The Preacher of the Good News
Scripture: Romans 1:1
Code: 45-02

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Bad News

A quick look at any newspaper or magazine shows that the world is getting worse and worse. The bad news that occurs on a larger scale is only the multiplication of what is occurring on an individual level. The term "bad news" has become a colloquialism to describe our era.

The reason there is so much bad news today is that people are in the grasp of a terrifying power that grips them deep inside their being. It causes men to self-destruct. The power that makes for bad news is sin. There are four ways in which sin produces bad news in the human race.

1. Selfishness

It is truly bad news when everyone is bent on fulfilling his own particular desires at any price. The basic element in selfishness is the dominance of your own ego above others. It all started when Satan said, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most high" (Isa. 14:13-14). Man has inherited that propensity to sin and is utterly self-centered. Whatever evil a society permits, man will attempt. He will go as far as society's toleration will allow. Man will consume everything in sight based on his own lust--things, people, and ultimately himself. Many times when a friend, spouse, or family member ceases to provide what an individual wants, they are discarded like an old pair of useless shoes.

The ultimate goal in life for sinful man is to achieve self- satisfaction. Whether it is in businesses or marriages, man ends up perverting everything because of his selfish lust for fame, dominance, popularity, money, and physical fulfillment. Sin pushes humanity to self-consumption. Someone has well said we ought to use things and love people, but instead we love things and use people. The end

result of man's selfishness is that he is unable to have meaningful relationships. He is unwilling to give and thus he forfeits that which is the truest source of joy--an unselfish, sacrificial love for others. Man becomes dominated by selfish greed that alienates him from everyone and everything. He finally comes to a place of utter loneliness and despair. When man follows his own lust, he begins to realize the law of diminishing returns--the more he wants, the less it satisfies.

2. Guilt

Using and abusing people, or doing whatever else is necessary to indulge yourself brings about guilt. God has designed man to feel sorrow when he sins, otherwise man could never prevent himself from going to hell. It is like pain. God has given the sensation of pain to allow you to recognize when your body is injured. Likewise, God has given us the sensation of guilt as a way to tell us that we are sinful and something has to change. The bad news is that man lives with anxiety, fear, psychological problems, ulcers, and a myriad of illnesses caused by his guilt. He may try to alleviate his guilt by drunkenness, debauchery, or even suicide. Men try to cover their guilt with a frivolous facade. Some men even try to rationalize their guilt away with money, possessions, alcohol, drugs, sex, travel, and psychoanalysis. Some blame their guilt on society, perhaps on a so-called antiquated biblical tradition. People will push off their sin on anything. I read of one man who blamed his guilt on a banana his mother gave him when he was a child! But you only end up compounding your guilt when you blame someone else for it.

3. Meaninglessness

When man experiences selfishness and guilt, he will invariably ask himself, "Is what I'm experiencing all there is to life? What are the real answers? The real questions? Why am I alive? What is the real meaning of life?" Man is fed a steady diet of lies by Satan himself, who runs the world's evil system. And since his lies never really answer the question of man's existence, man is left with no answers. Edna St. Vincent Millay said this in her poem "Lament": "Life must go on; I forget just why. " Many live in a series of 24-hour periods without real significance, where little changes. The epitomy of man's problem is summed up by Roquentin, the main character in philosopher Jean Paul Sartre's novel Nansea, who said, "I decided to kill myself to remove at least one superfluous life. "

4. Hopelessness

Born out of the trauma and anxiety of meaninglessness is the reality that you have nothing to live for and nothing to look forward to. The only result of a self-centered, guilt-ridden meaningless life is the starkness of death. That is why people mask the reality of death by laughing at it or ignoring it to avoid the inevitable hopelessness--the sense there is nothing for man here in this life or in the life to come--is the worst news of all.

Thousands of babies are born every day into a world filled with bad news. With each passing day, men find themselves falling deeper into the human dilemma because they live in a world dominated by the father of lies--Satan himself. As a result, sin produces bad news. And even the small amounts of good news are but moments of rest in an unending saga of bad news. It is like so many peace treaties--those moments when everyone stops to reload. In between the bad news, much of the good news is short-lived.

B. The Good News

With so much bad news, can there really be any good news? Yes! The good news is that sin can be dealt with. You don't have to be selfish. Guilt and anxiety can be alleviated. There is meaning to life and hope of life after death. The apostle Paul says in Romans 1:1 that the good news is the gospel, which is the good news of God. That is what the book of Romans is all about. Paul begins this epistle with the good news of God, and ends with it as well (cf. 15:16). Bracketing the entire epistle is the great reality that there is good news from God.

1. Its significance

Paul called the gospel by many different phrases, but whatever he called it, it was good news. It is the good news that man's sin can be forgiven, guilt can be removed, life can have meaning, and a hopeful future can be a reality.

Paul endeavors throughout the book of Romans to unfold the incomprehensible riches of the good news to man. But did you know that the entire thrust of all 16 chapters of Romans is distilled into the first seven verses? Paul is so thrilled by what he wants to say that he can't wait to say it, so he capsulizes his foundational thoughts in Romans 1:1-7. It is as if the seed of the gospel is in the first seven verses and then fully blooms throughout the rest of the epistle.

2. Its source

The Greek word for gospel in verse 1 is euangelion. It is used over 60 times by Paul in his epistles. Paul had lived all his life hearing only the bad news, but once he heard the good news he couldn't help but tell everyone in sight about it. Tyndale wrote that the word euangelion signifies good, merry, glad and joyful tidings that makes a man's heart rejoice and makes him sing and dance and leap for joy. The good news is the merry, glad, and joyful news that God will deliver us from our sin.

The thrust of the Greek text of Romans 1:1 is that the good news is from God. It is important that Paul distinguished between ordinary good news and good news from God because euangelion was a common Greek word. In one of its more prominent occurrences, it was used to precede messages to the people from the emperor. In the Roman Empire, the people were required to worship the emperor as if he were a god. Whenever someone from the emperor's official party made an important announcement, it was called euangelion, or good news. The messenger would proclaim, "Good news, the emperor has given birth to an heir" or "Good news, a new emperor has acceded to the throne. "

Paul contrasts his good news as if to say, from the emperor by saying, "I'm writing to you at Rome who are used to hearing the euangelion of the empire and I'm telling you I've got good news not from Caesar, but from God. " The really good news is from God, (most of the Caesars were bad news!). God brings good news to those who are undeserving.

The Way God Loves

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse illustrated the Christian's unworthiness by recounting this story: "It was told that a young man, much loved of his mother, pursued a wicked course that took him deeper and deeper into sin. He became enamored of an evil woman who dragged him further and further into unrighteousness. The mother naturally sought to draw him back to a higher plane and the other woman resented it bitterly. One night, the story goes, the evil woman chided the man with an accusation that he did not really love her. He vowed that he did. She appealed to his drunken mind, saying, that if he loved her he would rid them of his mother and her pleadings. According to the story, the young man rushed from the room to the nearby house in which his mother dwelt, and dealt her death blows, tearing the heart from her body to carry it back to his paramour. Then comes the climax

of the tale. As he rushed on in his insane folly, he stumbled and fell, and from the bleeding heart there came a voice, `My son, are you hurt?' That's the way God loves you" (Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure, Vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], pp. 21-22).

Charles Wesley put the same thought into his hymn "Depth of Mercy": "Depth of mercy! can there be mercy still reserved for me? Can my God His wrath forbear--me, the chief of sinners, spare? I have long withstood His grace, long provoked Him to His face, would not hearken to His calls, grieved Him by a thousand falls. " Wesley marvelled at the good news from God to undeserving men.

II. THE PREACHER OF THE GOOD NEWS (v. 1)

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. "

God called a unique man, Paul, to be a major spokesman for the good news. God had committed to him mysteries concerning the church that had been hidden from past generations but were now to be revealed (cf. Eph. 3:3, Col. 1:26-27). Paul was God's keynote speaker for the heralding of the good news to the Gentiles. He had a remarkable Jewish heritage, Greek education, and Roman citizenship. He had incredible abilities as a leader, fighter, motivator, and articulator who was specially called and converted by God Himself. From Jerusalem to Macedonia, Paul had completed three missionary journeys proclaiming the good news. And even though Paul was mightily gifted by God and could perform miracles, he could not rid himself of his own thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Paul could cause prisons to fall (Acts 16:26), yet became a permanent prisoner. All the preachers who have ever preached since Paul have depended on his sermons for their material. Paul left a great legacy of biblical teaching through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

A. Paul--A Servant of Jesus Christ (v. 1a)

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. "

1. A slave of dignity

The Greek word used here for servant is doulos, which means "slave. " Those who love the Lord are his servants.

a) Exodus 21:5-6

The Lord said, "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free; then his master shall bring him unto the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him forever. " Because of his love for his master, this servant became known as a "bondslave. " He didn't serve because he was forced to but because he wanted to. He became a slave of love.

b) Genesis 26:24

"The Lord appeared unto him [Isaac] the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham, thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake" (emphasis added).

c) Numbers 12:7

The Lord said, "My servant, Moses, is faithful in all mine house" (emphasis added).

d) Joshua 24:29

Scripture says, "It came to pass . . . that Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old" (emphasis added).

e) 2 Samuel 7:5

The Lord said, "Go and tell my servant, David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in" (emphasis added).

f) Isaiah 20:3

"The Lord said . . . my servant, Isaiah, hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia" (emphasis added).

g) Isaiah 53:11

The Lord prophesied about the coming Messiah by saying, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities" (emphasis added).

Paul was a bondslave. It was something he chose out of love, not fear. There were perhaps millions of slaves in the Roman Empire. For the most part, they were treated not as persons but as objects. If a master wanted to kill his slaves, he could. Some Bible commentators think Paul is using doulos only in its Jewish sense--not in the Roman sense--and is thereby affirming love for Christ. The Hebrew concept of servant could include someone in the highest ranks of service. Kings had servants, and in that sense, a servant could be someone who had great honor and dignity.

2. A slave of humility

However, to see Paul as referring to his slavery to Christ only out of love does not encompass the entire point of the term. There is a certain incomprehensible dignity in being called a servant of Jesus Christ. But it is not correct to disregard the Gentile understanding of the term. The Greek term itself (doulos) referred to abject slavery--a term of humility, not dignity. Paul used two other words to speak of his servitude.

a) 1 Corinthians 3:5

"Who, then, is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" The Greek word for "ministers" is diakonos, which means "table waiter. " Paul described himself as nothing more than a menial servant for Christ.

b) 1 Corinthians 4:1

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ. " Here the Greek word translated "ministers" is hup[ma]eretes. The prefix of the word, huper, means "under" and the suffix, etes, comes from a word that means "to row. " A trireme ship had three levels of oars with three levels of galley slaves who rowed those huge ships. Paul was saying he was a third-level galley slave for Christ.

Combined in the term slave is the Hebrew concept of dignity, honor, and respect, but also the Greek concept of humility. Paul paradoxically finds himself both exalted as the servant of Christ and debased as well. That is the ambivalence every representative of Jesus Christ must face.

When I think of the honor in being a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it sometimes overwhelms me. There is no higher calling in life than to proclaim the gospel of God from the pulpit, and to be able to teach the Word of God under the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet there is also a paradox that requires the minister of Christ to realize he has absolutely no right to think he deserves to minister. He must have the proper perspective of being an unworthy slave who has the incomprehensible privilege of proclaiming the good news.

B. Paul--An Apostle of Jesus Christ (v. 1b)

"Called to be an apostle. "

1. The calling

The best rendering of the Greek text of Romans 1:1 is that Paul was a called apostle. His being an apostle was not based on his own decision. God effectually called him to that office. It was not a human appointment. The term apostle was first used by the Lord in Luke 6:13. He referred to the twelve as His apostles. Paul was also called an apostle by God Himself.

a) Acts 9:15

The Lord said of Paul, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. " Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, but the Lord stopped him dead in his tracks. The decision for Paul to preach did not originate with him; it was God's sovereign choice.

b) Acts 22:14-15

Recounting his conversion, Paul quoted Ananias as saying, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. "

c) Acts 26:16-17

The Lord had said to Paul, "Rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee. " Paul obeyed the heavenly vision given by God on the Damascus road. He was called of God to be an apostle.

d) 1 Corinthians 9:16

Paul affirmed his call to the ministry by saying, "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!"

e) Galatians 1:1

Paul began the epistle to the Galatians this way: "Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. " Later in verse 12 he said, "I neither received it [the gospel] of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. " Paul's call to the ministry was from Christ Himself.

3. The concept

The Greek word for apostle is ap[ma]ostolos which means "one who is sent, commissioned, or dispatched. " It refers to a messenger, ambassador, or an envoy. There were certain vessels referred to as "apostolic boats. " They were common cargo ships. The word apostle meant anything dispatched or sent. Paul was saying he had been sent by Jesus Christ Himself. The term apostle itself appears over 78 times in the New Testament, the majority of those references being used to describe the twelve disciples and Paul. They were specially sent by Christ.

There is a story of an old black preacher who pastored a small country church. He always preached his heart out because he was a humble and godly man. A young man came to preach one Sunday night at his church. He was cocky, self-assured, and thought he was more than the people deserved. As he preached, it was apparent his attitude was not one of love or compassion. When he finished preaching, the old black preacher came up to him and said, "Young man, was you sent or did you just went?" There are probably many other preachers who are in the latter category. The apostle Paul was sent. He knew that because God had affirmed it to him.

3. The credentials

a) The office of an apostle

There is also an official sense in which the word apostle must be understood. An apostle was someone who held an official office within the church. The term can have a broad meaning to describe all who bear the message of Christ. All Christians are sent by Christ into the world to preach the gospel (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). But the ones who were specially sent by Christ bear the title of Apostle with a capital "A" in a sense.

b) The origin of an apostle

The New Testament describes various people as apostles in addition to the twelve and Paul. But they did not hold the specific office of an apostle. To be in the office of apostle, you would have to have been verbally called by Jesus Christ into the ministry and to have been eye witnesses of Christ and His resurrection. Paul qualifies because he saw Christ on the Damascus road. The apostles and their close associates were also to be the human authors of the New Testament because Jesus made the promise to them that the Spirit would come and bring to their remembrance all that He had said to them (cf. John 14:26).

The twelve apostles--Matthias replacing Judas--and Paul were called by Jesus Himself. The Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah, "Woe be unto the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" (Jer. 23:1). The church today is filled with preachers who are talking but should not be listened to. They do not have the anointing of God on them and have corrupted the church throughout the centuries.

c) The signs of an apostle

The apostles were given the ability to do signs, wonders, and miracles, which Paul calls the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). Their office was not restricted to a local church, or for a certain period of time in their lives. Once you were an apostle, you were an apostle for life. They became the foundation on which all the history of the church is built.

C. Paul--Set Apart by Jesus Christ (v. 1c)

"Separated unto the gospel of God. "

1. The meaning of separation in the Old Testament

You cannot serve God unless you are separated. The word has the idea of being set apart for a specific task or purpose.

a) Numbers 15:20

The Lord said to Moses, "Ye shall offer up a cake of the first of your dough for an heave offering. " God wanted the firstfruits of the land to be set apart to honor Him.

b) Numbers 8:11

Again the Lord said to Moses, "Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the Lord. " God desired to set apart the best men by consecrating the Levites to His service.

d) Leviticus 20:26

The Lord said, "Ye shall be holy unto me; for I, the Lord, am holy, and have separated you from other people, that ye should be mine. " God took the whole nation of Israel and separated them from all other nations for His glory.

In each of those passages, the Septuagint--the Greek version of the Old Testament--uses a form of the word aph[ma]orizein, which is the same word used in Romans 1:1. It refers to separation in the fullest sense. Paul knew that once he was called as an apostle, he would be disconnected from his past. In the middle of aph[ma]orizein is phoriz which may refer to the word Pharisee meaning "separated one. " Paul had been the most ardent Pharisee, separated unto the traditions of the Jewish people (Phil 3:5). In a sense he could say, "I am a Pharisee separated unto the gospel of God. "

2. The meaning of separation in the New Testament

a) Galatians 1:15

Paul said, "It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace. " Paul was elected by God unto the gospel of God.

b) Acts 13:2

The Holy Spirit said to the church at Antioch, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them. " The secret of Paul's service was that he was a bondslave of Christ, utterly surrendered to the Lord. He was sent to carry the message of the cross, so he cut the cord with the world. There are so many people in the gospel ministry who see little fruit and no power, because they are unwilling to be separated from the world.

c) 2 Timothy 2:15

d) Paul said to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. " Timothy had come to the point in his life where his ministry was falling apart. In verse 6 of chapter 1 Paul told Timothy to make use the gift he had for preaching and teaching, which had been confirmed by the laying on of Paul's hands. Timothy had been getting lazy in the ministry.

He had also become timid (1:7). He had been personally discipled by Paul, was gifted enough to have followed Paul as the pastor of the Ephesian church. Paul had even said to the Corinthians, "I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which are in Christ" (1 Cor. 4:17). He may have been involved in the "profane and vain babblings" of speculative philosophy (2:16). Verses 22-23 of the same chapter indicate he was getting embroiled in youthful lusts as well as striving in "foolish and unlearned questions. "

Timothy had been influenced by the world's evil system. Paul was exhorting Timothy not to be caught up in the lusts of this world. When you are called into the ministry of Jesus Christ, you must sever your ties with the world.

II. CONCLUSION

Paul was not only a servant of Christ, but also called as an apostle and separated to God in holiness. He didn't get himself entangled with the affairs of this life (2 Tim. 2:4). Many men today have left the ministry because they love money or possessions. They couldn't sever the ties with the world and fell into sin. Some men are more concerned about their reputation, so when they get an opportunity to speak, they make sure they never offend anyone. But in so doing, they offend God because they are not separated from evil men (cf. John 12:42-43).

Paul was a man after God's own heart. Romans 1:1 says it all: his position--"servant", his authority--"called to be an apostle by God", his power--"separated", his message--"the gospel [good news] from God. "

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is there so much bad news today?

2. The basic element in selfishness is the dominance of your own _____ above others.

3. True or False: The ultimate goal in life for sinful man is to achieve self-satisfaction.

4. What is the law of diminishing returns and how does it affect man's attitudes?

5. What is the second area of bad news in today's world and what is its result?

6. Explain the bad news of meaninglessness and hopelessness.

7. What is the good news? Explain how it relates to selfishness, guilt, meaninglessness, and hopelessness.

8. What is the significance of the first seven verses in Romans?

9. What was the secular understanding of good news? What is Paul's contrast?

10. In what ways was Paul blessed to preach the mysteries concerning the church?

11. Explain the Hebrew and Greek concepts concerning slaves. How did Paul exhibit both characteristics?

12. A minister must have the proper perspective of being an _____ _____ who also has the incomprehensible _____ of proclaiming the good news.

13. Explain how Paul was called to be an apostle.

14. According to the criteria for the office of an apostle, can there be any apostles in the church today? Explain your answer from Scripture.

15. When you are called into the ministry of Jesus Christ, you must _____ your ties with the world.

Pondering the Principles

1. The apostle Paul was a servant of Jesus Christ. He recognized the dignity of the position but also knew of its humility. Every Christian is likewise called to be a servant of Christ. That involves serving others. Do you have a servant's heart? Do you desire to please God by serving your fellow man? Read the following verses and ask God to make you into a Christlike servant: John 12:26, 13:14-16 and 2 Cor. 4:5.

2. Paul realized that to be a proclaimer of the gospel, he had to separate himself from evil men. Men will not listen to the message of Christ if the one presenting it is living in an unrighteous manner. Are you separating yourself from evil so that the gospel is not being discredited because of you? If there is anything in your life that is discrediting the gospel, confess your sin to God and ask Him to make you holy on a daily basis. Memorize Hebrews 12:14: "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. "

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