

Paul and the Gospel – Part Two

Romans 1:1 – 6

“The gospel of God” (v. 1b)

What do we mean by “the gospel”?

The gospel is the good news that God – in eternal counsel as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – devised a plan to rescue sinners from God’s wrath for God’s glory.

The word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euangelion*:

Dr. Steven Lawson: “The *eu* at the beginning means ‘good.’ Someone might give a eulogy, which means ‘a good word,’ at a funeral. You can hear the Greek word *angelion* in the word angel, meaning a ‘messenger or message.’ When those two Greek words come together, the word gospel simply means ‘the good news, the good tidings, the glad tidings.’

“The gospel is the good news of salvation through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, to rescue us from the wrath of God. Romans 1:18 says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” God is angry with the wicked every day. It is through the gospel that sinners like you and I are delivered and rescued from the wrath of God. You will never hear anything better than the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not just good news, it is the greatest news that will ever enter your ear and come into your heart.”

Martin Luther: “Evangel (gospel) is a Greek word that means a good message, good tidings, good news, a good report, which one sings and tells with rejoicing. So when David overcame the huge Goliath, the good report and the comforting news came among the Jewish people that their terrible enemy had been slain, that they had been delivered, and that joy and peace had been given to them; and they sang and danced and were happy because of this.”

In first century Rome, *euangelion* would be news dispatched by a messenger from Caesar or provincial governors. In Romans 1:1, Paul is using the same terminology, but adds the qualifier “of God,” meaning that this is THE good news from the throne of God which is better than any good news from the throne of an earthly emperor or governor.

The gospel is the good news of our deliverance from destruction, of our rescue from wrath. It should cause our hearts to rise up with joy and bless the name of the Lord.

So let's break down the definition of the gospel we gave above:

"The gospel is the good news that GOD..."

God is the source of the gospel. Paul makes it clear in Galatians 1 that the gospel he preaches is "not after man" and that he did not receive it from man, but by revelation from God. [see also 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:13]

God is the initiator and executor of the gospel. He is the one who chooses us, redeems us, calls us, quickens us, forgives us, seals us, raises us, and seats us with Christ in heavenly places. There is no place for any human effort or merit in God's plan of salvation.

"...in eternal counsel as Father, Son and Holy Spirit..."

Ephesians 1:11: "...according to the counsel of his own will..."

The Father devised the plan to rescue sinners; the Son executed the plan to rescue sinners; the Holy Spirit makes the plan effective.

It is an eternal plan – that is, not an afterthought or "now that the horse has left the barn (Adam's sin)." Before a planet was created or stars were hung in place, before God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, the Holy Trinity IN ETERNITY planned God's rescue of man from his sin.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love," [Jeremiah 31:3] means that God's love for his elect has no end because it had no beginning. Just as there is no ending point to "everlasting," in the same way there is no beginning point; which is why nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! [Romans 8:31-39]

The eternal counsel of God determined that God himself in the Second Person of the Holy Trinity would take on sinful human flesh (Romans 8:3). In a body of human flesh he would perfectly obey every command of God in perfect obedience (Romans 5:19), thus earning perfect righteousness. That perfect righteousness would then be imputed to [credited to] us sinners and our sin would be imputed to Christ (Isaiah 53:5-6; 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:3-4). The Holy Spirit – working through the preaching of word of God (Romans 10:14 – 17) – causes the dead spirits of sinners to be made alive by the word (Ephesians 2:1; John 6:63), making the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross effectual for those whom God has chosen (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 5:9; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

“...devised a plan to rescue sinners...”

From Romans 1:18 – 3:19 Paul acts as a prosecuting attorney, presenting incontrovertible evidence that leads to the conclusion of Romans 3:19: all the world is guilty before God.

The trouble with our world today is that we don't have any sinners. We have people who've made mistakes. We have people who have problems. But we don't have anyone who sees themselves as a sinner.

What is a sinner? Someone who has willfully rebelled against the word, will, and law of God.

The gospel is bad news before it is good news. The bad news is Romans 3:10 – 18: “There is none righteous, no not one.” And there is not one thing that any human being can do to make themselves righteous in God's sight and to satisfy the just demands of His law.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...”

Our tendency in the modern church is to attempt to “tweak” the gospel to make it “relevant” and “palatable” to sinners because we hold the false view that we have to somehow make the gospel attractive so that THEN God can make the gospel effective. In point of fact, the gospel with its bad news of man's sin IS the starting point. No sinner understands the gospel. No sinner has the ability to respond to the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:14). Yet it is the gospel itself (which the sinner has no innate natural ability to receive) which is the operative agent. The gospel IS the power of God unto salvation – not our presentation of the gospel. The only way a spiritually dead sinner can hear the gospel is to have the gospel spoken to them. It is the gospel itself that brings the dead sinner to life, giving them the ability to hear and to respond to the message of the gospel.

“...from God's wrath...”

Because of our willful rebellion against the will, law, and word of God we are the rightful objects of God's wrath.

Our only justification is the blood of the sinless Son of God (Romans 5:9). We are saved from the wrath of God by the death of Jesus Christ in our place – in which death he absorbed every ounce of the wrath of God which we deserved.

The wrath of God is not in conflict with the love of God. No earthly father would be loving who permitted his children to persist in a lifestyle of behaviors detrimental to their welfare.

God the Father would not be love if he permitted us to remain in open rebellion to his will, law, and word without eternal consequences.

“...for His glory.”

If someone asks you why God saved you, a response of “so that I wouldn’t go to hell,” is way down on God’s list of reasons for saving you. The number one reason God saved you is for His own glory. God devised His plan to rescue sinners in order to give those rescued sinners to His Son as an eternal inheritance and reward for the Son’s obedience to the Father’s will.

Three times in Ephesians 1 Paul says that the reason God saved us so “that we should be to the praise of His glory.”

God saved you for His own glory. That seems egocentric to us. But because “in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) and because “in Him all things consist,” (Colossians 1:18) if God were not committed to His own glory, the universe would implode. Everything that exists is “from him, and through him, and to him,” (Romans 11:36) therefore God’s commitment to His own glory is for the good of all of His creatures and the created order (Romans 8:19-23).

How does Paul designate the gospel in the remainder of the letter?

Romans 1:9 – “The gospel of his Son”
Romans 1:15 – “The gospel”
Romans 1:16 – “The gospel of Christ”
Romans 2:16 – “my gospel”
Romans 10:15 – “The gospel of peace”
Romans 10:16 – “The gospel”
Romans 11:28 – “The gospel”
Romans 15:16 – “The gospel of God”
Romans 15:19 – “The gospel of Christ”
Romans 15:20 – “The gospel”
Romans 15:29 – “The gospel of Christ”
Romans 16:25 – “my gospel”

What does Paul mean by the designation “my gospel”?

Paul’s gospel is *the Gospel of God’s Son, the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of God, and THE gospel* as opposed to “another gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:1 – 12; 1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Paul does not mean “my” in the sense of origin or possession. Rather he means “my” and “our” in the sense that

- 1) the gospel has been committed to him (1 Timothy 1:11)
- 2) as it is proclaimed (preached) by him to those who hear it (2 Thessalonians 2:14).