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Question: "What is the gospel of Paul?"

Answer:

Other than our Lord Jesus, Paul is probably the most prominent character in the New Testament. Born in Tarsus shortly after the birth of Jesus, Paul, then known as Saul, was a Benjamite brought up in the strict manner of the Pharisees. Early in life, he demonstrated a keen intellect and a zeal for the traditions of Judaism. Though afforded the rights of a Roman citizen, Paul was an ardent Jewish nationalist who despised the ways of the Gentiles. Prior to his dramatic conversion during a journey to Damascus, Saul was a fiery persecutor of the church. After his conversion, he became the New Testament's most prolific writer and Christianity's most tireless missionary.

Paul speaks of the message he proclaimed as "my gospel" in Romans 2:16 and 16:25. What, then, is the "gospel of Paul"? Does it differ from the true gospel, the gospel the other apostles preached? Or does he call it "my gospel" for a different reason?

During his long ministry, Paul’s apostolic authority was repeatedly questioned (**1 Corinthians 9:2; 2 Corinthians 11**) despite his acceptance by the church (**Acts 9:19–25; Galatians 1:18–20**). Even today, there are cultic groups that deny the legitimacy of Paul’s ministry. Those who question Paul’s apostolic authority ignore the testimony of Peter, James, and John, recognized apostles of Christ and pillars of the early church, who extended “the right hand of fellowship” to Paul and his companion Barnabas (**Galatians 2:9**).

Let us set aside any foolish belief that Paul was a counterfeit apostle who preached a spurious message, for the plain teachings of Scripture proves otherwise.

The gospel of Paul was not a different or a counterfeit gospel; the “good news” or “good announcement” he preached conformed in every way to the teachings of the Old Testament writers, the other apostles of the faith, and, most importantly, to the gospel message according to Jesus Christ. If there is a difference in the apostle Paul’s treatment of the gospel, it is not in the essence of the message but in the meticulous detail of the gospel. Indeed, most notably in Romans and Galatians, the apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, delves into the lofty heights and unfathomable depths of the gospel unlike any other New Testament writer. Even Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, was moved by the “weightiness” of Paul’s writings (**2 Peter 3:15–18**).

With that said, let us explore the question “**What is the gospel of Paul?**”
And...

Whose gospel is this?

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. - **Romans 1:1–6, ESV**

Is this Paul’s gospel? *By his own words,*

- the message he preached is the gospel of God (*verse 1*)
- the good news Paul preached, the gospel of God, was foretold by the holy prophets long before Paul lived (*verse 2*)
- the gospel message focuses on Christ Jesus, a descendant of King David according to the Scriptures (*verse 3*)
- though born of a woman and, thus, being fully man, Jesus was also fully God and divine in nature; His Sonship was indisputably established by the Holy Spirit through His bodily resurrection (*verse 4*)

- Paul's authority as an apostle, being called to preach the gospel of God, was granted to him by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (*verse 5*)
- those called of God, having heard and believed the gospel of God, now belong to the Lord Jesus (*verse 6*)

The gospel focuses on the Lord Jesus (**Romans 1:9**) and His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:1–4**).

Paul unashamedly devoted himself to broadcasting this thrilling message, for the gospel reveals the power of God—a mighty force capable of transforming sinners into saints (Romans 1:16). Knowing we are incapable of saving ourselves, we trust the gospel, which reveals the righteousness of God, who saves all who simply believe (Romans 1:17).

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ²By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. - **1 Corinthians 15:1–4 (ESV NIV)**

According to this passage (*1 Corinthians 15:1–4*),

- there is only one gospel: it is the gospel of God that Paul preached and in which the redeemed have taken their stand (*verse 1*)
- this is the gospel that saves, the gospel Paul delivered, and the gospel that must never be forgotten or discarded (*verse 2*)
- according to the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus died for our sins. His sacrifice paid our sin debt (*verse 3*)
- after His lifeless body was taken from the cross and laid to rest in a borrowed tomb, Jesus miraculously walked away from where He lay, as foretold by the holy prophets, proving His absolute power over sin and death (*verse 4*)

How can this be? Dead men do not rise from their graves. A jeering mob had witnessed our Lord's mangled body hanging lifeless on a cruel Roman cross. To counter those who would say the Lord's bodily resurrection is no more than a fanciful tale, He appeared to His disciples and to a company of more than five hundred eyewitnesses. The resurrection did not take place in a dark, hidden corner; the evidence of Jesus' bodily resurrection is a verifiable fact beyond dispute (**1 Corinthians 15:5–8**).

The Gospel of Antiquity

The gospel did not originate with Paul, nor did Paul preach a new or novel message that was hitherto unknown:

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you - **1 Peter 1:17–20**, *(ESV, emphasis added)*

In His perfect knowledge, God knew, even before He spoke the earth into existence, that mankind would need a redeemer. It is rightfully said Christ was slain before the foundation of the world.

The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. - **Genesis 3:14–15**, *(ESV, emphasis added)*

The gospel was first preached by God in the Garden of Eden; the future Messiah, called the “Seed” of the woman (NKJV), would suffer an injury by the hand of Satan, but, in the end, our conquering Savior would deliver a fatal blow to our infernal enemy. As our Savior suffered on the cross, it appeared victory belonged to Satan, but the victory was short-lived. Jesus conquered death and, in doing so, set the stage for Satan’s ultimate doom (**Revelation 20:10**).

The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it and was glad.” - **John 8:48–56**, (*ESV, emphasis added*).

High atop a mountain in the land of Moriah, Abraham told his son Isaac that God would provide the sacrificial lamb (Genesis 22:8). Though Abraham lived some two millennia before the Lord Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, the patriarch was well familiar with the gospel message, and, in fulfillment of Abraham’s prophetic utterance, God indeed provided the perfect, unblemished sacrificial Lamb (**John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:17–20; Revelation 5:8–10**).

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- **Isaiah 53:4–6**, (*ESV*)

Eight hundred years before Roman guards nailed iron spikes into the hands and feet of our Lord Jesus, Isaiah peered into the future and foretold of the Messiah's sacrificial death, which is foundational to the gospel. The gospel according to the prophet Isaiah is the same gospel preached by the apostle Paul, who wrote,

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” - **Galatians 6:14, (ESV)**

The New Testament Gospel

Pulling back the curtain of time, the Holy Spirit allowed the prophets and patriarchs of old to see the future coming of the Messiah; then, in the fullness of time, the Son of God clothed Himself in human flesh to fulfill His role as Redeemer (**John 1:14; Luke 19:10**).

The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said,

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ - **John 1:29–30, (ESV)**

John the Baptist testified that Jesus was the long-awaited sacrificial Lamb sent by God according to the words of the holy prophets. To fulfill this role, Jesus had to be sinless and willing to die for the sin of the world. Had Jesus been born with a sin nature, there would be no gospel message.

16 “For God so loved the world,[a] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. -

John 3:16–18, (ESV)

This most familiar passage gives us the essence of the gospel. God sent His Son, the One who shared in His divine nature, to save a lost world. Those who receive Him by faith are granted everlasting life. Conversely, those who reject Him are already condemned. Later, the apostle Paul wrote,

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” - **Ephesians 2:4–9, (ESV)**

It is obvious the message of Paul agrees with the gospel according to Jesus.

Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost,

29 “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

““The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.””

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. - **Acts 2:29–38**, (ESV)

From Peter's powerful sermon, we learn

- Christ Jesus was a descendant of King David (*verse 30*)
- Christ Jesus was raised from the dead (*verse 31*)
- Peter and many others were eye-witnesses of our Lord's bodily resurrection (*verse 32*)
- now that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit of God begins His ministry (*verse 33*)
- God the Father promises God the Son that His enemies will be defeated (*verses 34–35*)
- the One crucified is both Lord and Christ (*verse 36*)

Convicted by the Holy Spirit, Peter's audience asked what they were to do. By faith, they believed Peter's gospel message, so what was next? Peter instructed his audience to repent, that is, to renounce the rites and rituals of mere religion by turning to the living Savior. Repentance involves a change of heart and a change in direction. Peter also instructed the new believers to publicly acknowledge their newfound faith through water baptism. Believers are not saved by the ordinance of baptism, but believers willingly choose to be baptized because they have been saved.

Again, the gospel focuses on the person of Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus is the unique, unblemished, and uncompromised Anointed One, fully God and fully man, who overcame death and the grave so that all who believe in Him will receive the gift of everlasting life. This is in accordance with the inspired teachings of both the Old and New Testament writers.

Warning against counterfeit gospel messages

Just as our Lord Jesus warned against false christs (**Matthew 24:23–24**), the apostle Paul warned against perversions of the gospel. Satan understands that false christs and false gospel messages are incapable of saving lost sinners, so for two thousand years, our enemy has been counterfeiting phony messiahs and advancing spurious gospel messages.

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. - **Galatians 1:6–9, (ESV)**

Paul's warning to the church in Galatia says

- those who follow a different gospel have, in truth, deserted our Lord Jesus and have turned their backs on His loving grace (*verse 6*)
- there is only one gospel, and all others are worthless distortions of the truth (*verse 7*)
- those who preach counterfeit gospel messages are heretics worthy of damnation (*verses 8–9*)

Obviously, those who proclaim there are many ways to God are the false teachers Paul warned against.

Conclusion

Despite the false charges levied against Paul, his gospel teachings are in harmony with the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, his New Testament contemporaries, and, most importantly, the teachings of Jesus. Those who accuse Paul of having strayed from the gospel stand on shaky ground; Scripture proves that, rather than teaching a “different gospel,” he gave the church greater insight into the only true gospel, the gospel of God (**Romans 1:1**). The following passage gives ample evidence that Paul’s prime motive was not in making a name for himself, but in furthering the cause of Christ:

10 I appeal to you, brothers,[a] by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. - **1 Corinthians 1:10–17, (ESV)**

What is the gospel of Paul? Quite simply, the gospel Paul preached is the same gospel proclaimed by the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and the Lord Jesus. The gospel of Paul is the gospel of God. He refers to it as “my gospel” because it was the message he had devoted his life to proclaiming.

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It is ALWAYS best to pour over the scriptures yourself, thoroughly and in prayer* together with other trusted brethren to enable you to reach the best possible interpretations that God has intended for us.

However when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak from Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. - **John 16:13**