

The Gospel of God

Romans 1

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No apology is advanced relative to the introduction of this subject, one so often referred to as "elementary," a word quite correct if used in its true place. Nothing can be more blessed, more important, or of such value as that which is "of God." Its *source* is the heart of the eternal God and, as eternal in its character, an eternity is essential for the full *results* of its objective. The charm and preciousness of its contents — the blessed God's thoughts and desires towards men — endears it and the Source from which it comes, to the hearts of those to whom it is addressed — the "beloved of God" (Romans 1: 7).

Whilst the reception of and obedience to the gospel assures our eternal salvation, it has a very definite word as to our conduct here. Romans, the great gospel Epistle, does not take us from the earth, but it has in mind the character of our whole lives here — *the true relationship of man to God*. The movement of a *holy* God towards men involves at once the revelation of His wrath against all that is offensive to Him, and in the precious glad tidings we see the way in which God Himself introduces a power, a righteousness and a love which establishes the conditions wherein man can be in peace and acceptability with Himself. In Genesis 1: 1 we see the whole Godhead (Elohim) moving in absolute unity (‘created’ is a *singular* verb) as to the creation of man. Sin (which a holy God cannot look upon) has spoiled that relationship, and now we see the whole Godhead moving in power and righteousness in the glad tidings of God with the result that man can be happily in God's presence and in the enjoyment of His love. Thus the *primary* objective of the gospel is that God thereby secures joy to Himself in the recovery of man!

The gospel is introduced as "concerning His son . . . Jesus Christ our Lord." First He is referred to as "come of David's seed." He, and He alone was capable of maintaining to the full the rights of the throne of God; He alone could give effect to the "sure mercies of David" (Isaiah 55: 3). Then, too, He is "marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness" (v. 4). Perfect, spotless, holy in His pathway, manifesting a power over death itself "by resurrection of (the) dead," and establishing in His own resurrection the basis upon which death shall no more separate man from his God — He Himself "the resurrection and the life." Every hostile feature removed, Paul can rejoice in the gospel as "God's power to salvation, to everyone that believes." The word 'power' is *dunamis*, from which we derive our word "dynamic." No other power can withstand it, and hence Paul says "I am not ashamed of the glad tidings." The Greek idiom could equally be translated "I am proud of the gospel."

"He Satan's power laid low;
Made sin, sin's reign o'erthrew;
Bow'd to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death by dying slew."

It stands related to the prophetic Scriptures (of 1 Corinthians 15) and to the "commandment of the eternal God" (1 Cor. 16: 26). Paul was "separated to it" — a word indicating the enlargement of his horizon. No longer bound by Pharisaical practices, he was ready to preach the glad tidings of God to *all* — Jew and Greek alike. "Ready" is a *militant* word. He could refer to himself at the end of his

pathway as having "combated the good combat," and would encourage Timothy to be marked as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ." How much is owing to those who have endured the hardships and sufferings of such a service! How they valued the precious gospel!

A righteous basis established, and an unassailable power manifested, God is now free to make known the fulness and blessedness of His eternal love — "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." No theory or activity of man's natural mind can effect a sphere in which these three great and blessed facts have an *abiding* place — righteousness, power and love. All are open to, and are to be enjoyed by everyone receiving God's glad tidings in *faith*. The gospel is both factual and dependable, it deals with things as they are. The fact of man's sin and departure from God is universal and has eternal consequences. The facts of the gospel are clearly defined in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15 where we have the indestructible tripod magnificent in its presentation and effect. (1) "Christ died for our sins." I am told that the death of Christ is mentioned some 175 times in the New Testament. It is the *God given fact* which deals completely with the facts of man's condition before a holy God. (2) Christ "was buried," and in the burial of that precious sinless Saviour the man so offensive to God has been put out of sight. (3) Christ was "raised from the dead" — the verb *raised* is in the perfect tense — its results can never diminish or cease. The glorious *facts* established upon this unshakeable tripod are presented to faith in the glad tidings and having received them we can say with the apostle "we have *received*", "we *stand*", "we *have salvation*. The God of our salvation is the God who says — "I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3: 6).

The reception of the Gospel by faith is the beginning of a path of untold blessedness in which the eternal thoughts of God in all their wonder and greatness may be known and enjoyed. In Acts 20 we have a *fourfold* (universal) presentation of God's thoughts expressed by Paul in his ministry to the Ephesian elders. He holds back "nothing of what is profitable" and that includes first the testimony of "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 20, 21). Thus the responsibility of *all* (both Jew and Gentile) *towards God* is stressed. He then speaks of God's attitude *towards men* — the testimony received from the Lord Jesus Himself — "the glad tidings of the grace of God." The rights of God (the kingdom) is the burden too of his testimony for without the recognition of these rights there would be no appreciation of the wonderful unfolding of the whole "Counsel of God." In Ephesians 2 he sets forth the *fourfold* way in which God moves towards us — "God . . . rich in *mercy*"; "His great *love* wherewith He loved us;" "*saved* by grace;" "the surpassing riches of His grace in His *kindness* towards us in Christ Jesus." Every attribute of the blessed God is subservient to His love, and the magnitude of His movements in infinite mercy and love, grace and kindness will be the magnificent display of His glory in the coming age.

The gospel of God is *personal*. It involves a true appreciation by faith of the atoning work of Christ and, too, a deep yea deepening sense of the infinite preciousness of His holy Person. This latter is an essential if *practical daily* salvation which is to be known and enjoyed, and moreover it is the power for testimony to others. With the question of the removal of sin in mind John Baptist speaks of Christ "coming towards him;" His *work* was in view. On the morrow he sees Him walking and in happy contemplation calls attention to His *Person*. Such testimony drew others to Christ.

Finally the gospel is marked by *finality*; and commands obedience — "the obedience of faith among all nations." In John 16 the sin for which the Holy Spirit reproves the world is unbelief in Christ — the Subject of God's glad tidings. He came into the world bringing "grace and truth" (John 1) but was refused. The dreadful consequences of persisting in this refusal and disobedience to the glad tidings of which He is the precious substance are seen in 2 Thessalonians 1. "*But* (thank God for the 'buts' of Scripture) as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to be children of God, to those

that believe on His Name." In Mark 7 religious men are seen "receiving to hold" the traditions of men. Alas! so is it in great measure today. The gospel is God's final testimony to men. Creation shows His power. The law witnesses His righteous claims. Both power and righteousness are embodied in the glad tidings — but His precious eternal love shines out in the display of His movements towards men in His Son.

The substance of the Apostle's preaching in the Acts, following the coming of the Holy Spirit, was primarily the truth of the resurrection. All blessing stands related to the risen Man in the glory. In the day of his exaltation in Egypt, Joseph was given the name `Zaphnath-paaneah'. The three meanings of that name are seen in their full blessedness in Christ — "Saviour of the world," sent as such into this world by the Father (1 John 4: 14), received as such by men (John 4: 42)! "Sustainer of life" — a subject so preciously detailed in John's gospel. "The revealer of secrets" — the eternal purpose of God, the fulness of the Father's love, all made known in Christ.

"Thou hast made known the Father, whom we've seen
In Thy blest Person — infinite delight."

With what joy the four *gospel* writers approached their task! "Book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David" — every right of God's throne maintained. Son of Abraham — every promise of God secure in Him. For the Bible student a careful reading of verse 16 and its outstanding contrast to previous verses will yield much instruction. "The glad tidings of Jesus Christ, Son of God." Precious service in humility and yet in the true dignity of Sonship. What a challenge to all *our* activities! "He has done all things well" (Mark 7) — again a perfect tense. Truly an epitome of the gospel itself — opening men's ears to hear the Word of God and opening mouths to respond in thanksgiving and praise. Luke speaking with careful accuracy relates the first recorded words of Jesus — "Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in My Father's business?" "The Father of compassion." How often we read — "He saw and had compassion." Space allows but a brief reference to John. Here we have the LOGOS — the expression of all that lay in the eternal heart of God eventuating in our present and eternal enjoyment of "life everlasting."

What dignity is put upon the glad tidings in the words of Hebrews 2, words beyond the utterances of angels — "so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord." Let us assimilate afresh the words of Christ in Luke 4 — "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed *Me to preach the gospel*". The preciousness of that which follows is beyond compare.

Elementary? Yes! Profoundly simple — but simply profound. May, under the Lord's hand, this simple word enlarge the dignity and eternal results of the gospel in all our hearts, enabling each in their own sphere to say in truth "For God is my witness, whom I serve *in my spirit* in the glad tidings of His Son."