

## Paul's Gospel

### 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Paul originally came to the Thessalonians on his second missionary journey. They warmly accepted him and the doctrine he taught them and Paul thought of himself as a nurse and father to them (1 Thessalonians 2:7—11). Paul was desirous to see the Thessalonians growing and maturing in Christ and so they were often in his prayers (1 Thessalonians 1:1—3; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). He was so concerned about the spiritual state of the Thessalonians that he sent Timothy to them while he was ministering down in Corinth to help keep them strong and growing in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

Seeing how important it was for Paul to see them grow, it's important for us to understand exactly what doctrine he was teaching. Although most understand Paul to be preaching the same message as Jesus and the Disciples, I maintain that idea is a most unscriptural view of Paul's message. Is it possible that Paul preached and taught a different message than the earthly Jesus?

#### **Our Gospel** (verse 5)

Most understand that Scripture gives us a progression of God's redemptive plan of salvation. I believe this is absolutely correct. The first hint of a future good news (gospel) is the proclamation that Satan will bruise the future Redeemer while that Redeemer will crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). As we now know, Christ's death on the cross supplies the final and fatal blow to Satan. As Scripture is slowly revealed to mankind, God's plan of salvation is also revealed culminating in His full revelation through Paul.

This final revelation is known as the Mystery for it was information hidden from before creation but revealed through the apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:26). This revelation came to Paul directly from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11—12) and it was through the Holy Spirit that his contemporaries, the apostles and prophets, became aware of Paul's teaching and accepted his teaching as coming from God (Ephesians 3:1—5).

Paul hints at the uniqueness of the Mystery doctrine by often referring to the Gospel he presented as "my (our) Gospel" (Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 15:1—2; 2 Corinthians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). The most common interpretation of what Paul meant is that he was simply saying it was the gospel that he preached, which was the same one preached by Jesus and the Disciples. To carry this into today, the gospel you preach would be your gospel and the gospel I preach is my gospel but they are both the same gospel. Some would say this one gospel is the good news of Jesus.

The Gospel of the Kingdom was the good news that the Millennial Kingdom was at hand. God was announcing that He would soon set up His Kingdom on this earth with Jesus Christ ruling over the earth. The content of this gospel can be found in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and in early Acts. To accept this gospel, a person needed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, or Christ (Matthew 16:16; John 11:27). This gospel included repentance and baptism (Matthew 3:1—2; Acts 2:38). Those who were not baptized rejected God and therefore were not believers (Luke 7:30). Notice that although Christ's death, burial and resurrection are critically important, believers were only required to believe in the person of Jesus Christ as being their Messiah. They were to believe in the name but not the work of Christ (John 3:16—18; 20:31).

In contrast, Paul defines "his gospel" as believing in the person of Jesus Christ and in His work accomplished through His death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1—4; Colossians 2:9). Paul even makes it clear that in contrast to the commandment for the Disciples to baptize (Matthew 28:19) that he did not come to baptize (1 Corinthians 1:17). Notice how baptism is connected to the Gospel of the Kingdom but completely separated from the Gospel Paul was preaching. Although Christ is at the

center of both gospels, the focus and details of each are different. They cannot be the same gospel when there are differences between them.

This difference is pointed out in Galatians 2:7 when it was agreed by the Kingdom believers, headed by Peter, that they would concentrate on the Gospel of the Circumcision while Paul the Gospel of the Uncircumcision. This verse points out two gospels, not two groups of people.

Paul coined this expression to distinguish the gospel which had originally been committed to Peter and the Eleven from his gospel, the gospel of the uncircumcision. Attempts have been made to nullify this distinction by contending that Galatians 2:7 should be translated: "But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel to the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel to the circumcision was unto Peter," thus making the distinction to be, not in the gospel, but in the people to whom the gospel is sent... There are at least two objections to this translation. The first is that Paul uses the genitive case for circumcision and uncircumcision. The genitive case "denotes any kind of dependence on or belonging to." It is the gospel belonging to the circumcision and that belonging to the uncircumcision. The second objection is that in verse 9, where Paul definitely speaks about going to these two groups he uses an entirely different construction: "eis ta ethne" and "eis ten peritomen." Had he intended to mean unto these two groups in verse 7, he would no doubt have used the same expression which he did in verse 9.

C. F. Baker. "A Dispensational Theology." pages 319—320

### **Indicators of change**

There are additional factors that highlight a change in the Gospel message. By reading the four Gospels and comparing them to Paul's writings we can see that the Jews were once the primary focus (Matthew 10:6) but now it is the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:16; 1 Timothy 2:7). There was also a change as to how the cross was viewed. During the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom the cross was seen as a shame to Israel (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:113—15) but now under the Gospel of Grace the cross is seen by Paul to be a glorious thing (Galatians 6:14). While the Gospel of the Kingdom was preached there were numerous miracles and healings performed (Matthew 10:7—8), a foretaste of the approaching Kingdom. These supernatural events came to a close under Paul's ministry (1 Corinthians 13:8; 2 Corinthians 12:5—10; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20). Gentile salvation was also different under these two gospels. Under the Kingdom the Gentiles were to be saved by Israel (Zechariah 8:20—23; Luke 24:44—47) but today there is no distinction of Jew or Gentile (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11). Under the Gospel of the Kingdom the believers were baptized by Christ into the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) and being so identified they manifested the gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues, special knowledge, prophecy, etc.). Under Paul's Gospel we are baptized into Christ, manifesting our identification with Him through us being seen as having died with Him being buried and rising (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3—5). We also see Peter lose his leadership position during the book of Acts and when the Disciple James is put to death (Acts 12:2) he is not replaced as was Judas in early Acts.

All these factors point to an important change during the writing of the book of Acts. I believe these changes indicate a whole new work of God beginning with the apostle Paul, not an extension of an old program to new people. My belief is given life by Ephesians 2:11—16 that clearly speaks of a whole new man being formed out of Jews and Gentiles. This new man is the Church, the Body of Christ and is defined by Paul's revelation of the Mystery doctrine kept hidden (Colossian 1:26) until revealed personally to Paul by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). This was the Gospel that Paul shared with the Thessalonians. A gospel that was unique and distinct from the Gospel of the Kingdom as preached by the 12 Disciples and Jesus. The Kingdom gospel was ultimately rejected by Israel (at the stoning of Stephen) and the offer was rescinded by God. It is no longer valid good news. Our good news of grace and reconciliation has replaced Israel's good news.

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