

Six Important Facts about the Gospel

Intro: In our last lesson we showed how that the word “gospel” was commonly used in the Roman world to describe the good news of a child born in the emperor’s family or the success of a military campaign. But the word “gospel” took on special meaning in Scripture. It was the word used to describe the message of Jesus and His apostles.

Paul begins the book of Romans by relating six important facts about the gospel. Let’s hear what he had to say:

“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 descendant of David according to the 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;” (Romans 1:1–6, NASB)

In this lengthy opening sentence Paul anticipates many of the key themes of his letter to the Romans and introduces to his readers to the good news which he preached.

The origin of the gospel is God.

Paul first appears not be speaking of the content of the gospel, i.e. it is a message about God, as it is a statement about its origin. It is God’s message.

In contrast to the word that went out from or concerning the emperors in Rome, Paul speaks of an *euangelion* that went forth from the king of kings, from God himself. Paul unapologetically affirms that what he preaches did not originate from any man. It was not invented by the apostles. It was not the product of human speculation. It was not one more religion to add to all the rest. It was itself in a category all its own—it is the good news that God the creator of all things wanted proclaimed to all His creation. It is God’s good news to a world lost in sin and destined for His righteous wrath.

It is this most basic conviction that stood behind Paul’s tireless efforts to teach others all over the Roman world and which should also be the driving force behind all our efforts as well. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NASB)

The attestation of the gospel is Scripture.

The gospel is the message which God promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Because the good news was in the mind of God before the creation, he could reveal His future intentions to His spokesmen who lived along before the time of Christ.

Through the prophets God gave a message to His people which they wrote down creating the OT Scriptures. Thus Paul affirms the inspiration of the OT as the word of God and not the private interpretations of men.

God promised the gospel...

In the promise to Abraham:

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.”” (Galatians 3:8, NASB)

In the types and shadows of the Law (in the animal sacrifices and festivals)

“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2:16–17, NASB)

In the predictions of the suffering and glory of the Messiah

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, 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.” (1 Peter 1:10–11, NASB)

The substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ

If we bring verses 1 and 3 together, by omitting the parenthesis of verse 2, we are left with the statement that Paul was set apart for the gospel of God regarding his Son. Later Paul would call the message he preached ‘the gospel of his Son’ (9).

God’s good news is about Jesus. His coming is the center and focus of all revelation. The OT looks forward to him; the gospels describe him; the remainder of the NT urges faith in Him and prepares for his return. Or as it has been put: The theme of the Bible is “someone--someone is coming, someone has come, someone is coming again.”

Paul reveals two essential truths about Jesus which he gives in contrast.

With reference to the flesh he is the son of David

In his earthly life he was born of woman through lineage of David.

It is not only an affirmation of his humanity, but identifies him with the many OT passages that express the prophetic hope that one of David’s descendants will once more arise to sit upon his

throne. It anticipates that Jesus is God's promised Messiah which leads to the second phrase:

With reference to the spirit of holiness he is the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.

The Greek word does not usually mean "declared" but appointed to a role or task. Paul's point is not that Jesus became the Son of God by the resurrection. His point is that the resurrection appointed Jesus to His powerful Messianic role. Paul is probably thinking of passages like Psalm 2 where God is portrayed as saying to the Messiah:

I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee. (Psalm 2:7, NASB)

Such statements were tantamount to a conferment of royal authority and power.

Thus, at the resurrection Jesus was exalted to the throne of God to rule in power over the whole creation.

Stott: It seems then that the two expressions 'according to the flesh' and 'according to the Spirit' refer not to the two natures of Jesus Christ (human and divine), but to the two stages of his ministry, pre-resurrection and post-resurrection, the first frail and the second powerful through the outpoured Spirit. So here is a balanced statement of both the humiliation and the exaltation, the weakness and the power of God's Son, his human descent traced to David, his divine sonship-in-power established by the resurrection and gift of the Spirit. Moreover, this unique person, seed of David and Son of God, weak and powerful, incarnate and exalted, is Jesus (a human, historical figure), Christ (the Messiah of Old Testament Scripture), our Lord, who owns and rules our lives. (Stott)

The scope of the gospel is all the nations

Paul now comes back from his description of the gospel to his own apostleship and writes:

Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith (5).

What then did Paul 'receive' from God through Christ? He calls it grace and apostleship, which in the context seems to mean 'the undeserved privilege of being made a disciple and an apostle.' For Paul always attributed both his salvation and his apostleship to God's gracious decision and appointment.

What the gospel makes known is that the good news of the coming Messianic king was not just for the Jewish people, but for all people including the Gentiles. Jesus wanted it proclaimed to all creation:

“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” (Mark 16:15, NASB)

It brings the blessing of righteousness through divine forgiveness to all who believe, whether Jew or Greek. As we sing: *Through one the Lord has made the race, through one has come the fall; where sin has gone must go His grace; the gospel is for all!*

The purpose of the gospel is the obedience of faith

Literally, Paul writes that he has received his apostleship ‘unto obedience of faith among all the nations’. So ‘obedience of faith’ is his definition of the response which the gospel demands.

Some consider “faith” here to be the message of the gospel, i.e. “the” faith; but the article is absent here. So though true, there may be another more likely meaning.

Some consider “faith” as the obedience God is looking for. As Jesus would say to his contemporaries, “This is the work of God that you believe on His name.”

But in view of Paul’s development in Romans, we could say that the “obedience of faith” is that obedience that results from trusting in Jesus Christ. The faith which saves is never alone as pure mental assent to truth; but is a living and active obedience to the commands of the Lord.

Paul bookends the epistle with this prologue and a similar epilogue.,

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25–27, NASB)

Both make clear that the true response to the gospel involves not only belief in the truth of its message, but also an obedient life which Paul carefully distinguishes from the concept of salvation by works.

The goal of the gospel is the honor of Christ’s name

Why did Paul desire to bring the nations to the obedience of faith? It was for the sake of the glory and honor of Christ’s name.

“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9–11, NASB)

The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate

the wrath of God, verse 18), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ. Our burning passion should be to exalt His Name among men.

Conclusion: Consider then these six fundamental truths about the gospel. Its origin is God the Father and its substance Jesus Christ his Son. Its attestation is Old Testament Scripture and its scope all the nations. Our immediate purpose in proclaiming it is to bring people to the obedience of faith, but our ultimate goal is the greater glory of the name of Jesus Christ.

Or, to simplify these truths by the use of six prepositions, we can say that the good news is the gospel of God, about Christ, according to Scripture, for the nations, unto the obedience of faith, and for the sake of the Name.

I am indebted to the late John Stott for this outline as given in his commentary, “The message of Romans: God’s good news for the world (pp. 48–54). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.