



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 8 Issue 35

September 6, 2009

The Gospel of God, Part 2

Context of this Epistle

Paul was a man consumed with the Lord's work. Yet he wasn't a LONE RANGER Christian. He was committed to doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way, and that "way" was through the support and prayer of the Local Church. Now in the process of doing the Lord's work, Paul was burdened with the West: SPAIN.¹

Yet this presented a problem. None of the churches which had supported him were far enough West to serve effectively as a missionary base for Spain. Radio, TV, Telephone, and Airplanes were a few years off. Thus, Spain's distance was just too far for any of his known works to help him. The only church which could serve as a missionary base was the church in Rome. But while Paul had never been there, the rumors about him most likely had. For example, James and the other Christians in Jerusalem related to Paul about the Jews in Jerusalem these words:

Acts 21:21, "And they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs."

¹ Compare Romans 15:24

Thus if Paul was going to be accepted by the Christians at Rome, he needed to show not only that what he was preaching was NOT...

- Fanciful.
- Error.
- Heresy.
- Something he had made up.

BUT TRUTH! And isn't that what we need to know today as well?

We live in a pluralistic society which when it comes to "religion" says that whatever you believe — provided you believe it — is true. In this climate, the Bible becomes just one more "avenue" to God. And yet listen, Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6).

From this there is no escaping the conclusion that ...

- The Bible is truth!
- If a teaching/philosophy doesn't agree with the Bible, it isn't true!

And yet, how can we so confidently assert this? That is the issue. Last time we saw that Paul began this letter addressing who he was: A Messenger of the Gospel of God. Today, we are going to look at Romans 1:2 where Paul establishes The Validity of His Gospel. In essence he is answering the question, "How do I know that what you are saying is true?"

The Gospel's Validity

Romans 1:1, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand..."

This is an uncommon word in the New Testament. It denotes "to promise from the beginning." The emphasis here is not on the fact that the gospel was promised, BUT that it was promised beforehand.

Now the question we naturally ask is, "When was the Gospel promised? How far back is the "beforehand" of this text?"² Notice the time frame of the gospel.

Titus 1:1-2, "Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago."

This phrase, long ages ago, literally means "before times eternal." Indeed, before the ages of time began, the Good News of God was conceived. That's pretty "beforehand!" Speaking of God,

2 Timothy 1:9, "Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works,

² See also Acts 2:23; 2 Timothy 1:9.

but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”

In theological terms we call this the Covenant of Redemption. This refers to an agreement on the part of the members of the Godhead to redeem/save a particular people before time began! How far back does the gospel go? It predates time!

1 Corinthians 2:6-7, “Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory.”

Unlike the wisdom of the rulers of this age who are passing, the Gospel was predestined “before the ages”! Speaking of Christ, ““...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...” (Ephesians 1:4).

The Gospel was not a divine afterthought, nor was it something that burst on the scene during the Roman Empire. It wasn’t a late change in God’s plan or a revision of His strategy. Rather, it is the Good News that God conceived BEFORE time began! From this we conclude with Paul that what He preached, what is in our hands this very day, is truth!

Now by way of application for us, and this is so incredible, do you understand the implication here?

If,

- The gospel was planned and conceived before time began.
- Prior to creation, the members of the Godhead covenant together to redeem a particular people.

Then we conclude that before the world began, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit had a conversation regarding the salvation of man and YOUR NAME was mentioned!

Are you special to God? Could you ever do anything to separate yourself from the love of God? Is your salvation secure? These are some of the many themes that flow from this, and which we are going to gaze upon as we work our way through this book!

The Avenue of the Gospel

But this is getting us sidetracked from Paul’s point here, the Gospel he preached is true because of its Advent! And yet, there is another reason for Paul’s assertion as seen in its avenue.

Romans 1:2b, “[speaking of “the gospel of God”] which He promised beforehand through His prophets.”

In the Old Testament a prophet was a “spokesman of God.” Thus this designation could generally apply to any one who spoke by inspiration and/or who was the interpreter of God’s will. As such this refers to the Old Testament writers in general; NOT ONLY to such men like Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, and the like, BUT ALSO Moses, Elijah, Micaiah, and Samuel, ANYONE AND EVERYONE who wrote or proclaimed God’s word.

Now at this point, it is tempting to focus on “His Prophets.” Yet this is not the focus of this statement. The emphasis rather is through: notice, Paul does not say “by” but “through.” The prophets were the agents THROUGH WHICH the Good News of God was given not “by which.” You say, “What’s the big deal?” It is everything.

A Gift

If I said, “This present was given BY Jim.” This would imply that he...

- Made it.
- Bought it, or in some way...
- Was responsible for it.

But, if I said, “This present came THROUGH Jim.” - this would imply that he simply DELIVERED it.

And that is the case when it comes to God’s word. This verse is telling us that the Gospel is a message from God given *through* man. And that is exactly what the rest of Scripture teaches.

2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God...”

The word for “inspired” is literally translated “God-breathed.” The significance of this expression is realized when you understand the nuance of “the breath of God” in the Bible. Notice, it was the breath of God that...

- Created the world, Psalm 33:6; Proverbs 18:15.
- Adorned the world with beauty, Job 26:13.
- Created man, Genesis 1:26.
- Gave man life, Genesis 2:7; Isaiah 42:5.
- Enabled man to be a thinking, moral being, Job 32:8; 33:4.
- Preserves the world, Job 37:10.
- Parted the Red Sea, Exodus 15:8.
- Preserved and protected His chosen one, 2 Samuel 22:16.
- Regenerated man, Ezekiel 37:5-10.
- Takes men from this world, Job 4:9; 15:30; Isaiah 40:7.
- Someday will destroy the world, Job 34:14.
- Will condemn and so destroy Satan, 2 Thessalonians 2:8.
- Brings judgment upon the earth, Isaiah 30:27, 33; 33:11.
- Resurrects man, Revelation 11:11.

From these passages, we understand that the “breath of God” in Scripture is synonymous with God’s almighty power! Accordingly, when Paul declared that “every Scripture,” or “all scripture” is the product of the Divine breath (is “God-breathed”) he asserted with as much energy as could be employed in human language that Scripture is the product of a specific Divine operation.

In other words, the word of God sitting in your lap this day is NOT the product of man, BUT of God! And

thus, it is reliable! We see it in 2 Peter.

2 Peter 1:21, “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

This passage was given to demonstrate the superiority of having, reading, and knowing the word of God over phenomenal experiences with the Divine.³ Peter’s point is that the word of God resting in your hands this morning is a more reliable source for truth than beholding...

- The burning bush.
- The transfiguration of Christ.
- The parting of the Red Sea.
- The ascension of our Lord into Heaven.

In other words, if you were given the choice between these supernatural events and the word of God to verify the truth of the gospel, the choice 100 times out of 100 is the word! It is more authoritative, reliable, and dependable than any experience!

Why is that? Because notice both its source and manner of giving.

2 Peter 1:21, “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will [IOW Scripture did not come because a holy man deigned to record his insights. No! Scripture came by...], but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

Truly the Bible came from God and was delivered through men whom God raised up to be His prophets.⁴ And so the Gospel of God was not...

- Something Paul made up (Galatians 1:11-12).
- A divine message polluted by man.
- The message of “a prophet.”

Rather, the Gospel is the Good News given to us BY God THROUGH man.⁵ From this we therefore conclude that the Gospel to which Paul and all Christians are bound is TRUTH!

The Attestation of the Gospel

³ Compare 2 Peter 1:16-19

⁴ Compare also 1 Peter 1:10-11. I love this passage. Far from God’s word being written by *personally* inspired men recording their visions or insights about the divine (like Mohamed, Joseph Smith, or Mary Baker Eddy), the prophets of old who recorded the word of God did so by inspiration! In fact at times they didn’t understand what God was calling them to write. Yet they nevertheless wrote according to the instruction of “the spirit of Christ within them.”

⁵ Lest any be confused on this point, understand that the process of Biblical inspiration was not akin to the process of dictation one might see between a boss and a secretary. No! We understand that Biblical Inspiration was organic- it involved the writers speaking from a life experience which was completely and totally governed by God. Berkhof put it this way, “...the Holy Spirit acted on the writers of the Bible in... harmony with the laws of their own inner being, using them just as they were, with their character and temperament, their gifts and talents, their education and culture, their vocabulary and style. The Holy Spirit illumined their minds, aided their memory, prompted them to write, repressed the influence of sin on their writings, and guided them in the expression of their thoughts even to the choice of their words” (*Summary of Christian Doctrine*, pg. 20). In other words, from the Biblical teaching on this important doctrine we understand that the Holy Spirit so acted upon man that it can be said that what is written in the Bible is absolutely and completely God’s word.

Romans 1:2c, “[again speaking of “the gospel of God”] which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures.”

Literally this reads “in holy Scriptures.” It is here without the article which stresses the character of the writings as “holy.” And what does this mean? In the Bible, to be “holy” is to be different or set apart. For example, the Bible speaks of...

- Holy Ground.
- Holy Temple.
- Holy Priests.
- Holy Spirit.
- Holy Days.

Why are all of these things considered to be “holy”? On account of their association with God, they are different from anything and everything else in this world. And that is the emphasis in our text this morning. The gospel and so the word of God is “totally different.” It is holy!

Now in what way is it “totally different?” The answer given in this epistle is that Scripture is set apart as different primarily on account NOT of its origin or manner of giving (though that is significant), BUT its message! It’s the message that makes this book special! Truly, no other religious book in the world contains a message like this one. I can say this authoritatively, even though I have not read all the religious book in the world, ONLY in this book will you read of....

- Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!
- God becoming man, dying in our place that we might live.
- A Fish — ichthus — catching fishermen, and sending them out to turn the world upside down.

Now as we consider the message of this book, notice that the focus and essence of the message of the Bible is twofold. From beginning to end, it was written to proclaim the glorious message of Christ. After reading Isaiah 61 in which a glorious promise of deliverance is recorded, Christ said this:

Luke 4:21, “Today this Scripture [which had been written about 760 plus years prior to Christ’s sermon] has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

When Isaiah penned his prophecy, he ultimately was speaking of Christ! Christ told the Jews,

John 5:39-40, “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.”

On the road to Emmaus, Christ held the following conversation with two disciples:

Luke 24:25, 27, “And He said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!’... And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

Later in the upper room, Christ continued the conversation, now with all the disciples:

Luke 24:44-48: "Now He said to them, 'These are my words which I spoke to you while I was with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."

Hebrews 1:12a, "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*..."

The implication here is radical. Everything we read in this book revolves around the person and work of Christ! That is what makes this book holy! And thus, the word of God/the gospel was given that we might become that which God intended us to be in our creation. Speaking of the word of God, David wrote this:

Psalm 19:11, "...by [it] Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

What's the "great reward" acquired by the one who keeps God's word?

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate [mature], equipped for every good work."

God's word was given that we might become mature men and women of God; the very beings the Lord intended us to be at creation. Truly, by submitting ourselves as redeemed individuals to the "teaching, reproof, correction, and training of the word," we reap the great reward promised in God's word: life; life as God intended! Thus David wrote this:

Psalm 119:103-104, "How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, *sweeter* than honey to my mouth! From Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."

The "understanding" here is not a head full of knowledge. Rather, in the Hebrew sense of the term, it is the acquiring of a mind and so a heart that loves the kingdom of God and so with joy and rejoicing dwells therein. From all of this I hope you see that the word of God/the gospel is holy! It was given that we might know Christ, and in knowing Him, we might enjoy the life for which we were created!

Accordingly, I want to encourage you with this verse. We live in a day in which RELATIVISM reigns.

- "I'm OK, You're OK!"
- "There are no absolutes."
- "What you believe is true for you, but not for me." In other words, what you believe isn't "truth."
- It's a nice principle to live by, but NOT something by which ALL should be bound.

And this movement is just another push on the part of Satan to confuse, disrupt, and mislead many. You see, Satan is a liar who works by sowing doubt when it comes to the validity of God's word.

Genesis 3:1, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said...'"

Satan twisted the truth of Scripture in his temptations against Christ.⁶ Yet, in spite of everything Satan and the world tell you, you have it on the Authority of God's Word that the Gospel of God is VALID and so TRUE!

- It was conceived before time began —as a result it is not a copy-cat!
- It was given by God through man — as a result there are no errors in it!
- It contains a message which no other religion in the world can boast: the good news of the grace of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus!

Now as you and I are convinced of the VALIDITY of the Gospel, we are immediately confronted by the QUESTION: "What then is our calling? What ought we to do with the word? We must STUDY it.

It's a shame to talk to Christians who have a more thorough grasp on...

- The BASEBALL stats.
- The SOAP OPERAS, or
- BROADWAY.

Than the content and teaching of GOD'S WORD.

How this must not be named among us! As a family of God, that which must characterize us individually, as families, and as a church is our understanding of and so our grasp on the glorious word in our laps. Listen to the calling of God that rests upon each and every one of us this day.

1 Timothy 4:7b-8, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

Does this calling characterize...

- Your walk?
- The goal and bent of your marriage?
- Your children?
- The goal and intent of your schooling?

If it doesn't, then you are settling in your life!

2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

This properly is the goal and calling of life as children of God! This therefore must be our passion and

⁶ Compare Matthew 4:5-6

goal as a covenant community! We must be faithful WITNESSES of the gospel. Listen to the account in Scripture of the siege of Samaria.

2 Kings. 7:3-9a, "Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, 'Why do we sit here until we die? If we say, "We will enter the city," then the famine is in the city and we shall die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us go over to the camp of the Arameans. If they spare us, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.' And they arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Arameans; when they came to the outskirts of the camp of the Arameans, behold, there was no one there. For the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, *even* the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, 'Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.' Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, even the camp just as it was, and fled for their life. When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they entered one tent and ate and drank, and carried from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid *them*; and they returned and entered another tent and carried from there *also*, and went and hid *them*. Then they said to one another, 'We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent...'"

Now this is a picture of us. People are dying all around us without the gospel. The very people who are made out to be our enemy, these are the ones starving to death. And we look at Scripture and see that the judgment of God is coming in which...

- Our Family.
- Our Friends.
- Our Co-workers.
- Our Neighbors.
- Our Associates.

ALL could incur the wrath of God in hell for eternity.

How can we keep silent? We who have been given such a feast in the gospel (v. 8), how can we not tell the world?

Truly on account of the VALIDITY of the Gospel, we are charged to engage the world in which we live whereby...

- Speculations might be destroyed.
- Thoughts captured by the glorious gospel of grace.
- Lives bound by the Lord of Glory.

We must BELIEVE it and so LIVE it. This truly is the greatest apologetic when it comes to our faith. It is our greatest need as God's children.

Hebrews 4:1-2, "Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us,

just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”

What a sober calling! It is not enough to just master the content of the word or to be equipped to engage the culture in which we live. We must ourselves be bound and moved by the word, the Gospel of Grace! Truly we must not be so caught up in obeying the word of God that we neglect to submit to its teaching- which is nothing less than Christ! Thus, Paul’s conviction when it came to his life and ministry was this:

1 Corinthians 9:27, “But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

Paul knew that heralding the word didn’t save him. He Himself Had To Submit To It! We see the same concern on the part of Ezra.

Ezra 7:10, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

How I pray and hope that as we mature as a congregation so also does our grasp on God’s word, its glorious message, and its life changing ministry. But all of this is but a noisy gong and clanging cymbal if we do not submit ourselves to the message of this word, the gospel of grace!

What does this look like? We’ll begin to answer that next time!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly. It is distributed via the internet.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. There is no recording for this sermon. The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows:

<http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 6, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.