

THE GOSPEL

ACCORDING TO PAUL

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A Reappraisal

Graham H. Twelftree



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To
Randall and Estella Kay Pannell

“When Christianity (precisely because it is not a doctrine) is not reduplicated
in the life of the person presenting it, it is not Christianity he presents.”

SØREN KIERKEGAARD (1813–1855)

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Preface

PAUL'S GOSPEL IS MISUNDERSTOOD. At least that is the argument of this book. Paul's gospel is not simply his message or even his empowered message. The misunderstanding of Paul's gospel has become obvious with new interpretive lenses available as a result of the change in the theological center of gravity of the global church, and of many local churches in the West.

The Reformation continues to dominate most of the theological landscape against which Pauline studies are conducted. Paul is seen primarily as an intellectual and a theologian. Debates over his intellectual and theological achievements continue to center around his understanding of what became the Reformation's *shibboleths* of "law," "grace," and "justification by faith alone." The unspoken assumption is that if these and related terms are understood, Paul—and Christianity—is understood. Large sectors of the church and academy would agree with Günther Bornkamm that, as "the gospel of justification by faith alone was the article by which the church stood or fell . . . an effort is required to reintroduce Paul's doctrine and rekindle the fire with which it once burned."¹

However, the modern Pentecostal and charismatic movements have brought an increasing theological and ecclesial sensitivity to, and interest in, the affective and ecstatic aspects of Paul's thought and work. Though I am not a Pentecostal, nor am I the son or even father of one, this study seeks to take into account the new landscape in which Paul is more broadly read than through the myopic lens of Reformation concerns.

In particular, in this study we will see that the generally agreed notion of Paul's "gospel," inherited from the Reformers, if not simply wrong because of its narrow denotation, is profoundly different and poorer from the one he had. For example, we will see that even to describe Paul's gospel as his God-empowered message is a gross oversimplification and misunderstanding of what he had in mind.

1. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 136.

It was near the end of working on *Paul and the Miraculous: A Historical Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) that I became aware that Paul's description and understanding of his gospel appeared to be very different from what it is generally supposed to have been. In this book I want to take up, explore, develop, and test ideas that were emerging towards the end of that project.

However, research has led to different conclusions from what I expected. The earlier project carried my conclusion that, "For Paul, *no more could the gospel be proclaimed without words than it could come or be experienced without miracles. Without the miraculous Paul may have had a message, but he would not have had a gospel. Without the miraculous there was no gospel, only preaching.*"² While this remains true, it turns out to be only partly true. Only now, completing this book, has the richness and all-encompassing depth and breadth of the gospel according to Paul become apparent to me. I hope the reader is able grasp not only how different Paul's idea of the gospel is from how it is generally seen, but how rich and polyvalent that different gospel is.

Given the significance of "gospel" in Paul's writings, his understanding of it can be expected to have implications across his thinking. His theology and writing are so tightly woven that to pull at any one thread is to tug at and unravel the whole cloth. To keep this study within manageable limits (or a readable length!) and to maintain focus on what will be argued to be the principle ongoing misunderstanding of "gospel" in Paul, attention here will be directed to elucidating the core of his views and attending to the most immediate associations he makes with the motif, rather than exploring their broader implications. Therefore, for example, in the pages that follow no particular attention is given to the sociological or political implications of Paul's gospel. Rather the attention of this project is on the core meaning and Paul's immediate use of the term "gospel." Wider implications of "gospel" (verb and noun) and the connections with other motifs will have to be left to others, and other projects, to explore and develop.

When I was invited to be the first incumbent of the Charles L. Holman Professorship of New Testament and Early Christianity at Regent University, I had the opportunity to try out aspects of my ideas in the inaugural lecture. This book is a development of the ideas set out in that lecture. I met Charles Holman (1935–2006) in 1978 when we were both reading for our doctorates at Nottingham University under James Dunn. At Regent University, where years later we became colleagues, Charles was a greatly

2. Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 317 (emphasis original). On Paul's understanding of the miraculous see the brief discussion below (§3.2 [a] 3) and in more detail see Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 20–26, 313–14.

loved professor. He was also the quintessential absentminded professor. For example, one evening my wife and I went with Charles and Rose, his wife, to the Pavilion in Virginia Beach. On emerging after hearing Beethoven's ninth symphony, Charles wandered off to get the car, I assume in some state of musically induced ecstasy. He brought the car around in front of us and I opened the doors for the ladies to get in. As I closed the doors for them, Charles promptly drove off. Thankfully, the shouts of our wives caused him to return for me. Others who knew Charles treasure equally interesting memories of this dear man. Charles did most of his scholarly work looking over the shoulders of Paul the apostle. It is a privilege to follow Charles in looking over those same shoulders.

Looking back on the life of this project I am grateful for the help of those who have made its completion possible. At the top of the list are the librarians, Patty Hughson, Keith Lang, and Bob Sivigny. With great patience, grace, and perseverance, they have made hard-to-find resources available. Particular thanks is due to John Nelson for a summer of research assistance and lively interaction, and to Douglas Campbell, Michael Gorman, Kenneth D. Litwak, Petr Pokorný, Steve Rumens, Andy Steere, Jerry Sumney, Barbara Twelftree, Brenton Wait, and Catherine Wait, who read and interacted with parts or the whole of the project. Two anonymous reviewers were also most helpful in raising questions and pointing to problems in what they read. In that I have not always heeded their advice none of these people should be held responsible for what follows. I am most grateful to Michael Thomson, Acquisitions Editor at Wipf and Stock, who has been an enthusiastic, informed, and helpful supporter of the project. I am thankful to Thomas Casemore, Jonathan Dendy, Amaris Rivera Mercado, and Sarah Parsons, for their essential help in the final stages of the project. Rachel Bennett, a remarkable and long-suffering PA, has made this and so many other projects possible.

Once again, Barbara, my wife, has gone beyond any reasonable expectations of companionship to constructing bibliographies and spending countless hours proofreading. Thank you!

Unless noted as my own, translations of biblical texts are from the NRSV. Much of this project revolves around a discussion of the use of particular Greek words Paul used—or did not use. Notwithstanding, throughout this book care has been taken to keep in mind readers who are not familiar with Greek.

The body of secondary literature relating to the study of Paul of Tarsus is astonishingly large and continues to grow unabated. Not surprisingly, not even the footnotes can contain everything; only a small fraction of the

mountain can be mentioned. Also, the bibliography contains only those items referred to in the project.

In January 2002, when we went to live in the United States for what turned out to be fourteen special years, Randall and Kay Pannell were warmly welcoming and went to great lengths to help us settle and feel at home. Randall, an Old Testament specialist, was my supportive colleague, then caring, tireless leader as Associate Dean of the School of Divinity, and then with compassion and singular integrity, Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs at Regent University. Kay became and remains my wife's most special and longtime loyal friend. This book is dedicated to them as a token of the gratitude Barbara and I owe to them.

Graham H. Twelftree
London School of Theology

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
Abbott-Smith	G. Abbott-Smith, <i>A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament</i> . Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973
ABS	T. & T. Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und Ihrer Geschichte
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
APAMS	American Philological Monograph Series
ASV	American Standard Version
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BAGD	Walter Bauer, et al., eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979
BBE	The Bible in Basic English
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Frederick William Danker, et al., eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BDF	Friedrich Blass, et al., <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
BHT	Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BiBh</i>	<i>Bible Bhashyam</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
<i>BT</i>	<i>Biblical Translator</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	The Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CGTSC	Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges
<i>ChrCent</i>	<i>Christian Century</i>
<i>Colloq</i>	<i>Colloquium</i>
<i>Conc</i>	<i>Concilium</i>
CSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
CTQ	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DBY	The Darby Bible
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert

<i>DJG</i> ²	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green, et al. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013.
DRA	Duay-Rheims Amercian Edition (1899)
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EC	Epworth Commentaries
<i>EDNT</i>	Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 1991, 1993
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
EGT	The Expositor's Greek Testament
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ERV	English Revised Version
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FRLANT	Forschung zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GNV	Geneva Bible
<i>GNT</i> ⁴	Barbara Aland, et al., eds. <i>The Greek New Testament</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft and United Bible Societies, 1993.
<i>GR</i>	<i>Greece & Rome</i>
GWN	God's Word to the Nations Version
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HThKNT	Herder Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>

<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae. Editio Minor.</i> Berlin: de Gruyter, 1924–
<i>IGRR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res romanas pertinentes auctoritate et impensis</i> , edited by Rene Cagnat, et al. Paris: Librairie Ernest Leroux, 1901
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
JAJSup	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCTCRS	Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHC</i>	<i>Journal of Higher Criticism</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of The New Testament</i>
JSNTSupp	Supplement to the Journal for the Study of the New Testament
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of The Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JTC</i>	<i>Journal for Theology and the Church</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	<i>Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version
KKS	Konfessionskundliche und Kontroverstheologische Studien
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LQ</i>	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>

LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, eds. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed., with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
LXX	Septuagint
MGS	Franco Montanari, et al., <i>The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek</i> . Leiden: Brill, 2015
MIT	MacDonald Idiomatic Translation
MM	James H. Moulton and George Milligan, <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament</i> . London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
NA ²⁵	Barbara Aland, et al., eds., <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1975
NA ²⁶	Barbara Aland, et al., eds., <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979
NA ²⁷	Barbara Aland, et al., eds., <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993
NA ²⁸	Barbara Aland, et al., eds., <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012
NAB	The New American Bible
NAS	New American Standard Bible (1977)
NAU	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NCB	New Century Bible
NCIB	New Clarendon Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation
NETS	Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. <i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 2007
NewDocs	G. H. R. Horsley, <i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i> , vol. 3. North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie University Press, 1983

NIB	New International Version (UK)
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDB	<i>The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, et al. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2010
NIDNTTE	Moisés Silva, revision editor, <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIRV	New International Reader's Version
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJ	New King James
NLT	New Living Translation
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplement
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTCC	New Testament in Context Commentaries
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTL	New Testament Library
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTM	New Testament Message
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OGIS	<i>Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs

PCNT	Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament
PG	Patrologia Graeca [= Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886
PMS	Patristic Monograph Series
PNT	Bishop's New Testament (1595)
PNTC	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
PNTCS	Pillar New Testament Commentary Series
PPS	Past and Present Series
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
PthS	Paderborner theologische Studien
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RCT</i>	<i>Revista catalana de teologia</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RWB	Revised Webster Update
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
<i>ScEccl</i>	<i>Sciences ecclésiastiques</i>
<i>SCJR</i>	<i>Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations</i>
SCO	Studi classici e orientali
SComS	Septuagint Commentary Series
SD	Studies and Documents
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum graecum</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament

SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTSU	Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World
SP	Sacra Pagina
SPIB	Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
Str-B	Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck. <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> . 6 vols. Munich, 1922–1961
STRev	<i>Sewanee Theological Review</i>
StTh	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVTP	<i>Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigraphica</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
THNTC	Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
ThTo	<i>Theology Today</i>
TLG	THESAURUS LINGVAE GRAECAE®, A Digital Library of Greek Literature, University of California, Irvine
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TNT	Tyndale's New Testament (1534)
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TPINTC	Trinity Press International New Testament Commentaries
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UBW	Understanding the Bible and its World
UCBS	Understanding the Bible Commentary Series
WBC	Word Bible Commentary

WC	Westminster Commentaries
WEB	Webster Bible (1833)
<i>WesTJ</i>	<i>Wesleyan Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WW	Word and World
YLT	Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>
ZWB	Zürcher Werkkommentare zur Bibel

1

Paul's Gospel?

FEW FIGURES IN HUMAN history have been or remain as influential as Paul.¹ In Christian history Paul's impact has been profound. His early influence is seen both in the enduring impact of his own letters, and the influence of his thought found in the other texts collected in the New Testament, including those written by others under his name. Perhaps only the Fourth Gospel shows no evidence of Pauline influence. Subsequently, many of the leading figures of Church history—Augustine (354–430), Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Wesley (1703–1791), and Karl Barth (1886–1968), for example—claim to have been decisively influenced by Paul.² In our time, Paul is seen as the inventor³ or founder of Christianity⁴ or its theology.⁵ Few would dissent from the view that, if theological significance is measured in terms of originality, skilled articulation, and later influence, even if he is not deemed the founder of Christianity, Paul has no equal.⁶ Given such impact through history, including such early interpretive significance and such ongoing influence and scholarly veneration, it is important we continue to

1. E.g., Hart, *100*, ranks Paul after Muhammad, Isaac Newton, Jesus Christ, Buddha, and Confucius, and ahead of, for example, Johannes Gutenberg, Albert Einstein, Galileo Galilei, and Aristotle.

2. E.g., Bruce, *Romans*, 58–60.

3. See Maccoby, *Mythmaker*; Tabor, *Paul and Jesus*; Wilson, *How Jesus Became Christian*; and the discussion by Sumney, *Steward of God's Mysteries*, 1–9.

4. E.g., Lüdemann, *Paul*. Cf. Wrede, *Paul*, 179–80.

5. E.g., Schnelle, *Apostle Paul*. Cf. the discussion by Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 2.

6. Cf. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 2–3.

interact with Paul's writings so they can be read with as much understanding as possible in our time.⁷

§1.1 WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Where do we begin in understanding Paul's highly original, articulate and influential ideas? "Justification by faith"⁸ or "reconciliation"⁹ are often championed as the center of his theology, but so is being "in Christ."¹⁰ Going a step further, Douglas Campbell says that, "Christ *himself* (in some sense), rather than Paul's conceptual and linguistic construction of Christ, is at the center of Paul."¹¹ Or perhaps it is from his understanding of the cross that his theology radiates.¹² Ever since the groundbreaking book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (1977), by E. P. Sanders (1939–), some have used his phrase "participationist" to sum up the essence of Paul's theology.¹³ Also recently, Udo Schnelle has suggested that Paul was so overwhelmed by the experience and insight of ultimate experience in Jesus Christ that in him Paul saw the eschatological presence of God's salvation as the basis and center of his thought.¹⁴ Alternatively, perhaps the center of Pauline thinking is a cluster of key ideas, such as "the whole and undivided richness and mystery of Christ and of the Father's saving purpose through his Son," as Joseph Plevnik put it.¹⁵ Some interpreters looking for a central organizing principle for his ideas¹⁶ even see discovering this center as the fundamental problem in Pauline studies.¹⁷

I do not intend to claim the gospel is the central, organizing principle of Paul's theology. However, I do want to demonstrate broadly that the term

7. Cf. Furnish, "On Putting Paul in His Place," 17.

8. Notably, Käsemann, "'Righteousness of God' in Paul," 168–69, and the discussion by Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 11–218.

9. Martin, *Reconciliation*.

10. Cf. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*. For a discussion of the Spirit and the center of Paul, see Pretorius, "Theological Centre of Pauline Theology," 253–62.

11. Campbell, *Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 32 (emphasis original).

12. E.g., Wilckens, *Brief an die Römer*; Gorman, *Cruciformity*.

13. Cf. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 26–36.

14. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul*, 389.

15. Plevnik, "Center of Paul's Theology," 477–78. Also, see the discussion by Lincoln, "Ephesians 2:8–10," 617–30.

16. Cf. Campbell, *Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 17–28. For brief, earlier discussions, e.g., see Boers, "Foundations of Paul's Thought," 55–68; Bishop, "Gospel(s) According to Paul," and Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 19–21.

17. Boers, cited by Beker, "Paul the Theologian," 354.

"gospel," and what it signifies, is of such importance to Paul as one of the central and centralizing concepts in his thought and theology¹⁸ that we would advance the cause of understanding him if we grasped the understanding he had of the term.¹⁹ In turn, given that large tracts of the academy articulate notions of the Christian gospel that are explicitly or implicitly dependent primarily on Paul's writings,²⁰ and that large swaths of the church take their theological bearings not simply from Paul's theology or writings but, in particular, from his understanding of the gospel,²¹ a reexamination of his views is of enormous potential contemporary importance.

We begin to see the significance of the word "gospel" (noun and verb) for Paul when we notice that over half of its occurrences in the New Testament are found in his writings.²² The importance of the term also becomes obvious when we note that in more than half of his use, "gospel" is in the absolute, needing no adjective or other term to describe it.²³ More significant than statistics, Paul understood himself in relation to the gospel. He talks of "my gospel" (Rom 2:16; cf. 16:25) or "our gospel" (2 Cor 4:3) and of being "set aside for the gospel."²⁴ Whatever the nature of this gospel, it is clearly very important to him and his self-understanding. Further, much of what he writes appears to be an explanation of the gospel,²⁵ or a defense of it.²⁶ Paul can even use the verb, and describe his work as, "gospelling,"²⁷ as it

18. Cf. Becker, "Gospel, Evangelize, Evangelist," 111: "In Paul *euangelion* has become a central concept in his theology."

19. Cf. §5.3 and 5.5 below.

20. E.g., see McFarland, "Gospel," 200–201.

21. E.g., biblical support for The Southern Baptist Convention's statement on "The Centrality of the Gospel" is selected primarily from Paul's letters: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1199/on-the-centrality-of-the-gospel>.

22. The noun *εὐαγγέλιον* ("gospel") occurs seventy-six times in the NT, and forty-eight times in Paul's letters: at least once in each of the seven generally-agreed-authentic letters of Paul: Romans 9x; 1 Corinthians 8x; 2 Corinthians 8x; Galatians 7x; Philippians 9x; 1 Thessalonians 6x; and Philemon 1x. The verb *εὐαγγελίζεσθαι* ("to gospel") occurs fifty-four times in the NT, and nineteen times in Paul's letters: Romans 3x; 1 Corinthians 6x; 2 Corinthians 2x; Galatians 7x; and 1 Thessalonians 1x. In more detail see the Appendix below.

23. Rom 1:16; 10:16; 11:28; 1 Cor 4:15; 9:14 (x2), 18 (x2), 23; 2 Cor 8:18; Gal 2:5, 14; Phil 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15; 1 Thess 2:4; Phlm 13. Cf. Friedrich, "*εὐαγγελίζομαι, κτλ.*" 729n65.

24. Rom 1:1; cf. 1:9, 16; 15:16; Gal 2:7.

25. E.g., see Rom 1:16; 2:16; 15:14–29; 1 Cor 4:1–21; Gal 1:6–9.

26. E.g., at Gal 1:6; cf. 2 Cor 11:1–6. At 1 Cor 9:3 and Phil 1:7, 16, Paul uses *ἀπολογία* ("defense") in relation to his work.

27. See *εὐαγγελίζω* in Rom 1:15; 15:20; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:16, 18; 15:1; 2 Cor 10:16; 11:7; Gal 1:8, 9, 11, 16, 23; 4:13; 1 Thess 3:6.

can be translated. For example, he says he was sent (1 Cor 1:17), or is eager, to “gospel” (Rom 1:15; 15:20). It is reasonable, then, to suppose that without a comprehensive understanding of Paul’s “gospel” we will not understand him or his work as well as we might.²⁸

The purpose of this book is, therefore, to answer this question: What is the gospel according to Paul?²⁹ In order to answer this fundamental question, along the way a number of other and subsidiary questions will be answered: What did the word—noun and verb—mean in Paul’s world? Where did Paul get the term—noun and verb? Did he introduce the term to Christianity, or did he receive it from earlier followers of Jesus? What role did Paul’s Scriptures play in his understanding of the gospel? Is the gospel, for Paul, his preached message? Is the gospel his empowered message, a message embodying God’s transforming power? Or, is the gospel something else?

In answering these questions, the project exposes the disconnect between the gospel according to Paul and his gospel as it is now generally understood. In part, this book develops ideas in my *Paul and the Miraculous: A Historical Reconstruction*, particularly the statement near the end that “Paul’s message was not his gospel.”³⁰ Positively, through close attention to what he says, this project is able to set out what Paul most likely meant when he used the term “gospel.” As a result, we will see his multifaceted understanding of the gospel.

This first chapter, “Paul’s Gospel?,” takes a look across the recent history of Pauline studies, as well as at current studies, through discussing the representative work of James Dunn, Tom Wright, Udo Schnelle, Michael Gorman, Michael Wolter, and Douglas Campbell, and along the way taking into account other significant voices. We will see that, over against what appears to be Paul’s richer and more nuanced perspective, his gospel has been, and continues to be, taken as his message about Jesus. Sometimes, particularly more recently, that gospel message is taken to embody God’s transforming power. By the time we reach the end of our study it will become patently clear that this view of Paul’s gospel stands in stark contrast to what he most probably had in mind.

Chapter 2, “The Gospel Paul Inherited,” sets out the idea of “gospel” in Paul’s Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions, and among his predecessors in the Jesus movement. Through this exercise it becomes clear that,

28. Cf. Furnish, “On Putting Paul in His Place,” 17.

29. As his title suggests, the study by Calhoun, *Paul’s Definitions of the Gospel*, is confined to a small part of Paul’s writings and analyzes only a part of what Paul understood by the gospel.

30. Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 316.

particularly among earlier followers of Jesus, the term “gospel” was far more than the content of preaching. In turn, this helps explain the origin of Paul’s approach, as well as highlights the novelty of his views and practices.

A careful reading of his letters in chapter 3, “The Gospel Paul Promoted: Thessalonians, Galatians, and Philippians,” and chapter 4, “The Gospel Paul Promoted: Corinthians, Philemon, and Romans,” the core of this project, shows that although the term “gospel” was polyvalent for Paul, it generally referred to something that could be experienced or seen as well as described or preached. Notwithstanding, in his first letter (that to the Thessalonians), Paul has left clear traces of the missional message that he preached to those who became believers. Reconstructing what he initially preached to the Thessalonians helps us understand the relationship Paul saw between the gospel and what he said, particularly in relation to the coming of the gospel. Also, in Romans, at the other end of his brief letter-writing career, Paul gives an extensive treatment of his understanding of the gospel that we will be able to set out in outline.³¹ The final chapter, “The Gospel According to Paul,” chapter 5, will draw together the results of the study, including an attempt to reconstruct what Paul meant by “gospel.” The brief Contemporary Coda that ends the final chapter notes some of the implications of our conclusions that, given the credibility of the results of this study, need urgent attention by theologians, pastors, preachers, and teachers.

To contextualize this project and to demonstrate its need, we begin by doing two things. First, in the next few sections of this chapter (§§1.2–4), through sampling some key studies on Paul, we will see how his gospel has been, and continues to be, understood. It will become obvious that the prevailing view has been, and remains, that Paul’s message was his gospel or that his gospel was his message. Then, to provide the raw material to test the credibility of this prevailing view, in the next section (§1.5) Paul’s uses of “gospel” (noun and verb) will be set out.³² The conclusion (§1.6) draws attention to what appear to be the main contours of the differences between what Paul says and what the prevailing views assert. In this difference is the reason for this project.

§1.2 EARLIER VOICES

If this was a history of the understanding of Paul’s gospel we would be taking into account much earlier voices such as Origen (c.185–c.254), Jerome

31. See §3.2 (a) 1 below.

32. In the Appendix below, Paul’s use is set out statistically in the context of the wider use of the “gospel” word group.

(c.342–420), John Chrysostom (c.347–407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350–428), and Augustine of Hippo (354–430).³³ However, our primary concern is with how Paul's gospel is understood in contemporary discussions.

The first systematic study of Pauline theology was published in 1824 by the Zürich theologian Leonhard Usteri (1799–1833).³⁴ In *Entwicklung des Paulinischen Lehrbegriffs* (*The Development of Pauline Doctrine*), Usteri describes the treasure and wisdom of the gospel as a preached message of salvation about the love of God in Christ.³⁵ Around two decades later, in 1845, Pauline studies took a new direction in the work of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), the founder of the Tübingen School.³⁶ In *Paulus der Apostel Jesu Christi* (*Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*), he advanced the novel and still-debated view that Paul developed his theology over against others in early Christianity.³⁷ Nevertheless, in line with other students of Paul, Baur saw the gospel by its nature as having intellectual principles or content, and being proclaimed and heard.³⁸ Notably, he supposed that, in character, the gospel was inconsistent with the miraculous, which hides historical truth.³⁹ For example, concerning the story Luke has of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48) Baur said that it was “wanting in historical connexion.” He went on to say that, “No satisfactory aim seems to be furthered by such a miracle.” He then enquired, assuming a negative answer: “How does so studied and complicated a series of miraculous occurrences agree with the character of the Gospel history?”⁴⁰ Similarly, toward the end of the nineteenth century, J. B. Lightfoot (1828–1889), who interacted with Baur,⁴¹ describes the gospel as a doctrine preached, taught, and learnt.⁴²

33. On Romans, e.g., see Greenman and Larsen, *Reading Romans through the Centuries*; Bray and Oden, *Romans*.

34. Kümmel, *New Testament*, 95.

35. Usteri, *Entwicklung des Paulinischen Lehrbegriffs*, 160, 265–66, 279–80, 291, 342. The first edition of 1824 was revised in 1829, 1830, and 1832 by Usteri. After his death two more editions appeared, in 1834 and 1851. Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 9n1.

36. See Harris, *Tubingen School*.

37. Cf. Goulder, *St Paul Vs St Peter*, a reworking of Bauer's proposal, and the discussion in the review by Elliott, “Tale of Two Missions,” 295–98.

38. Baur, *Paul the Apostle*, 1:37, 39, 60, 107–8, 112, 115–18, 130–131n, 164, 176, 177, 226, 240, 260, 261, 280, 288, 324, 334, 336, 338, 340, 345, 348, 374–76, 378, 2:13n, 56, 58, 86, 87, 149, 217, 319.

39. Baur, *Paul the Apostle*, 1:83, 153.

40. Baur, *Paul the Apostle*, 1:82, 83.

41. E.g., see Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 15n1, 23n2, 74, 170, 177n2, and 296n2, and the discussion by Kaye, “Lightfoot and Baur,” 193–224.

42. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 76, 107, 173; Lightfoot, *Colossians*

In the early part of the twentieth century, the historian and theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) of Berlin, perhaps the most important patristics scholar of his time, appended a study of “gospel” to his *The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries*.⁴³ In the section on the gospel in Paul, Harnack rightly notes that, like εὐαγγελίζεσθαι (“to gospel”), εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel”) most frequently stands by itself since Paul assumed his readers knew its meaning. However, in light of evidence from Paul we will have to call into question Harnack translating εὐαγγελίζεσθαι “to preach.”⁴⁴ Given that Harnack takes εὐαγγελίζεσθαι to refer to preaching, he takes the content of the εὐαγγέλιον to be Paul’s message: “God’s plan of salvation, contained in the Old Testament as a promise, and realized through Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵ He also notes that the term εὐαγγελίζεσθαι is not exclusively a technical term for the apostle in that he can use it of Timothy bringing news of the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:6). Harnack’s brief study is one of the few studies dedicated to “gospel,” and will occasionally be taken into account in this study.

Around the same time, Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) produced a two-volume New Testament theology in which he gave considerable attention to Paul.⁴⁶ For Schlatter, Paul’s gospel is a message of “the good news of God.” Notably, he also says the message “has power, because it not merely promises God’s gift but also grants it.” This gift centers around Jesus Christ and forgiveness.⁴⁷ A year later, in 1910, Julius Schniewind (1883–1948) published his inaugural dissertation at Friedrichs University Halle-Wittenberg on the terms “word” and “gospel,” concluding they mean one and the same thing, looked at from two different angles.⁴⁸

In his survey of the discussion of how the life and work of Jesus became the basis of the theology of Paul, Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) also refers

and to Philemon, 132; Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of St Paul*, 12, 13, 120, 244; Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, 85.

43. Harnack, *Constitution and Law*, 275–331, esp. 292–303.

44. Harnack, *Constitution and Law*, 293. Cf. Asting, *Die Verkündigung des Wortes*, 388–408, esp. 408: “The gospel and the proclamation stand in an inseparable relationship (*Das Evangelium und die Verkündigung stehen also in einem unlösbaren Verhältnis*).”

45. Harnack, *Constitution and Law*, 294.

46. Schlatter, *Theology of the Apostles*, 187–321. Cf. Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 375–89.

47. Schlatter, *Theology of the Apostles*, 191; cf. 264, 279, 311.

48. Schniewind, *Die Begriffe Wort und Evangelium*, 114.

to the gospel as a message⁴⁹ and implies no more than that it is a set of ideas.⁵⁰ In *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Schweitzer works with the same set of assumptions and ideas.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, then, Paul's gospel, a recasting of Jesus' doctrine of his redemptive death and his expectation of the kingdom of God, is preached.⁵²

Arguably the most significant British New Testament scholar of the early-to-mid twentieth century, C. H. Dodd (1884–1973) described Paul's gospel as transforming the apostle and was, in turn, something that he preached.⁵³ Dodd says that the content of this preached gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness by faith and for faith (Rom 1:17).⁵⁴ In turn, the key words of the Pauline gospel are "redemption," "atonement,"⁵⁵ "righteousness," and "faith."⁵⁶ A hint from him that Paul's gospel is more than his message is in Dodd's understanding of faith. He says that faith does not "mean belief in a proposition, though doubtless intellectual beliefs are involved when we come to think it out." Rather, Dodd says, faith "is an act which is the negation of all activity, a moment of passivity out of which the strength for action comes, because in it God acts."⁵⁷ We can note, however, that Dodd is at one with those who have seen, and continue to see, Paul's gospel as a message.

Adolf Deissmann (1866–1937), a pastor and then professor of New Testament at Heidelberg and Berlin, resorting to hyperbole to make his point, took the Greek "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον) to be "a word that is one of the greatest creations of mankind."⁵⁸ For Deissmann, Paul's gospel incorporated a religious faith in Christ with the gospel of Jesus concerning God and the nearness of his kingdom.⁵⁹ In turn, the gospel was something Paul

49. Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 62.

50. Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 64, 82.

51. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 389–90.

52. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 390, 393–94.

53. Dodd, *Meaning of Paul for Today*, 7, 36, 42; Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 9.

54. Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 9.

55. Dodd, *Meaning of Paul for Today*, 54.

56. Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 9.

57. Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 16.

58. Deissmann, *Religion of Jesus*, 102. His discussion of the English history of "gospel" remains instructive (102–4).

59. Deissmann, *Paul*, 257.

preached⁶⁰ and which could be characterized as propaganda.⁶¹ His gospel was not something different from that of Jesus' but the experience one had of God secured for many.⁶²

With Martin Dibelius (1883–1947), also of Heidelberg, we reach the end of the first half of the twentieth century and still find Paul's gospel described as his proclamation. In a small book, *Paul*, which his student Werner Kümmel completed, Paul's gospel is taken to be his message that is preached and heard.⁶³ Accordingly, what Paul handed on in his preaching were the accounts he had received of the news of salvation that had appeared in Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3, 5), along with an interpretation of the why and the how of that salvation.⁶⁴

§1.3 RECENT VIEWS

Even though most of his work was undertaken in the first half of the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) remains part of the conversation about Paul.⁶⁵ In the first volume of his classic, *Theology of the New Testament*, published in English in 1952, he says that "the proclamation of salvation can . . . be called 'gospel'."⁶⁶ Paul's gospel is "truth," knowledge, or a message, and something proclaimed by a prophet and teacher which is heard, understood, obeyed, and crystalized into creeds and literature.⁶⁷ In the same period, others such as Johannes Munck (1904–1965) of the University of Aarhus, and the Jewish scholar, Hans J. Schoeps (1909–1980) of the University of Erlangen, for example, continued to hold the view that the gospel was what Paul preached.⁶⁸ Schoeps notes Paul mentioning

60. Deissmann, *Paul*, viii.

61. Deissmann, *Paul*, 128.

62. Deissmann, *Paul*, 258–59.

63. Dibelius, *Paul*, 56, 68, 69, 95, 97, 119, 149, 155, 157, 159.

64. Dibelius, *Paul*, 88–89.

65. E.g., Zahl, "New Source for Understanding German Theology," 413–22. However, Wright, "Paul in Current Anglophone Scholarship," 367, suggests that Bultmann is no longer a key discussion partner.

66. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:34.

67. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:67, 86, 89, 120, 269, 271, 274, 275, 280, 283, 286, 288, 314–15, 318.

68. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 16, 41, 42, 49, 51, 191, 264, 298, 300; Schoeps, *Paul*, 58, 72, 78, 79, 80, 85, 102, 107, 230. Cf. Whiteley, *Theology of St. Paul*, 73.

Spirit-inspired signs and wonders (2 Cor 12:12), but connects them not so much with the gospel as with the justification of Paul's ministry.⁶⁹

In what Victor Furnish called "a magnificent achievement,"⁷⁰ Günther Bornkamm (1905–1990) set out in his book, *Paul*, to give both an account of Paul's life as well as an exposition of his gospel and theology. Bornkamm wrote of "the intellectual range" of Paul's gospel,⁷¹ which was a development of the primitive Christian *kerygma*.⁷² As one would then expect, Paul's gospel is preached and proclaimed.⁷³ As Paul Bormann put it, writing at the same time, Paul's "Gospel is the oral, actual spoken word."⁷⁴ Yet, for Bornkamm, Paul's theological statements resist being systematized, not because of the changing situation of his letters, but because his mode of thought is "so much dominated by the *encounter between God, man, and the world*" that there is no place for "stock phrases."⁷⁵ Importantly, even though Bornkamm distances Paul's gospel from "signs," (1 Cor 2:18–25)⁷⁶ he notes that "his gospel and theology in general, exhibit oddly 'enthusiastic' features."⁷⁷ Unfortunately, however, Bornkamm does not develop these comments. Ernst Käsemann (1906–98) also distanced Paul's gospel from miracles: "Not individual miracle and ecstatic experiences, but the continuity of . . . service by the congregation is the actual apostolic sign Thus, the ministry of the Gospel is separated from any kind of enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) and a conspicuous boundary is established against enthusiasm as well as traditionalism."⁷⁸

Werner Kümmel (1905–1995) of the University of Marburg said that Paul's gospel, which he preached, revealed God acting righteously to acquit

69. Schoeps, *Paul*, 81.

70. Furnish, Review of *Paul*, 501.

71. Bornkamm, *Paul*, xxvi.

72. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 114.

73. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 18, 19, 21, 29, 33, 36, 49, 51, 53, 62, 65, 67, 92, 104, 112, 139.

74. Bormann, *Die Heilswirksamkeit der Verkündigung*, 201: "*Evangelium is das mündliche, das aktuell gesprochene Wort*," which is expressed in the subtitle of the book: *Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Verkündigung* (A Contribution to a Theology of Proclamation.) Cf. Thrall, *II Corinthians*, 2:668, who says that εὐαγγέλιον ("gospel") "is Paul's frequent term for his own apostolic message (1 Cor 4:15; 9:12, 14, 18, 23; 15:1; 2 Cor 2:12; 4:3–4; 8:18; 9:13)."

75. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 118 (emphasis original).

76. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 159.

77. Bornkamm, *Paul*, 20, 64.

78. Käsemann, "Die Legitimität des Apostels," 70–71. Translation in Klaiber, "Ernst Käsemann as Theological Exegete," 29.