've been to church-growth seminars where God is not once mentioned. I've been to lectures and talks on pastoral issues where he is not so much as alluded to. I have read strategies for every kind of recovery under the sun where God is not there. I have talked to students in seminaries who tell me of manifold courses where God is peripheral at best. I have recently read mission statements of major evangelical organizations where God is not even mentioned.

"I admit freely that I'm on a crusade, and I have one message: God is an *important person*, and he does not like being taken for granted."

a. as we see in today's passage from Romans, Paul was never guilty of forgetting this truth; first and foremost, his priority in life was God and the will of God

2. this passage is so packed with truth, replete with doctrine of such paramount importance, that I despair of even scratching its surface this morning

a. Pastor John Piper spend 5 weeks preaching on these verses and something like six months of Sundays on this chapter

b. Robert Haldane, the Scots preacher whose ministry in Geneva 185 years ago brought revival while

teaching this book, spends 8 pages on verse 4 alone

- c. and yesterday, as I tried to order my final thoughts on the passage, I gave up, deciding just to touch on some mountain peaks of what is a vast range in these few verses
- d. but I will simply look at three aspects of the way that Paul's life was shaped by three, interwoven Divine priorities
 - (A) Priority One: the Triune God
 - (B) Priority Two: Paul's God-given Ministry
 - (C) Priority Three: the Gospel

B. Priority One: the Triune God

- 1. at least a dozen times in these verses is God referred to by various names, titles or the personal pronoun
 - a. this forms the foundation of all that Paul is going to be teaching in this book of Romans: it is an explanation of what God has done for the readers, the Christians at Rome
 - (A) just as the Bible opens with the presumption of *God* — Genesis 1:1 NAS: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*"
 - (B) so in similar fashion, Romans opens with the presumption of the *Trinity*; in these seven verses we have a dozen or more specific references to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit
 - (1) and the casual way in which the Three Persons are brought together in equality by Paul, a devout Jew
 - (2) is evidence that the truth of the Trinity was inherent from the very first in the New Testament teachings
 - (C) now, as you read the Bible, perhaps you have difficulty in distinguishing references to "God" denoting "God the Father" or other Person of the Trinity from those which denoting the Triune God
 - (1) in some cases it is made clear by the context
 - (2) but, not surprisingly, in many places it is not clear
 - (3) the reason is very simple
 - (a) Deuteronomy 6:4 NAS: "*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!*"
 - (b) Christians do NOT worship three Gods, but ONE
 - (c) while there are differences in "role" amongst the Persons of the Trinity, They act in full concert, unity and agreement; so distinctions among the Three persons are frequently blurred

2. Paul gives priority to Triune God not just by talking about Him but
 - a. in recognizing that all these *blessings* flow from Father God
 - (A) James 1:17 NAS: *"Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow."*
 - (B) in verse 1 we see that the blessings of the gospel come from the Father (the pronoun His is shown by the context to refer to the Father) — It was in the eternal plans, purposes and counsels of God that the gospel arose
 - (C) in verse 7 we see that the resultant blessings, summarized here by the terms "grace and peace" likewise come first of all from the Father and then from the Son
 - (D) so there is no taking God for granted in these blessings
 - b. Paul gives priority to Triune God by recognizing the *authority* and the majesty of the Son *"concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord"* verse 3 in AV, verse 5 in NAS/NIV
 - (A) the Gospel, the promises, are *"concerning His Son"*
 - (1) the Gospel is comprised in the Son; the Son is the Good News; the angels announced to the shepherds. Luke 2:10-11 NAS: *And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."*
 - (2) this Son is not just the interpreter, the legislator of Divine Will (like Moses, the Prophets, the Apostles)
 - (3) rather the Alpha and Omega, who founded it with His blood, the one who is truly, exclusively the Son
 - (B) and it is the Son in His incarnation: as *"Jesus Christ"*
 - (1) Jesus = Joshua (Jehoshua'), Jeshua: "Jehovah that saves" – Matthew 1:21 NAS: *"And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."*
 - (2) Christ = Messiah – the Anointed One, a designation of His office as all three of Prophet, Priest and King, anointed for that purpose
 - (C) then Paul uses the term *our Lord*
 - (1) in the Old Testament "Lord" corresponds to Jehovah

- (2) "Lord" can be used of each of the Trinity, or of each Person in the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- (3) and the Son is called "Lord of glory", "Lord both of dead and living", "Lord of All"
- (4) the implication is clear: the Son of God is sovereign in His purpose, and particularly should be so in the life of any believer — and Paul submits to His rule
- c. Paul gives priority to Triune God by recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in declaring the victory of the Son — *"according to the Spirit of Holiness"* — verse 4
 - (A) it is the Holy Spirit who links the declaration of the Son of God with power to Paul's having received grace and apostleship
 - (B) so the Holy Spirit must be given priority in the life of the believer so that He may *work* God's will in us

3. how are you doing with giving the Triune God the priority that He warrants in your life?

C. Priority Two: Paul's God-given Ministry

1. Paul gives the two titles he possesses for his ministry in verse 1

- a. *"a servant of Jesus Christ"* – this is literally a bond-slave
 - (A) firstly, this is an expression of *humility*
 - (1) not His own, belonged to Christ
 - (2) but this term should be common to all believers
 - (a) we are the exclusive property of Christ Jesus
 - (b) we are purchased to Him by right of redemption
 - (B) secondly, it is also an expression of *dignity*
 - (1) what an honour to be employed by Jesus Christ in extending kingdom of God! for Paul; for us
 - (2) servant is accorded dignity by the Master he serves
- b. *"called [to be an] apostle"* — literally *"called apostle"*
 - (A) this second title explains the first and shows his rank
 - (1) Paul had been called, not merely externally (like Judas) but internally and efficaciously
 - (2) called to a ministry, conferring on him the qualities — gifts — needed to carry out that calling
 - (3) the office: *Apostle* – "messenger", but in the Bible one sent forth by Jesus Christ to preach the

gospel

- (a) highest office in church; distinct from all others
 - (b) distinguished by nature, authority, appointment, qualifications, those so called without successors
 - (c) Paul, defending his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 9, lays out some of the criteria of apostleship [further references in the handout]
- (B) Paul, despite all his resistance, had no chance to other than God's will once Christ laid His hand upon him
- (1) "Who are you Lord" ... "I am Jesus"
 - (2) Jesus became Paul's Lord; so, apostleship was not just something that Paul had felt was a good idea!

2. Paul recognized that his work was at God's *command*

a. *separated [or set apart] unto the Gospel of God* — verse 1

(A) word "set apart" = apo (from) + 'orizo (boundary, horizon) — God revised Paul's life-plan completely!

(B) Paul's apostleship determined in time and in eternity

(1) pre-ordained in the same fashion as Jeremiah 1:5 NAS: "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."

(2) and on coming to Christ, Galatians 1:15-17 NAS: "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, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus."

3. *we have received grace and apostleship* — verse 5

a. one of first acts of risen Lord was to bestow His Spirit and His *grace* on His chosen ... witnesses and Paul understood why he was saved ... it was to serve

b. Paul also understood why and where he was to serve

- (A) that people might be brought "to the obedience of faith"
- (B) it was to be "among all nations [or, the Gentiles] which was not based on his own choice and was recognized by the council at Jerusalem, Galatians 2: 7 NAS: "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised"
- c. and Paul understood what was at stake in his ministry
 - (A) it was "for His name [or, NAS &c., His name's sake"
 - (1) the *reputation*, the glory of the name of Jesus Christ
 - (2) as Philippians 2:9 NAS: "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,"

4. how are you doing with carrying out the ministry God has given to you for His glory?

D. Priority Three: the Gospel

1. Let's briefly note why the Gospel had priority in Paul's life — and why it likewise should have priority in ours
 - a. it is the "Gospel of *God*" — verse 1
 - (A) *God* is its author, its interpreter, its subject
 - (B) it is the glad tiding of His accomplishing salvation
 - b. it was "*promised* afore [or beforehand] by His Prophets" – v2
 - (A) the entire Old Testament was spent in showing its need, its effect and its coming in words and in type
 - (B) thus Paul repels any accusation this was novel doctrine
 - (1) OT and NT not two essentially dissimilar religions
 - (2) same truth: predicted, prefigured, fulfilled
 - (C) Paul also repels accusation of opposing Moses & Prophets to reject the gospel is to reject them, John 5:39 NAS: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me;"
 - c. it is established "in the Holy *Scriptures*" — verse 2
 - (A) thus is established the inspiration of *Scriptures* — gospel based on God's true word – not oral tradition
 - d. it is the explanation of the marvellous event we celebrate at this time of year: the *Incarnation* of the Son

of God

- (A) *"which was made of the seed of David"* — verse 3
- (B) *"of thy [Abraham's] seed"* – a blessing to the Jews
- (C) *"of seed of woman"* – a blessing to all mankind
- (D) this being *"according to the flesh"*
 - (1) the Messiah was truly man; one of us
 - (2) which has tremendous implications respecting the matter of our salvation in He could take our sin
- e. it bears God signature *"by the resurrection from the dead"*
 - (A) demonstrated Jesus Christ to be person spoken of by the prophets as the Son of God
 - (1) both Peter and Paul used this truth in their preaching in the book of the Acts
 - (2) the seal to Christ's claim to be the Son of God
 - (3) His honourable reception by the Father who sent Him, furnished the most complete proof that He had faithfully fulfilled the purposes of His mission
- f. it gives to the believers a new, holy position before God in that they are *"called saints"* — verse 7
 - (A) since sin has contaminated the entire history of mankind, the transforming power of the gospel is of utmost import
 - (B) and it opens the way for God's gospel blessings ...
- g. it gives unparalleled blessings: *"grace to you, and peace"*

2. how are you doing with giving the good news — the Gospel — the priority that it warrants in your life?

E. Conclusion

1. People often get their priorities completely hay-wire:

It was 99 degrees on a September day in San Antonio, when a 10-month-old baby girl was accidentally locked inside a parked car by her aunt. Frantically the mother and aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria, while a neighbour attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. Soon the infant was turning purple and had foam on her mouth.

It had become a life-or-death situation when Fred Arriola, a wrecker driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer and smashed the back window of the car to set her free.

Was he heralded a hero? He said, "The lady was mad at me because I broke the window. I just thought, What's more important - the baby or the window?"

Sometimes priorities get out of order, and a Fred Arriola reminds us what's important. —^{3}.

2. How about you? Are you giving the proper priority to God Himself? ... to the ministry that He calls you to carry out? ... to the wonderful news of salvation through Jesus Christ?
 - a. if you haven't accept the last, you can't carry out the others
 - b. so ensure that God has full control of the rooms in your life

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Holwick” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. “The Art of Positive and Negative Preaching”, Craig Brian Larson, Leadership Magazine, winter 1995 – Holwick illustration #3090
3. “Priorities”, Ray Tiemann, Leadership Magazine summer 1990 – Holwick illustration 1907