

Sermons through

ROMANS

The Ancient Paths—The Good Way

Romans 1:1b-3a

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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Romans 1:1b-3a

Paul taught that as an apostle, he was...

set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, (Romans 1:1b-3a).

Introduction

As a people grow older, they tend to call upon their years as a means to legitimize their thoughts and actions. A relatively successful engineer or physician with twenty-five years of experience may mention that number when seeking to explain to a younger colleague why theirs is the proper way to do things. Although there is something to be said for experience, the mere passage of time doesn't necessarily justify an action. Just because something is old doesn't make it right.

This, however, cannot properly be applied to religion. If a person's god happened upon history somewhere in history's midst, how can that god truly be God? People will seize upon this in their criticisms of the Christian faith; as if Christianity began two thousand years ago—this weighed against other religions that extend further back into history and, therefore, have a weightier resume'.

In Paul's opening chapters of Romans, he will be leveling the playing field of humanity in his instruction on the universal sinfulness of man from Adam on. With this, Paul will lift up the name of Christ in such a way as to reveal the universal need man has for that which only Christ can grant—that is deliverance from that sin and consequential death.

This is the “**gospel of God**” for which Paul was set apart. Note that it is the “gospel of *God*” thus maintaining our premise that Romans, although containing numerous topics, is a letter about *God*—that even the focus on the gospel here is not so much where it goes (to the ears and hearts of men) but where it’s from (*God*). Paul then points to the history of the gospel of *God* and where it is found.

...which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures (Romans 1:2)

Holy Scriptures

One thing that jumps out at us is Paul’s high estimation of the Holy Scriptures—an attribute lost in our culture and sadly, even in today’s church, which often seeks existential fulfillment over propositional truth.

We frequently go to church or the Scriptures with the hopes of acquiring serenity, motivation, encouragement, direction and consolation; and that is understandable—the law and gospel of *God* found in the Scriptures and (hopefully) preached in the church promises just those things.

But they also (at some level) promise just the opposite—promises of consternation, discouragement, pandemonium and difficulty. Is this not found in the words of *God* about Paul himself? When Ananias was unsure about Paul’s conversion, *God* assured him:

Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name (Acts 9:15, 16—parenthesis mine).

The foundation upon which we trust our souls and build our lives is found not in the cloudy instruments of human sentiment but in the defined message God has graciously deposited in His word.

So God stabilizes (if that's the correct word) the pandemonium we might experience in our circumstances, passions and psyches by informing us through His word that He has matters well in hand—from the sparrow falling to the ground (Matthew 10:29), to the decisions of kings (Proverbs 21:1).

The numerous expressions of **"peace be to you"** (Luke 24:36) spoken by the Lord along with the glorious imperative **"be anxious for nothing"** (Philippians 4:6) by Paul are not words of empty solace. We are to know amidst life's storms (storms ordained by God—**Psalm 107:23-32**) that we all well tethered—Christ being the very anchor of our soul in heaven (Hebrews 6:29). God has graciously granted us this information in His word.

It is not without warrant that we see this emphasis:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV).

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching (1 Timothy 4:13).

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17).

Paul would include his own letters in that same category:

Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge

that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:36, 37).

And what do we make of the much repeated admonition of the Lord saying **"Have you not read?"** (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31; Mark 12:26, etc.) I certainly realize that the Scriptures don't always provide the immediate entertainment and gratification found in Harry Potter or The Hunger Games, but the sound meal found in the Holy Scriptures relegates all other literature to a diet of fog. For soundness of soul and mind, we must eat well for—**"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"** (Matthew 4:4).

The Genesis of the Gospel

But perhaps more to the point is Paul's drawing of his readers to the genesis of the gospel—literally found in Genesis—the protoevangelium (first gospel) of Genesis 3:15 where God promises that the head of the serpent would be crushed by the seed of the woman.

The gospel is also seen in Noah who was **"a herald of righteousness"** (2 Peter 2:5) and an **"heir of the righteousness that comes by faith"** (Hebrews 11:7). How clear the promise of the gospel given to Abraham that in him **"all the families of the earth shall be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3) which Paul equates to justification by faith:

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8).

Add Moses:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward (Hebrews 11:24-26).

The term "Christian" was not used until the New Covenant church was well under way (Acts 11:26). But it is no stretch to call Moses a Christian—a man of faith who trusted in the promised Messiah.

The Christian faith, according to Paul, was not introduced two thousand years ago but at the very dawn of history, at the fall of man. Paul is not introducing a new religion but clarifying the promise of God from the very beginning.

Thus says the Lord: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls (Jeremiah 6:16).

This would be very significant information for a church who felt that the gentile Christians were so-to-speak Johnny-come-lately(s) to the program. God had a plan for history which was (and is) unfolding just as He determined.

"In the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4) God would keep His promises by sending His son. Why was the fullness of time two thousand years ago? We can only guess. Had God accomplished this at the dawn of history there would have been only two people to observe it. Had God done this in the modern era it would be too easy to perpetrate a hoax—Jesus came during the most powerful and oppressive government in human history (an opinion) and during an era when religion, even the true religion, had fully fallen into the hands of

Satan (John 8:44). Jesus was truly a light shining in a dark place (John 3:19-21). Still, just a guess.

As a bondservant, with the authority of an apostle set apart for the gospel and with the Scriptures in hand Paul's salutation would crescendo with the words "concerning his Son" followed by the identification of who Jesus is in the flesh and who He is declared to be according to the Spirit of holiness—that is, who He is, what He did and why this qualifies Him to call all nations to the "obedience of faith" which we will take up in our next meeting.

For now, let us again consider the words recorded in Jeremiah, along with the last sentence in the verse—the sentence I left out above.

Thus says the Lord: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it (Jeremiah 6:16).

Let us pray that by God's grace, that not be our sentiment or the sentiment of those by whom we are surrounded.

Questions for Study

1. Do the amount of years a person does something make it more or less legitimate? How does this relate to religion? Explain (page 2)?
2. Why do you think Paul calls the gospel "the gospel of God" (page 3)?
3. What do we find in the Scriptures and why is it important (pages 3, 4)?
4. Where do we first see the gospel (page 5)?
5. Did saints in the Old Testament believe in Christ? Explain and give examples (pages 5, 6)?
6. Read ahead to what Paul writes "concerning his (God's) son." Why would this qualify Jesus to call all nations to "the obedience of faith" (page 7)?