

The Gospel

A Study on Romans 1:1-3a

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

The twentieth century has brought more confusion to the minds of men about the meaning of Christianity than any other period in the history of the church. Today even the very simplest terms and teachings of the faith are not understood. Terms such as “saved,” “blood,” and “hell” are emotional words associated with people who are narrow, uneducated, bigoted, or who are soapbox preachers. While it is true that some groups have misused these terms, they are perfectly good biblical words, and when properly understood, have deep spiritual meaning.

One of the terms most misunderstood by those outside of Christ, and most misused by those who are Christians, is the word “gospel.” This message will concentrate our attention on the words of Paul in Romans 1:1, “the gospel of God.”

THE MINISTRY OF PAUL (ROMANS 1:1a)

Paul. A Pharisee in the Jewish religion, Paul trusted his good works to get him to heaven. He was so sincere about his religion that he persecuted and murdered Christians in the name of God. Before he became a Christian, Paul was blinded by religion, good works, and sin. He was sincere, but sincerely wrong. When the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he was saved. When he came personally to know the resurrected and living Christ, his whole life was changed.

A servant of Jesus Christ. Paul, who had been a slave to sin, self, and religion, became a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He was appointed by

God to be a Christian, and he voluntarily gave himself over to be a slave to Jesus Christ and His work.

Slavery to Christ brings progressive freedom from sin and self in the Christian life.

Called to be an apostle. Paul was sovereignly called by God to be an apostle. He did not choose this position himself; God gave it to him.

Separated unto the gospel of God. Paul was set apart for this special ministry by God alone. He was separated and committed to the gospel and this is why he said, “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16)!

In one sense, every Christian is called to the ministry of proclaiming God’s gospel.

THE MESSAGE OF PAUL (ROMANS 1:1b-3a)

The gospel of God. “Gospel” means “good news,” and it has its source in God; he is its originator and instigator. The gospel is a message of glad tidings from God, and it ever continues to be God’s message of salvation to lost men.

The message of the gospel is *not* that man can be saved by his own deeds and efforts. By nature, every human being is trained to think in terms of the merit system. No Christian is opposed to good works, but good works can never make one a Christian. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”

(Titus 3:5). Every Christian believes in good works as a result, not the cause, of salvation.

The reason men cannot do enough good works to gain merit before God is that they are sinners, separated from God. The best of their works falls short of what God requires of them. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Men are sinners by nature and by act. All of us tend to compare ourselves with other people, and usually we feel that we are as good as most folks and better than some. But how do we stack up next to the holiness of God? He is absolutely holy and righteous. If a man has committed one evil act, that man is placed in a different category from God’s. Man is a sinner when compared to God’s holiness. Because God is holy, he must judge sin; if he does not judge sin he cannot be God. Since men are sinners, they stand in line for God’s judgment.

Sin is an attitude of indifference to God and is characterized by an attitude of active or passive rebellion. You will observe that I am not saying that sin is just a matter of getting drunk, committing murder, or being immoral. These are sins, too, but they result from prior sins which are often much more passive. You may then ask, “What are the symptoms of a life separated from God?” In addition to the grosser sins, there are: worry, irritability, lack of purpose in life, no goal, no power, no real interest in living, utter boredom, an inferiority complex, frustration, a desire to escape reality, and fear of death. As Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, all men have sinned.

Unsaved men may be alive physically, but they are all spiritually dead before receiving Christ. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Pull out the plug of a floor lamp from its wall socket; contact with the electrical current is broken and the light goes out. Man, because of sin, broke fellowship with God. He needs to get plugged back into God. He needs power to live for God.

All men will face an eternal judgment:

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).

This is *bad news*. If I had only this to tell people, I would jump off a bridge because this is a black picture of man’s true condition. Unless there is a way to solve the sin problem, man is in a hopeless and helpless condition, going headlong into a godless eternity!

The *good news* is the gospel: God has devised a way to solve the sin problem. He sent Christ, His perfect and sinless Son, to die in the place of sinful men. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Christ died for sinners. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). By believing in Christ, one can receive forgiveness from sin, be declared right before God, and have eternal life:

“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him

all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39).

“He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

This is the *good news*, and it is just as true today as it was two thousand years ago.

Which he had promised afore by his prophets. The gospel is not new. The basic or elementary facts of the gospel were in the Old Testament, but they were not clearly revealed. Someone has put it this way:

“The New is in the Old concealed,
The Old is by the New revealed.
The New is in the Old contained,
The Old is by the New explained.”

The Bible itself repeatedly testifies to this fact:

“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:46-47).

“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:3-6).

“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

In the holy Scriptures. Paul placed the foundation for his faith in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The Bible was his authority for everything. If we are rightly to understand Christianity and the salvation that is found in Christ, then we must know what the Bible teaches on the subject:

“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” (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Concerning his Son. The gospel concerns Jesus Christ. It all centers on what Christ has done for men. If you want to know how to be a Christian, learn about the person and work of Christ for fallen men. You must then believe this message and receive Christ personally. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

When Keith Shubert was ministering with Campus Crusade for Christ at Temple University, he told me about great things God was doing there. One of the good things was that the religion department had allowed Keith to present the conservative position of theology. This came about because of Dr. Van Buren, who was the head of the religion department, a liberal, and one of the three leaders of the “God is dead” movement. Keith met Dr. Van Buren and explained to him the work of Campus Crusade for Christ. In the process he shared with him “The Four Spiritual Laws.” Dr. Van Buren said that he did not believe the gospel. Then Keith asked him, “Dr. Van Buren, do you know God in a personal way?” Dr. Van Buren became very quiet and said nothing for about a minute. Then he said, “Keith, you are the first person to ever ask me that question. I never thought about God being personal.” Dr. Van Buren did not receive Christ then, but Keith had given him the gospel, and Dr. Van Buren had such admiration for Keith that he invited him to speak in his religion classes.

CONCLUSION

There is much confusion on how to become a Christian today. Some folks say, “I’m too bad to become a Christian,” but Christ clearly stated that he died for ungodly people. Others think that they have to clean themselves up before Christ will accept them. Not so. We must come as we are — as unworthy sinners — and he will cleanse us. Still others think that becoming a Christian is giving up some things. Certainly becoming a Christian is changing our attitude about sin, but it is not giving up anything; it is receiving the person of Jesus Christ who can give eternal life and forgiveness of sin. Still others say, “If I receive Christ, it will take all the fun out of life.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Christ will only remove those things from our lives hinder our experience with him. Experiencing Christ is far more fulfilling than the

“fun” sins he removes from our lives. When Christ comes into the life, he brings stability, purpose, and new horizons of adventure.

How do you become a Christian? Acknowledge that you are separated from God because of sin, and believe that Christ died in your place and for your sin. Invite him into your life as personal Lord and Savior by faith, and trust that his work on your behalf, and only his work, is sufficient to save you. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” Our eternal destinies hang on what we do with Christ in this life!