

The Significance of the Gospel (15:1-2)

Paul's gospel preached (15:1a)

In the opening verses of the 15th chapter, Paul begins with the expression, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel.” The conjunction δέ (*de*) likely has the force of emphasizing a contrast, i.e. “now.”¹ This emphasis is seen in conjunction with the rest of the opening expression. The verb “I make known” is γνωρίζω (*gnōridzō*) and is not as easy to render into English in this verse as one might expect. It has as a lexical gloss the meaning “make known,” or “reveal.”² The difficulty lies in the context that immediately follows. Paul says that what he makes known to them is the content of the gospel, a gospel that he then tells them they had already believed when he preached to them. How can something be made known that is already known? This difficulty has led many translators to render the verb “remind.”³ There is, however, a common Greek verb available to communicate the sense, “I remind you.”⁴ We are left then with trying to correctly understand what Paul is saying with the choice of this verb. It may very well be that the idea of remind may be the equivalent of what Paul is saying even with the choice of verb. The verb γνωρίζω (*gnōridzō*) is a conscious choice by Paul to communicate to them that they were deficient in their true understanding of the gospel of Christ. Findlay goes so far as to say with the choice of the verb, “Paul writes, with a touch of blame, as though *informing* the Cor. of what the staple of his message had been, that on which the their whole of Christianity is built.”⁵ In other words, while they had believed the gospel message when it was preached to them (2:1-5), their lives as believers left a lot to be desired. They had been saved but since then had become mired in disunity and factions, leading to indifference towards sin and each other. In effect, they had forgotten from whence they came and were in need of a stronger refresher course in the gospel message and the gospel ministry. Therefore they were in need of hearing the gospel message again, as if for the first time. Fee notes, “Now he ‘makes known’ to them what they already know, but seem to have forgotten.”⁶

What Paul makes known to them again, is “the gospel.” The term εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) basically means “good news” and needs to be qualified when used. In other words, it is good news about someone or something. For believers, it denotes the good news of Jesus Christ, a fact which Paul is about to demonstrate very powerfully in a few verses. The term is found eight times in the epistle with six of the uses in chapter 9 alone as Paul discusses the nature of liberty as if relates to his own example of being supported by the gospel ministry. In none of

¹ BDAG, s.v., δέ, 171, 1.c. BDAG notes this use of δέ for “relating one teaching to another.”

² Ibid., s.v. γνωρίζω, 163.

³ See NIV, NLT, RSV, NRSV, ESV, GNT.

⁴ See ἀναμνησκω.

⁵ G. G. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 2:729-953, 5 vols. ([London]: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897-1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 2:918.

⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 719.

these uses is he giving a treatise on the nature of the gospel, but simply uses the term to discuss his own relationship to ministry. The only other use of the term besides here in 15:1 is in 4:15. This passage is found in a part of the argument of the book where Paul chides the church for misunderstanding the nature of gospel ministry. It is curious of Paul that in chapters 1 and 2, while making extensive comments about the gospel message, he never makes mention of the actual term εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) until chapter 4. This omission of the term can be seen for instance in 1:21 where he reminds his readers that God was pleased to save all who believed “the foolishness of the message preached.” In 1:23 he mentions that he preached “Christ crucified.” In 2:1 he reminds them of when he came with the gospel he knew nothing “except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (2:2). Again, there is no mention of the actual term “gospel.” Paul is not adverse elsewhere actually using a personal pronoun with εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) as in “my gospel” (Rom 2:16, 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8). However later on in 2:4 he simply states “my message and my preaching.” It isn’t until toward the end of his demonstration of how much they really misunderstood the nature of the gospel message and ministry that he writes, “for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (4:15). They owed their eternal lives to the grace of God through Paul’s gospel message and ministry. Paul went on to deal with other problems in chapters 5 and 6 before going on in chapters 7-14 and addressing specific questions they had raised, but when he finished with all this he was ready to address them with what was on his heart. And he did stating, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel.”

The term “gospel” is a key Pauline term and concept, being used almost 80% of the time by the apostle (60 of 76 New Testament uses). Paul’s life was intricately tied to the gospel of Christ. He was set apart for the gospel from his mother’s womb (Gal 1:11-15). He was entrusted with the gospel (Gal 2:7). He was called to suffer for the gospel (2 Tim 1:8). He was compelled to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9:16). He was not ashamed of the gospel (Rom 1:16). He did all things for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:23). Paul’s life was the gospel.

This gospel, Paul declares, “I preached to you.” The verb “preached” is εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelidzō*), the verb form of the noun “gospel.” It means to preach or herald good news.⁷ So in this opening phrase we have both the noun and the related verb in close proximity to each other: τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην (*to euangelion ho euēnglisamēn*). We live in an age that wants to do everything with the gospel except preach it. Today many churches want to sing it, dramatize it, paintball it, and in some cases, bury it. The Greco-Roman world was well versed in drama and the arts. However neither Paul nor any other New Testament writer ever implores the church, “Dramatize the gospel.” As a matter of fact, Paul seems to go out of his way in 2:1-4 to show that he was just a simple preacher, not a gifted orator, actor, or soprano for that matter. He preached good news about the saving cross of Christ. God did the rest and as Paul noted, the Almighty was well pleased to do the saving. This is a message that is lost today on a church that looks to church growth gurus for guidance on how to do church. This emphasis on new means of doing church is not new with the church of the 21st century.

⁷ BDAG, s.v., εὐαγγελίζω, 317.

Debates about what constitutes biblical church ministry is an old, ongoing one.⁸ We need to remember that God doesn't want anyone or anything getting credit for how sinners are justified. It is all a work of his grace.

⁸ For a helpful treatment of this issue in the 18th and 19th century, see Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994. See especially 161-252.