

## 2. Paul's Identification of His Gospel (1:2-5)

In the very first verse of the epistle Paul introduced the gospel and his relation to it as Christ's apostle. That introduction in turn provided the springboard for his elaboration of the gospel that extends through the next four verses. Grammatically, verses 1:1-7 are one continuous sentence with 1:2-6 acting to modify the noun *gospel*. In other words, everything Paul says in the five verses following his mention of the gospel in verse 1:1 functions as one extended adjective providing rich insight into his gospel.

This grammatical structure is important, for it establishes the orientation and direction of the Roman epistle as a whole. It not only highlights the gospel as thematically central to the letter, it serves to introduce the redemptive-historical perspective that will be seen to govern Paul's approach to the gospel throughout the epistle. There are two main subdivisions within this structure: the *first* is a relative clause and the *second* is a complex prepositional phrase embracing another relative clause.

### a. Paul's Gospel Concerned the Fulfillment of Promise (1:2)

The initial relative clause serves to establish both the *veracity* and the *antiquity* of the gospel. Perhaps the most notable aspect of the apostolic preaching is that it was entirely founded upon the Old Testament. When the apostles preached the gospel of Christ they did so from the text of the Hebrew Scriptures. Even more importantly, *they did so not from a handful of scattered proof-texts, but from the breadth of the Old Testament, interpreting it with an openly comprehensive, Christological insight.*

Illumined and taught by the Holy Spirit, the apostles and inspired writers of the New Testament understood the fullness of the truth of Jesus' declaration that the Law, Prophets, and Writings all spoke of Him. *They came to see that the Old Testament constitutes God's own interpretation of his sovereign interactions with men throughout history, which interpretation reveals that history is simply the outworking of His eternal purpose in redemption* (Ephesians 1:9-10). Whether covenants, forms, structures, or the comprehensive movements of providence, all things had been ordered by God to anticipate and progressively paint the portrait of His Redeemer and the saving work He would perform on behalf of men.

For this reason it is eminently appropriate that Paul's first comment on the gospel was that God had *promised it beforehand through the prophets in the holy Scriptures*. He regarded as fundamental to his readers' understanding of the gospel the awareness that human history is the history of *redemption*. And because the Old Testament interprets history in the light of God's redemptive intention and accomplishment, the gospel must necessarily lie at the heart of the Hebrew Scriptures. The gospel Paul carried to the nations and desired to preach in Rome was not of his own invention; it spoke of *divine* promise and fulfillment.

Thus there is an essential continuity between the Old and New Testaments, with the Old proclaiming the gospel in anticipation and the New proclaiming it in fulfillment. And at the center, and providing the point of continuity, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One whom the prophets sought to discern in the shadows (Matthew 13:10-17; 1 Peter 1:10-11), and the One whom the apostles preached in the full light of redemption's day (2 Corinthians 3:1-18).

b. Paul's Gospel Concerned God's Son (1:3-4)

The gospel Paul preached, while embracing and interpreting the broad sweep of the upward movement of salvation history, has as its focal point a single individual, who is the Son of God. Grammatically it is possible to link the prepositional phrase, "*concerning His Son*," with either the noun *gospel* or the verb *promised*. Thus Paul's statement can be interpreted as indicating that the *gospel* concerns God's Son, or that the *promise* concerns the Son. But regardless of which interpretation is adopted, his meaning is essentially unchanged. For if he did indeed intend to say that God's promise concerned His Son, he has already affirmed that what was promised through the prophets was the *gospel*. And so it is that the gospel is the gospel of God's Son.

Because the gospel testifies to the fulfillment of the divine promise of redemption from the curse of sin, and at the same time has as its focal point the Son of God, *it follows that this work of redemption implicates the nature and character of the person of the Son*. If the vanquishing of the curse is associated with the Son, and yet the whole created order is in subjection to the curse, then the Son of God must be somehow distinct from every other created thing. For this reason Paul began his presentation and defense of the gospel - the gospel that concerns God's Son - with a succinct explanation of the nature, character, and work of Christ. And fundamental to that explanation is that Jesus Christ is the *God-Man*. The parallelism is striking and rich:

- According to the *flesh*, He *came into being* as the promised *son of David*.
- According to the *Spirit of holiness*, He was *marked out* as the *Son of God*.

As the gospel of God's promised redemption focuses upon Christ Jesus, so it begins with His identity as the God-Man. The great promise of the prophets was that Yahweh would one day come in power in order to redeem and restore the cursed creation and recover His people. *Redemption was promised as a wholly divine work, yet one that was to be accomplished in connection with the tangible presence of God in the person of His Servant, Prince, and Shepherd*. With increasing clarity the prophets revealed that God's promise of deliverance stood upon the mystery of the God-Man (cf. Isaiah 9:1-7; 10:1-11:10, 32:1-20, 35:1-10, 43:1-44:5; Jeremiah 23:1-8, 24:1-7, 31:1-40, 33:1-26; Ezekiel 34:1-16, 36:16-28; Daniel 7:1-28; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-13; etc.).

Although Christ's humanity and deity are clearly indicated by Paul's statement, it is arguable that simply identifying Him to his readers as the God-Man was not his primary thrust. It has been noted that the fundamental structure of the Roman epistle is *redemptive-historical*. As a gospel-centered epistle it could not be otherwise, since Paul's entire gospel perspective was redemptive-historical. That is, *Paul viewed the coming of Christ and His work of redemption as constituting the fulfillment of all of God's historical and prophetic interaction with mankind.*

- The movement of history leading up to Calvary was specifically the divinely orchestrated outworking of God's eternal determination to "sum up all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1:9-10), and the cross event itself stood as the focal point of history and the point of transition from the old age to the new age of the kingdom of God.
- In particular, it was Christ's *resurrection* that served as the point of transition, for His "life from the dead" proved the accomplishment of redemption and provided the promise of life and renewal for the fallen and cursed cosmos. The old order had passed and the new order that is the kingdom of God had come in its *essential substance*: God's appointed and promised King had been installed over His kingdom, and with His ascension all things were put in subjection under His feet, with mortality remaining as the only enemy to be vanquished (1 Corinthians 15:1-58; cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:14-36; Ephesians 1:3-2:7; Colossians 1:3-20).

This redemptive-historical perspective that recognizes the *new aeon* of the kingdom ushered in by Christ's work is foundational to all of Paul's writings, but is especially evident in his Roman epistle. As noted, this is precisely what would be expected given his thematic emphasis upon the gospel. For in its most comprehensive sense the gospel is nothing more than the proclamation that in Jesus Christ the new order with its renewing and transforming power has come (cf. 3:19-26, 4:1-5:2, 5:9-21, 6:1-8:39, 12:1-21, 13:8-14, 14:1-17, 15:1-13).

Given the perspective and emphasis of the entire epistle, it is expected that Paul's primary reason for introducing the Christ of his gospel as both the *Son of David* and the *Son of God* is redemptive-historical. In other words, by this introduction Paul identified Christ as the man who entered the world of the old order and fulfilled as the "last Adam" the obligation of righteousness the first Adam had forsaken (5:12-21; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-50). Adam had been created as the divine *image-bearer*, unique among all God's creatures. And as image-bearer he stood in a unique relation with God defined by perfect and entire conformity to His Creator. In his created nature as the image of God Adam was fully suited to the most thorough intimacy with God, an intimacy not shared by any other creature, even the elect angels. But with his disobedience came the "death" that is estrangement and enmity between God and man. The Scripture represents this consequence under the imagery of banishment and separation from the tree of life.

Furthermore, man had been created to rule over God's creation as His vice-regent, *so that the earth and all it contains were to find their proper relation to God through the mediating stewardship of man*. Adam was to understand that he was not simply another creature; he was uniquely God's image-bearer, created to exercise God's mediatorial dominion over the works of His hand. This is the emphasis of the Genesis creation account, and is the specific import of God assigning to Adam the naming of all the creatures (Genesis 2:19-20). For this reason, when man rejected his place and role and became estranged from God, the whole created order was implicated. Man's dominion would continue, but his rule over the earth would bear the marks of his own perversion and alienation. Rather than ruling as God's vice-regent, man entered upon a dominion defined by self-proclaimed autonomy. Adam's sin represented man's exaltation of himself to the place of autonomous despot; *in Adam man had made himself his own god*.

This perverse relation of man to God with its consequences in the created world constituted the old order into which Christ entered as the man, Jesus of Nazareth. He was born of woman, born under the law and its condemnation in order to redeem men from the curse (Galatians 4:1-5). He entered the world that was the first age - the age defined by alienation and its resultant curse - to bring the world into the new age - the age defined by reconciliation and the blessing of the kingdom of God. Ridderbos comments:

*"It was in that way, in that mode of existence [the flesh], that he was 'known' before his resurrection. In this 'flesh' he lived and he died, or as it is also called: 'in the body of his flesh' (Col. 1:22), which expression likewise refers not only to the physical as material organism, but to the whole of Christ's existence as a man subject to transitoriness, dishonor, frailty. And it was also in this flesh, i.e., his human existence delivered up to the death of the cross, that the enmity was abolished, the church reconciled, and sin condemned."*

*"It is Christ's being revealed in the flesh (to be understood in this way) that is the specific significance of Christ's life before his resurrection, and which is to be adored...But the new creation is that of Christ's resurrection. For this reason the death of Christ is a turning point in the existence of the old aeon. Christ dies to it, through death he dies to the flesh, to the old aeon. It is this turning point to which Paul orients himself and to which he wants believers to orient themselves. Not only does Christ's life in the flesh come to an end, but an all-important and all-embracing Transition takes place, namely, from the existence of the old to that of the new, from the old aeon to the new creation. By dying Christ has thus snatched his people away from the present aeon (Gal. 1:4). From this moment on faith no longer 'knows,' that is to say, judges, 'after the flesh' (2 Cor. 5:16). It regards all things from another point of view, namely, that the aeon of the sole dominion of the flesh is done away with and the mode of existence of the Spirit has been entered upon." (Paul - An Outline of His Theology)*

- 1) From this perspective it is readily evident why Paul associated Christ “according to the flesh” with *David*. Clearly, if his intent was simply to establish the humanity of Christ he could have used *any* of His human ancestors. Certainly others than David would have been biblically suitable, such as Noah, Shem, Abraham, and Judah. In fact, if Christ’s humanity were his concern Paul should have arguably linked Him to the first man Adam in whom the whole human race found its origin (Luke 3:23-38). Yet despite all the available options Paul chose to associate Jesus in His humanity with David. *The reason is the singular role that David played in God’s revelation of redemption and its fulfillment in His Son.*

Like many others, David was a great Old Testament *type* of Christ, but he was so in a unique way. The nature and scope of that typological relationship are codified in the *Davidic Covenant* recorded in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17. The content of that covenant reveals that, beyond his descent from Abraham, no other figure in Christ’s genealogy is more significant than David. *For it is the reality of His being a son of David that forms the prophetic basis for Christ being the true King of Israel - the promised King of the kingdom of God that is the new aeon.*

Beginning with the Davidic Covenant, for a period of some five hundred years the prophets declared that the house of David would have preeminence in God’s kingdom. As its King, Messiah would sit upon the throne of His father David and reign in righteousness over the house of Israel forever (cf. Psalm 89; Isaiah 9:6-7, 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5-6, 30:1-22, 33:1-26; Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25; Hosea 2:1-3:5; Amos 9:11-15; Zechariah 12:7-8). Centuries earlier Jacob had prophesied that the scepter would not depart from *Judah* until Shiloh comes. This prophecy established the regal aspect of Messianic revelation, but it left the matter with little concrete definition. That definition awaited God’s covenant promise to David. Only then would God bring substance to the Shiloh prophecy and reveal that, through David, the descendent of Judah, the promise of a royal Messiah was to be fulfilled.

Equally important, given how Paul introduced Christ in Romans 1:3-4, is that it was with David that Messianic prophecy first introduced the *divine sonship* of the future Redeemer and King of Israel. This reality would later be developed in the Psalms (note especially Psalm 2), but it was first articulated to David in the context of God’s covenant with him. God promised that a son to come from David’s loins would sit upon his throne and reign over his kingdom. Though David had desired to build a house for God, it would be this son who would accomplish that work. Moreover, God declared that *He* would build a house for David. This son would enjoy the lovingkindness and favor of God – God would regard him as a son, whatever his failings should happen to be.

In context these covenantal promises had their immediate referent in *Solomon*, as David well understood (1 Chronicles 22:6-11). Solomon was the son appointed to inherit the throne of Israel from David, and God established his reign in a time of peace and unparalleled prosperity and dominion. It was in that context that Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 4:20-5:5; 1 Chronicles 28:1-6; 2 Chronicles 6:1-11). Furthermore, God did bestow His favor and lovingkindness upon Solomon despite his numerous moral and religious failures (2 Samuel 12:24-25). But it is equally clear that the covenant looked beyond Solomon to a son of David who would come after him (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16, 18-19).

God promised to David that He would establish the throne of his kingdom *forever* (note Psalm 89:19-37 and its context). The notable emphasis upon uninterrupted perpetuity with respect to David's throne and kingdom testifies that God's promise was not limited to Solomon himself, or even the theocratic throne associated with David's reign over Judah. Though David did not know it, God had already determined to sever the line of kings descended from him, even before the end of the theocracy.

The historical end of the Davidic throne with the death of Zedekiah is crucial to note, given God's promise that He would establish David's throne forever. That end had come with the captivity of Judah, *brought about by God because of the unrighteousness of the Davidic kingdom and its kings*. Yet God had promised the permanence of the Davidic dynasty, and the prophets spoke of that reign as being characterized by perfect, unending righteousness. This meant that the promised kingdom associated with David - and more specifically David's *Seed* - would not be realized in the Old Covenant theocracy. The end of David's dynasty with the captivity made that abundantly clear. But because the kingdom was to be marked by all-encompassing righteousness, it would not be realized in a post-exile recovery either. *David's Son would reign over another kingdom, a kingdom not of this world; that is, not of the present order* (cf. Isaiah 11:1-10, John 18:36). By His conquest this son of David - revealed by God in the Davidic Covenant to be a *divine* Son - would restore righteousness, peace, harmony and prosperity to David's fractured and fallen kingdom (cf. Jeremiah 33:1-26; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Amos 9:11-15; Luke 1:31-33), and then ascend to take His throne at the right hand of His Father. From that place of exaltation and unqualified authority He was to exercise dominion over the restored cosmos as the *true Man* (second Adam) and the *true King* (Son of David) (Acts 2:14-36; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 1:1-4; Revelation 5:1-14; etc.).

*"Thus says the Lord God to them, '...I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken."* (Ezekiel 34:20-24).