

# The Source of the Gospel

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, well let's turn to God's Word now and to the letter of Romans. I'm looking at the first few verses of chapter 1, page 939 I think, if you have one of the visitor Bibles.

We'll be looking at these opening verses over the next few weeks I think. Willie will be taking us through these opening verses in Romans chapter 1 and this evening we're looking at verses 1 to 7.

So reading from verse 1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. May the Lord bless to us his word this evening. Do turn up Romans chapter 1 and we're looking this evening really at just two verses, these first two verses of this great letter.

[ 2 : 0 1 ]     Paul, a bond slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Well, in the mornings, we are embarking on a study of Hebrews together. It'll take us many months as we try to get to groups with the whole book. Some years back, we worked through the whole of Romans together in just that way.

We take normally quite large chunks of the text so that we can get through the whole thing, so we can get a sense of the whole picture of the message.

These are letters after all, they're not theological textbooks. So it's not always the best way to sort of just take one verse at a time. It would take a very long time if we were to take one verse at a time.

Famously, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, I think, spent 13 years every single Friday evening working through Paul's letter to the Romans. Well, we don't quite have enough time for that.

[ 3 : 0 4 ]     But of course, a book like Romans is full, isn't it, of great, great riches. And so there is real benefit sometimes in just focusing on just a few verses.

Because even in a few verses like these, there are answers to many, many great and important questions. So we're not going to spend 13 years, but we're going to spend three Sunday evenings just looking at this opening paragraph of Romans, the first six verses.

And of course, often you find in the opening paragraphs and the closing paragraphs of Paul's letters, you find the sort of compressed essence of the thread of what he's talking about all the way through the letter.

Sometimes it's a very good thing to do to just read the beginning and the end. It gives you a good sense of what's happening. You often get a kind of executive summary at the beginning and then a recap at the end.

And certainly this opening paragraph of Romans, it gives us a great deal about the gospel that Paul is taken up with all through this extraordinary letter.

[ 4 : 12 ] So we're going to focus on these few verses and ask this key question, the gospel of God, which is what he's talking about, what is it all about?

And that's a very important question today. We were touching on that this morning. Important question within the professing church, especially in our Western world, because there is so much confusion about what people actually mean by the Christian gospel.

You will not find the answer, friends, by listening to Thought for the Day on the radio in the morning. You will not find the answer, I'm afraid, tuning in to songs of praise. And nor, sadly, will you likely find the answer by listening to many of the recognized Christian leaders of national churches today.

Christmas is coming, and at Christmas, we'll have Christmas broadcasts, won't we? They'll be in the news. You'll have the words of the Pope, the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and so on.

And what you will hear them saying, I'm afraid, is largely a political message or a social message. I thank God for Her Majesty the Queen, who tends to have usually something much more worthwhile to say and always a very clear testimony, in fact, to the Lord Jesus.

[ 5 : 25 ] We should give thanks for that. But we need to find the answers to these questions, not from those who purport to speak for Christ, but those who truly do speak for Christ. And thankfully, there is no lack of clarity with the Apostle Paul.

Right here in verse 1, he is absolutely clear. Do you see? The Gospel is the Gospel of God. That's the Gospel he's talking about. That's what his whole message is about.

That's my Gospel, says Paul. He talks about it in those terms in the last chapter. It's deeply personal. My Gospel is the Gospel of God. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel.

And God's Gospel, notice here, is Paul's Gospel. Paul is God's own appointed mouthpiece to reveal to the world the truth about himself with all God's full authority.

Notice that. God set him apart to be an Apostle. Don't anybody ever say, oh, we don't need to listen to the Apostle Paul. That's just Paul's perversion of the words of Jesus.

[ 6 : 30 ] No, no. Look at verse 1. Paul, this Paul, was set apart by God for the Gospel of God. And this Gospel, what it is and what it does and what it demands is what the whole letter of Romans is all about.

And Paul's great concern in this letter, driven by the Gospel, is the global mission of the Gospel. Look at verse 5.

The Gospel is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all nations. You see, world mission, right there in the first paragraph.

You find almost the very same words at the end of the letter. Let me read them to you from chapter 16. He's talking about his Gospel, my Gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been manifested and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith unto all the nations.

See, Paul's Gospel, God's Gospel, is all about bringing the mission of Christ to all the nations. It's for everyone.

[ 7 : 50 ] It's for all the peoples, all the nations, all the cultures. It's to bring the Gentiles, he says, to obedience. The obedience of faith. And that's why two words are so very prominent, right, through the very first chapter of Romans.

The words all, or everyone, and the word gospel. You go through, like I've done, and highlight those words with one color, you'll see they come all the way through this paragraph. They come together, you see in verse 16, the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation for all, everyone who believes.

The gospel of the one true God is a gospel for all the world. And it's a gospel for all of those who would find out what it means to be truly human.

That's a big claim, isn't it? In a pluralist, multicultural world, like the first century world that Paul was speaking in and writing in. It was a pluralist world, a multicultural Roman empire.

And of course, the 21st century global village in which we live. But that is Paul's claim. And that is God's claim. And these six verses that begin Romans make that so very clear for us.

[ 9 : 09 ] Paul is preaching an unequivocal gospel. It has but one source. And that is, he says, the Holy Scriptures. And he's preaching a unique gospel.

It has one subject. That is Jesus Christ, the Lord. And he's proclaiming a universal gospel. It has one summons to all, to obedience to Jesus Christ.

And that alone is the gospel that animated, that drove his extraordinary mission to the world, right across the known world of his day.

That is the gospel that possessed him. Look at verse one. He calls himself a servant set apart for this gospel. That word servant is far too weak. The footnote there is better.

Bond servant, bond slave. The gospel of Jesus Christ, he is saying, claims absolute ownership of his whole life to that end.

[ 10 : 07 ] And likewise, it claims ownership of all people the world over for obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord and Master. It's a gospel that proclaims God as the sovereign Lord, as the Lord who commands all people everywhere to repent, that is to bow the knee to his soul lordship, to belong to him, to live under him and for him forever.

So right from the outset, you see, we have to be very clear that the Christian gospel is not, first of all, about human beings. It's not about our needs, whether they're physical needs or psychological needs, even spiritual needs.

It's the gospel of God. It's God telling us in the world who he is and what he's done and what he demands of all the world.

Whenever we meet together as a church like this, almost always there are people here who are wandering in for the first time, people here who are seeking, perhaps because you sense a need in your life or you've got questions about life or questions about the Christian faith.

You're looking for answers. You want to know about Christianity. You want to know about spirituality in general. But you see, whatever those questions might be, whatever your needs might be as you feel them to be in your life, Paul's gospel, God's gospel, God himself says to you, let me tell you about me.

[ 11 : 40 ] Let me tell you my gospel. Let me tell you where it comes from, what it concerns, what it demands because that's what you need to know. That's what you must know. That's what you've got to grapple with before any of the rest of your life is ever going to be sorted out and ever make any sense to you at all.

So first then, tonight, let's just focus on these first two verses that tell us about this unequivocal source of the true Christian gospel. Do you see, the gospel comes from God alone and it's revealed where?

In the scriptures alone. It's the gospel of God, verse 1. He himself promised it, he spoke it, you see, beforehand through his prophets in the the, the holy scriptures.

Very important. Not just any prophets, not just all prophets all over the world and not in many and varied different scriptures. Not the Koran, not the writings of the Buddha, not the Vedas of the Hindus, not the holy books of any sect or religion the world over.

No, the holy scriptures through God's prophets. That is the unique revelation of the Jewish law and the prophets, what we call the Old Testament.

[ 13 : 03 ] That is the unequivocal source of the Christian gospel. Now that's very important in our pluralistic world today.

There's no denying the fact that the Christian gospel claims an utterly unequivocal source. It claims absolute exclusivity.

it is from one source alone. Now that is very offensive, let's admit it. It's very offensive to many people today. Who would want to say, well all religions are really the same.

The different religions just give different slants, different ideas, different parts of the one story. Now central to Paul's whole message is that the gospel comes from the scriptures.

scriptures. There is only one gospel for all. There is only one salvation for all because there is only one God, not many gods. And there is only one true revelation of God.

[ 14 : 06 ] There are not many different revelations of God. In Romans 3 verse 30 he says God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles. Why? Because God is one, not many.

God is not different in every different culture and religion. God is one. That's a classic, that's a universal position of the New Testament gospel.

Let me read to you from Paul's first letter to Timothy in chapter 2. He says very much the same thing. He's saying we are to pray for those the world over because God our Savior desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Why? For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all. That's the testimony given at the proper time.

That's what I was appointed a preacher and an apostle to proclaim. And right at the start you see of this letter to the Romans he stresses that unequivocal source of the gospel.

[ 15 : 19 ] And he's doing it so that he can address head on the concerns of both Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church in Rome. And he's doing it to show them that neither one group or the other is in any way superior to the other and that both groups, indeed everyone, comes to peace with God in the same one way, on the same basis, through the same grace and mercy of God revealed in the same scriptures.

Think about what it would mean to a Jewish person, a Jewish Christian in Rome, who's in this church outnumbered by Gentile Christians, and perhaps feeling as though the whole story of their Jewish history has been set at naught and set aside and it doesn't really matter anymore.

Not at all, says Paul. No, no, no. As Jesus himself said, salvation is of the Jews. The Old Testament is not a forgotten book in the Christian church.

The scriptures that you have cherished all your life, they are the unequivocal source of my gospel. That would be a word of great comfort and encouragement to Jewish Christians, that Paul takes the Jewish scriptures so very seriously.

And of course, as you know, he devotes huge tracts of the letter to the Romans to expounding the whole story of the promise right from the beginning right back to Abraham all through chapter 4. It's all about Abraham and Abraham's faith.

[ 16 : 57 ] And then, of course, when you get to Romans 9 and 10 and 11, he's explaining Israel's vital part in the whole overarching plan of God's salvation for the whole world. He is absolutely not abolishing the law and the prophets.

No, he is preaching the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of everything that the law and the prophets spoke of, promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures.

Do we overthrow the law, the faith of our fathers by this faith, he asks in chapter 3, verse 31? By no means. We establish the law, we establish.

It's our Jewish law, it's our scriptures that proclaim Jesus Christ to the world. So it's a great comfort to the Christian believer from a Jewish background that everything that he learned in the scriptures about God was true and still is true.

But of course for that very same reason, it's also a great challenge to the Jew who loves his Old Testament scriptures. Because what Paul is saying is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is precisely not new.

[ 18 : 18 ] It's these very scriptures, it's the law and the prophets that have always borne witness to the righteousness of God through faith which is now for all who believe in Jesus Christ.

That is, it's for Jews and for Gentiles. It's for those who grew up with the knowledge and the background of the scriptures and it's for those who never had that privilege but now have been brought in to God's family of faith.

This gospel of salvation for everyone who believes it's the fulfillment says Paul of God's promises right back to Abraham. It's the very heart of the faith of Israel that now paradoxically mysteriously now Israel in the main seems to be rejecting he's saying.

And that's the tragic mystery that he's dealing with in Romans 9 to 11. You see what he's saying? He's saying that for Jews to reject the gospel is to reject their own law and prophets, their own Bibles.

In fact, it's to reject their own God. So when the chief rabbi comes on to thought for the day, well I don't listen to it now, I can't stand it anymore, but when I used to listen, the chief rabbi often gave a lot more sense than many of the Christian clerics who came on, but you have to say to the chief rabbi, it's the chief rabbi, you're rejecting your own scriptures.

[ 19 : 42 ] Because this gospel of Jesus Christ is what your own scriptures that you're devoted to announced beforehand through his prophets, the very scriptures that you so revere in your synagogue. And if you want to fulfill the law of God, if you want to truly worship the Lord, the God of Israel, you must now bow to Jesus Christ.

The gospel is not new, certainly not to faithful Israelites. The whole Old Testament speaks of me, said Jesus. Somebody's put it this way, the prophetic writings rustle with the eager whisper that deliverance would at last come for the people of God.

And all true Israelites, you see, throughout that whole Old Testament era, they knew that and they longed for that. And they therefore would rejoice and welcome the Messiah, Jesus, the Christ, when at last he came.

If they really were true believers in God and in the scriptures that God had given them. That's what you find when you begin to read the gospels in the New Testament. When you read Luke's gospel, as we'll do at Christmas time, I'm sure.

And in chapter 1, we meet these faithful Israelites, Zechariah and Elizabeth and Simeon and Anna, and we're told right there at the beginning, these were people who were walking blamelessly in the law of Moses.

[ 21 : 05 ] They were righteous and devout. They were waiting for the consolation of Jerusalem. They were real believers trusting in the promise beforehand of God through the scriptures, obeying his commands and trusting in his promises, showing the obedience of faith.

And what happened when the Lord Jesus arrived? They recognize him, they bow down and they worship him. And they say everything our scriptures has promised at last now has been fulfilled.

So right at the start, you see, of this letter, Paul's issuing a challenge to Jews that Jewish pride must submit to Jesus Christ, that there's no other way of salvation, there's no other way of acceptance with the Lord, the God of Israel, except through Jesus Christ, to refuse Christ, to stumble over Jesus as a rock of offense, as Paul says unbelieving Jews did.

That's to refuse, that's to reject God himself. That's to disobey God's revelation from the very beginning in their own Jewish scriptures.

Now, why is that relevant and important for us today? Well, it's very important because it's often said today in the light of the terrible anti-Semitism of the last century.

[ 22 : 36 ] Well, of course, it's not just the last century, is it? It's rearing its ugly head even in our own society today among the neo-Marxists. But in the light of the terrible anti-Semitism, in the light of the Holocaust and the destruction of Jews, it's often said today, isn't it, that Christians shouldn't evangelize Jews.

No, no, no, that's offensive. We should be seeking reconciliation with Jews. We should be expressing unity with Jewish people. Well, of course, no Christian can ever be anti-Semitic.

Salvation is of the Jews. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Jewish Messiah. But at the same time, Paul is absolutely clear, isn't he?

Jews also must respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ just as Gentiles must the world over. Because the gospel is the power of salvation for everyone who believes.

He says here in verse 16, for the Jew first. Notice, for the Jew first before we even start talking about Gentiles. It's the Jewish gospel. And to resist the gospel is to resist God's law and God's prophets and to resist God himself.

[ 23 : 52 ] of course, there's equally in these words of Paul about the unequivocal source of the gospel is equally a challenge to Gentiles.

Because there's absolutely no room for pride among any of the Gentile Christians in Rome or indeed any Gentile Christians anywhere. And that's important for us here, isn't it?

It's important in two ways because we can have no sense of superiority as Christians over Jewish believers or even over Jewish unbelievers.

As though somehow, because in the main Jews have rejected the gospel of Christ that God has simply done away with and replaced his old Israel as it were, with a new Israel, the Gentile church.

That is absolutely not the case. Paul says that very, very plainly in Romans chapter 11. Just listen. In fact, actually just turn with me to Romans 11 because it is very important.

[ 24 : 54 ] Romans 11, Paul is speaking about God's true Israel, his true people, his true family. And he's using the image of an olive tree with many branches. Look what he says in Romans 11 verse 17.

If some of the branches were broken off, that is Jews who refused to believe in the Messiah. If some of the branches were broken off and you, the wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the tree, do not be arrogant towards the branches.

If you are, remember it's not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. You see, you've been grafted into their tree of God's salvation. It's that root that supports you, Johnny come lately.

And he goes on, look at verse 19. Then you'll say, well, the branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in. Yes, that's true.

They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not you become proud, but stand in awe.

[ 26 : 04 ] If God didn't spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. you see, don't you be proud and arrogant. God has not replaced Israel with you just like that.

You also can be cut off if you prove to be unbelieving and arrogant as they've been. Just as they, look at verse 23, just as he says about them, if they don't continue in unbelief, they'll be grafted back in to God's great salvation.

He goes on to say in verse 24 that if God can graft in wild branches like you Gentiles, how much more will he graft back in the natural branches, the natural Jewish branches into their own tree?

So what a majority Gentile Christian church is like us? I guess probably nearly everybody, if not everybody here today is a Gentile Christian. What are we to think of unbelieving Jews, rejecters of Jesus Christ?

Well, look at verse 20 again. Do not become proud, but stand in awe of God. See, Christian anti-Semitism is an impossibility if we take the New Testament seriously.

[ 27 : 21 ] Rather, what we're to do is we're to humbly rejoice in our Jewish Messiah and the Christ. And surely we're to join Paul in longing, longing that many more of the natural branches of the olive tree.

Jewish people, the world over, would be grafted back in through faith in Jesus Christ, their own Messiah, as we've been. And that's why our reformed Christian heritage has always, always taught a great concern for evangelism of the Jewish people.

If you read the Westminster larger catechism, you'll see that it urges to pray regularly for the conversion of Jews to Christ. And also, therefore, obviously to share the gospel with Jewish people as well as with others.

The gospel is from the Jewish scriptures and it's to the Jew first. So we can have no sense, no sense at all of superiority over Jews.

I think that's important that we're absolutely clear on that matter. But secondly, and this is also just as important, we can have no scorn for the Jewish scriptures. If we Gentiles are to be humbled by the scriptures and brought to the source of salvation in a Jewish Messiah, then also in the same way we're to be led in our lives of faith and obedience now by these very scriptures.

[ 28 : 45 ] There's no place for what's called anti-Semitism, for anti-nomianism, rejecting the Old Testament scriptures. Sometimes you hear people, evangelical people, say, oh, but we're New Testament Christians today.

No, no, no, no. Paul says the gospel comes from the whole Bible. We can't just ditch the Old Testament as though it was irrelevant.

We are biblical Christians. There's one gospel, there's one Bible. And again, that's so important today, isn't it? Think about the things that are sometimes said in the debates about human sexuality, issues like homosexuality and so on.

Oh, we don't need to pay any attention to Old Testament texts. There's just a few old obscure things, writings way back from the time of Moses and Leviticus. What possible reference has that got for us today?

But no, said Jesus, I did not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them. Paul says the same things later on in Romans chapter 15, verse 4.

[ 29 : 54 ] All these things that were written in the former days, the Old Testament scriptures, they were written, he said, for our instruction, instruction in the way of God's holiness.

That's the basic meaning, actually, of the Hebrew word law, Torah. It means instruction. God gave it to his redeemed people to teach them the way of living that pleases God. These are written for us.

It says the same things to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10. All these things are written for our instruction who live in these end of the ages, as he calls them. Same language as we were looking at in Hebrews this morning, in these last days.

These sacred writings, remember what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3. We looked at it last week. These things will do two things, won't they, these Old Testament scriptures? They'll make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and they'll equip us for every good work.

The Old Testament leads us to salvation, and the Old Testament will equip us for our service. The Bible, the whole Bible speaks with one voice about one God and one great salvation.

[ 31 : 08 ] So we must all be both humbled by the scriptures to come to Christ and led by all the scriptures to live out our obedience to Christ. I don't know about your Bible, but my Bible consists of about two thirds, the three quarters of the Jewish laws and prophets and writings.

So the source of the gospel is a challenge to the Jew and to the Gentile. There's no room for any pride on either side, and all who believe will come to God the same way through the same faith.

But of course, there's also an ongoing challenge to all of us, isn't there? Because there's no room for complacency for any of us. The gospel comes from God through the scriptures, and it's fulfilled as the whole world hears the gospel and comes to obey the gospel when the nations are being called to the obedience of faith.

And scriptures, you see, are not fulfilled when Gentiles become Jews or when Jews kick off their historic past and become Gentiles. No, says Paul. God's promise is fulfilled when both Jews and Gentiles are being obedient to God through faith in Jesus the Messiah.

Look at verse 5 again. The gospel is all about the obedience of faith among all the nations. The unequivocal source of the gospel of God leads inevitably to the unequivocal commission of the people of God to go and to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded.

[ 32 : 50 ] That's what the gospel of God is all about. God's word for the whole world and his message that we are to take to the whole world.

So here's a question maybe you'd like to ponder for the rest of this week. It would be good, wouldn't it, just to ponder these two verses. Think about them every morning when we wake up to think about what it means.

Look at verse 1. Paul, a bondservant, a slave of Christ Jesus. Here's a question. What extent do you think you are living your life as a bondservant, as a slave of Jesus Christ to that end?

Set apart for the gospel of God? That's what Paul says of himself, isn't it? His legacy is pretty clear.

None of us would be here today, would we, without the legacy of the apostle Paul living utterly set apart for this glorious message that it would reach all the nations for the glory of God.

[ 34 : 02 ] Let's ask ourselves that question. What will it be for you and me? What will our legacy be? What will people say of you and of me on the day when they gather for our funeral to bury us?

I often say to people, that day will very probably be your greatest testimony to the Lord Jesus in your whole life. Because everybody who's there will know you. And everybody will know that what's being said from the front is either true or it's just a lot of flattery and mummery.



We're preparing, aren't we, for that day, every day, our legacy. Preparing for what people see then, that our life has really all been about. Has it been a life set apart for the gospel of God, promised beforehand in the scriptures, that all the nations might come to the obedience of faith?

That'd be a great thing, wouldn't it? For people to be saying spontaneously, undoubtedly, at your funeral and at my funeral. And a great thing for it to be said when we stand before the Lord on that great day.

Well, let's think about these words every day of this week. Let's pray. And we pray in the words of another great servant of the gospel from the fourth century, Augustine, whose legacy, like Paul's, remains all over the world today.

[ 35 : 42 ] Lord, you who are the light of minds that know you, the life of souls that love you, and the strength of the thoughts that seek you, help us to know you, that we may truly love you.

And so to love you, that we may fully serve you, whose service is perfect freedom.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Am I to the time. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.