

The Gospel of God

Paul begins the Epistle to the Romans with a simple statement, innocuous in its presentation, but utterly profound in its implications for humanity as it pertains to the purpose of the Triune God who progressively reveals Himself throughout the pages of this Epistle. Romans contains more than just an argument for justification by faith; it supplies more than just source material for sermons that uphold the law-gospel hermeneutic; and it therefore contains more than just an indictment of fallen humanity and upholds more than just the preciousness of Christ's redemptive death on the cross. True, it can be employed in all of these theological endeavors, but these are not the ultimate purpose of the God from whom this Gospel derives its very existence. The Epistle to the Romans is the "gospel of God" (1:1); it is a speaking from God through the apostle Paul that reveals God, imparts God, and organically expresses God in His many sons.

God Revealed

As a starting proposition, it may seem almost trite to declare that Romans is a revelation from God. All who acknowledge the divine inspiration of the Word of God readily accept this proposition (2 Tim. 3:16), not only in regard to Romans but in regard to the entirety of the Scriptures. Implicit in this acceptance, however, is a further proposition that a revelation *from* God is also a revelation *about* God since what is made known is His will (Eph. 1:9), which derives from His very person. At its deepest level, the revealed will of God, the command of God contained in the gospel of God in Romans, involves the organic impartation and expression of the revealed God within the believers. In Romans the mystery in the gospel is made abundantly clear by God Himself (Rom. 16:25), who is unveiled within the believers. The gospel of God conveys God's intentional desire to reveal who He is to and into humanity.

The crucial role of revelation can be seen throughout Romans. The gospel is powerful because the righteousness of God is revealed in it (1:16-17). All that is known of God is due to the fact that God has manifested it both in creation and in clear utterances committed to Scripture (v. 19). So complete is His revelation that even the invisible things of God are clearly seen and can be perceived, that is, made comprehensible to the human mind (v. 20).

Humanity in its early interaction with this self-revealing God knew both Him and His attributes, especially His righteousness through judgment (v. 32). Under the dominating power of sin (6:14), however, humanity exchanged the revealed truth of God for a lie and did not approve of holding Him in their full knowledge (1:25, 28).¹ We became ignorant of the power of sin over our lives, necessitating the need for God to further reveal Himself in contrast to sin through the law (3:20), which serves as a testimony that only He is capable of righteousness, holiness, and glory, and that by default all of our efforts fall short of the standard of His self-revelation (v. 23).

Even though the law brings with it a clear knowledge of sin, the righteousness of God, in order to fulfill the will of God according to the promise of God, required a deeper revelation, an organic revelation, apart from law. This occurred through the manifestation of righteousness in the person of Christ in His incarnation, and through a demonstration of righteousness in the work of Christ in His crucifixion (vv. 21, 25-26). These verses underscore the principal point concerning the revelation that comes from God and that is about God in Romans: it comes from a living God, and it reveals a living God who desires to be righteously reconciled and organically joined with humanity so that His life may be imparted into the believers (5:10). The basis for the Triune God's interaction with redeemed and regenerated humanity is not one of law, but rather one of life—His divine life. From Galatians 3:21, it is clear that the law is incapable of giving life; from 1 Corinthians 15:45, it is clear that the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit; and from Romans 8:2, it is clear that the Christian life depends upon the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

The revelation of an organic and living God begins with Paul's affirmation that the gospel of God concerns "His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:3-4). Paul identifies Christ the Son with the term *seed*, indicating not only His organic identification with humanity as the seed of David according to the flesh, but also His potential for growth and expression within those whom He redeems. *The seed of David* exemplifies the mingling of divinity

and humanity in the person of Christ. The designation of this seed of humanity as *the Son of God* in resurrection exemplifies the deification of humanity in the person of Christ. In resurrection, the humanity of Jesus was designated, uplifted, and fully divinized.

The pattern of the mingling of divinity and humanity in 1:3-4 is unveiled in the life and living of the believers throughout the remainder of the Epistle. This living derives from the believers' union and organic identification with Christ. This identification, which involves the operation of the indwelling Triune God, is revealed particularly in chapters six and eight. The believers have been baptized into Christ and into His death, utterly separating them from the power and influence of the old creation (6:3). Thus separated, the believers have been supplied with the power of the resurrection life which enables them to walk in newness of the divine life (v. 4). This process of participating in the death and resurrection of Christ is likened to growing together with Christ (v. 5), in which the body of sin is annulled and there is a living with Him that is to God (vv. 6, 8, 10).

Our growing together with Christ is possible because we were cut off from the wild olive tree of our fallen humanity through our crucifixion with Christ (11:24; 6:6), which is practically and mystically realized in our baptism, and because we were subsequently grafted into the cultivated olive tree of the God-man, Christ. This grafting of the divine life with redeemed humanity is the mingling of divinity and humanity within the regenerated believers, a mingling that has been made possible through the unveiling of our organic Triune God. In Romans 8, an organic emphasis is presented and highlighted in relation to each person of the Divine Trinity. The Spirit is revealed to be a Spirit of life (v. 2), and the One who raised Jesus from the dead through the indwelling Spirit is giving life to our mortal bodies (v. 11). Finally, our spirit is life because Christ the Son, who is life, is in us (v. 10; John 14:16). The gospel of God reveals an organic God who desires to impart His life and nature, that is, His very being, into us.

God Imparted

Romans does not reveal an objective, distant, and judgmental God but, instead, a subjective, imparted, and experiential God. At its deepest level, revelation entails impartation and experience. The unveiling of the divine mystery is the imparting of the divine mystery. The gospel of God involves a speaking, a ministry, a dispensing, that unveils and imparts the reality of what is spoken. Paul declares, "I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift" through the announcing of the gospel (1:11, 15). The gift that Paul desires to impart is the "free gift in grace of the one man Jesus Christ" which abounds to many (5:15). This gift is the gift of righteousness which

cannot be separated from the obedient One who constitutes the believers righteous (vv. 17, 19). The principal experience associated with this gift is one of receiving; constitution does not come from working, but from receiving the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness, which issues in the believers' reigning in the divine life through their identification with Jesus Christ (v. 17).

Through the impartation of the divine life, there is a constitution in the divine life (v. 19), which alone can overcome the effects of the fall which constituted humanity with a different and destructive, organic element. Humanity has been corrupted and constituted with sin and death through the operation of the law of sin and death (8:2), that is, through the organic operation of the satanic life and nature. Sin has entered into the world; death has been passed on to all men (5:21); there is no escape, only a complete and total falling short of the glory of God. All have sinned because all have been constituted sinners (v. 19). But where sin abounds, grace—revealed, unveiled, and imparted—super-abounds (v. 20). It is important to realize that this super-abounding grace is the experiential and economical impartation of the Triune God.

Romans is replete with references to the reality of an imparted God. The desire of God to impart Himself is revealed in the account of Abraham in chapter four where the promise of God is clearly linked with the concept of seed. The God of glory appeared to Abraham in Ur of Chaldees, spoke to him of seed and enlargement (vv. 16-18), infusing Himself into Abraham as faith through His preaching of the gospel (v. 20; Gal. 3:8). Abraham believed God, and this belief then was accounted to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:22). In chapter five the righteousness of God was fully satisfied through Christ's death for the ungodly, thus enabling the love of God to be poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (vv. 6, 8, 5).

Having been reconciled to God through the death of His Son, we can experience the much more salvation that is available through the impartation of His divine life (v. 10). Our identification with Christ's death and resurrection in verses 3 through 5 of chapter six is for the purpose of being joined to Him in order to bear fruit to God in verse 4 of chapter seven. This fruit is the overflowing expressiveness of the imparted God; it is an issue of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in chapter eight. In this chapter, the Spirit of God dwells in us; we have the Spirit of Christ, and Christ is in us (vv. 9-10). Additionally, the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, giving life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells us (v. 11). The imparted Spirit in this chapter is active—He is witnessing with our spirit that we are children of God (v. 16), joining in with

us in our groanings (v. 26), and interceding for us according to God (v. 27).

All of these operations of the imparted God in Romans are possible only because God has passed through a process in His economy which makes the mingling of divinity and humanity possible. This economical process is also revealed as a crucial component in the gospel of God in Romans. The economy of God is the plan and purpose of God, which He purposed in Himself, to gain an enlarged corporate expression of Himself in those who were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world and who were predestinated unto sonship (Eph. 1:4-5, 9). In order to carry out this eternal purpose, which Paul restates with clarity in Romans 8:29, of having many sons conformed to the image of His Son, God passed through a process of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension for the purpose of redeeming, regenerating, indwelling, and ultimately glorifying His elect. His process makes His impartation possible. In each part in this process, the Triune God was fully involved, being eternally coexistent and coinherent. We all must be willing to humbly acknowledge the mystery in this process, and we all must be willing to affirm that it is revealed in the holy Scriptures. This is the gospel that we will be judged according to (2:16); this is the form of the teaching into which we have been delivered (6:17); and this is the revealed mystery that will establish the believers in the local expressions of God's eternal and universal expression in the Body of Christ (16:25).

Concerning incarnation, Romans reveals that God, knowing the weakness of the law through the flesh, sent His own Son, the eternal and only begotten Son, in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin to condemn sin in the flesh (8:3). This one man, Jesus Christ (5:15), came out of the seed of David according to the flesh and lived a perfect and upright human life by living according to the divine life (1:3). The righteousness of God was manifested in the human living of the person of Christ (3:21), and as such He was qualified to be the propitiation place to reconcile God and sinners through faith in His blood (v. 25). On the cross in His death, the power of sin was terminated in the crucifixion of our old man (6:6), and there is no longer the unrestrained power of death and sin lording over us (vv. 9, 14). In recognition of the power of Christ's redemptive death for our offenses, He was raised in resurrection for our justification (4:25). He is the One who has been raised from the dead that we might bear fruit to God (7:4). He also ascended to the highest heavens and has been enthroned (8:34). In the culmination of this process, the Triune God in Christ has made Himself available to His chosen and redeemed to indwell us through and as the Spirit (v. 2). Without His being processed, there is no impartation, no union, and ultimately no expression and enlargement of Himself

within the organic Body of Christ, fully conformed to the image of His Son.

God Expressed

The ultimate aim of God's revealing and imparting Himself is an enlarged expression of Himself through the organic Body of Christ. This expression is related to the glorification of the believers with the glory of God. The glory of God is a central item in the gospel of God: Through the gospel the believers are called to the obtaining of the glory of God (2 Thes. 2:14); through the gospel of the glory of Christ, the image of God is illuminated and shined upon the believers (2 Cor. 4:4); and through the sacred entrustment of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, the God of glory appears and imparts Himself for His enlarged expression (1 Tim. 1:11; Acts 7:2). Glory is simply God expressed, and the gospel fills the believers, who are vessels of mercy that have been prepared beforehand for glory, with the riches of God's glory (Rom. 9:23).

Glory is central to the presentation of the gospel of God in Romans. The fall of humanity is intrinsically linked with humanity's failure to glorify God. According to Paul's retelling of the Genesis account, humanity knew God but did not glorify Him as God or thank Him (Rom. 1:21). Failing in God's original intention to express Him, they became vain in their reasonings and darkened in their hearts. Although vessels by design, humanity after the fall not only lacked the ability to manifest the glory of God, but was also barred from obtaining it without the shedding of blood. Instead, the void created by their failure to partake of God as life was filled with other images. The glory of the incorruptible God was changed into the likeness of the image of corruptible man, birds, animals, and reptiles (v. 23).

The standard of judgment is God's glory, and from Romans 3:23, it is clear that the standard of judgment is God's glory. Anything short of God's glory is sin. The glory that was lost because of the fall, however, becomes obtainable once again through faith by grace (5:2), as a result of Christ's redemptive death and resurrection from the dead through the glory of the Father (6:4). The imperative of glory within the divine economy is so powerful that the entire creation will be freed from the corruption of slavery into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (8:21), which will be revealed upon us at the moment of the redemption of our bodies (vv. 18, 23). The end of the divine economy is glorification—our predestination is unto glory, unto conformity to the image of His Son (vv. 29-30).

The purpose of humanity is to express God, which is reflected in our creation in the image and likeness of God. Although this purpose was frustrated and corrupted by

lower and profane forms of expression, God will fully gain His desired purpose by recovering humanity back to His original intention. This work of recovery is made possible through the process that the Triune God passed through in order to impart Himself into His redeemed and regenerated elect. But even more importantly, the recovery of image and dominion, that is, the full expression of God in humanity, is accomplished by the reproduction of God Himself in His redeemed and regenerated elect. God truly is expressed only when God is organically reproduced in the believers according to the prototype of His Firstborn.

The gospel of God at its most intrinsic level concerns the reproduction of Christ, the divine seed, within redeemed humanity in order to produce an organic expression that is fully one with Him in life and nature. In order to produce a prototype, God became man through incarnation as the seed of David, and then in resurrection, the humanity of this seed was designated the Son of God. In resurrection man became God in the person of Christ. Through the gospel, this divine-human seed has been deposited into us, and we are growing together with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, that is, we too are also be divinized with the divine life and nature to the point that we will be fully conformed to the image of the Firstborn. Eventually, in our glorification,² the hope of the glory of our God will become our reality. God will be reproduced in us by virtue of our organic identification with Him through His life and nature. We will be declared and unveiled as sons of God, fully possessing His life and nature, but not His Godhead and certainly not as objects of worship. Rather, glory forever and ever will redound to the One who is the only wise God through Jesus Christ (16:27).

In this age, however, the reality of this organic identity is made known through the church which is unveiled in Romans as both the universal Body of Christ in chapter twelve and the local churches as the vibrant expressions of this organic Body in chapter sixteen. In this organic union, Christ is the Head and the church is the Body. Christ and the church not only express the image of God, but also exercise the dominion and authority of God, as Satan is crushed under the feet of the church that is joined to Christ the Head (v. 20).

The Gospel of God

The gospel of God in Romans is not about faith versus works, but ultimately about life versus death. We were dead in offenses and sins, but through the gospel, which reveals, imparts, and reproduces the life of God within God's chosen, redeemed, and regenerated elect, we have been made alive through our organic identification with Christ. We have been joined to Him as the prototypical God-man, and we are being conformed to His image for His glory. This conformation involves our participation in the same process of death and resurrection, the same process of divinization that will culminate in the revelation of the sons of God who, as vessels of mercy, are filled and overflowing with the riches of the glory of His grace. It is at this point that the depths of the gospel of God will be unveiled, established, and realized.

by John Pester

Notes

¹Much of God's revelation, however, can be lost when that which is known of God is not acknowledged with thankfulness (Rom. 1:19, 21). Expositions on Romans that are limited to an objective presentation of justification by faith often fail to acknowledge that which has been clearly manifested in Romans concerning God's new creation in His New Testament economy, and thus much is lost.

²Glorification is the step in God's complete salvation in which God will completely saturate our body of sin, which is of death and is mortal (7:24; 8:11; 6:6), with the glory of His life and nature according to the principle of His regenerating our spirit through the Spirit. In this way He will transfigure our body, conforming it to the resurrected, glorious body of His Son (Phil. 3:21). This is the ultimate step in God's complete salvation, wherein God obtains a full expression, which will ultimately be manifested in the New Jerusalem in the coming age. (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:30, note 2)

Works Cited

Lee, Witness. Footnotes. Recovery Version of the New Testament. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1991.

Footnote from the Recovery Version of the New Testament on Romans 1:1

"Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated unto the **gospel** of God."

Gospel: The gospel of God, as the subject of this book, concerns Christ as the Spirit living within the believers after His resurrection. This is higher and more subjective than what was presented in the Gospels, which concern Christ only in the flesh as He lived among His disciples after His incarnation but before His death and resurrection. This book, however, reveals that Christ has resurrected and has become the life-giving Spirit (8:9-10). He is no longer merely the Christ outside the believers, but He is now the Christ within them. Hence, the gospel in this book is the gospel of the One who is now indwelling His believers as their subjective Savior. (Note 9)