

DID PAUL PREACH A PROPHESED GOSPEL ?

A Refutation Of The Teaching of Pastor Cornelius R. Stam on This Subject
by Peter Wiering.

One day I picked up the January 1977 issue of the "Berean Searchlight". An article by the editor, Cornelius R. Stam, caught my interest. It was the first installment of the author's exposition on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans and was entitled: "Paul and his message." I saw what the writer tried to get across and disagreed with his thinking. Since then I have, studied the subject more in depth, and have discussed it with others. I now send out this article to help members of the Body of Christ to search the Scriptures and to further the right understanding of the Word of God.

That Paul preached truth that was never before made known I fully acknowledge. As Paul states it: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will . . ." (and) "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery. . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men." (Ephesians 1:9; Ephesians 3:1 to 4). To Paul the Lord revealed a great body of truth concerning God's method and purpose with the Church, Christ's Body, gathered out of the nations. This was not made known till it was revealed to Paul.

Much more could be said about the revelation of the mystery given to the Body of Christ in the Epistles of Paul, but we are now concerned with the question: "Did Paul preach a prophesied gospel?" Must we quickly conclude that since Paul made known "the mystery of the gospel" he could not have been preaching at the same time a message of salvation that was foretold or prophesied long before? We think not. Or must we reason that since Paul had to preach "the mystery of. the gospel" he couldn't have been preaching a prophesied gospel, for he surely did not preach "two gospels"? Again we do not accept that as sound reasoning. There may be some who think that accepting it as fact that Paul preached both a "foretold" and a "kept hidden" gospel would force us to conclude that Paul preached the one gospel in his early ministry and the other in his later ministry. This thinking we do not accept either as necessary. No, we think that there is no particular problem in taking Paul's own words at face value by seeing that he preached both truth that was before made known and truth that was never before made known. Paul calls both these subjects of truth "gospel" or good news. In Paul total message both elements were harmoniously fitted together. (We should add here, for clarification, that Paul received truth progressively, as well)

The Epistle to the Romans shows us so beautifully how Paul's total message contained both good news that was foretold by the prophets and good news that never was made known. The contents of the letter also bear this out. We do realize that Paul received fuller revelation as to the "gospel of salvation" than anyone had yet received. Also we are very much aware of the fact that Paul's total message was unique.

In order to examine brother Stam's article and avoid any misrepresentation of his teaching, we reproduce here in full the part of his article that we are concerned with. First we will show the two parts of Romans that are important to the subject

Romans 1:1 to 5

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus

Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

Romans 16:25 and 26

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

The following is taken from the Berean Searchlight, January 1977, pages 296-301.

PAUL'S MESSAGE

If we bring Verses 1 and 3 together (Verse 2 is a parenthesis), we see that the Apostle Paul was called to proclaim "the gospel [good news] of God, concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." His good news was essentially about Christ.

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Verse two, the parenthesis, presents a problem for many, for it indicates that Paul's gospel was promised afore by [God's] prophets in the Holy Scriptures,"

To some this is evidence that either

- (1.) Paul preached "the gospel of the kingdom" during his early ministry or that
- (2.) "the gospel of the grace of God" was prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures.

These friends generally draw a contrast between "the gospel . . . promised afore" in the opening verses of Romans, and what Paul calls "my gospel . . . the mystery . . . kept secret since the world began." in the closing verses of the epistle.

This view fascinates many but it will not stand the Berean test for several reasons.

1. There is no evidence that Paul ever preached "the gospel of the kingdom." He proved to his Jewish hearers that Jesus was the Christ; so would we if we would have them trust Him as their Savior. But even in the Apostle's first recorded address at the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, the climax of his message, that which all the rest led up to, was justification by grace, through faith in Christ. apart from the Law. Hear his powerful conclusion: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that THROUGH THIS MAN IS PREACHED UNTO YOU THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS: AND BY HIM ALL THAT BELIEVE ARE JUSTIFIED FROM ALL THINGS, FROM WHICH YE COULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW OF MOSES" (Acts 13:38 and 39).
2. "The gospel of the grace of God" was not prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul states clearly in Ephesians 3:2 and 3 that his "dispensation of the grace of God" was a "mystery," a secret: "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God

which is given me to you-ward: "How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery...."

3. In both his earlier and later epistles the Apostle consistently speaks of "my gospel," "the gospel which I preached unto you," "that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles," etc. Never is there any indication that he preached two gospels one earlier and one later. Indeed, in Acts 20:24, looking backward as well as forward, he expresses the desire: ". . . that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." This passage could hardly state more clearly the fact that Paul was commissioned to proclaim one gospel, the full content of which was, of course, gradually unfolded to him (See Acts 26:16; II Corinthians 12:1, et al).
4. "The gospel," here in Romans 1:1 to 5, which some hold to be Paul's earlier message, is stated to be the same basic message as that which he still proclaimed just before his martyrdom at Rome. Note carefully; Romans 1:1 to 5: ". . . the gospel of God . . . concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of THE SEED OF DAVID according to the flesh [This is how Christ had been known.], and declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead. By whom we have received grace and apostleship. for obedience to the faith among all nations." II Timothy 2:7 to 9 (Just before his martyrdom): "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ, of THE SEED OF DAVID, was raised from the dead according to my gospel; wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound." In both these passages it is clear that Jesus Christ, "of the Seed of David" (as He had been known), was preached by Paul in a fuller light.
5. In both the beginning and end of Romans Paul declares that his gospel is God's message to be received in the "obedience of faith" among all nations: "Romans 1:5: "...for obedience to the faith [the obedience of faith] (Exactly the same in the Greek as Romans 16:26.) among all nations, for His name." Romans 16:26: ". . . made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." It should be noted here that this gospel ("my gospel") was "the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began." Since this must apply also to Romans 1:1 to 5, how could Paul have been preaching the gospel of the kingdom, or how could "the gospel of the grace of God" have been prophesied?
6. The essence of Paul's message in Romans had not been prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. Where in the Old Testament do we read about God's righteousness imputed through the death of Christ, or of justification without the deeds of the Law, or of Jews and Gentiles placed on the same level, or of the believer's baptism into Christ, or of the one joint-body? All this is dealt with in Romans.

Why, then, does the Apostle say that his gospel was "promised afore by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures"?

In the light of all the Scriptures and especially of the Epistle to the Romans itself, it is clear that Paul refers not to the contents of his gospel but simply to the fact that God had predicted that He had, wonderful good news in store for mankind. This is borne out by Isaiah 64:4 and I Corinthians 2:9 and 10.

ISAIAH 64:4

"For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him."

Referring back to this passage the Apostle says: I Corinthians 2:9 and 10: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

BUT GOD HATH REVEALED THEM UNTO US BY HIS SPIRIT...."

Surely this implies that now God, by His Spirit, has made these things known to us, i.e., in His Word.

These are the things we shall seek to find, and to learn to appreciate, as we continue in our studies in the Epistle to the Romans.

More is sometimes read into Romans 4:6,7 than it says, If David had told the people of Israel that they need not obey the ceremonial law he would have been stoned to death for blasphemy.

Although this exposition by our brother in Christ may appear to be a substantiated Scripture study, we don't believe that it will stand up when a real Berean test is applied. Moreover we are convinced that it is an important issue as it touches upon the very gospel of salvation.

The author begins his explanation of the second verse with the remark: "Verse two, the parenthesis; presents a problem to many," Honestly I wonder of whom Mr. Stam is thinking, for it seems to me that this verse primarily presents a problem to him because of his peculiar explanation of the subject. He then proceeds to state what "some" think. Thus instead of saying what he thinks verse two means, he diverts the attention to what some others think and then refutes their thinking. He speaks of "friends" who draw a contrast between the gospel ... promised afore and my gospel the mystery.

From a careful study of the writings of the late J. C. O'Hair we see that brother O'Hair is one of these "friends" who draw such a contrast. Mr. Stam thus has taken a different position than Mr. O'Hair has stood for. Again, in order to avoid any misrepresentation of the thinking of J. C. O'Hair, we reproduce here various quotes from his writings.

"Every person who has ever been saved, since the days of Abel, has been saved on the grounds of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Note:

ACTS 13:29 and 30

‘And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. But God raised Him from the dead.’

Thus we see that 'the Mystery of the Gospel' is something different from the fact that Christ died for our sins and was buried and raised the third day." Unsearchable Riches, p 258

"In I Corinthians 15:1 to 4 we read of the gospel by which sinners are saved: the crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of Christ, all 'according to the Scriptures,' or in fulfillment of the Scriptures called 'the Old Testament.' (I Corinthians 15:3 and 4 . . . Luke 24:44 to 47 . . . Acts 13:29 and 30)"

"In rightly dividing the Word of truth, the intelligent, spiritual student of the Scriptures will know the difference between the gospel (good news) for the sinner, in I Corinthians 15:1 to

4, and the gospel (good news) for the saint in Ephesians, called "The mystery of God's will" (Ephesians 1:9).

"There is a very decided difference between 'the gospel' by which sinners are saved and 'the mystery of the gospel' for saints. Peter and other apostles preached and wrote the truth that Christ died for our sins in fulfillment of prophecy." The Most Wonderful Truth in the Bible, pages 10 and 11

"Why did Paul suffer as an evildoer? For the gospel. For what gospel? He said "MY GOSPEL". All of the apostles were preaching I Corinthians 15:1 to 4. Paul was not referring to that." Unsearchable Riches, page 99.

"Paul had a 'confirmation' (prophesied) ministry and a 'revelation' (unprophesied) ministry. Acts 26:22 to 24; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 3:8 and 3:1 to 4." (How to understand and enjoy the Bible, page 51)

"No one was ever saved, or ever will be saved, except by the gospel of I Corinthians 15:1 to 4: "Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised". That was all 'according to the Scriptures' and in fulfillment of prophecy." (Acts 13:29 to 31; Acts 26:21 to 23; Luke 24:41 to 46). Bible Truth, page 71

Mr. Stam then has six points to prove that there is no contrast between the two gospels mentioned in Romans one and sixteen. Let us take up these six points.

- (1) The issue here is not whether Paul preached the "gospel of the kingdom" as the Twelve preached it. (I do not believe that he did) The issue is rather whether the gospel of salvation which he preached was prophesied or not. "Justification by grace, through faith in Christ, apart from the Law" as Paul preached it in Antioch was promised in the Old Testament Scriptures, even though it wasn't fully revealed at that time. Paul quotes Habakkuk: "The just shall live by faith" and uses the words and examples of David and Abraham to show that justification is not of works of the law, but by faith.
- (2) Under point two Mr. Stam confuses the issue by introducing Ephesians 3:2 and 3 and by making that synonymous with the gospel of salvation. We think that he fails to distinguish between the parts of the whole message of Paul.
- (3) While brother O'Hair held to a difference between the gospel of salvation and the mystery of the gospel, brother Stam thinks that Paul had but one gospel and thus makes these two one. Pastor O'Hair of course did not teach that Paul preached one gospel earlier and one later but he simply saw that Paul's total message was comprised of the prophesied gospel of salvation and the unprophesied "my gospel" . . . " . . . the mystery,"
- (4) Under, point four Mr. Stam doesn't actually prove that "the gospel of God" was not prophesied, but only that Paul continued to preach it;—what we agree to.
- (5) Here Mr. Stam argues that the gospels mentioned in Romans 1 and 16 must be the same because both were to be received in the obedience of faith among all nations. We do not think that this point of similarity negates the point of difference . We must not fail to distinguish the things that differ. I can't follow his way of reasoning when he claims that since one was "kept secret" it must apply to the other also.
- (6) Under point six brother Stam comes to the point. First he states that " the essence of Paul's message in Romans had not been prophesied, and he names some truths to back up his claim. Of the five examples he uses, the latter three deal with hidden truth

and relate to Romans 16 instead of Romans 1:1 to 5. Thus they only prove that Romans contains mystery truth, which we fully acknowledge. The first two are indeed, we believe, subject of the revelation in the Old Testament. We might use the illustration of a puzzle. Even if the puzzle has not been fully assembled, there are pieces to be found. And at least enough pieces are in the Old Testament to show that "imputed righteousness"; "justification without the deeds of the law" is essentially God's plan and that by the death of the Lamb that God would provide. Mr. Stam then poses the question why the Apostle says that his gospel was promised afore. He claims that Paul didn't refer to the contents of the gospel, but only in general to the fact that good news was in store for mankind. It is to this explanation that we strongly object. Again we would ask you to read Romans 1:16 and 17—3:21 and 4:1 to 25: Also Galatians 3:6 to 18. Notice what Peter said to Cornelius: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remissions of sins."

We must give brother Stam credit for being consistent in his explanation of Paul's preaching in relation to what the Lord had revealed before. Thus we read in his booklet, *We Know a Secret*: "The Apostle makes it clear that this is the message that he had preached to the Corinthian believers and that he had received it from the Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 15:1 to 4) ("... verse 1,3), thus it is a part of the mystery committed to him. What then does the twice-repeated phrase according the Scriptures mean in this connection? Simply that the Scriptures confirm this to be so, or nowhere do the Old Testament Scriptures state that Christ Would die for the sins of the world, yet all its pages unite to indicate that God had this in mind all the while!"

This last statement is diplomatic language indeed! It seems impossible to our brother, that Christ could have revealed to Paul a message of salvation that was foretold in the Scriptures. He concludes that since the Lord. revealed it, "it is a part of the mystery." In the same pamphlet, page 16, he makes the statement: "Thus I Corinthians 15:3 gives us the answer to, perhaps the two greatest riddles of history, the sin of man and the death of Christ, and that answer is: Christ died for our sins. Mark well, not on account of our sins, as in the prophetic Scriptures, but for our sins, to pay their just penalty. This is the great Pauline message; 'the preaching of the cross,' as good news."

The reader must draw his own conclusion, but we consider this a wrong explanation of the Scriptures. In love we must point out that this is wrongly dividing the word of truth! Let us search the Word! In an article "Rethinking Isaiah 53" which appeared in the Searchlight at least twenty years ago, Mr. Stam wrote: "This is not to deny, of course, that we Gentiles too have gone astray and worse. It is simply to insist that Christ's death for us: is not contemplated in Isaiah 53.

But we know that often in the New Testament, the writers, through the Spirit, put a wider; or even different, meaning on quotations from the Old Testament. When Paul says: "Christ died for ours sins according to the Scriptures" I for one surely think of such passages as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. In this same article on Isaiah 53, the author makes the statement:

"We say all this to point out the fact that while many untaught believers consider substitution the very acme of Christian truth, it is actually but the very beginning."

First, we say that substitution means Christ. dying for our sins, not on account of. Then we should point out that substitution is one of the great foundation doctrines of the Christian faith. While it is simple enough for a child to grasp and believe, it is profound enough as a

Scriptural truth to engage the wonder of the angels. What would the mystery be without the foundation of the substitutionary death of Christ?

In "Things that Differ" page 74 the author states: "Predictions concerning the death of Christ are to be found in numerous Old Testament passages as well as the four records of our Lord's earthly ministry, but never were the merits of Christ's death proclaimed as the ground of salvation until Paul:"

We say: there was a gradual, although not a complete unfolding before Paul of this truth. We list some Scriptures which you can look up and consider.

Old Testament Scriptures:

Genesis 3:15. The promise of victory over sin and satan by the seed of the woman.

Gen. 3:21. "coats of skins" (shed blood)

Gen. 4:4. Abel's sacrifice.

Gen. 22. Isaac as type of Christ, carries wood upon the mountain and in principle is sacrificed. The Lord will provide.

Exodus chapters 12 and 13. The passover lamb, redemption of the firstborn. Deliverance.

Exodus 25-40. The building of the tabernacle with its typical teaching.

Leviticus. The priesthood and offerings.

Numbers 21. The serpent upon the pole.

Joshua. The scarlet cord of Rahab.

Ruth. The Kinsman-redeemer.

Psalms 22, 40, 110 and others.

Job 19:25. I know that my redeemer liveth

Isaiah 53. Read this whole chapter care fully. Notice such statements as: "with his stripes we are healed" (healing from sin—see context) "when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed. "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." ". . .he bare the sin of many. . ."

Dan. 9:26. "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself..."

This is not a complete list, nor does it mention the many passages that speak of salvation and of faith,

New Testament Scriptures: (before Paul)

Matthew 1:21. ". . .thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Matthew 20:28. "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Luke 24:26, 27 and 45. This passage shows that the disciples received understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Luke 24:47. "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations."

John 1:29. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,"

John 3:14 to 16.

John 6:51 and 53.

Matthew 26:28. "For this is the blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

We believe that these Scriptures do indeed proclaim the merits of Christ's death as the ground of salvation. Thus the Apostle Peter declared:

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

". . . that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe . . . And God put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. But we believe that through the grace of the . Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." (Acts 4:12 and Acts 15:7 to 11).

The fact that Peter does not according to the record we have, say specifically "Christ died for your sins so that you can be saved if you believe". . . does not do away with the fact that that truth had been revealed, although not to the full. We believe that the Lord used the Apostle Paul to make known the full and clear revelation of the doctrine of salvation. But that does not mean that salvation by grace, because of the substitutionary death of Christ, is peculiar to the dispensation of the mystery. God's New Covenant way of forgiving and blessing Israel is based upon the death of Christ on the cross and is bestowed upon them by the grace of God—not because of their merits. The book of Hebrews bears this out so clearly. That Epistle teaches "so great salvation" as the fulfillment of the Old Testament revelation in type and teaching. In Hebrews there is no revelation of the mystery concerning God's outcalling of the Gentiles and the joint-body of Ephesians 3, but rather a grand unfolding of God's New Covenant way of dealing as to the all sufficient work of Christ as the greater sacrifice and greater High Priest.

When Paul preached the gospel to the Jews at Berea, they searched (the Old Testament) Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:10 and 11) In Romans Paul writes: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." (Romans 3:21). Paul appeals to the Old testament Scriptures to back up his teaching on justification by faith as we see in Romans chapter 4 and Galatians chapter 3.

In Genesis 15:6 we read:

"And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Paul says: "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." (Romans 4:23 to 25).

What the Old Testament prophets did not speak about is the particular way in which God is bringing salvation to the nations and his eternal purpose concerning Christ and the Church, His Body.

IN CONCLUSION

We have not written to discourage the dispensational study of the Word. Neither do we in any way seek to detract from the unique ministry and message that the Lord gave to Paul. Rather we have written so that the cause of Scriptural dispensationalism will be furthered.

We see the important distinctions that the Scriptures show between these two major purposes of God:

- A. The purpose regarding Israel and the nations, to be fully realized in the prophecied kingdom of God on earth.

- B. The purpose regarding saved persons from any and all nations to be members of Christ in one Body without distinction, with the heavenly blessings, calling and hope. This purpose was hidden in God till it was revealed to Paul.

But we recognize as well the underlying unity between these two purposes. It is that it all centers in Christ. As we read in Ephesians 1:10 concerning "the mystery of his will": "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."

The substitutionary death of Christ is the grand foundation for all God's redemptive purposes. From the first chapter of the Bible we see the promise of the Coming One slowly unfolding. We see the footsteps of faith and the trail of blood leading to Calvary.