

"THE GOSPEL OF GOD"

**I. Introduction**

- A. While all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for our edification, Christians have long recognized that the epistle to the Romans holds a prominent place in the biblical canon.
1. This is confirmed by the fact that Romans was given top billing in the New Testament collection of the Pauline epistles.
  2. Even though Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 and 2 Corinthians were written before Romans, Romans was placed first in the canonical list.
  3. It was given this position because it is the most comprehensive statement of the gospel of God.
  4. The importance of Romans is also attested by the role that it has played in numerous conversions, including those of Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley.
  5. Luther said of Romans, "This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel... It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."
  6. And Calvin said, "when anyone gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."
- B. The main theme of Romans can be stated as follows: The only righteousness that we can have before God is the righteousness that comes from God in Jesus Christ, a righteousness that is bestowed by grace alone and received through faith alone.

1. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, near the end of his third missionary journey.
2. He was preparing to deliver the relief offering he had collected for the church in Jerusalem and then he hoped to travel to Rome so that he could encourage the Christians there and receive their support for a proposed missionary trip to Spain.
3. Paul wrote this letter in order to introduce himself to the Roman Christians, and he did so by setting forth his gospel.
4. As we study the opening verses of Romans today, we will consider it under three points: the ambassador of God's gospel, the content of God's gospel, and the recipients of God's gospel.

## II. The Ambassador of God's Gospel

- A. Following the literary conventions of his day, Paul begins this letter by identifying himself as its author.
  1. You may know that some people have tried to drive a wedge between Jesus and Paul.
  2. Such people claim that Jesus taught a simple message of peace and love and that Paul came along later and made Jesus into something else altogether.
  3. This theory continues to be popular, even though it was thoroughly refuted nearly one hundred years ago by J. Gresham Machen in his book *The Origin of Paul's Religion*.
  4. Paul was not the founder of the Christian religion.
  5. Paul was a disciple and servant of Jesus, and Jesus is the cornerstone upon which the Christian faith is founded.
- B. Paul refers to himself as both a servant of Christ Jesus and an apostle.

1. This is Paul's identity.
  2. The term "servant" might be better translated as "slave".
  3. It indicates Paul's total devotion to Christ.
  4. From the time of his conversion on, his life was no longer his own.
  5. He had been purchased by the precious blood of Christ, and he offered his life in service to his Lord.
- C. If you are a Christian, then the same is true of you.
1. Your life is no longer your own.
  2. You belong, body and soul, in life and in death -- to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ.
  3. Because of the mercy that he has extended to you, he calls you to offer your body as a living sacrifice to him.
  4. You are a bond-slave of Christ.
  5. This is something that you always need to keep clear in your mind.
  6. This is what will enable you to endure whatever trials and disappointments you encounter in life.
  7. It will keep your focus on doing what your heavenly Master would have you do instead of always worrying about how to get what you want in life.
- D. Paul also refers to himself as an apostle of Christ.
1. In its general sense, the word 'apostle' describes someone who has been sent by another as an authorized representative.
  2. In its more technical theological sense, the word refers to the men who were specially appointed by Christ to give the foundational

testimony upon which the church would be built.

3. Jesus commissioned his twelve disciples and Paul to serve as his apostles.
4. Because Paul is an apostle, he does not write this letter in his own name but as an officer of Christ.
5. Even though he sometimes refers to the gospel as “my gospel”, he knows that it is ultimately God’s gospel.
6. This is something that the church always needs to remember.
7. We are never free to alter God’s gospel in order to make it more palatable to the people of our culture.
8. If we do that, we are creating a gospel of our own imagining, which is no gospel at all.
9. Like Paul, we are called to bear witness to the gospel of God.

### III. The Content of God’s Gospel

- A. We turn now to the main body of our text, verses 2-5, where we find a summary of the content of God’s gospel.
  1. The first thing that Paul says about this gospel is that God promised it beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.
  2. In other words, the gospel is not a New Testament innovation.
  3. It is promised throughout the pages of the Old Testament, beginning with God’s promise to Adam and Eve that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.
  4. The entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is about the gospel.

5. This is why someone once said, 'The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.'
- B. The next thing that Paul says about God's gospel is that it is "concerning his Son."
1. The subject matter of the gospel is Jesus Christ.
  2. The gospel is not a message about who we are.
  3. It is not an adjective that modifies things that Christians seek to accomplish.
  4. It is about who Jesus is and what he has accomplished on behalf of all who will look to him in faith.
  5. We don't look within, but without, for the content of our witness-bearing.
- C. Paul says that Jesus was descended from David according to the flesh.
1. This is an important detail, because the Old Testament says that the Messiah would come from David's line.
  2. Even though Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Spirit, the fact that Joseph accepted him as his son meant that he was descended from David in a legal sense.
  3. That being said, Jesus was not merely a man.
  4. He was also declared to be the Son of God in power when the Spirit of God raised him from the dead.
  5. Of course Jesus has always existed as the Son of God, but at his resurrection he was declared the Son of God *in power*.
  6. This stands in contrast to Jesus' estate of humiliation, when he lived on this earth in the weakness of our human flesh, when his divine

glory was hidden behind the veil of his human nature.

7. That estate of humiliation came to an end when Jesus was raised from the dead.
  8. At his resurrection, God “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9–11)
- D. The next thing that Paul says about the gospel is that the task to which he has been called in his apostolic ministry is “to bring about the obedience of faith.”
1. There are several ways this phrase could be interpreted.
  2. It could mean ‘the obedience that consists in faith’, in which case Paul would be talking about faith as the obedient response to the gospel.
  3. The phrase could mean ‘the obedience that flows from faith’, in which case Paul would be talking about the obedience that is always the fruit of true faith.
  4. It could be that Paul had both of these things in mind and that he is describing the whole saving response to the gospel, which always includes faith and the fruit of obedience.
- E. The scope of Paul’s apostolic ministry is “all the nations.”
1. This is a theme that is developed all throughout this letter.
  2. The gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles.
  3. It is to be offered to all people, which means it is to be offered to your non-Christian neighbors, family members, and co-workers.

- F. The ultimate goal of Paul's apostolic ministry is "for the sake of [Christ's] name."
  - 1. Paul does not labor in order to make a name for himself.
  - 2. He labors in order to magnify the name of Christ.
  - 3. This should always be the focus of the church's ministry and of the entire Christian life.
  - 4. The chief end toward which every aspect of your life is to be oriented is the glory of God's name.

#### IV. The Recipients of God's Gospel

- A. This brings us to the last two verses of our text, where the focus is upon the recipients of God's gospel.
  - 1. Paul says that the Roman Christians are "called to belong to Jesus Christ."
  - 2. This is true of every Christian.
  - 3. There are many people in the world today who have no sense of belonging.
  - 4. They go to all sorts of lengths in order to stake out a sense of identity for themselves.
  - 5. When you have faith in Christ, you don't have to do that.
  - 6. You know who you are.
  - 7. You know that you belong to Christ.
  - 8. And that sense of belonging is what will train you "to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age". (Titus 2:12)

- B. We should also note the significance of the fact that the Christians to whom Paul originally wrote this letter lived in the city of Rome.
1. Rome was the greatest city in Paul's world.
  2. It was the capital of the empire.
  3. It was also a center for all sorts of idolatry and immorality.
  4. Sexual impurity was rampant, unwanted babies were left on rubbish heaps, people were addicted to entertainment and distraction, all sorts of manmade gods were worshipped.
  5. Does that sound familiar?
  6. The Lord took people from that debased culture and made a people set apart for himself, and he is doing the same thing in our culture today.
- C. The Christians in Rome are described by Paul as those "who are loved by God and called to be saints."
1. The text literally says, 'loved by God, called, saints.'
  2. Their identity as saints is based upon God's love and God's call.
  3. Because God graciously set his love upon them before the beginning of time, he effectually called them to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
  4. And because of the union that they have with Christ, they are now saints.
  5. Every Christian is a saint.
  6. In the Bible, the word 'saint' doesn't describe what you do but who you are, though it certainly has ramifications for what you do.



7. If you trust in Christ you have been set apart as a member of his holy people.
  8. Your calling to live a holy life is rooted in the identity that you already possess as a saint in Christ.
- D. Our passage ends with the greeting that Paul issues to these believers: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
1. This is not flowery language.
  2. It is a concise summary of this letter.
  3. ‘Grace’ is the word that describes the unmerited favor that God imparts through Christ.
  4. ‘Grace’ stands in sharp contrast to the wages that our sin-stained works earn us from God — the wages of death and hell.
  5. ‘Peace’ is the standard Jewish greeting, the Hebrew word ‘Shalom.’
  6. Through Christ we have peace with God as well as the inward sense that we are right with him.
  7. And note that these blessings of grace and peace come “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
  8. The fact that Paul sets Jesus alongside God as the source of this grace and peace is very significant.
  9. It tells us that Paul sees Jesus as fully divine.

## V. Conclusion

- A. The world has its own ideas about what constitutes good news.
1. The world offers all sorts of ways for people to find a sense of identity and all sorts of ways for people to feel good about

themselves.

2. But the gospel of God is the only thing that provides the answer to our most fundamental need: our need for grace from God so that we can have peace with God.

B. This is the message of Paul's letter to the Romans.

1. And it is a theological message, a message that needs to be carefully considered and digested by those who would enjoy its blessings.
2. Paul was a missionary, but he was never willing to set aside doctrine for practical ministry purposes.
3. For Paul, theology was the heartbeat of the church's ministry and of the Christian life.
4. As we study this great letter over the coming months, we will be digging deep in the mines of biblical doctrine.
5. May God grant that as we do so we will grow in the grace and knowledge of our precious Lord and Savior.