

# What is an evangelical?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please would you turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 1 on page 1131 and we're going to read the first 17 verses.

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.

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

[ 1 : 54 ] For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

[ 3 : 09 ] Before we dive in, can I just say, first of all, I've had great fun this weekend, and I'm very grateful to you all for your hospitality. And secondly, there's another big thank you I want to say, and that is that from a Crosslink's point of view, we want to say thank you to you all for the way in which you are taking an active participation in things beyond where you are here in Dulwich.

And in particular, I have in mind the gospel partnership you formed with Jamie and Helen Reid in Port Elizabeth. Simon and I had the great privilege of spending a week teaching at the college, as many of you will know, in the earlier part of this year.

But I know how well and seriously you're taking that partnership, and from a Crosslink's perspective, I want to say we appreciate it very much indeed. Indeed, in fact, our ambition is to promote those kind of partnerships.

So rather than you thinking in terms of us doing the mission, what we want to do is to serve you in your engagement in God's mission. So if somebody asks you, okay, so where is Grace Church Dulwich involved in God's mission?

The answer automatically is, well, here in Dulwich, oh, and in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. That's where you're involved in mission, and God willing, in other places as well.

[ 4 : 35 ] So those are my thank yous. We are now going to turn to this passage that we had read just a moment ago. If you've got a Bible within arm's reach, and there appear to be a lot of very nice, smart, new, unsoiled Bibles, knocking around, could you please find page 1131 and Romans chapter 1.

Now, for those who are able to be at the day yesterday, one of the things we noticed was that the Apostle Paul urges Christian people not only to go on believing the gospel, not only to proclaim the gospel, but actually to contend for the gospel.

We were reading this in his letter to the church at a city called Philippi. And of course, if you're going to contend for the gospel, you do need to know what it is you're contending for.

We said yesterday that if we're going to be evangelical people, and the word evangel is the New Testament word, the Greek word for gospel, so evangelical means a gospel person.

We said yesterday that to be an evangelical is to be a Bible person and a gospel person. Then the gospel needs to be at the very heart of all that we're doing, both as individuals and as a church.

[ 6 : 09 ] I was in Nigeria at the beginning of August, and there I had the privilege of teaching the letter to the Philippians. And I was very struck in preparing it to notice how Paul longed that that church might have the gospel at its very heart, that the gospel will be the engine that drives everything.

And what Paul longed for them, Paul longed for all the churches of which he was an apostle, and the New Testament longs that churches today would be like churches back there then, with the gospel as the engine.

So what we're going to do this morning is turn to a Bible passage in which the apostle Paul talks about the gospel. Now, this is the beginning of a long letter. I'm mindful of the children's thing we had this morning, and conscious that in fact what we're doing is reading just half of the first chapter of rather a long and interesting book.

So let me say straight away that this is not going to be really an introduction to the letter of Romans. So we're not going to do that. We're coming to this passage in order to notice what the apostle Paul says here about the gospel.

Now, a lot of other stuff here, and if we were beginning a series on Romans, we would have to notice all of that other material. This then is a topical study on the theme of the gospel, because here in the first part of chapter one, the apostle Paul makes five great statements about the gospel.

[ 7 : 52 ] And I'm very grateful to Joe, who's produced this little A5 outline. I hope that you've got it, and that will give you a little map to show where we're heading. Now, the apostle Paul wasn't always a gospel man.

The New Testament tells us that he grew up within quite a strict Jewish family, and he became an enthusiast for his religion.

He was taught under a leading rabbi called Gamaliel. He became a scholar, and the religion that he grew up within, he adopted with full seriousness.

Now, we know, don't we, in our day and generation, what it looks like to have serious religion. It may be you have neighbors or friends who are active Muslims, for whom at the moment, in the season of Ramadan, there are very strict rules and regulations about what has to be observed.

That is serious religion. The apostle Paul took his religion very seriously. Let me read to you, don't need to turn to it, let me read to you what he says about his own background.

[ 9 : 13 ] If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. I was circumcised on the eighth day, born of the people of Israel, born of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness, under the law, blameless.

Now, that is quite a claim to make, isn't it? If you understand the size and the scale of the legalistic requirements that first century Pharisaic Judaism laid upon its adherents, with more than 600 do's and don'ts.

That is serious religion. And that is to do with feasts and festivals. It's to do with fasting. It's to do with sacrifices. It's to do with self-discipline. It is to do with obedience.

It is to do with tithing. It is a tremendous list of things. And Paul says, as to the law, blameless. Now, you remember that Saul, in his persecuting of the church, headed off one day down to Damascus. And from Jerusalem to Damascus on that road, he was confronted by none other than the risen Lord Jesus.

[ 10 : 51 ] Jesus, bright light, he falls to his feet, he recognizes in whose presence he is, but he's not sure of the name. And so he says, who are you, Lord?

To hear the voice, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Paul thought he was persecuting the church. He regarded the church as deserving of persecution, for it had abandoned the faith of their

forefathers.

And the voice from heaven said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Well, we read about the story in Acts 9.

If you're not familiar with it, it's a terrific thing to go and to read. Listen to what Paul says later on. After he has become established as a Christian believer.

After he has been commissioned by Christ as an apostle. Again, as he writes to the Philippian church. But, he says, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[12:02] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things. And count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

The righteousness from God that depends on faith. The language Paul uses here is language borrowed from financial world of his day.

It is the language of one who thought they had great assets and now finds that they are worthless. Apologize to any for whom here, that is a very sore and touchy subject at the end of a tumultuous week, I know, in our financial markets.

But that was how Paul found himself. All those assets he had accumulated over the years, through his religious observance, he discovered actually were worthless.

[13:14] And he now counted them as a dead loss. Compared, he says, with the surpassing worth of possessing this one thing that Christ has won for him.

Is that true of you? You come to that realization? The gospel grabs you so that everything that you've had, everything you've achieved, everything you've accomplished, you can write down as a loss compared with the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

I wonder for how long you have understood things that way. Whether it's still fresh for you. Its freshness had stayed with the Apostle Paul.

And so back in Romans chapter 1, come back with me. We find that he, in writing this letter to a church in Rome, not a church that he had founded, not a church he'd yet visited, although he hopes to go there soon, Paul describes himself as a servant, and the word could equally be translated slave, of Christ Jesus.

You know, sometimes Paul swaps the names around. So Christ is the title, Jesus is the name, yes? So Jesus Christ is the normal way of putting it.

[14:35] But when he wants to emphasize that this is the King, he puts the title first. A servant of King Jesus. A servant of Christ Jesus.

And as such, he was called to be an apostle. Now, every Christian person, every believer in Jesus, is a servant of Jesus.

Not every Christian person, of course, is an apostle. That was a unique role and responsibility that Paul and his fellow apostles were privileged to perform in the first century.

But it means that what follows next is as true of you as it was of Paul. That is to be set apart for the gospel. That is what God does, isn't it?

When he opens our eyes to understand these things and draws us to repentance and faith in Christ, he sets us apart for the gospel. You are no longer your own.

[15:39] You are bought with a price, the apostle writes elsewhere. And so at the beginning of this tremendous letter to the Roman church, what Paul does is to speak of that gospel and to make five great statements about it.

We're going to pick out these statements. I'm going to try and say something about each of them.

And then we're going to land up in verse 16 with a little bit of a puzzle that we need to work our way through.

So here we go. Five great statements about the gospel. Number one, it's God's gospel. You can pick that up in verse one. Paul says he's set apart for the gospel of God.

And what that means quite simply is that it's not man's gospel. It's not even the apostle Paul's gospel.

Paul, writing to some other churches in the region called Galatia, speaks about the fact that he's very concerned that those Christians were heading off to a different gospel.

[16:48] Listen to what he says. I'm astonished that you're so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. Now listen to this.

Not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. There is only one gospel.

And its content is given, it's fixed, because it's God's gospel. Listen to what Paul says next. Even if we, that is the apostles, or an angel from heaven, so even if Gabriel were to turn up and preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached, let him be accursed.

As we've 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. It's a very serious issue.

The Galatian church were being troubled by people who claimed to be teaching the gospel, but whose gospel was different from the gospel. And Paul says not even he as an apostle has the authority to change the gospel.

[18:04] It's God's gospel. It's a gospel that, as we're reminded again in the excellent children's slot this morning, it's a gospel that was part of God's plan and purpose from the very first times.

It's a gospel that God promised even to Abraham at the beginning of the Old Testament. It's a gospel that is brought to fulfillment in the coming of Jesus, and it's a gospel that will continue until Christ returns and this world is put to an end.

It's therefore not the church's gospel. The early church didn't get together and decide, look, Jesus has been a jolly good chap. It's all been quite an impressive start. What do we do next?

We need a message for the world. Come on, chaps, let's meet together and we'll work out a narrative and then we'll get a PR firm and we'll make that narrative known to the world.

It's not the church's gospel. The church does not have proprietorial rights over it. It is God's gospel. It's given. That's the first great statement about the gospel.

[19:14] Second one. Pick it up in verse three. The gospel is all about Jesus. You see, the fulfillment of all those promises of God in the Old Testament is to be found in the coming of Jesus in his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection.

So it is that when Mark begins his gospel, he says the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ as was written in the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

The gospels then are about the gospel and they are the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament pointed forward to.

Paul here speaks of this Jesus having been descended from David, King David, the greatest king of the Old Testament, the one to whom God said one of his sons would one day be placed on his throne and his rule would last forever.

Jesus is great David's greater son. Despite that extraordinary physical lineage, nevertheless, that Jesus died on the cross.

[20:37] But that was not the end of his story. For he was declared, verse four, to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

And so Paul is right to speak of him as Jesus Christ our Lord. For the resurrection proclaims that to all the world. And Paul as an apostle had been set apart by God in order to proclaim that message. Verse five, through whom we've received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name.

And there Paul picks up the final words of Jesus recorded at the end of Matthew's gospel where the risen Jesus says, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. the obedience of all nations.

[21:41] And says Paul, that includes you Romans. The gospel then is not about Paul. Paul never turned up and preached about himself.

Now he said, our gospel is about Christ and him crucified. Anybody wants you to give a summary of the gospel? What is the gospel?

The answer is the gospel is Christ and him crucified. It's not just the story of Jesus. It's not just about who Jesus is. It's about what Jesus did.

It's Christ and him crucified. The gospel then is not about us. The gospel is not about church.

The gospel is all about Jesus. So it's God's gospel. It's all about Jesus. This third one. We're going to dive toward the end of the passage to pick up this third one.

[ 22 : 37 ] I'm going to do it in this order because I think this is the way, the logical way in which Paul is setting it out. But you can see therefore that we're sort of picking this theme from the passage.

Come to verse 17. The gospel concerns righteousness. For in it, that is in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.

As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. Some of you will have heard and know a little about Martin Luther, a great German reformer.

Luther was a Bible teacher. He was a scholar. And he was giving a series of lectures on the book of Romans in a German university. And he wrote that he longed to understand Paul's letter, but that there was one hurdle that he simply struggled to overcome.

And that was to grasp the meaning of the phrase, the righteousness of God. Luther wrote that he'd always assumed that phrase meant God's righteous character, whereby he would judge and condemn all sinful people.

[ 23 : 51 ] And then, says Luther, it dawned on me that this actually means the righteousness that belongs to God, but it's a righteousness that he gives.

At the very heart of the gospel is this idea that God can give righteousness. You see, the Bible tells us that every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve, every human being ever born on this planet is in our heart and our mind instinctively and characteristically rebellious against God.

Instead of acknowledging God as God, we push him on one side. We make ourselves king and lord of our own lives. Back in our church, we explain sin to children like this.

We say sin is a simple word, so it's only got three letters, and it's got I in the middle. And that's what sin does. It puts me in the middle of my world.

As a result of which, the holy and righteous God looks at all mankind, and what he sees is that we are unrighteous.

[ 25 : 13 ] All have sinned and fallen short of his standards, says Paul later on in this letter. But now in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed.

For Christ died on the cross to take upon himself the punishment we deserved that we might have credited to our account his righteousness.

We're back on financial accounting again. It is somebody who has become bankrupt, suddenly having credited to their account huge and colossal assets that they never earned.

That is your position if you are in Christ. No wonder Paul decided that all that he'd accumulated he could write off as a loss because now credited to his account was not his own paltry efforts at righteousness, but Christ's perfect righteousness.

an infinite bank balance. It's worth having, isn't it? Worth swapping anything for that. And for Martin Luther, this he said, opened the very doors of heaven.

[ 26 : 32 ] For he suddenly saw that at the heart of the gospel lay a righteousness that God gave to those who had faith.

Faith that trusts God's word. Faith that understands that when Christ died he died for me and for you and for every man and woman for every slave and every free man for every Jew and every Gentile for every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve.

The gospel concerns righteousness and by faith in the finished work of Christ we can be declared righteous. The technical word is justified.

It's a legal term. It means that we as it were appear at the bar of the court and we are declared not guilty. But the grounds of that declaration are not our own great moral efforts but Christ's death on our behalf.

It's God's gospel. It's all about Jesus. It concerns righteousness. If you cast your eye up just to verse 16 you'll notice Paul says that this gospel is God's call to all people.

[ 27 : 55 ] to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Now if you cast your eye back we noticed this earlier on in this passage.

Verse 5 Paul speaks about the sake of his name among all nations. God's agenda from the very beginning from his promise to Abraham was to bring a blessing to all the peoples on earth.

God worked out his plan through a particular people the nation of Israel but his agenda was always for the whole world.

And so Paul can write this letter to the very capital city of his world in the first century and say you also verse 6 are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

The gospel is God's call to all people. What does the gospel do? It calls me to repent of my sin and to put my trust in Christ.

[ 29 : 00 ] So when I become a real Christian for the first time in my life I do as I'm told. Our parents like children to do that don't they? They say well done please do as you're told.

Parents have you not ever said that? In the gospel God comes and says will you please do as you're told? The gospel is God's call. God calls us to repent of our sins and put our trust and faith in Jesus.

Now my friends it's not any more complicated than that. That's not complicated is it? It's terrific isn't it? The gospel is God calling.

Apparently after the Lib Dem conference I don't know whether you were one of those who got it Mr. Clegg sent out a quarter of a million phone calls by recorded message in order to try and get the Lib Dem message across.

Anyone here fortunate enough to receive one of those? No? Well there we are then you see. The gospel is God calling. So when you explain that you're a Bible person and a gospel person and when you explain that the gospel is about Christ and him crucified it's God's word.

[ 30 : 19 ] It's God calling. The gospel is God's call to all people. Lastly verse 17 it's God's power for salvation.

This is a terrific statement isn't it? At the end of verse 16 I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. Salvation is needed because we need to be rescued.

We need to be rescued not from our sin but from the consequences of that sin. We need to be rescued from God's wrath.

And that's the great thing that Paul goes on to if you read on in this chapter from verse 18 and beyond that. Of course there's a great deal of fallout from human sin.

[ 31 : 25 ] Our world is a wreck of a place. But the gospel comes to bring salvation from God's wrath. And the word salvation is rescue.

And the gospel is God's power for rescue. The gospel is able to rescue anybody whatever their stage of life whatever their background whatever their struggles God knows our hearts he knows our minds he knows the worst about you.

If you're here this morning and you're tempted to think oh that's okay but the gospel is not strong enough to rescue me. Yes it is my friend because it's God's gospel and it is the power of God for salvation.

We won't understand how powerful it is until we face God on judgment day. And then we will realise as we see the awesome majesty of God what a powerful gospel this is that can rescue sinful men and women like you and me.

It is a terrifically powerful gospel. So five great statements about the gospel. Paul was fairly taken by the gospel don't you think? It's God's gospel it's all about Jesus concerns righteousness it's God's call to all people and it's God's power for salvation.

[ 32 : 56 ] Which brings me finally to my little puzzle which is verse 16 because verse 16 is a surprise isn't it? I mean if Paul is clearly very thrilled about the gospel isn't he?

He's very chuffed to be an apostle he's set apart as an apostle for the gospel it's the gospel of God and all the rest of it why would he have to say to these Christian people in Rome therefore that he wasn't ashamed of it I mean who would have thought he was?

It's a little bit of a puzzle isn't it? What is it about the gospel that he might be ashamed of? Well the problem with the gospel in the first century was that it was so counter cultural you see the Graeco-Roman world loved great victories and it loved great heroes who won those victories if you visited Rome you'll know that sometimes great triumphal arches were built to celebrate Roman generals victories and the Roman general would ride on a great white stallion and all his prisoners would be coming behind him and everyone would be sort of casting wreaths and he'd be given all sorts of prizes and honours and tributes so first century Graeco-Roman world loved powerful heroic big achieving people and it despised the weak and the lowly but at the heart of the gospel is a crucified messiah one who rode to his death not on a great white stallion but on a donkey one who couldn't even apparently deal with a provincial

Roman procurator called Pilate you see at the heart of the gospel is something weak and frankly shameful to be crucified was a fate too bad for a Roman citizen to be permitted to endure it's counter it's counter cultural too because it speaks of future blessings and present struggles and so it is very easy isn't it to be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel people say to you which church do you go to and you say what sort of church is that oh it's a bible church and it's a gospel church or do we duck it one of the things I enjoy doing in my spare time is playing golf I'm a member of a golf club in Blackheath I've been a member there about five years and very often in a round of golf some people say you know well what do you do and I say well

I work for an international mission agency and that of course can sound very good because it's you know if they're not Christian people they think well that's good Alan's obviously involved helping all the poor of the world and a temptation for me is to let them have that wrong understanding and not actually say what we're doing is proclaiming the gospel throughout the world you see and I can back off that and then they can think Alan's a jolly nice guy you know he's concerned for the poor and needy in the world which is quite a different platform for the conversation than if I'm actually saying no I'm doing this because I'm a bible person and I'm a gospel person and God's gospel is God's call even to you my friend it's easy to back off isn't it and so was Paul ashamed of the gospel he says not how about 21st century knowledge prepared to make a stand for the gospel amongst your friends your neighbours your work colleagues here as a church it's

[ 37 : 03 ] God's gospel it's all about Jesus concerns righteousness God's call to all people it's the power of God for salvation Paul says I'm not ashamed of that gospel let's pray that we may not be let's pray Father we want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your gospel we pray for ourselves we pray for those sitting around us this morning that your great good news of the gospel may be for us as it was for Paul the most precious thing that we have in comparison with which everything we have achieved everything we own is as a loss and then we ask Lord that you would drive out from us any shame we feel keep us we pray from being ashamed of your gospel but rather help us to glory in it and to proclaim it for

Jesus name sake Amen beers enorme amazing to bad topres Hö few people do anything that ha■ got ■■ Nio huh not anybody it little■ we