

PAUL, GOD, AND THE GOSPEL (PART 3)
ROMANS 1:5-6

You don't need me to tell you this, but our world is changing. Rapidly.

This week I read a sobering article entitled, ["Stage Two Exile: Are You Ready for It?"](#) The author's premise was that over the past thirty years or so the church has been "exiled" from the culture. We didn't realize it then, but what experienced was only the first stage of the exile. We are entering a second stage, "and it will not be an easy time," he writes:

In Exile Stage One the prevailing narrative was that the Christian church was being marginalised, Christendom was over, the church needed to come up with better strategies to strip away the dross, and all of this in order to reconnect Jesus with a lost world.

The biggest problem the church had, according to Exile Stage One thinking, was that no one was talking about us anymore. And as Oscar Wilde wryly observed, the only thing worse than being talked about, is not being talked about.... We'd been marginalised;...discarded....

...Everyone was discussing what it meant to have Christian convictions, but be post-foundational. Christendom was collapsing, and isn't that a good thing, given all the fighting and crusades and bad stuff priests did? Were we not sick of simply being chaplains to the culture? Time to refresh. Time to do organic/total/on-the-other-side/radical church. For Exile Stage One adherents there was a kind of glee that Christendom was falling....

But here's the problem. Exile Stage One thinking has left Christians completely unprepared for Exile Stage Two reality....

In the last five or six years the culture (read: elite framework that drives the culture) is increasingly interested in bringing the church back into the public square. Yes, you heard that right. But not in order to hear it, but rather, in order to flay it, expose its real and alleged abuses and to render it naked and shivering before a jeering crowd. It is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego standing up before the statue of gold, whilst everyone else is grovelling and going, "Pssst, kneel down for goodness sake!" It is officials conspiring with the king to show that Daniel's act of praying towards Jerusalem three times per day is not simply an archaic and foolish hope, but a very real threat to the order of the society and the new moral order that will hold it together....

If the primary characteristic of Exile Stage One was supposed to be humility, the primary characteristic of Second Stage Exiles will have to be courage. Courage does not mean bombastic pronouncements to the world, not at all. It has to be much deeper than that. It will mean, upon hearing the king's command that no one can pray to any god save the king for thirty days, that we go into our rooms with the window open towards Jerusalem and defy that king even as our accusers hunt us down. It means looking the king in his enraged face and saying, even if our God does not rescue us from the flames, we will not serve your gods or bow down to your statue of gold.

If we assumed neutral culture we assume we can get involved in, and play with, culture without

getting infected by it. That we can remain distinct from it, undrawn to its more sickly parts, and more than capable of knowing when to say no to culture's soft-focus, slow-motion beckoning and effete "Join us! Join us!" plea....

Simply put, we assume that we can have more impact on culture than it can have on us. That is dangerously naive thinking. Jesus never said the culture will misunderstand you; he said the world will hate you. He did not say to his disciples, "Display reckless abandon and go out there and change culture"; he said "fear not, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).

How have I seen this play out over the past decade? Sadly in too many ways. Whilst good has come of it, I have watched too often as burnt out evangelicals who are sick to death with fundamentalist infightings drift first from saying we must get back to the source of the gospel for the sake of the culture, to re-interpreting the gospel in the shape of the world. I have watched as a series of questions that began with "What if we changed the perspective on how we look at this traditional issue?" end up with "Did God really say?".

I do not believe he has overstated what is coming; difficult days *are* ahead.

But if we read our Bibles well, difficult days have always been ahead. Persecution has always been promised to and expected by God's followers. (We have just forgotten that truth.) But persecution of believers has never been the final declaration. In fact, the final word is the word of God a word that contains the eternal gospel. How do we minister in times like this? With the gospel. For all the difficulty we are beginning to experience, it has never been clearer in our lifetimes "who is in Christ?" and "who needs Christ?" We have that clarity today. And we have an answer for those who are outside of Christ — and the answer is the same answer that Paul affirmed to the Romans as he prepared to go on his missionary journey to Spain. The answer is the gospel. It certainly didn't seem to be a powerful solution in Paul's day and it too often doesn't seem powerful in our day either. But, Paul says

KEEP MINISTERING THE GOSPEL BECAUSE OF WHAT THE GOSPEL IS AND DOES.

Why did Paul preach the gospel and why should we preach the gospel and be committed to the gospel? In these two verses he offers five reasons why we should maintain our commitment to gospel preaching.

1. **The COMMISSION of the Gospel (v. 5a)**
2. **The GOAL of the Gospel (v. 5b)**
3. **The SCOPE of the Gospel (v. 5c)**
4. **The (Ultimate) PURPOSE of the Gospel (v. 5d)**
5. **The EFFECTIVENESS of the Gospel (v. 6)**

The first reason to keep holding onto and ministering the gospel is because of —

1. The COMMISSION of the Gospel (v. 5a)

- Remember that Paul is writing to the Romans because he is planning to go on a westward trip with the gospel to Spain (15:22ff); Antioch had been his base when he went on his first three journeys to the east, but that would be too far from Spain, so he is asking the Roman church to support his trip and be his new base of operations.
 - ✓ But since he had never been to the church in Rome, he was writing to affirm his understanding of the gospel and the implications of that gospel. That's what Romans is about: God's gospel.
 - ✓ And as he gives a salutation at the beginning of the letter (one long sentence in vv. 1-7) he provides an overview of the gospel — in verse 1 he introduces himself, the preacher of the gospel, in vv. 2-4 he explains the essence of the gospel, now in vv. 5-6 he explains why the gospel is essential, and in v. 7 (next week), he will explain what the gospel does.
 - ✓ So these two verses offer Paul's summary understanding of why the gospel is so essential — why should it be preached? And Paul's answer is an answer that is appropriate for us as well.
- Verse five begins by building off the name of *Jesus Christ, our Lord* (v. 4). It is through Jesus Christ, Paul says, that *we have received grace and apostleship*.
 - ✓ Now who is the *we* that Paul is talking about? Notice that in v. 1 he doesn't include anyone else in the salutation. And while he was with others in Corinth, it seems unlikely that he would be including them with this "we" if he doesn't also mention them by name.
 - ✓ He could be referring to himself and the believers in Rome, except that would mean that all the believers in Rome are also apostles, and we know that isn't correct, since the office of apostle was limited to men who had seen the resurrected Christ and been commissioned by Him.
 - ✓ So it is best to take this as an "editorial 'we'" where Paul is referring to himself alone (that is done in writing more formal works in English and was also done in Greek).
 - ✓ And Paul says the gift received is *grace and apostleship*. Paul could mean the grace of salvation and the office of apostleship that came after his salvation. But it is more likely that this is a figure of speech (hendiadys) where two connected terms are used to refer to one thing: gracious apostleship; it was a particular grace that Paul became an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-10).
 - ✓ So Paul is saying that his unique position as an apostle came as a result of the direct commissioning of the Lord. Jesus appeared to Him on the Damascus Road and sent him to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-18; Gal. 1:1, 10, 12).

- Now what is the significance of all this? Simply this: Jesus Christ with the authority of the Father sent Paul to his task. So how could he do anything but preach the gospel? He was bound by the task.
- Now you and I aren't apostles, but we have been similarly commissioned (Mt. 28:18-20; Col. 4:5-6). What will we use to minister to people who are bound in sin? As crazy as it sounds to the world (and sometimes to the church), we will use the gospel (**1 Cor. 1:18ff**).
 - ✓ And we use the gospel because that is what God the sovereign King has told us to do.
 - ✓ This really comes down to an issue of authority and submission. Who is authoritative and will we submit to the Lord? If God is authoritative and He sends Paul and us on a mission with the gospel, then we will prioritize the gospel in preaching. But if God is not authoritative to us, then when He sends us with the gospel we'll use other things that we believe are more creative and compelling and only come back to the gospel if all else fails.
 - ✓ Paul's message was the gospel and nothing else because he was sent with that message from God and our message is the gospel for the same reason.

Another reason we minister the gospel is because of the goal of the gospel —

2. The GOAL of the Gospel (v. 5b)

- Notice in v. 5 Paul says he was given the gift of apostleship *to bring about the obedience of faith*.
 - ✓ The word “to” indicates a purpose. Paul was made an apostle so that he would preach the gospel and that the preaching would produce obedience of faith.
 - ✓ The goal of his gospel preaching was obedience of faith.
 - ✓ Now there are somewhere between four and seven legitimate ways to understand the little phrase *obedience of faith*. I am convinced that Paul is talking about obedience that naturally flows from saving faith in Christ. In other words, one comes to believe in Christ and when he believes, he will also become increasingly obedient to Christ.
 - ✓ I say that because of how Paul uses the terms seemingly interchangeably. Look at verse 8 — there Paul commends the Romans for their *faith* in Christ; then look at 16:19 — a very similar phrase where they are commended for their *obedience*. In other words, they are both part of the salvation experience — two sides of the same coin of salvation. Without faith, there can be no obedience, and there can be no obedience without faith; and where there is faith, there will also be obedience; there can be no faith without obedience. We can only obey God when we have faith in Christ; when we have faith we will obey. The two cannot be divorced.
 - “Genuine faith is obedient faith.” [MacArthur]
 - “...the response Paul looked for was a total, unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ...” [Stott]

- The gospel has a goal and the goal is the transformation of those who believe.
 - ✓ Some might say, “but isn’t Romans about the gospel *only* and how we can get to Heaven? It isn’t about morality and doing things for God — it is about the free gift of salvation.”
 - ✓ Yes, it is about the free gift of salvation, but that free gift is also designed to liberate us from sin. Romans emphasizes the power of the free gospel to sanctify us (v. 7, “called saints,” 6:12, 17-18; 12:1; 15:18; 16:26). Cf. also Heb. 11:8ff
 - ✓ Believers in Christ belong to Him without reservation — they want Him. That’s what the gospel does. And that’s why Paul and we preach the gospel — because only the gospel can do that.
 - ✓ We live in a unique time in the history of the church when obedience has been separated from faith. Some (many?) will teach that salvation and discipleship (or justification and sanctification) are separate, independent events. They will say that while it is good to be a disciple (or sanctified) it is not necessary. They say it is possible to believe in Jesus without obeying Jesus. Life goes better when one obeys, but you don’t have to obey.
 - ✓ Paul has no such category. Faith and obedience are inseparably linked. Cf. Js. 2:14, 17, 20.
- Implication: when you communicate the gospel to others preach the whole gospel —
 - ✓ The gospel is more than a “get out of Hell for free” truth.
 - ✓ The gospel is a “get you to God for free” truth. The gospel belongs to God and is designed to reunite sinners to Him; and the reunion to Him means we want to do live free from sin and obediently to Him.
 - ✓ If you want Heaven but you don’t want God or if you want forgiveness but don’t want to give up your sin, you may not be a believer. (That doesn’t mean your flesh isn’t still enticed by sin; it will be. But that does mean that your greater desire, while battling the flesh, is to obey God.)

A third reason to continue to minister the gospel is the scope of the gospel —

3. The SCOPE of the Gospel (v. 5c)

- The gospel that transforms people is for *all the Gentiles*.
 - ✓ The church began in Jerusalem among the Jews — Jesus and the 12 apostles were Jews and the first converts were Jews (Acts 1); but the gospel quickly spread to non-Jewish regions and Gentiles were soon added to the church.
 - ✓ Now remember that Jews and Gentiles had a natural hatred for each other. Jews particularly scorned the Gentiles and yet in the Roman church they were living together as one body (11:25ff). And what enabled that unity and reconciliation is the gospel (e.g., **Eph. 2:13ff**).

- All men — Jew or Gentile — stand condemned before God for their sin (3:9).
- And **all men** have the same access to the gospel of Christ.
 - ✓ No one is excluded by race or nationality from the gospel (e.g., Rev. 5:9; 7:9). The gospel “is for everybody, without exception and without distinction.”
 - ✓ This was the intent of God when He made the covenant with Abraham — that not only would Israel be blessed, but so would all the nations on the earth (Gen. 12:3; Is. 19:18-25; 49:6).
 - ✓ This is the magnificence of grace — no one has inherent value to deserve the gospel. I should be excluded from the gospel, and I’m not.
 - ✓ But the gospel is available to all so that any can believe and the gospel is powerful to transform all man into the likeness of Christ. The way Paul says it in Colossians 3:11 is particularly helpful — “Christ is all, and in all” — Christ is all-sufficient and He is in all believers equally.
- And this is why we preach the gospel — because it is the only message that is adequate for everyone. No one can live without it; all men need it.
- We talk about niche marketing — advertisements and products are created for people in particular demographics; by nature those products exclude particular segments of society — we don’t need diapers or baby food or a new house or a car, but I might be interested in a particular techno-gadget or eBook... (and unfortunately Bibles and churches are marketed the same way — I’m waiting for the study Bible for women with two teenagers and one toddler who have been married twice and whose husbands travel one week a month and live in a three bedroom home under 2000 sq. ft. — I looked on one website and saw I could choose a study Bible by choosing from 22 different variables!). But the gospel is adequate for everybody and necessary for everybody, so we preach it.

A fourth reason to minister the gospel is the purpose of the gospel —

4. The (Ultimate) PURPOSE of the Gospel (v. 5d)

- The goal of the gospel in the life of the individual is that they would become obedient to God.
- But there is a purpose of the gospel that is greater than the transformation of the individual. At the end of verse 5, Paul says that the reason believers obey God is **for His name’s sake**.
 - ✓ The word **for** indicates purpose and **His name’s sake** refers to honor — the reason believers trust God and obey God is for the honoring of His name.
 - ✓ Obviously there are benefits to the believer when he is saved; but the greater value of the saving event is that God is glorified (revealed) as the saving God of the universe. And He is honored because He is the One who has accomplished the salvation; it is entirely by Him and through Him.

- ✓ This principle permeates the Scriptures: Ps. 23:3; 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11; Is. 45:4; 48:9, 11; 66:5; Jer. 14:7, 21; Ezk. 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:22; Dan 9:19; Mt. 19:29; Lk. 21:12; Jn. 15:21; Acts 9:16; Rev. 2:3.

- *Ps. 25:11 For Your name's sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.*
- *Ps. 31:3 For You are my rock and my fortress; For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me.*
- *Ps. 79:9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; And deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.*
- *Ps. 106:8 Nevertheless He saved them for the sake of His name, That He might make His power known.*
- *Is. 48:9, 11 "For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And for My praise I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off....For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another."*
- *Jer. 14:21 Do not despise us, for Your own name's sake; Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory; Remember and do not annul Your covenant with us.*
- *Ezek. 36:22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went."'"*
- *Dan. 9:19 "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."*

- We communicate the gospel to unbelievers because when we do that and when unbelievers are saved, God is honored as being a sovereign, saving God. And that also means that we must preach the gospel in a way that we don't receive the glory, but that God does.
 - ✓ After Charles Lindbergh flew non-stop across the Atlantic in 1927, the friends of Charles Lawrence held a dinner in his honor because Lawrence was the man who is credited with developing the engine for "The Spirit of St. Louis." At the dinner, Lawrence responded to the attention given to him by saying, "This is nice, and I appreciate it very much, but who ever heard of Paul Revere's horse?" The point was simple — the real accolades belonged to Lindbergh, who did the work of flying. In salvation, the credit goes to God because He is the One who has done the work.
 - ✓ And that means that, "The highest of missionary motives...is the glory of Jesus Christ." [Stott]

The fifth and final reason that Paul gives for ministering the gospel is the effectiveness of the gospel —

5. The EFFECTIVENESS of the Gospel (v. 6)

- After all that has been said about the gospel, someone might say, “but does that ever take place? Does the gospel ever really change people?” Paul answers in verse six —
- The Roman believers were living “among the Gentiles” (v. 5) — and while living there, they were also *the called of Jesus Christ*.
 - ✓ The sense is that they are living in the real world, they are Gentiles and they are living in Rome in Gentile country, and at the same time they have a greater identity — they are *called of Jesus Christ*. They are in the world, but they really belong to Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ Understand what Paul means with the word *calling*. He doesn’t mean, “God made a general call to all people but was uncertain about who would respond or when they would respond.” God’s calling refers to the divine initiative in producing salvation in believers; later in this letter Paul will demonstrate more decisively what he means — cf. **Rom. 8:28-30**.
 - Note the progression: foreknew — predestined — called — justified — glorified.
 - God initiated the process and no one who is anywhere in that process can drop out. In other words, God’s calling is effective to produce salvation — it is a compelling to bring people to salvation that cannot be resisted (and those who come don’t want to resist).
 - God who calls people to salvation through the gospel is effective in saving them by that gospel. He does what He intends to do with the gospel.
 - ✓ This afternoon I am going to replace a sprinkler head on my aerobic septic system. If a septic sprinkler head can be special that one is. When we were installing the system we needed to go from that head to the other side of the yard, through the driveway. But my driveway was already installed and I didn’t want to break it up and then re-pour part of the driveway. So I was told I could get a long section of PVC, attach a pressurized garden hose to it and “trench” underneath the driveway. So for about an hour I blew water and got we and fussed and advanced my hole about 6-12 inches under a 30-foot driveway. It wasn’t happening! So I rented an auger that is designed to burrow under wide expanses like my driveway; and a couple of hours later, I had a trench for my water pipe without tearing up my driveway! Happy day!
 - ✓ The point is, “the right tool for the right job.” And the right tool for the transformation of men’s lives is the gospel. Nothing else will work except the gospel alone. And at the same time, the gospel is fully effective in accomplishing its purpose. It is the gospel we must use.
 - ✓ If you are believing in Jesus Christ for your salvation, you can also rest with great joy in the fact that He is the One who initiated your salvation (though you didn’t deserve it) and it was His joy to complete that salvation. You are sealed and in Him, never to be removed.

CONCLUSION: At the beginning of this message I mentioned the article, “Stage Two Exile...” In that article, the author concludes:

Second Stage exiles do not place their hope in [anything] here...but seek a city that is to come (Hebrews 13). Second Stage Exiles do not need the approval of the culture, neither do they need to provoke the culture in order to feel good about themselves. No, true exiles can live out their time in exile with confidence, love and hope because they trust in him “who is able to keep [them] from stumbling and to present [them] before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.” (Jude 1:24). Christian, Second Stage Exile is coming. Are you ready for it?

With the gospel, we *are* ready for exile, for the gospel is not only our hope, but it is the only hope for the world. We have an answer to the one problem of the world (sin) and that answer was Paul’s commission and is similarly ours and it is powerful to bring about obedience and transformation. Why the gospel? Because we have nothing else strong enough to change people’s lives.