

Serving and obeying

Romans 1:1-6 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

*1. **SHOUT-OUT** What is your understanding of a Christian's obedience to God?

Just let the group brainstorm – don't provide an answer yet. Write their answers on a flip-chart.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

Read Romans 1:1-6 to the group

*2. Paul is writing a letter to Christians in Rome. What does he tell us about himself in v1?

He is a servant of Christ Jesus (doulos = slave).

He has been called (by God) to be an apostle – apostle: Gk apostolos = messenger. Can be a general term, or a specific term, applying to those witnesses to the risen Jesus who were commissioned by Christ to spread the gospel = the 12 plus Paul, Barnabus, James etc (NBD p59). Heb 3:1 also refers to Jesus as an apostle.

He is set apart (by God and fellow believers) for the gospel of God.

*3. What do you think it means to say that you are a servant of Jesus?

Servant is used in a positive sense, not meaning drudgery or unpaid labour! It will help to think about what it means to serve Jesus – to obey him, to do what he asks me to do, to be in communication with him so that I know what he wants me to do, to put his interests above mine, to work for his benefit even at my cost, to do it his way not mine, to do all this willingly, etc.

*4. Paul paid great costs as he served Jesus – read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. How do you think he was able to face such great difficulties without going under or giving up?

Prayer, complete dependence on God, seeing God's bigger picture and knowing it was all worth it even if he couldn't quite see how in the middle of a crisis, unwavering commitment to God whatever the personal cost,

realistic assessment of the costs he might face before he got involved, etc.

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In what ways might you be able to serve Jesus in this prison?

Help the group to think of practical and achievable examples. Include serving other people, for Jesus' sake.

*5. What do you think might be the costs for you of serving Jesus? How can you be equipped to face them?

Think about realistic costs your group might face – opposition from family, friends, other prisoners, fear etc. Then think about how they can be equipped – prayer, commitment to the big picture of God's kingdom, dependence on God (not self), having insight into what costs you might face so it's not so much of a shock when it happens, having other people around you to talk to, etc.

*6. Paul has been set apart for the gospel – what does he tell us about the gospel in Romans 1:2-3?

NB Gospel = good news. The gospel is God's good news.

It was promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures (our Old Testament)

It is concerning God's Son

God's Son was a descendant of David (the most famous king in the OT. It was prophesied that the Saviour would come from David's family)

NB (v4 is not to be misread: Scripture teaches consistently that Jesus is the eternal Son of God – v4 cannot mean that Jesus was appointed Son of God. The resurrection is where we see not only that he is the Son of God, but that he is now the Son of God “*in power*”. (Keller 2014, p13).

Bible versions:

'was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,' ESV.

'who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.' NIV2011.

'and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead', AV.)

*7. **SHOUT-OUT** What do you know about the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Let the group brainstorm and write their answers down.

Then read Romans 5:8-9 to the group, and briefly explain the gospel, including the following:

God created everything – good and sinless, including people

The first people, Adam and Eve, sinned (rebelled against God) and thus sin entered the world

Sin comes from inside us, Mark 7:21-23. We are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners. We are all sinners – we all live in rebellion against God.

God is angry at sin, Romans 5:9. Death is the penalty for sin.

Jesus is the Son of God – he is actually God. He lived a life of obedience to God and he died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin, Mark 10:45.

He rose from the dead, proving that the price for sin (death) had been paid and that he had opened the way for eternal life for all who follow him.

If we repent, believe and trust in Jesus' death on our behalf, our sins have been paid for – we are forgiven and God sees in us Jesus' obedience, not our disobedience.

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Do you trust in Jesus' death to pay for your sins?

Encourage everyone to answer. Ask those who say yes to explain what difference this has made to their lives, and those who say no if they can explain what it is about the gospel that they are struggling with / find it hard to believe / trust.

Questions 8-10 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

8. **SDL** Read Romans 1:5-6. Who was Paul sent to share the gospel with?

The Gentiles – anyone who is not a Jew. Other apostles, including Peter, were sent to the Jews. (ESV says 'all the nations')

9. **SDL** What was Paul sent to call them to?

To the obedience that comes from faith for (Jesus') name's sake.

(NB ESV 'the obedience of faith', and AV, 'obedience to the faith'. Stott favours it referring to the obedience of the faithful, not to the obedience of responding in faith to the gospel (2007, p52-53)).

10. **SDL** Where does obedience to Christ come from? (v5)

Faith in Christ.

11. **SHOUT-OUT** In what way is obedience that comes from faith in Christ different to keeping God's laws because you're a 'religious person'?

Write the answers on a flipchart. It will be easier if you do one column at a time, looking for answers such as those suggested. You will probably have to prompt a lot! Ask about motivation, how easy / hard it is etc.

The obedience of faith	A religious person keeping God's laws
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Because you love God</i> • <i>Freeing – helps us to live in the way we were designed to live</i> • <i>A positive experience – done out of desire to honour Jesus and live his way</i> • <i>Done knowing that you are saved and can do nothing to add to what Jesus has done</i> • <i>Glorifies God</i> • <i>Done knowing that your broken relationship with God has been fixed</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Because you fear God</i> • <i>Restrictive – we don't really want to do it</i> • <i>A negative experience – a struggle, done from obligation</i> • <i>Done in the hope that I will please God enough that he will have mercy on me</i> • <i>May result in good behaviour but has no impact on God's mercy</i> • <i>Done because you know that all is not well between you and God and you're trying to fix that yourself by good behaviour</i>

*12. Read John 14:15 and 14:23. What does Jesus say about obedience to him? Does this surprise you?

If we love him, we will obey him. Take care that no-one misunderstands! Jesus doesn't say that he will love us if we obey him. Challenge the group about whether they had thought about this before, and how it might impact them personally.

13. Why do you think Jesus says this?

Think about how our obedience to Jesus demonstrates our love for him. Think about what our obedience shows Jesus and what it shows other people. It might help to think about what disobedience would show Jesus and other people about our love for him. If we love him, we will obey him because 1. It brings glory to his Name, 2. We love him so we want to please him by living his way, 3. Others see our obedience to Christ which can be a powerful witness, 4. We understand the depth of our sin and the depth of Jesus' sacrifice to save us from it, 5. v23 says that 'we will come to him and make our home with him' – the Holy Spirit is indwelling the believer and leading them to obey, etc.

14. How can we find out what it means to live Jesus' way?

Think of practical applications, don't just accept 'from the Bible'! E.g. group Bible study, personal Bible reading, using Bible study notes, reading / listening to the Bible with someone else, learning from more mature Christians, etc. Make sure all answers relate to the Bible – there is no other source of Jesus' words!

*15. Read Romans 1:5 again – what is the ultimate reason for our obedience to Christ?

'For his name's sake' – it's all for the honour of Christ. It's not about us getting brownie points with God (we can't) it's about bringing glory to Jesus' name.

16. Since we are all sinners, and continue to sin even after we have trusted in Jesus' death on our behalf, how do we stand with God when we fail to obey Jesus?

Our sin (past, present and future) is forgiven at the cross, but we continue to sin because we still have a sinful heart, Mark 7:21-23.

We need to carry on repenting when we sin, in the knowledge that Jesus has already died and paid for our sin, no matter how 'big' that sin seems to be. Think about why this is, since we are already forgiven: repentance means that we admit ownership of our sin as we have to admit it to ourselves in order to admit it to God, it brings us back to complete dependence on Christ's forgiveness etc. We'll look at this in more detail when we study Romans 6&7.

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Are there areas in your life where you are aware that you are being disobedient to God? What needs to happen?

Help them to think of personal examples of ongoing disobedience. Prompt if necessary, e.g. honesty, humility, false idols (money, people, addictions etc.), language, what we stick on the wall, etc.

Remind them that ongoing struggles with sin don't mean we're not saved, it means that there is an ongoing battle with sin – the Holy Spirit living in us leads us to desire to obey Christ but our sinfulness pulls us towards disobedience.

We'll learn more about this later in Romans 7.

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