



grow. pray. study.

February 18, 2024 *God's Grace and the Human Condition*

Scripture: M

### The gospel [good news]: central to Paul's message

#### MONDAY 2.19.24 Philippians 1:3-7, Romans 1:1-5, 16-17

We surveyed the life of the apostle Paul in a [three-week series](#) last November. Now for Lent, we focus on this apostle's pivotal teachings, which played a huge role in shaping the Christian faith. And we have to start where his self-understanding did: with the gospel. "The Greek word *euangelion*, frequently translated 'gospel,' means 'glad tidings,' or 'good news,' and in Pauline usage it refers to the message of God's saving work in Jesus Christ." \*

- Paul gave a clear-cut account of the vital core of the gospel he taught: "God promised this good news about his Son.... This Son is Jesus Christ our Lord." "The Gospel accounts describe events from the life of Jesus and the Lord's teachings, whereas Paul's focus is on the significance of Jesus' life and message, with a particular focus on the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection." \*\* How do the Gospels and Paul's letters help you value Jesus more fully than either of them could alone?
- Why would Paul feel he needed to tell Christians in Rome that he was "not ashamed" of the gospel? "The pagan Romans... didn't care for the Jews. They sneered at them and distrusted them. From the Roman point of view, Christianity was bound to be seen as doubly strange and unwelcome: a kind of Jewish religion that made other Jews angry!" \*\*\* What factors today can make you feel ashamed of the gospel, and eager to hide your faith from those who don't share it?

**Prayer:** Lord God, thank you for the life-changing good news about Jesus' saving grace that has touched my life. Guide me into an ever-deepening grasp of your wonderful salvation. Amen.

\* A. B. Luter, Jr., article "Gospel" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, p. 370.

\*\* Hamilton, Adam, *The Call: The Life and Message of the Apostle Paul* (p. 35). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

\*\*\* Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone, Romans Part One: Chapters 1-8* (p. 8). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

## Sin the human problem, the gospel of grace God's solution

### TUESDAY 2.20.24 Ephesians 2:1-7, Romans 3:21-26

The apostle Paul said God revealed righteousness apart from the Law (“*torah*” in Hebrew), yet “the Law and the Prophets” (the Hebrew Scriptures) confirmed it. He told Christians in Ephesus that the positive changes in their lives (cf. [Acts 19:18-20](#)) were not just their doing, but God's doing, shaping them to live out the transformed life God designed them to live. We don't find salvation through arduous self-improvement. We trust in the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

- Before he met Jesus, Paul had trusted in his own goodness as one of God's “chosen people” (cf. [Philippians 3:4-7](#)). But no more. In today's reading, he said, “There's no distinction. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace.” What helps you (especially if you're a competitive “high achiever”) to remember that a key part of the gospel's good news is “there's no distinction”?
- Once you realize God accepts you through sheer grace, Paul said, that throws out any bragging (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:29](#)). But, hey, you're a polite person anyway. You'd never “brag,” right? Have you ever seen a (quiet, carefully hidden) sense of superiority lead someone else (not you!) to set himself/herself apart from (and just a bit above) others? How can you keep that kind of thinking from creeping into your attitudes, and so avoid that kind of divisive thinking?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you didn't accept me because I'm such a superior specimen. Thank you for your grace. Help me extend your grace to all the people with whom I share your world. Amen.

## Christ's grace can free you from slavery to sin

### WEDNESDAY 2.21.24 Romans 6:1-14

The United States made slavery illegal in 1865. \* Most of us don't think a lot about it these days. In a Roman Empire in which legal slavery was very much a reality, though, the apostle Paul wrote about a different kind of slavery that continues to exist beyond the reach of any legislative body. In today's passage, he said, “We wouldn't be slaves to sin anymore.” He said Jesus' grace could free you from that slavery if you chose to let it: “Don't let sin rule your body, so that you do what it wants.”

- Rome had no interest in freeing slaves, and the United States' legislators couldn't free people from the kind of slavery that concerned Paul. But God could: “In sharing Christ's death Christians have died to the old order. They no longer live in sin (6:2), but are ‘slaves’ of righteousness, who have become obedient to God (6:15–18).” \*\* In what ways has Jesus' grace brought you greater freedom from hurtful ways of living? Are there ways you still want to claim that freedom?
- Living in Jesus' grace doesn't mean just being at church when it's handy. “Paul envisages the various parts of the human body as implements to be used in the service of this master or that. Our limbs and organs, and for that matter our mind, memory, imagination, emotions and will, are to be put at the disposal not of sin, but of God. We are to think and act as people... who have died and been raised to new life.” \*\*\* How easy or hard is it for you to choose to let God guide your life?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for giving me the possibility, the promise and the choice of a better way to live. I choose you as my master. Amen.

\* The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1865, reads, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

\*\* Sanders, E. P., *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions Book 42) (p. 79). OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.

\*\*\* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One: Chapters 1-8* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 109). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

## Paul defended the gospel to his earliest Gentile converts

### THURSDAY 2.22.24 Galatians 1:3-4, 2:16, 21-3:2, 26-29

In Galatians, “responding to a severe challenge to his gospel and apostleship, Paul defends ‘the truth of the gospel’ ([Galatians 2:5, 14](#)): A person is made right before God on the basis of what God has done in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ rather than on the basis of doing the works of Moses’ Law.” \* In simple, even blunt, terms, the apostle said the central message he preached was not optional or negotiable. Any version of “trusting Jesus plus something else” was NOT the gospel.

- When Paul wrote “we **know** that a person isn’t made righteous by the works of the Law,” he wasn’t speaking hypothetically. He’d once been sure that his religious credentials were good enough to win God’s acceptance (cf. [Philippians 3:3-7](#)), but meeting Jesus led him to see he could never be holy enough on his own. What’s your experience? What has awakened in your heart a sense of your need for God’s redeeming love and grace?
- In Galatians, Paul specifically answered people who said Gentile Christians must follow the Hebrew ritual of circumcision (cf. [Galatians 5:2-6](#)). The principle has been the same through the centuries, although the outward rituals to “qualify” with God have varied. What are some external signs of holiness that you might try to rely on today (e.g. church attendance)? How can you live a holy life as an outgrowth of your love relationship with God, not as an effort to earn that love?

**Prayer:** Lord God, through Paul, you show me that I don’t need to turn guilt (“I made a mistake”) into shame (“I AM a mistake.”) Thank you for freeing me—warm my heart today with your grace. Amen.

\* Frank J. Matera, introduction to Galatians in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 353 NT.

## Jesus' resurrection central to the gospel's good news

### FRIDAY 2.23.24 1 Corinthians 15:9-14

When you hear or read a message, there are two key questions: 1) is the messenger credible? and 2) is the message true? This matters today, and it was even more true in Paul's day because they didn't have modern technology. They couldn't use the internet to "fact check." When the Christians in Corinth heard today's passage, they would have heard two things loud and clear: 1) Paul the Apostle was a credible messenger, and 2) without Jesus' resurrection, other preaching and faith are pointless.

- Paul referred to himself as the "least important" apostle. He went on to say he didn't "deserve" to be an apostle. In fact, we know Paul may have been the most influential apostle of all. How did Paul's humility show his awareness that God had turned him from the church's #1 enemy to its #1 champion? There will never be another Paul, but God calls you to be a messenger today. In what ways can you be a "credible messenger" for Christ today with your thoughts, words, and actions?
- People in Jesus' day didn't have modern science or technology, but they were not "dumber" than you. Paul knew rising from the dead sounded as crazy to people then as it does to many today (cf. [Acts 17:31-32, 1 Corinthians 1:21-24](#)). Yet he said, "If Christ hasn't been raised... our preaching is useless and your faith is useless." Have you reflected on how crucial it is that Jesus defeated death? How can the fact of Jesus' resurrection give you renewed confidence for life's challenges?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you are my Lord and my God, my Creator and my Redeemer. Because you live, I too will live forever. I thank you and I praise you today. Amen.

## The gospel shaped Paul's own walk with Jesus

### SATURDAY 2.24.24 1 Timothy 1:12-16

The apostle Paul never preached the gospel from a detached, impersonal perspective. He could never forget that, honestly convinced he was doing what God desired, he had hated and even killed believers in the Jesus he now served (cf. [Acts 26:9-11](#)). Today's passage from 1 Timothy showed him \* recalling when he was a persecutor and describing himself as "the biggest sinner of all." But that was not a statement of self-loathing or despair. It was a grateful, joy-filled testimony to the amazing difference God's grace had made in his life. "Our Lord's favor poured all over me along with the faithfulness and love that are in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 1:14).

- As an ambitious, angry young Pharisee, Saul had all the human credentials—"proper" birth, great education, and even persecuting Christians. What are the human accomplishments, family heritages, and social awards and recognitions you are proudest of? If preserving any of them ever conflicted with accepting God's grace and heeding God's call on your life, what choice would you make? Paul told the Philippians they were all his "partners in the ministry of the gospel" (Philippians 1:5) and urged the Romans to render their "appropriate priestly service" to God by using the gifts God had put in each of their lives (cf. [Romans 12:1-8](#)). In what ways has God not only accepted you in mercy but equipped you to join in sharing God's grace with others ministry? How are you responding to that God-given call to serve?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, like Paul, I've done plenty of things that disappointed you and hurt others. Thank you for showing me mercy and calling me into your service. Amen.

\* "Most mainline scholars believe that Titus and 1 and 2 Timothy were written after the time of Paul by one who was a disciple of Paul, offering the kind of guidance and instruction Paul had given while he was alive." (Footnote in Hamilton, Adam, *The Call: The Life and Message of the Apostle Paul* (p. 82). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.)

**Prayer Requests** – [cor.org/prayer](https://cor.org/prayer)