

The Gospel Which Paul Proclaimed

The Central Message Throughout the Pauline Epistles

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, *let him be accursed.*

As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, *let him be accursed.*

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:6-12).

Paul’s use of the word “gospel,” meaning *good news*, *MUST always be understood contextually*. Paul did not use this word as it is used, almost without exception, in Christian circles today — as a reference only to the gospel of the grace of God. Rather, Paul used this word, time after time, as a reference to *the good news* which had been delivered to him by “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” following his conversion (Gal. 1:11, 12).

As will be shown, Paul used this word, *FAR, FAR more often than not*, as a reference to the main crux of his ministry — *the good news pertaining to that encompassed within the mystery*, which had been delivered to him, which he, in turn, had been called to proclaim to Christians throughout the Gentile world (Eph. 3:1-11; Col. 1:25-29). And the Christians to whom Paul ministered would have easily understood his use of the word “gospel” from the context of that which he had either said or written.

This *central thrust* of Paul's ministry becomes *self-evident* as one reads through the Book of Acts and the Pauline epistles.

Paul proclaimed both *the gospel of the grace of God* and *the gospel of the glory of Christ*, and he proclaimed the good news pertaining to *the grace of God* with a view to his then being able to proclaim the good news pertaining to *the glory of Christ*. Paul explained to individuals *HOW they could be saved*, with a view to subsequently being able to explain to them *WHY they had been saved*.

For example, note how plainly the matter is outlined in Paul's final message to the Christians in Ephesus, through their elders (Acts 20:24-32). Or, for that matter, note also how plainly the matter is outlined in Paul's epistle to the Christians in Ephesus (1:7ff; 2:1ff; 3:1ff). And a similar structure can be seen in other epistles, not only in the Pauline epistles but in the general epistles as well.

Existing Confusion

Because of the dual nature of I Cor. 15:1-4 in this respect, this passage will be used to illustrate Paul's ministry as it pertained to the gospel. This whole passage, seen below, is invariably used erroneously by Christians, not in a dual sense, but in a singular sense — as a reference *only* to the gospel of the grace of God.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:1-4).

This passage begins, not with a reference to the gospel of grace but, a reference to *the gospel of the glory of Christ* (vv. 1, 2), then briefly moves back to *the gospel of the grace of God* (v. 3), and then comes back to where it began, to *the gospel of the glory of Christ* (v. 4) — *providing the complete gospel message, covering past, present, and future aspects of salvation*.

Paul, in this passage, *began* with the central message which he had been called to proclaim; *then he briefly moved back* to the message of the gospel of the grace of God, which, of necessity, must be proclaimed *first* to the unsaved; *then he came back* to the message which was to be proclaimed to individuals once they had heard the gospel of the grace of God — *the central message which he had been called to proclaim throughout the Gentile world.*

The problem emerges when a person attempts to not only make Paul's reference to "the gospel" in verse one a reference to the gospel of the grace of God but also make that stated in *ALL* three of the continuing verses refer to the gospel of grace as well.

Verse two, as evident from a plain reading of the text, as will be shown, *CANNOT possibly have to do with the gospel of grace. NOR can that seen in verse four, the burial and resurrection of Christ, as will also be shown.*

It is the "death" of Christ *ALONE* which pertains to the gospel of the grace of God. The "burial" and "resurrection" of Christ move beyond this and have to do with things pertaining to the continuing good news, *the gospel of the glory of Christ.*

Note the type beginning in Exodus chapter twelve. "Death" *alone* is seen in this chapter. "Death" had been decreed upon the firstborn, but God provided a way for this death to be carried out in *a vicarious manner.*

And it is exactly the same today. "Death" has been decreed upon the firstborn, but God has provided a way for this death to be carried out in *a vicarious manner.*

In the type, this was done through the death of paschal lambs and the proper application of the blood from these slain lambs.

In the antitype, this is done exactly the same way. The Paschal Lamb has died in the stead of the firstborn, but the blood must be applied (through believing). The passage "from death unto life" occurs *AT THIS POINT, not beyond.*

"Burial" and "resurrection" though move beyond this in the type — the Red Sea passage (burial), and emergence from the Sea on the eastern banks (resurrection [*cf.* Ex. 14:13-15:19; I Cor. 10:2]).

And it is exactly the same in the antitype (Col. 2:12; 3:1ff).

1) I Corinthians 15:1, 2

Verses one and two refer to the good news (the gospel) which Paul had previously proclaimed to those in Corinth, which they had accepted and upon which they presently stood.

In verse two, this good news had to do with *present and future* aspects of salvation (not past, as seen in the gospel of the grace of God), it had to do with *holding fast* to that which had been proclaimed (with the possibility that there could be *loss*), and it had to do with Christians in Corinth either *believing* or *not believing* the message with reference to a *purpose (or cause)* in view.

The present and future aspects of salvation in this gospel are shown by the words, “By which also ye are saved [lit., ‘... ye are being saved’],” referring to the Christians in Corinth.

Holding fast to the message proclaimed is shown by the words, “if ye keep in memory [lit., ‘if ye hold (are holding) fast’] what I preached unto you.”

And *believing* or *not believing* the message with reference to a *purpose* in view is shown by the words, “unless ye have believed in vain [lit., ‘...believed apart from a purpose’ (or, ‘without a cause in view’)].”

The present and future aspects of salvation have to do with *the salvation of the soul* (cf. James 1:21; I Peter 1:4-9). The eternal salvation which we presently possess — *the salvation of the spirit*, wherein man passes “from death unto life” (cf. John 5:24; Eph. 2:1, 5) — places man in a position where he can realize *the salvation of his soul*.

And these two aspects of salvation *MUST always be kept completely separate, one from the other*.

The thought of Christians *holding fast* to those things in the message being proclaimed can be seen in the second and fourth warnings in the Book of Hebrews. The same word appearing in the Greek text of I Cor. 15:2 appears twice in the second warning (3:6, 14) and once in the fourth warning (10:23).

Holding fast in the second warning is with reference to “the heavenly calling” and “the hope” set before Christians (vv. 1, 6); and *holding fast* in the fourth warning is with reference to this

same hope — “the profession of our faith [*lit.*, ‘the confession of the hope’]” (vv. 23-25).

Then, the thought of Christians *believing without a purpose (or cause)* can only be a reference to the fact that a person has been saved *for a revealed purpose* — a purpose seen, in its entirety, in the gospel of the glory of Christ. And that purpose is the same as the purpose pertaining to man’s creation in the beginning — “... let them have dominion” (Gen. 1:26, 28).

Man has been saved with a view to his one day occupying *a position of power and authority with Christ in His kingdom*, which has to do with realizing the present aspect of salvation at a future date — *the salvation of one’s soul*.

Believing without a purpose (or cause) in verse two leads a person *nowhere*. An individual has been saved for a purpose, which can be seen and understood *only through believing the gospel which Paul referred to in the previous verse*; and this is a purpose which can one day be realized *only through presently governing one’s life accordingly, set forth in verse two*.

2) I Corinthians 15:3, 4

Note the way verse three begins. Paul’s statement here is not at all a continuation of the subject matter from the first two verses.

And this is really *self-explanatory*. Paul states this in so many words.

Verse three begins, “For I delivered unto you *FIRST OF ALL that which I ALSO received...*” That which he is about to reference is something which he had proclaimed unto them *FIRST* (prior to proclaiming the good news to which he had previously referred, in vv. 1, 2), and this is something which he had *also* received (that is to say, he had received this *IN ADDITION* to the good news referred to in vv. 1, 2).

The message which Paul proclaimed unto those in Corinth *FIRST* can be seen by going back to I Cor. 2:1, 2:

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

Paul, when he *first* went to Corinth, couldn't begin with a message pertaining to the gospel of the glory of Christ, referred to in I Cor. 15:1, 2 (and also in I Cor. 2:1, preceded, as in I Cor. 15:1, 2, by a proclamation of the gospel of the grace of God [2:2; 15:3]).

When Paul *first* went to Corinth, he found a city filled with unsaved Gentiles. And he *had to FIRST* minister to those in Corinth on this basis.

He *had to FIRST* proclaim the simple message pertaining to the gospel of the grace of God unto them. He *had to BEGIN* with "Jesus Christ and him crucified." He *couldn't begin* elsewhere.

But, once individuals had believed, once individuals had passed "from death unto life," *then Paul could move beyond this message.*

(Verse three, in actuality, deals with a dual aspect of the matter, seen first in the preaching of the cross to the unsaved, then to the saved [ref. the author's article, "The Preaching of the Cross"].

The word "first" [v. 3] would show that the subject matter at this point had to do with the unsaved; but the context in which verse three is placed would also show that the subject matter has to do with the saved as well.)

Paul, in the preceding respect, spent one and one-half years in Corinth "teaching the word of God among them [among those who had been saved under the preaching of the simple message pertaining to the gospel of the grace of God]" (Acts 18:11; cf. I Cor. 2:3ff).

And this is why Paul, in I Cor. 15:1, 2, could allude to these things through simply calling their attention to "*the gospel* ['*the good news*'] *which I preached unto you...*" They would know exactly what he meant, for he had previously spent *an extensive period of time* teaching them things pertaining to this gospel.

And they would *also understand* the distinction when he moved back in time and referred to that which he, of necessity, had proclaimed to them "*first of all,*" *which could only have been the gospel of the grace of God* (v. 3).

But, though moving back in this manner, Paul then came back to where he had begun — *continuing to reference things pertaining to the central message which he had been called to proclaim throughout the Gentile world* (v. 4).

(As seen, Paul, throughout his epistles to individuals and different Churches, used the word “gospel,” time after time, in a *singular respect*. Paul repeatedly used the word “gospel” to reference a message — *good news* — directed to Christians, not a message directed to the unsaved.

In this respect, it would make no sense whatsoever to see Paul opening an epistle such as his letter to the Christians in Rome by referencing the gospel of grace. Paul, opening this letter, expressed a desire to travel to Rome in order to proclaim the gospel to the recipients of his letter, the Christians in Rome, to those who had already heard and responded to the gospel of grace [vv. 7-16].

And exactly the same thing is seen in Galatians chapter one through Paul’s reference to a gospel other than the one which he had proclaimed to them. Paul thought enough of this message that he pronounced a *curse* upon any who would pervert this message, whether men or angels.

During Paul’s day, this message — this gospel, this good news — was proclaimed to Christians throughout the Churches. *This was the message of the hour, the central message proclaimed; and the contents of this message would have been familiar to practically any Christian.*

Thus, perverting this message would also have been an ever-present danger, particularly because of the central content of the message — *Christ and His co-heirs one day replacing Satan and his angels in the kingdom.*

Today though, the situation in the Churches has completely reversed itself. It would be extremely rare to even hear this message taught to Christians today. Thus, there is really no existing message to pervert.

And the vast majority of the Bible teachers of the land find themselves keeping it that way by squelching any mention of the subject, calling it heresy, etc.

The curse in Gal. 1:8, 9 has to do with those perverting an existing gospel during a past day. It will be left for the reader to make any application for those subverting a non-existing gospel during the present day [non-existing for all practical purposes].)

Paul’s Gospel, General Epistles

The epistles (Pauline and general epistles, including Hebrews) were written by at least five — probably six — different men (the author of Hebrews being unknown), and certain individual distinguishing qualities and characteristics of the writers can be seen in their writings.

In Paul's case, his extensive use of the word "gospel" — how and why he used this word — forms a major trait which makes his writings uniquely different from those of any other writer of a New Testament book.

Paul, for evident reasons, appeared almost *obsessed* with this word, using it *far more extensively* than any of the other writers. And he used the word both alone and through qualifying it various ways (e.g., "gospel," "my gospel," "gospel of God," "gospel of Christ," etc.), usually referring to the same facet of the overall gospel message, though possibly with different emphases.

Paul's writings comprise slightly less than one-third of the New Testament, but of the one hundred thirty-two times that the word "gospel" appears throughout the New Testament — in both its noun and verb forms (*euaggelion* and *euaggelizo* respectively) — almost two-thirds of these occurrences are found in the Pauline epistles.

The word appears twenty-three times in the four gospels, seventeen times in the Book of Acts, six times in the general epistles, and three times in the Book of Revelation. But Paul used the word *eighty-three times* throughout his epistles.

Why did Paul use this word so extensively? The writer of Hebrews only used the word twice; James didn't use the word at all; Peter only used the word four times; John didn't use the word in either his gospel or his epistles, though he used it three times in the Book of Revelation; and Jude didn't use the word in his epistle.

Invariably, individuals want to associate the word "gospel" with only one thing — *the good news pertaining to Christ's finished work at Calvary*. They see the word "gospel" in Scripture, and this is what invariably comes to mind (particularly in the epistles, but often in the gospels as well).

And, looking at the word after this fashion, they seek to understand about any portion of Scripture where this word appears, at least after some fashion, solely in the light of the gospel of the grace of God.

And, interpreting Scripture after this fashion, they usually end up with a perversion, for the word "gospel" is used *FAR, FAR more often than not* — particularly in the Pauline epistles — referring to good news *other than Christ's finished work at Calvary*.

And erroneously understanding the word “gospel” to refer to Christ’s finished work at Calvary, in a text where it doesn’t, will not only *do away with* that which the text does deal with but it will also often result in *a perversion* of the message pertaining to the simple gospel of the grace of God.

As previously seen, an example of this misunderstanding and misuse of the word “gospel” would be the manner in which I Cor. 15:1-4 is usually understood.

(This passage is again being referenced for two main reasons:

1. Because of the extensive misuse of this passage among Christians.
2. Because of the ease which the wording of this passage allows to illustrate the point at hand.

A main problem in so-called fundamental, evangelical circles today has to do with simply not paying proper attention to the exact wording of the text. Words have meaning; and Christians need to pay attention to words rather than gloss over them, often, through such means, making Scripture say whatever the expositor wants it to say.

And if anyone doesn’t think that the preceding is presently occurring in Christendom, actually occurring on a rather large scale, that person needs to both read some of the things being written and listen to some of the things being said out there today.

The matter at hand in I Cor. 15:1-4 is a case in point. *The waterpots MUST be filled with pure water [John 2:6, 7], not contaminated water or something other than water.)*

The word “gospel” appears in the first verse of I Cor. 15, and, as previously seen, all four opening verses are usually looked upon as referring to the same thing — the gospel of the grace of God. But both the text and the context reveal that such an interpretation is not correct at all.

Paul used the word “gospel” in connection with that which is stated in verses one, two, and four; and it is evident from the text that this has no reference to the gospel of the grace of God.

Salvation in these verses is spoken of as *an ongoing process in the lives of those to whom he was writing, the Christians in Corinth*. And this salvation, to be realized at a future date, is also spoken

of as something which *can be lost*.

NONE of this would be true relative to the gospel of the grace of God which Paul had proclaimed to them “*first*,” referred to in verse three (referred to apart from the use of the word “gospel”).

And when individuals combine these four verses and attempt to make everything pertain to the gospel of the grace of God, the truths referred to in verses one, two, and four *are ALWAYS done away with*.

And the gospel of grace, referred to in verse three, *can ONLY be corrupted* (through bringing elements from verses one, two, and four over into a message where they do not belong).

And this same thing would be true numerous places in the Pauline epistles when the exact wording of the text and the context are ignored and the word “gospel” is made to refer to something which the text doesn’t refer to at all.

Paul’s extensive use of the word “gospel,” particularly his extensive use of this word to refer to something other than the gospel of the grace of God, goes back to his experiences at the outset of his ministry.

Before Paul ever launched out on the ministry to which he had been called — *to carry the good news rejected by Israel to the Gentiles* — the Lord took him aside and taught him all the various things about the message which he was to proclaim.

And after this, as Paul went about fulfilling his calling, it was only natural for him to use the word “gospel,” meaning *good news*, to refer to the good news (which the Lord had personally taught him) which he had been called to proclaim to Christians throughout the Gentile world.

This “good news” had to do with *the mystery* revealed to Paul by the Lord (evidently after he had been taken to Arabia, then into heaven [II Cor. 12:1-7; Gal. 1:11-17]).

This “good news” had to do with believing Jews and Gentiles being placed together in “the same body” as “fellowheirs [‘joint-heirs’]” (Eph. 3:1-11); and these Jewish and Gentile believers (Christians), together, possessed the “hope” of one day occupying positions of honor and glory with Christ in “his heavenly kingdom” (cf. Col. 1:25-28; II Tim. 4:17, 18; Titus 1:2; 2:12, 13; 3:7).

(Note particularly Titus 2:13 among the previous references in connection with the misuse and abuse of Scripture by expositors these days [ref. also the indented data on p. 9 of this article].

The way Titus 2:13 is invariably interpreted throughout Christendom forms another example of what is presently occurring as Christians take a text, ignore what it clearly states, and end up essentially making the text say what they want it to say. And to see that the previous statement is quite true, one need go no further than noting what numerous Christians have been and are presently doing with this verse, *resulting in negative doctrinal repercussions throughout Christendom.*

The Book of Titus, as a whole, has to do with a facet of Paul's gospel. Throughout, the book has to do with *things surrounding Christ's return in all His glory — as stated in the book (2:13) —* which is part and parcel with being "made heirs according to the hope of eternal life [‘age-lasting life’ (the millennial age)]" (1:2; 3:7), which has to do with Christians having a part as co-heirs with Christ in that coming day.

This book *DOESN'T deal with the rapture at all.* Instead, this book deals with *events surrounding Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, events leading into the Messianic Era.*

But Titus 2:13 is almost universally taught throughout Christendom as a reference to the rapture, resulting in "that blessed hope" from the verse being extensively used as somewhat of a synonym for the rapture. In reality though, "that blessed hope" is explained in the verse itself as *Christ appearing in His glory, which occurs at the end of the Tribulation.*

Correctly translate this part of the verse, "...that blessed hope, the appearing of the glory..." In the construction of the Greek text, easily seen in the English text as well, "the appearing of the glory" is a further description of "that blessed hope." One is part and parcel with the other.

Note what glossing over this verse and ignoring the exact wording of the text, along with the context and the subject matter of the book as a whole, does to that which is actually being dealt with in the verse. Then note what this does relative to correct and/or incorrect information being extensively spread throughout Christendom. As well, note these things particularly in the light of the high premium that the Lord places on this message, a facet of Paul's gospel, being proclaimed throughout the dispensation in a completely uncorrupted form [Gal. 1:6-12].

For additional information on Titus 2:13 and the Book of Titus as a whole, refer to Appendix I, "The Hope," in the author's book, *The Rapture and Beyond.*)

Again, as previously seen, Paul referred to *the good news* which he had been called to proclaim to Christians throughout the Churches in the Gentile world, as seen in Titus or any of his other epistles, as “my gospel” (Rom. 16:25), “our gospel” (II Cor. 4:3), “the glorious gospel of Christ [*lit.*, ‘the gospel of the glory of Christ’]” (II Cor. 4:4), “the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1; II Cor. 11:7), “the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:7), etc. Then, numerous times Paul simply used the word “gospel” alone to refer to this *good news* (Rom. 1:15; Gal. 1:6).

The fact that the mystery had been revealed to Paul, with Paul called to carry this message to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2ff), is evidently the reason why he used the word “gospel” so often in his epistles. It was only *natural* for him to refer to the message which he had been called to proclaim through the use of a word which meant “good news,” for *this message was good news*.

For the unsaved, Christ’s finished work on Calvary was “good news.” As *unsaved individuals*, this was *THE BEST NEWS that they could ever hear*.

But once *they had been saved*, then they were to hear the “good news” about *why* they had been saved. And, as *saved individuals*, this was, as well, *THE BEST NEWS that they could ever hear*.

And Paul’s ministry centered around *the latter*, not the former. Paul’s ministry centered around proclaiming that which the Lord had revealed to him following his conversion, referred to as *a mystery*.

And the message contained therein dealt with the reason an individual had been saved (*cf.* Deut. 6:23); and it was *THE BEST NEWS redeemed man could ever hear, which was why Paul let NOTHING stand in the way of his proclaiming this message*.

This “good news” had to do with *the greatest thing God could offer redeemed man — positions as co-heirs with His Son, from a heavenly realm, in the coming kingdom*. To reference words which the writer of Hebrews used, it was “so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3).

And Paul’s repeated reference to the message pertaining to this offer as “good news” is one of the distinguishing characteristics of his writings.