

Having told us who he was (“*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus*”) and what God had done in his life (“*called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God*”), the apostle Paul now begins to explain to us what he means when he says, “*the gospel of God.*”

Remember that he is using his letter to the Romans to unify their local church for global mission through the right understanding and application of the Gospel. His explanation of the Gospel is not, therefore, unimportant. It is key.

For you and I to have any hope of being part of a unified congregation that changes the world for Christ, we must be thorough in our understanding of the Gospel. Today we see that the Gospel has always been, is, and will be His goal and purpose until the day of judgment. May His consistency in this become our consistency.

The Gospel is literally “good news.” It is not advice, a lifestyle, or even religion.¹ It is not about us, but about Jesus. Man didn’t create it (and so is not at liberty to change it) – it is God’s Gospel (verse 1). **The Gospel is announcement about what has happened.**

1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 1:2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures...

He Promised Beforehand: the Gospel Was Always God’s Plan Before the Foundation of the World

- The Gospel of salvation through grace by faith in Jesus Christ was not God’s back-up plan. It was His

¹ “The gospel centers on Jesus. It is about a person, not a concept; it is about him, not us. We never grasp the gospel until we understand that it is not fundamentally a message about our lives, dreams, or hopes. The gospel speaks about, and transforms, all of those things, but only because it isn’t about us. It is a declaration about God’s son, the man Jesus” (Tim Keller, *Romans 1-7 for You*, pgs. 12-13.

purpose from before Genesis 1:1, before creation, from all eternity.²

- “...*He [the Father] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world*” (Ephesians 1:4).
- “*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...this was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Ephesians 3:9-11).
- “...*God...has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity*” (2 Timothy 1:8,9).
- “...*you were...redeemed with...precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the*

² “...man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe. This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament; and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect” (1689 Baptist Confession, 7.2-3). Notice the span of the Gospel plan described by our Baptist forefathers: from the “eternal covenant transaction between the Father and the Son” to the Genesis 3:15 promise made “to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman” to “farther steps” (the Old Testament) to “the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament.”

*blood of Christ. For He was foreknown
before the foundation of the world”*
(1 Peter 1:18-20).

On the Day Humanity Fell

- On the day Adam and Eve broke God's Law in the garden, God gave this Gospel promise in His cursing of the serpent: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel”* (Genesis 3:15).
- The more and more I meditate on this verse through the years, the more and more I associate it with Christmas. Jesus is not conceived by the seed of a man, but is conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin (Matthew 1:18,20-23; Luke 1:26-38). He is the promised Seed of the woman of Genesis 3:15.
- The serpent is said to have its head crushed even as it strikes the Seed of the woman.³

Through Every Generation Until the First Christmas

- Luke 3:23-38 shows every generation between Adam and Christ. We are given the impression that all of the generations between Adam and Christ (the second Adam, Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21,22,45-47) had the hand of Providence on them. God used the long centuries after Adam for His purpose: bringing Christ into the world.
- Key figures throughout history knew of Christ:
 - *“The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying [in*

Genesis 12:3], *‘All the nations will be blessed in you’*” (Galatians 3:8). Add to this Jesus' statement that *“Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”* (John 8:56).

- *“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt”* (Hebrews 11:24-26).
- *“...the patriarch David...was a prophet and...he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ”* (Acts 2:39-31).

The Old Testament Background of the “Good News,” the Gospel Origin of the Word

- The verb “to bring good news” (בשר) occurs first in David's song (1 Chronicles 16:8-36) on the day the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem (verse 23).⁴
- The *“gospel of God”* is a new phrase, but is rooted in Old Testament promises:
 - Isaiah 40:9-11 (the phrase *“good news”* occurs in vs. 9). The Gospel here is the presence of the God-King Who is the great Shepherd of His sheep.
 - Isaiah 52:1-10 (the phrase *“good news”* occurs in vs. 7). The Gospel here is the God-King's powerful salvation of His people among all the nations, and a call to them to be pure and

³ Throughout Church history, many have drawn a connection between Genesis 3:15 and Jesus being crucified on top of a hill called “skull” (Matthew 27:33//Mark 15:22//Luke 23:33//John 19:17). Even as the devil is striking the Seed of the woman (crucifixion), the Seed of the woman is crushing the serpent's skull.

⁴ For other important occurrences of this verb, see Psalms 40 (vs. 9), 68 (vs. 11), and 96 (vs. 2).

holy, separate from the sinful practices of the nations from which they are saved.

- Isaiah 60:1-9 (the phrase “good news” occurs in vs. 6). The Gospel here is the pilgrimage of God’s people from among the nations to His presence to worship Him.
- Isaiah 61:1-11 (the phrase “good news” occurs in vs. 1). The Gospel here is the saving restoration accomplished by the One God has anointed with His Spirit.⁵
- Nahum 1:15. The Gospel here is a call to faithful devotion to God and a promise of deliverance from “the wicked one.”

The Gospel Promised Beforehand

There Is a Difference Between Creator and Creature

- If God had not revealed Himself to us, we would not know Him. Human beings, as creations of God, cannot know Him except by His revealing Himself to them in creation (including ourselves as His image-bearers) and, most perfectly, in Scripture.

God’s Revealing of Himself Is Grace

- God’s condescension to us is a grace. God was under no obligation to reveal Himself to a people who had rebelled against Him, but He did. The Bible in your hands is a testimony to God’s grace and goal to have a relationship with you, and the Book tells of the only way that relationship can happen – through His Son Jesus Christ (this is Good News!).

⁵ The verb “anointed” (משח) is the verb form of the noun “Messiah” (משיח). Jesus uses the Isaiah 61 text in His first sermon (Luke 4:14-30), where He claims to be the fulfillment of this O.T. Scripture. The verb “anointed” (χρίω) here is the verb form of the noun “Christ” (Χριστός). Isaiah 61 puts the good news in a trinitarian framework: the Father anoints the Son with the Spirit to accomplish salvation for His people.

The Gospel Is a Promise of God’s Action

- The verb in verse 2, “promised beforehand,” points us again back to God. I look for a lot of things when I’m reading through the Bible, but one of the main things I’m looking for are the promises. Paul tells us here that God, in the Old Testament, promised to bring about through Christ that which the “good news” (Gospel) proclaims.

The Gospel Given Through the Prophets

Who Are “the Prophets”?

- While we typically limit “Prophets” to Isaiah through Malachi in our Old Testament, consider:
 - Moses (who wrote Genesis through Deuteronomy) is called a “prophet” (Deuteronomy 18:15-18; 34:10).
 - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are called “prophets” (Psalm 105:9-15).
 - David is called a “prophet” (Acts 2:29,30).
- Even just limiting our definition of “prophets” to that section of the Old Testament from Isaiah through Malachi, the apostle Paul directly quotes the “Prophets” around 24 times. He directly quotes the Psalms 13 times and the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy) 22 times!

The Prophets to Christ: God’s Complete Revelation

- God’s revelation of Himself and His plan to save a people unto Himself is complete in the Bible’s testimony. Scripture itself reveals God’s disclosure from the Prophets to Christ:
 - “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers **in the prophets** in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us **in His Son**” (Hebrews 1:1,2).
 - “As to this salvation, **the prophets** who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the

Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Peter 1:10-12). The Old Testament “prophets” were “serving...you,” that is, Christians (note the trinitarian definition of Christians in 1:1,2).

The Importance of the Old Testament to the Church

- Jesus Himself tells us that the Old Testament is about Him (Luke 4:21; 24:25-27,44-49; John 5:39).
- Paul says the Church is “*built on the foundation of the apostles [New Testament] and prophets [Old Testament], Christ Himself being the corner stone*” (Ephesians 2:20).
- The early Church was “*continually*” devoted “*to the apostles’ teaching*” (Acts 2:42). The apostles’ writings (the New Testament) are packed with Old Testament quotes.
- We should be a people dedicated to a Christ-centered reading, study, and meditation upon the Old Testament.⁶ After all, Paul will later tell us that only those who are in Christ can actually understand the Old Testament (READ 2 Corinthians 3:14-16).

⁶ A Christ-centered reading of the Old Testament is Baptist: “All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, Who is Himself the focus of divine revelation” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, I). To make you, *any* contemporary nation, or your pet cause the focus of Scripture is to miss the point of the Bible. It makes you master of the Word. Christ is the goal of all God’s work, and is the purpose of the Bible.

The Gospel in the Holy Scriptures

The Holiness of the Scriptures

- When studying the Bible, one of the main things I do is look for patterns. In Paul’s introduction to this letter to the Romans, the idea of holiness is found three times: “...*the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy [αγίαις] Scriptures, concerning His Son...Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness [αγιωσυνης]...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints [αγιοις]*” (1:1,2,4,7). The Scriptures, the Spirit, and the people of God – all holy. Oh, how I (and you) need to become a greater student of biblical holiness! Paul can’t even introduce a letter without holiness being a thread throughout its cloth – where is it in our thinking, speech, actions, desires, and relationships?

The Gospel and the “Roman Road”

- Paul will soon describe the Gospel for which he was “*set apart*” as “*the power of God for salvation.*” This is the Gospel he wanted to preach both to Christians (1:15) and “*not where Christ was already named*” (15:20).
- Using verses in Romans, we share the need for salvation because of sin (3:23; 6:23), the gift of salvation found in Jesus Christ alone (5:8), what we must do to be saved in Christ (10:9), and the assurance of salvation in Christ (10:13). Paul was set apart for the Gospel. Are you? Have you walked down the “Roman Road” and know the salvation that comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone?

**Paul wrote his letter to the Romans
to unify the local church for global mission
through the right understanding and application
of the Gospel.**

We pray that the Holy Spirit uses it to do the same in us.