

Leverage Your Life Part 1

Set Apart

Romans 1:1-7

Memory Verses: Romans 1:1

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

How might you describe the Christian life? Would you say it is a life lived according to a specific set of standards? Would you say it is a religious life based upon the rules of the Bible? Would you say it is a mindset of righteousness? Or perhaps you might describe it as a sacrificial lifestyle where serving others is of the utmost importance. Maybe Christianity is defined by your denominational background or your traditions. I've always done it this way and thus that is what it means to be Christian. Or maybe it is simply a personal lifestyle that is different and defined differently for everyone.

Don't you think it is important to know? Don't you think that if you call yourself a Christian that you know what definitively what it means to be a Christian? Shouldn't this be something you can easily and quickly define and share? I'm a Christian and that means... But guess what? For the most part, people who say they are Christians can't define what it means to be a Christian. In the most recent study available from Arizona Christian University a survey was given to over 1000 people. Of those 1000 people 69% self-identified as Christian. Yet when asked to explain what that meant only 4% could lay out a biblical worldview that correctly defined core Christian beliefs. For example, the most popular answer as to what it meant to be a Christian was, "be a good person." The second, "go to church." In another survey conducted by Lifeway Research in 2022 only 9% of people claiming to be Christians said something about "accepting Jesus as Savior."

So what do we do with this? What do I do with this as your pastor? Simple. It is my job and the job of our Elders to make sure you clearly understand what it means to be a Christian. And if that is our goal then we need to look to the scriptures. And that means looking at the book of the Bible which best defines what it means to be a Christian. And that book is Romans; possibly the most important book in the Bible. And that's not my opinion. This is the opinion of some of the greatest theologians of all time. Martin Luther said, "this epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy that every Christian should know it word for word and occupy themselves with it everyday. John Calvin said that "if a man understands it, he may judge of all matters of religion." Charles Spurgeon called it the "very essence of Christianity." Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it "is the profoundest thing ever

written. It is the masterpiece of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." John Darby said it "is the foundation of all Christian doctrine." The book of Romans is essentially the Mount Everest of Scripture. It is the constitution of the Christian faith. It gives us everything to understand what to believe and why.

It was written by the Apostle Paul, from Corinth, around AD 57, to the divided church of Rome. Paul had never visited Rome before and we don't know who planted the church in Rome. Most likely, the Roman church was started by a group of believers who migrated to Rome after Pentecost. Regardless, the church was new and still struggling to find their footing and were still fighting over Jewish and Gentile cultural issues. Paul has heard of this from his friends in the Roman church and sends this lengthy letter to try to offer doctrinal stability and unity through teaching on sin, salvation, sanctification, sovereignty, service, and much more. The thread running through all of this, the heartbeat of Paul's message, is this... The gospel doesn't just save your soul: it claims your life. It orders it, shapes it, sends it, and leverages it.

This year we are going to be reading through this amazing book, verse by verse, and exploring its many themes and teachings and when it is all said and done, we will know exactly what being a Christian means. But I don't want you to have to wait a year to hear the punchline. So here it is from the get go! Christianity is: "Leveraging who we are and what we've been given for the sake of the Gospel, wherever we are and wherever God takes us." The first 18 verses of this book serve as an introduction on why we are to leverage our lives for the Gospel. And so for the next three weeks we will walk through the introduction of Romans and get acquainted with our theme for the year, "leverage your life." Let's begin by reading our passage for the day in Romans 1:1-7 and see what it means to have a leveraged life by being set apart for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The main point this morning is... If we are to leverage our lives for the Gospel we must first surrender to the Gospel.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

If we are to leverage our lives for the Gospel, the first thing we need to see here is that We Must Be Set Apart In Our Identity.

Let's talk a bit about leverage. When I say that we must leverage our lives for the Gospel, do you understand what I mean? Leverage has two different definitions that help us understand what it means to live for Christ. First, leverage means the exertion of force by means of a lever. A lever is a tool that can be used to exert greater force on an object. For example, when Steve and I were in Mountain City, TN we had to remove a lot of nails from an old porch. They were stuck in there good and a regular hammer claw wouldn't get the job done. So we got these very long crowbars to get the nails out. The longer the crowbar, the more leverage, the easier to

remove the nails. In the Christian life we are crowbars sent to release people from the bondage of their sins with the Gospel and for the glory of God. Secondly, leverage is a financial term meaning to use the assets of a company for maximum advantage and greater wealth. As believers it is our responsibility to live lives that leverage everything we have to see people come to Christ and bring God glory. Everything God has given us is to be used for the express purpose of bringing the Gospel to those who don't have it and to increase the kingdom of God and his glory here on Earth.

What has he given you that you can leverage for the Gospel? Has he given you wealth? Resources? Vehicles? Savings accounts? Health? Abilities? Talents? Creativity? Ideas? Spiritual Gifts? Houses? Skills? Connections? The Holy Spirit? Theological learning? Yes he has! He has given to you a measure of all of these things to a degree... and they aren't just for you to enjoy... they are for you to use for God. He wants you to take all of that and create an extremely long and powerful crow bar to advance the Gospel and the kingdom of God!

And how do we do that? We start by looking again at vs.1. You can't leverage your life until you know who your life belongs to. Look how Paul introduces himself. A servant. The greek word is doulos. It quite literally means a slave owned by another person. Paul literally identified himself as a slave of Christ; as someone owned by Christ. Being set apart means crossing from one place to another. You are crossing the line from one way to another way. Paul was once his own man. Now Paul has voluntarily crossed the line into another state. He has been set apart from those who think they can live however they want. Paul is owned by Christ now. He is a slave of Christ, bought by the blood of Christ, for the cause of Christ. It's like if Jesus found you on a shelf over here and picked you up and sat you on another shelf. He has set you apart from who you used to be and the world you used to live in... and given you and new life and a new way of looking at the world. Paul is not the master of his own fate anymore. His master is Jesus and he does only as he commands.

Paul is a slave of Christ... and he is called to be an apostle of Christ. Christ literally called him and drew him over to a specific mission and way of living. Paul didn't aspire to this life and this ministry... rather he was appointed to it by his Lord! Christ said, do this.. and Paul said, Thy will be done! This is identity language. Christ wants Paul to leverage everything he has and everything he is for the ministry of Christ. And so he gives Paul a completely new identity. You were once Saul... but now you are Paul. You were once a murderer of Christians but now you will lead the church. You were once a religious zealot, but now you will be a sacrificial servant. You were once free to sin, but now you are my slave in righteousness. You were once a pharisee but now you are my apostle.

Church, you are also given a new identity in Christ when you become a Christian. You are not who you used to be, you are something totally new! You are a slave of Christ and a minister of the Gospel. You are an ordinary person called into an extraordinary purpose.

And so you have to make a choice. Do you claim this new identity? Are you willing for Jesus to set you apart as a slave and minister of the Gospel? Are you willing to be his servant and he your master? Do you commit to following wherever he leads and to doing whatever he asks? Only then will you be a Christian; a follower of Christ. You can't leverage your life until you know who your life belongs to. If we are to leverage our lives for the Gospel we must first surrender to the Gospel.

We must be set apart in our identity and... We Must Be Set Apart In Our Message. Look at vs.2-4 again. Look at how Paul describes the Gospel message that he has been set apart for. This isn't a new story... this is the plan of God from the beginning of history til the end of the earth. This gospel has been promised from the beginning and shared throughout history by the prophets. This message is concerning his son. The promised messiah who has now come. He was the son of David, 100% man. He was the son of God, 100% divine. He rose from the dead, Jesus, our savior and our Lord.

This message was radically different than any other message in the Jewish, Greek, or Roman cultures of the time. The Jews thought Jesus a fraud and killed him. The Romans and Greeks had their own gods who allowed them to live in complete debauchery and sinfulness. Jesus wasn't just different, he was affront to their entire religion. To adopt this message was to be set apart from the rest of culture. This message either brought salvation or division. Life or death. In fact, this message was so important to Paul that not only did he live his life to tell it... he died for it!

If you are to leverage your life for Christ, you must also adopt this message, the Gospel, as your message. This message must become the reason you live and breathe. You are a part of this story now! A leveraged life is anchored to a bigger story than your own. Think of a relay race When the baton is passed into your hand, it doesn't matter if the race started long before you got there, you are now part of the story. The baton becomes your responsibility. God has placed the baton of the gospel in your hands. You didn't start the race, He did. But now your leg matters. Your lane matters. Your witness matters. It is your job now to carry the baton of the Gospel; the good news of a righteous king who died and rose to save rebels like us from our sin. When your life is anchored to this message, it becomes impossible to live for yourself. Will you be set apart with this message? If we are to leverage our lives for the Gospel we must first surrender to the Gospel.

We must be set apart in identity, message, and... We Must Be Set Apart In Our Mission. Look at vs.5-7 again. Notice Paul lists some of his

assesses, namely the grace of God and the calling to ministry. Apostleship here means two things. To Paul it means his authentic and specific calling as an apostle with apostolic authority and power. Only a few men in the Bible were called to the office of Apostle and there are no more after Paul and the other apostles. But it also means commission. We are all apostles in a sense that we are all called to go on mission for the sake of the Gospel. So Paul says, I have the grace of God, the power of God, the authority of God, and the calling of God on my life. I'm going to leverage these things in my life for a very specific mission. **To bring about the obedience of faith and to call all those who belong to Christ among all the nations.**

Guys, this is our mission. Not just the pastors, deacons, elders, small group leaders, super Christians, seminary professors, monks, or missionaries... No this is all of our mission! We have been set apart and called to leverage everything in our lives to see people from every nation on earth come to know Jesus as their Lord and savior. **If we are to leverage our lives for the Gospel we must first surrender to the Gospel.**

Application

So some questions have to be asked. You claim to be a Christian. What does that mean? Well, according to the passage this morning it means you must be willing to be set apart and leverage your life for the Gospel identity, message, and mission of Christ!

Conclusion

So are you willing to be set apart? Are you willing to be set apart as a slave of Christ? Are you willing to surrender the control of your life over to Christ alone? Are you willing to adopt the message of Christ as the primary message of your life? Are you willing to surrender the mission of your life over to God and follow his mission as your number one priority? Are you willing to forsake your dreams, goals, and desires, in order to share the Gospel and build the kingdom of Christ? Are you willing to leverage all that you have for the salvation of the world and the glory of Christ? If so then come on... be set apart! But if the answer is no, then you don't yet understand what it means to be a Christian. And though that's not fine, it's a start. Perhaps as we continue through this book the Spirit of God will call you to be set apart for him and you will surrender your life to him. **If we are to leverage our lives for the Gospel we must first surrender to the Gospel.**