

Romans
A Called Apostle
Romans 1:1
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C. Peter Wagner is a leading charismatic author and apologist. For thirty years he served as the professor of church growth at Fuller Seminary before retiring in 2001. In that same year of his retirement, 2001, Wagner claims that quote “the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation began.” In fact, he says, it may turn out in the long run to be more radical than the Protestant Reformation. Wagner calls this change that he is trying to produce among charismatic churches the New Apostolic Reformation. Here's how Wagner himself describes the change that is taking place. He says there is now a widespread recognition that the office of apostleship, or we could say, the office of apostle, was not just a phenomenon of the first couple of centuries of church history, but that it is also functioning in the body of Christ today.

Now there are a lot of things that I have trouble with in that statement, but don't miss the major point he's making, and that is, that just as there were apostles, bona fide apostles in the first century, there are bona fide apostles in the church today. In fact, in 2000 Wagner began to lead an organization called the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders. He became the Presiding Apostle, that was his title in that year, and he served in that role until 2009 when he became the Presiding Apostle Emeritus. Now, if you are sitting here this morning, you're thinking, you know, I think I'm called and gifted to be an apostle, there's good news for you, because you can be a part of that organization. If you live outside of North America you can join for 350 dollars a year. If you live in North America it will cost you 450 dollars a year, unless both you and your wife are apostles, in which case you can get a discount of 650 dollars a year.

Now, if this weren't so sad, it would be humorous. Not only is the idea of apostles today contrary to the Scripture, as we will see this morning, but tragically, for those who believe it, it also demeans and undermines the real authority of those who were truly apostles of Jesus Christ, like the apostle Paul. Paul begins his letter to the Romans by underscoring and emphasizing his role and office as an apostle. He emphasizes his apostolic authority.

Now let me just remind you of the flow of this first section of Romans. The first section really is the first 17 verses of the book of Romans. It consists of three simple paragraphs. In verses 1 to 7 you have Paul's basic greetings. He introduces himself. He introduces his subject. He introduces those to whom he writes. In verses 8 to 15 you have thanksgiving and prayer for the Romans, and then the third paragraph of this opening section is in verses 16 and 17 where we have a formal statement of the letter's theme. It's about the gospel. “I am not ashamed of the

gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation.” He introduces there the theme that he will unpack in the later part of this letter.

Now, this morning we continue our study of Paul's greeting in the first seven verses, which is really one long sentence in the Greek text. Let me read it for you again. Romans 1:1-7,

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

Now in this greeting Paul establishes three reasons why Romans matters, why it should matter to you. We're examining just the first of those reasons, and that is because Paul wrote it. This letter matters because of Paul and who he was. He starts with his identity, just the very first word of the letter, Paul. As Phoebe delivered this letter to the churches in Rome and as they began to unroll the scroll, the very first word they came to, Paul, would have been enough to excite their interests and to call them to read the letter.

But it's not merely because of who wrote it, but because of his credentials that this letter matters. And in verse 1 Paul lays out his credentials in three parallel descriptions. Notice them. Credential number one, “a bond-servant of Christ Jesus.” Credential number two, “called as an apostle.” And credential number three, “set apart for the gospel of God.” Now last time we examined just the first credential. He is a bondservant of Christ Jesus. Or as we noted, literally, a slave, a *doulos*, of Christ Jesus. That speaks of two distinct realities. That expression can speak generally of all believers. If you're a Christian, you are a slave of Jesus Christ. You were once a slave of sin, but you now have become a slave of Christ. But that's not really what Paul means. Certainly that's true of him. He was once an enemy of Christ and now he is His slave. But here he means it more specifically.

It is a title for one who is called as a spokesman of God. I noted to you that this exact expression, *doulos* of the Lord, is used repeatedly in the Septuagint, in the Bible of the first century, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that the apostles and Jesus used mostly when they use the Scripture. Over and over again we're told Moses was a *doulos* of God. David was a *doulos* of the Lord. The prophets were *douloi* of the Lord. So Paul's primary point here, when he says this, is that just as Moses, David, and the Old Testament prophets were servants of the Lord, he also is a servant of the Lord. He is a *doulos* of Christ Jesus. In other words, it underscores his authority to speak on behalf of God.

Now today we come to Paul's second credential. Notice again in verse 2, he is called as an apostle. Literally, it says in the Greek text, a called apostle. A called apostle. Paul not only was a servant of the Lord, authorized to speak on His behalf, he was also a called apostle. This was Paul's primary ministry credential. He begins nine of his thirteen letters by citing this fact, by asserting his authority as an apostle. So obviously this is an important concept for us to understand because this was the foundation of his authority to speak and to write and to command with the authority of Jesus Christ Himself. So we have to ask the crucial question, what is an apostle?

Well, first of all you need to understand that the English word apostle is not a translation. It is a transliteration. In other words, our translators have simply substituted the English letters for the Greek letters. The Greek word is apostolos. In English that becomes apostle, so it's not a translation, they simply brought the Greek word into English. So the question is what does it mean? Well, the verb form in Greek, apostello, means to send someone out. The noun form, apostolos, as it is here, means the one who was sent out. The word was originally used in classical Greek, before the time of the New Testament, of ships that were sent out on a specific mission. Eventually the word came to be used not of ships, but of individuals, of envoys and ambassadors, of messengers who were sent. It's in this widest sense of the word that apostle is sometimes used in the New Testament. It's used of anyone who is sent by someone else on a specific spiritual mission. For example, men like Barnabas and Titus, Epaphroditus, Apollos, Sylvanus, and Timothy, are all referred to in the New Testament as apostles in this widest, most general sense. They have been sent by someone on a particular mission. Either they were sent by their churches or they were sent by an apostle to do something in a particular church.

Let me give you a couple of examples of how this general sense is used. In John 13:16, it's the upper room discourse, Jesus talking to his disciples. He says to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master." He's just sort of giving a general principle, don't expect to be treated better than your master. A slave isn't greater than his master, and then he says this, "nor is one who is sent," literally, nor is an apostle, "greater than the one who sent him." He's saying listen, if you are sent on a specific mission, then you're not greater than the one who sent you. He's making a reference of himself as their Lord, as their Master, but he uses this general sense of the word apostle.

Another place this general sense is used is in 2 Corinthians 8:23, where Paul says, "As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren," now talking about those who served, who have been sent out by the churches "as for our brethren, they are messengers." The Greek word is the plural of apostle. They are apostles of the churches. In other words, they had been sent out on a mission by the churches, and therefore, it's appropriate to call them apostles in this general sense. In Philippians 2:25, Paul writes, "I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus." You see the church in Philippi had sent this man from their congregation, Epaphroditus, to help Paul, and he says, "I thought it necessary to send him back to you, my

brother, my fellow worker, my fellow soldier, who is also your messenger,” your apostle, “and minister to my need. In other words, you sent Epaphroditus on a specific mission to help me and therefore I call him an apostle. So understand then, this word can be used in that sort of generic, general sense of someone sent on a specific mission.

But most of the time this word apostle occurs in the New Testament, it is not used generally of a messenger. Instead, the word *apostolos*, or *apostolos*, occurs in the New Testament primarily of a unique group of men, handpicked by Christ, and placed into a specific office. Usually the word apostle refers to an office in the church. In fact, when you look at all the times this word occurs, you will find that almost entirely it refers to the twelve, and to Paul, to the twelve apostles and to Paul, the official representatives of Christ. It occurs this way ten times in the gospel, almost thirty times in Acts, more than thirty times in Paul's letters, and eight times in the rest of the New Testament.

So understand then, the apostles were in an office. They were chosen and commissioned by Christ to be his direct representatives. An apostle can act in another person's place in a way that is authoritative and legally binding, an authorized representative. Now you understand this, you, this happens maybe in your life as it does in mine. A couple of times a year I get a letter from our homeowners association. The first letter is always reminding me of my annual dues. But the second letter comes near the annual meeting. There's an annual meeting of the homeowners association to do the business of the association, and they will send this letter and they say, look, we understand you may not be able to attend the annual meeting, a lot of people don't, so please, so that we can conduct business, designate a proxy. Now what is a proxy? A proxy is simply someone you say can speak for me to the issues that come up and can vote for me. He is my official representative. That's what the apostles were. They were proxies for Jesus.

Or, think of another illustration from our culture. You can delegate power of attorney to someone. You can delegate the right for someone to act as your legal representative. You can give that person authority that's confined and defined by us for a specific matter in your life, or you can give the sort of sweeping general authority as a power of attorney for them to act in all of the financial and legal matters of your life. This is what the apostles were. They were proxies for Jesus. They had, if you will, the power of attorney to act on His behalf. And that's because they had been witnesses of His life and teaching, handpicked witnesses. John 15:27, “you will testify because you have been with Me from the beginning.” The apostles were official, handpicked, firsthand, eyewitness proxies. That's what they were. In fact it's interesting, if you read the sermons in the book of Acts, it's amazing how frequently the apostles appeal to this fact about themselves. They say, we are witnessing because Jesus picked us to be witnesses.

Now, the office of apostle was one of Christ's gifts to His church. On two occasions in the New Testament we're told that explicitly. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 we read, “And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing,

helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues,” and so forth. In other words, the apostles were one of the gifts God gave the church. Although not all spiritual gifts are offices, all offices are gifts, and in that sense, the apostles were a gift to the church. In Ephesians 4, you remember in verse 11, we’re told that Jesus gave to the church “apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastor teachers.” One of the gifts Christ gave to His church, to us, was the apostles.

Now like the Old Testament prophets, apostles spoke for God. Apostles could and did prophesy, but the office of apostle was distinct from the office of prophet, both Old and New Testament prophets. In fact, to qualify to be a New Testament apostle, for the office of apostle, you had to meet some very rigorous and unique qualifications. Let me remind you of what those qualifications were. You want to be an apostle? Here are the qualifications you have to meet. Number one, you have to be personally chosen by Jesus Christ. Turn back to Luke 6, Luke 6:12, “It was at this time that Jesus went off to the mountain,” there just outside the city of Capernaum, his hometown and ministry headquarters, “to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.” What was He praying about? Well notice what happens the next morning. Verse 13, “when day came, He called His disciples to Him,” in other words, He called the entire group of His followers. If you are a believer, if you are a follower of Christ, you are a disciple. So He calls all of His disciples to Him that were there in that vicinity, and out of them, notice verse 13, He “chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles.” Jesus selected, He chose twelve men to be His official representatives. He even gave them the title apostle.

Now this idea of their being chosen, to be an apostle you had to be chosen by Christ, is a recurring theme. In Acts 1:2 we read Christ gave “orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.” Later in Acts 1, you remember the eleven apostles after Judas’s suicide, the eleven apostles decide that based on what the Scriptures teach Judas needs to be replaced and so they convened a little counsel there, they decide they’re going to replace Judas. Acts 1:24,

they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.

So, from the Scripture they understood they needed to replace Judas, and a man is seated in that twelfth position named Matthias. But it's interesting that when the next apostle dies, in Acts 12, James, they don't move to fill his place, and as apostles continue to die they never again fill the role of an apostle. But in addition to the twelve, and in addition to Mathias, and we can even make a case, perhaps based on 1 Corinthians 15, for James the Lord 's brother, in addition to those, Christ also chose Paul to be his apostle. Look at Romans 1:1. Literally he says a called apostle. I am an apostle, and he says, I was called to that position by God.

He explains what he means by that called apostle in Galatians 1. If you notice Galatians 1:1, he says “Paul, an apostle,” and here he explains it, “not sent from men, nor through the agency of

man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead.” Now Paul makes some amazing statements there. He says listen, I am not a self-appointed apostle. Secondly, I am not appointed by the other apostles. Thirdly, I'm not appointed by any group of men whatsoever. But instead, fourthly, I am an apostle who had been put in that position by two people, God the Father and Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:1, Paul says, “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” I am an apostle, he says, by a divine decision. So Christ then chose Paul to be an apostle, and therefore Paul meets very clearly, this first qualification to be an apostle. He was personally chosen by Christ for this position.

There's a second qualification if you want to be an apostle, and that is you had to be taught directly by Christ. You had to be taught directly by Christ. In Romans, or excuse me, in Acts 1:21-22, as they're contemplating the replacement for Judas, they lay down the sort of qualifications, in Acts 1:21,

Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us - beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us - one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

In other words, this man has to have been taught, has to have been instructed, by Christ, to have been disciplined by Christ Himself. You say, well, how does Paul meet that qualification? Turn to Galatians 1. Galatians 1. Paul is eager to make this point to us. Galatians 1:11, “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.” It didn't originate with man, “For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” In verse 15,

But when God, who had set me apart even for my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so 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 be taught by the other apostles; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. But even then I didn't see any of the other apostles except for James, the Lord 's brother.

No what is Paul saying here? He's saying, listen, understand that the message that I preach didn't originate with me, nor was I taught it by the other apostles. Instead, I learned it directly from Christ Himself. Now, in what sense was Paul taught by Jesus? I think there are two ways we can answer that. The first and most obvious is on the Damascus Road. You remember that as a Pharisee Paul had been taught the entire Old Testament. In fact, he probably memorized large portions of it. But he didn't connect all the dots, all the planets weren't aligned. He didn't understand it. You know, the things of the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned. He didn't get

it. But when Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, through that revelation of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit, everything he knew from the Scriptures came together, fit together. All the planets aligned and he got it. Paul's mind was illumined and he understood the truth of the Old Testament in its entirety for the first time. So we can say that he was taught by Jesus in that Damascus Road experience, but I think it means more than that, because clearly, Paul received other truth from Christ by direct revelation other than on the Damascus road.

There are a number of times that he refers to that in the New Testament. Let me give you one example. In 1 Corinthians 11:23 Paul is laying out the command about the Lord's Table. Now Paul was not at the Last Supper, obviously, and he's the first one to write of all the, even of the gospel writers, Paul is the first one to write about what happened at the Last Supper. So how did he know? Well, listen to what he said. He said, "For I received from the Lord," 1 Corinthians 11:23, "what I also delivered to you." So clearly, Paul was taught by Christ, not only on the Damascus Road when it all came together, but in an ongoing way he received direct revelation from the Lord. So Paul then was taught directly by Christ in ways the other apostles had been, but none of us ever are. So Paul met this qualification for an apostle as well, and not merely by his own testimony, but remember in Galatians 2:9, the other apostles weighed in and said yes, that's true.

There is a third qualification to be apostle, you had to have seen the risen Christ. In Acts 1:22, when they're selecting Judas's replacement, they say "one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." He had to have witnessed the resurrected Christ. Paul saw the resurrected Christ. It's recorded, of course, historically for us in Acts 9. But I want you to look with me at Paul's commentary on that event. Turn to Acts 22. Acts 22, and notice verse 12. He's retelling the story here in front of a crowd at the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, and he refers to the fact, you remember that after the events on the Damascus Road he, verse eleven, was led by the hand of those were with him. He came into Damascus and then, verse twelve of Acts 22,

A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, [*in Damascus*], came to me and standing near to me, said "Brother Saul receive your sight!" And at that very time I looked up at him.

And this is what Ananias said to Paul,

The God of our fathers has appointed you, [*now watch what God has appointed Paul to,*] to know His will and, [*watch this*], to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.

Turn over to Acts 26. Paul in his testimony in his defense before Agrippa comes back to this theme in verse 15, "And I said," there on the Damascus Road, "Who are you, Lord?" And the

Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’” And now notice what Jesus says to Paul in verse 16, “But get up 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 to the things in which I will appear to you” in the future.

You see what happened? On the Damascus road, get this clear your mind, on the Damascus Road Paul did not see a vision of Christ. He didn't have some experience inside of his head. He actually saw with his physical eyes the resurrected body of Jesus Christ. Later he comes back to this theme amazed at it. In 1 Corinthians 9:1 he says, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” 1 Corinthians 15:8, and he’s talking about the witnesses of the resurrection, he says, “last of all, as to one untimely born, Christ appeared to me also.” I was a witness Paul says, of the resurrected Christ. I actually saw Him with my eyes. That's an amazing claim. He’s saying Jesus decided to show up and to let me actually see Him. Paul had seen the risen Christ, and therefore he was qualified to be an apostle.

There was a fourth qualification to be an apostle, you had to confirm your calling through the miraculous gifts of an apostle. Jesus gave miraculous powers and authority to the twelve. In Matthew 10:1-2,

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now these are the twelve apostles.

Later, the writer of Hebrews, in Hebrews 2:3-4, wants to remind us of those miraculous powers the apostles were given, and he writes this,

the message of salvation was confirmed to us by those who heard, [*that is, through the apostles,*] God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.

Paul was enabled to confirm that he was called as an apostle by miraculous gifts. He speaks in 2 Corinthians 12:12, “The signs of a true apostle I performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.” Paul says to the Corinthians, listen, you have no reason to doubt that I'm an apostle; God gave me miraculous powers to show that that's who I am. Now I want you to understand that God intended the miraculous gifts that accompanied the apostles to confirm that they were the genuine instruments of revelation, that they really were apostles.

Now look again at those four qualifications that you’ve jotted in your notes. Remind yourself of those four qualifications. There has been no one since Paul who has met those qualifications. There are no apostles today. There is no such thing as apostolic succession, whether you're talking about the bishops and popes of the Roman Catholic Church or whether you’re talking about the so-called apostles of the New Apostolic Reformation in the charismatic movement.

Lately I've been writing a response, there's a man on the Internet who, in England, who wrote a rebuttal to my case for cessationism at the Strange Fire conference, and his is one of the more rational and reasoned responses that are out there, and so Grace to You has asked me to respond to it, and I've been writing a response that will soon be published out on the Internet. But he wants to argue that there is sort of a second tier apostle. Listen, the idea that there is another church office called apostle, but that isn't at the same level as the twelve or as Paul, a kind of apostle second class, is a modern charismatic invention that cannot be found in the Scripture.

According to Paul, the apostles, along with the New Testament prophets, were the foundation of the Church. Ephesians 2:20, the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone." Folks, you only lay the foundation once and you do it at the beginning. That's the reason that image is used. Paul was part of that foundation. He was a called apostle. He was personally chosen by Christ. He was taught directly by Christ. He saw the risen Christ. He was confirmed to be an apostle by being enabled to work miracles, the true signs of an apostle. He was an apostle. Now you understand why he begins his letters by saying I am a called apostle, listen to me.

There's a third credential that Paul reminds us of back in Romans one. Notice Romans 1:1. He says he was "set apart for the gospel." He was "set apart for the gospel." The Greek word translated "set apart" means to separate or to select one from among others. It's used, for example, in Acts 13:2 where the Holy Spirit told the believers in Antioch, to "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." They were to be set apart from the rest of the people for a special mission. Paul was set apart for a special mission. I think, as he refers to himself this way, his minds going back to a very familiar Old Testament text, Jeremiah 1:5, where the Lord says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you," I set you apart, "I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." In the same way that God had set Jeremiah apart, He set Paul apart for a special ministry, and that ministry was the gospel. We will talk more about the gospel, Lord willing, next week.

But notice how Paul describes this being set apart in Galatians 1:15. I read it a moment ago, but let me reread it to you. "God set me apart even from my mother 's womb." That's what he's saying, God set me apart from my mother 's womb for the mission of the gospel. You know, it's interesting, the wordplay that Paul makes here. We can't be sure that it was intentional, but I really believe that it was. The word Pharisee, remember Paul was a Pharisee before his conversion, the word Pharisee means what? One set apart. So, before his conversion Paul set himself apart from sinners in the Jewish community and especially from Gentiles, he set himself apart. But now Christ has set Paul apart to the Gentiles, to take the gospel to them. Our God has an amazing sense of humor, and this would be one of those examples.

But you know, this expression that Paul had been set apart to the gospel reminds us, reminds us all, that although we are not set apart in the same sense as Paul, he had a unique gifting, a unique calling, Christ has in the widest sense set us all apart for the gospel. If you're a Christian you are called to gospel ministry. We are commanded to share the gospel with everyone. That's your job and not just my job. You've been commanded to evangelize. In fact, let me put it as bluntly to you as I've had put it to myself this week. If you are not sharing the gospel of Christ with others, you are disobeying your Lord. It's just that simple. There's also in this expression, set apart for the gospel, a remarkable encouragement. Listen to me for a moment, think about what Paul said, I was set apart from the womb to this calling. While you weren't set apart for a specific ministry role in the way Paul was, as believers we were all set apart from the womb to be His.

God knew you before you were ever in your mother's womb. He knew you before the foundation of the world. He knew you personally by name, individually, He knew everything about you, and before the foundation of the world He chose you, and He wrote your name in the Lamb's book of life. That's why when we get to chapter nine and Paul talks about election, this is personal. Just like with Jacob, He chose you when you were still in the womb and had done nothing good or bad. In fact, we can go back a lot farther than that. In Ephesians 1:4, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." There is nothing more wonderful, more compelling, more life changing, than the knowledge that in eternity past God set his electing love upon you and made you his own. In time, He knew you when you were born. Listen he knew you when you were still in your mother's womb. He knew you at the moment of birth. He knew you in those years when you were wandering everywhere but to Him. But He knew you because He knew that the time would come when through the gospel He would call you to Himself.

So, look at Romans 1:1. There they are, Paul's three great credentials. A bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. So what are the implications of those credentials? Why should they matter? Why have we taken time to unpack them? Because his credentials mean that Christ chose him and authorized him to speak on His behalf. What you read from the pen of Paul actually came directly from Christ Himself through His handpicked official representative. The apostle had the full authority of the one who sent him in whatever he spoke and whatever he wrote.

Now maybe you have a Bible, and it's okay if you do, but maybe you have a Bible that is a red letter edition. In the Gospels everything Christ said is in red letters. Frankly, I hate that, and here's why I hate it, because it communicates something that isn't true. It communicates that Christ is speaking when the red letters show up, but He isn't speaking anywhere else. Listen, Christ knows nothing of that. In fact, when Paul begins his letters, an apostle of Jesus Christ, he is saying Christ is speaking.

What an apostle wrote is Scripture and is universally binding on every disciple of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther put it this way, “We should indeed receive every servant of God with respect as one who does the work of the Lord among us, but much more so an apostle. He is the highest ambassador of the Lord and the greatest messenger of the Lord of hosts, Jesus Christ.” Listen, whatever the apostles write, you’re bound to obey. 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul says, “If anyone thinks he is spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.” 2 Corinthians 13:10, “I am writing these things in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “We thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which performs its work in you who believe.” In 2 Peter 3 Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture. Why should we spend the next few years studying the book of Romans, this letter that Paul wrote? Because it comes in the pen of Paul? Yes and no. Understand it didn't originate with Paul. The ultimate source is the Lord himself. Paul was simply a proxy for Jesus, His official representative.

Now you're here to hear the book of Romans. So I know you believe this in theory, but I want you to ask yourself this question, do you really believe that in the words you read in Romans 1:1 and throughout this book, when Paul writes Christ speaks? Christ appointed him to write this letter and even the specific words Paul chose were the words the Spirit of Christ in him wanted Paul to choose, is that how you think of the Bible? We must approach this letter without our own little pet ideas. We must sit, we must all sit in humble submission at the feet of the official proxy that Jesus Himself chose and taught, and we must listen and obey what we find here as though Christ Himself were speaking - because He is. Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ, a called apostle.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You for the straightforward clarity of Your word. Thank you that You sovereignly selected, You and Your Son, selected the men who would give us the New Testament, or under whose leadership it would be written. We thank you for Paul. We thank you for the book of Romans. Lord remind us that although we live in an age that hates to speak with authority and hates one who speaks with authority, that Paul does. He speaks with Your own divine authority, and every word he writes are Your words to us. May we humble ourselves and sit under Your word, submit our thinking and our behavior to this letter.

Father as Paul unfolds the truth of the gospel, may we embrace the gospel that he taught. As he unfolds the realities of how a man is sanctified, may we embrace the path of sanctification he lays down. As we study the doctrine of election, may we embrace what Paul teaches us from Your own mouth. As we come to the second half of this letter and we're reminded of the hard things we're commanded to do, may we bow our hearts in glad submission to what we learn. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.