

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL



**THE CROSS TRIUMPHANT
MINISTRY**

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1. PAUL'S GOSPEL IN ROMANS.

Galatians 2:2,

"But I went up on the basis of a revelation and presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles; and separately to those who were in esteem, that I might not walk or have walked in vain."

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1.

"Brothers, I make known to you the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand,"

GALATIANS 1:11.

"But I make it known to you, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not after man."

There are four main names in the New Testament for the basic matter it deals with, the truth of life it is about, and those four names are "**The Gospel, The Way, The Faith and The Testimony**". What was now known as "**Christianity**" was then expressed by one or other of those names. Of these four, the one that is used more than any other is the first - "**The Gospel**". That title for the inclusive message of the New Testament occurs at least a hundred times there - that is, in the noun form, "**the Gospel**". In the corresponding verb form it occurs many more times, but is not recognized by us because it is translated by several different words. The verb form of this very Greek word appears in our translation as "**to declare**", "**to preach**", "**to preach the gospel**".

When they preached, they considered themselves to be "**good news**" to everything and everyone. To preach the gospel was simply to announce good news. It is impressive that this word, this title, for the Christian faith - "**the gospel**" - appears abundantly in twenty of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The exceptions are, the *Gospel* by John, where you will not find it, not even in the three letters of John. You will not find it in Peter's second letter, nor in James or Jude. But these authors had their own titles for the same thing. We mentioned among the four, "**The Testimony**", this is John's peculiar title for the Christian faith - often together with him, "**The Testimony of Jesus**".

With James and Judas it is "**The Faith**". But you see how dominant this title of "**the good news**", "**The Gospel**", is.

The scope of the term "The Gospel".

So we have to take into account quite early an extremely important fact. It is that this term, the good news, covers the entire series of the New Testament, and encompasses the entirety of what the New Testament contains. It is not only those certain truths that relate to the beginning of the Christian life. The gospel is not limited to the truths or doctrines related to conversion and, in that limited sense, salvation - the initial matter of becoming a Christian. The gospel goes much further than that. It embraces all that the New Testament contains. It is as much the gospel in the profound letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians as it is in the letter to the Romans - perhaps no less profound a document, but often considered to be primarily connected with the beginning of the Christian life.

No, this term, the "**good news**", covers the whole ground of the Christian life from beginning to end. It has a large and versatile content that touches every aspect and every phase of the Christian life, from man's relationship to God and God's relationship to man. This is all included in the good news. The unsaved need good news, but the saved also need good news, and they need good news constantly. Christians constantly need good news, and the New Testament is just full of good news for Christians. The servants of the Lord need good news. They need it as their message, the content of their message. They need it for their encouragement and support. How much the Lord's servants need good news to encourage them in their work, and to support them in all the demands and costs of their labor! The Church needs good news for its life, for its growth, for its strength, for its testimony. And so the gospel enters at every point, touches every phase. The letter to the Romans is the great treatise on justification by faith. But justification by faith is shown to be infinitely greater than most of us have yet grasped or understood, and justification by faith has a very wide connotation and relationship. Everything that is contained in this letter to the Romans resolves itself into just one glorious matter, and therefore it begins with the statement that it is "**the gospel**". "**Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God... concerning his Son**".

Now all that follows is "**the gospel**" - but what a tremendous gospel it is! And we must somehow summarize it in one conclusion. We must ask ourselves: "**What is the result of our reading and our consideration of this wonderful letter?**"

You see, justification is not the beginning of things, nor is it the end of things, justification is the meeting point of a great beginning and a great end. That is, it is the point on which all past eternity and all future eternity are focused. **This is what this letter reveals.**

The God of Hope.

Now let's take a closer look at it in that particular light. What is the problem, what is the result? The result is summed up in just one word. It's a wonderful thing when you can get hold of a large document like this and summarize it in one word. what is the word Well, you will find it if you scroll to the end of the letter. It is significant that it comes to the point where the Apostle summarizes. He has written his letter, and he is now about to close.

Here it is.

ROMANS 15:13.

"And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace through faith, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit!"

"The God of hope". This is the word in which the apostle sums up the whole wonderful letter. It is therefore the gospel of the God of hope, more literally, the "**good news**", of the God of hope. So that what is really in view in this letter from beginning to end is hopeful.

A hopeless situation.

Now, of course, hope has no meaning and makes no sense except in light of the contrary - **unless the contrary exists.** The Divine method in this letter, therefore, is in the first instance to set the good news against a hopeless situation, in order to give clear relief to this great word - this ultimate matter, this conclusion, this result. A very, very hopeless situation is outlined. Look at the Divine method in this.

The situation is explained in two respects.

1. In the matter of inheritance.

First, it is laid bare in relation to race - the whole question of heredity. If we look at chapter 5, with which we are so familiar, we see that the whole race is brought back to Adam - "**as by one man...**".

ROMANS 5:12.

"Therefore, as through one man sin entered the world and through sin death, and so death spread to all men, because all have sinned."

The whole race of mankind is traced back to its origin and fountain in the first Adam. What is made clear in this chapter is this. There was a disobedient act through unbelief, which led to the disruption of man's relationship with God.

ROMANS 5:19.

"For as by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of the One many will be made righteous."

This is how Paul puts it - not only here, but in his letter to the Corinthians.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:21-22.

"For since death is by a man, the resurrection of the dead is also by a man. For as they all die in Adam, so shall they all be made alive in Christ;"

And therefore all people who descend from that man, Adam, became involved in that one act of disobedience and in its consequences - primarily the disruption of the relationship between man and God.

But that's not all. What immediately followed, as the effect of that act, was that man in his nature became disobedient and unbelieving. It wasn't just one isolated act he committed, not just one thing he fell into for a moment. Something went out of him, and something else came into him, and man became by nature a disobedient and unbelieving creature. Not only did he act that way, but he became it, and from that moment on the nature of man is faithless, the nature of man is disobedience. It is in his constitution, and all men have inherited it. This is something that cannot be adjusted. When you have become a certain kind of being, without a certain factor, you cannot adapt. You cannot adapt to what is not there. No man can believe unless it is given to him from God to believe. **Faith is:**

EPHESIANS 2:8.

"For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;"

No man can be obedient to God except as a mighty act of God works in him causing him to be of an obedient nature or disposition. You can't adapt to something that isn't there. So the situation is pretty hopeless, isn't it? Something went, and something else that is its opposite came in and took its place. This is the state of the race here. What a picture of hopeless despair for the whole race! This is our heredity. We are in the grip of it. You will of course agree that in other realms, in other departments of life, inheritance is a pretty hopeless thing. We often use its hopelessness as an argument to excuse ourselves.

We say: "This is how I am made: it does not help that you try to get me to do it - I am not made that way". We only argue that we have something in our constitution that makes the situation completely impossible. And let me take this opportunity to emphasize that it is quite hopeless for us to try to find in ourselves what God requires. We will exhaust ourselves, and in the end come to this very position that God has laid down, set, and established - it is hopeless! If we struggle to be a different kind of person than we are by nature, to try to overcome what we have inherited - well, we are doomed to despair, and yet, how many Christians have never learned that fundamental lesson! For the entire race, inheritance spells hopelessness. If it is to be focused at all, we need only consider the conflict and struggle that there is in believing God, with faith in God. We know that it is a deep work of the Spirit, of God in us, that makes us believe, either initially or progressively. This is the "*so-easily-contagious sin*" - unbelief - which is naturally followed by inability to obey.

We are crippled at birth. We are born doomed in this matter by our heredity.

2. In the matter of religious tradition.

Then the Lord takes this thing to another level. I hope we recognize the meaning of the background, the dark background, against which this word "**hope**" is placed. The Spirit of God through the Apostle takes it into the realm of religious tradition, as exemplified by the Jews. Everything is now traced back to Abraham and to Moses. How much does the apostle have to say about Abraham and his faith - "**Abraham believed**" - and then about Moses, and the Law coming in. And here is something of tremendous significance and importance that we must pay attention to, because here we see the particular function that was in view in God's sovereign choice of the Jewish nation. There are many things that can be said about the Jewish nation, their past, present and future, but what most definitely comes out here is their function in the sovereignty of God. This was, and still is, their function, as far as testimony is concerned, that is, the witness of their history. It was just to show one thing. You may have a grandfather and you may have the best religious tradition, but none of it is transmitted in your heredity, that is, it does not pass into your nature. What a father Abraham was! What a wonderful example of faith and obedience was Abraham! They were all from the lineage of Abraham, as a nation they descended from Abraham. And what a system the Jewish religious system was, as far as standard, a moral, ethical, religious standard. There is nothing that can improve upon it in the religions of the world.

What a wonderful system of religious precepts was the Jewish religion, which came in through Moses! - not only the ten commandments, but all the other teachings that made up the Law, covering every aspect of man's life. And they were its children, but what do we find here? You do not find the faith of Abraham in them, and you do not find the reflection of that great system in them, in their nature. These very people, who are descended from such a one as Abraham, and are the heirs of all those oracles of the Mosaic system, are in their nature devoid of all that is represented by Abraham and Moses. These people are still characterized by - what? unbelief, despite Abraham. Disobedience, in spite of Moses! What could be more hopeless? Some people have the idea that if they have a good father and a good mother, that puts them in a very secure position, but human nature does not testify to that. There may be advantages in having godly ancestors - some advantages, but it is no final guarantee that we will escape all the difficulties and all the conflicts and all the suffering to find our own faith. The fact is that parents can be perfect for God, they can be the most godly, the most pious, and yet their children can be the most apostate. A strange thing, isn't it? The disposition to faith and obedience is not in the blood. Religious tradition of the best kind does not change our nature. It may go back generations - it does not change our nature. We are still unbelieving and disobedient by nature, no matter how good our parents were. We may have prayed for a beloved child from the beginning, since it was the smallest baby, you may have sought us to live before it for God, and yet here is that child wayward, disobedient - everything else.

3. Hope in a desperate situation.

How desperately hopeless is this situation! But this is the way the Lord creates an environment for this tremendous thing called hope. And so we come to the transcendent solution, and I use that word carefully at this point, because here is something very big. It is an immense mountain, this mountain of inheritance, but there is something that surpasses the whole, rises above it all, a solution that rises above all the hopelessness and despair of the natural situation, and that is what "**the gospel**" be called. Oh, that must be good news! This is indeed why it is called "**good news**"! Good news! what is it.

There is hope in this most desperate situation.

The Gospel in the Eternal Past.

Now, if we look again at this letter as a whole, we will find that the good news, or the good tidings, of the gospel is not only in the Cross of the Lord Jesus - although that is its focal point, as we will see. It is found that the good news, or the gospel, is something much, much greater, even than the Cross of the Lord Jesus! what is it It is "**the good news of God ... concerning His Son ... Jesus Christ our Lord**". The Cross is only one fragment of the meaning of Jesus Christ himself.

So this letter, what does it do? It takes us right into the eternity of the Son of God. It is wonderful, if we understand it. If this gospel doesn't save us, I don't know what will.

Here we are taken back into the past eternity of the Son.

ROMANS 8:29.

"For those whom He foreknew, these He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers;"

He must have had His Son, the Master pattern, in view there before man was ever created, the eternal, the timeless. Pattern that the Son was, before there was any need for salvation, atonement, the Cross, the Son was the eternal pattern of God for man. And, mind you, it is so positive, so definite. It is at that time that a definitive, once-for-all act took place. "**Those whom He foreknew, He also foreknew.**" This is something that was done before the time was. This is where the gospel begins. Yes, we see the Son in His eternity as God's timeless Pattern, and then we have the eternity or timelessness of the redeeming sovereignty. The redemptive sovereignty is included in it. "**He foreordained, He called, He justified, He glorified**". Now these three remaining things are not subsequent. They all belong to the same time - which is not time at all, it is eternity. It does not say that He foreknew and foreordained, and then in time He called and He justified and He glorified. We see what we are committed to when we take that view. Most of us are called and justified, but we are not yet glorified.

But it says: "**He glorified**", in the "**once-for-all**" (aorist) tense. So it must mean that when He took this matter into His hands in relation to His timeless Pattern, the Lord Jesus, He completed it all in sovereign purpose and intention.

It was then all rounded off, so that the torn vessel is an incident in time, a terrible incident, a terrible tragedy, that the vessel was disfigured in the hand of the Potter, but, for all that, an incident in time. God's counsel surpasses all that has come in time. Dear friend, when the Lord projected the whole plan of salvation, it was not because something happened that needed an emergency movement to try to save the situation on the spot. He had already anticipated the whole thing and got everything in hand to meet the contingency.

The Lamb is.

REVELATION 13:8.

"And all the inhabitants of the earth shall worship him, all whose names have not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain."

The Cross reaches back over all time, right back over all sin, over the fall, over the first Adam - right back to the eternal Son, before eternal times. The Cross goes back there - to "the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world". What great hope is here! If it's true, if we can grasp it, that's good news, isn't it? We make everything about the situation in ourselves which is so hopeless. God does everything from His Son to meet our hopelessness. And God doesn't experiment because something has gone wrong - "We have to find some kind of remedy for this, We have to find something that We can experiment with to see if We can handle this emergency, man has become ill, and We have to look around for a medicine."

This was not the case at all. God already knew it from eternity, and prepared it from eternity, in His Son. This is the gospel, the good news, from God "**concerning His Son**". This can cause a number of mental problems, but here is the explanation of this book. Hope, we see, is not destroyed because Adam falls, Hope extends beyond man's sin. We say: "**Then what about the Cross?**" Well, the Incarnation and the Cross accomplish only what is established in eternity—to bring into time in a practical way from eternity, making effective for man in his desperately needy condition, that great purpose, purpose, design of God concerning His Son. The Cross is the means that lifts out of the trough, the valley, of human sin and failure, to the level of the eternal counsel of God, and restores the equal course of that which is ultimately eternally untouched by what has happened.

Great news, isn't it? The Cross becomes the occasion of faith through which all this is transcended - it naturally provides the ground for our faith - and when faith acts in relation to the Cross, what happens? We are brought into Christ. Not brought into the Jesus of three and a half years, or even of thirty years, but brought into Christ as representative of God's timeless thought for man. Faith brings us into it. This is the good news, "**the good news concerning His Son**"; the gospel, the good news of "**the God of hope**". We see, hope is based on God's eternal provision beyond time, and it is a very safe rock to stand on! Yes, based on the eternal rock of Christ's Sonship, not an afterthought and an after-measure to deal with something that happened unexpectedly. Hope is grounded and anchored beyond time.

The apostle, writing to the Hebrews, uses a picture, a metaphor.

HEBREWS 6:18-19.

"so that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible that God should lie, we who have escaped may have powerful encouragement to hold fast the hope that lies ahead; and we have it as an anchor of the soul that is safe and fixed and goes inside the veil."

It takes us beyond time, beyond this life, anchoring us there in eternity. **How great is the Cross!**

How great is the message of Romans 6! This takes us right back past Moses, Abraham and Adam. It takes us right back past Adam's sin and failure, and the entire race's hopeless condition. The Cross takes us back before all this, and there in the past eternity connects us with what God intended. The Cross ensures this.

And with the other hand the Cross reaches straight into the eternity to come, and says:

ROMANS 8:29-30.

"For those whom He foreknew, these He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He ordained before, these He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified."

The Cross ensures the coming eternal glory. How great is the Cross! Hope therefore rests on the greatness of the Cross. Hope rests on the fact that Christ, who passed on this road, became the last Adam, who was made for our sin, bears it all, now resurrected by God, sits at God's right hand. Therefore that we, as "*in Christ*" are placed beyond any risk of another fall. I always think that this is one of the most blessed factors in the gospel - that Jesus now in Heaven, after being on the way to His Cross, says that this Adam will never fail. There will never be another fall. This inheritance is safe, is safe, because it is linked to Him. There is no fear that we will be involved in another fall, no fear. It is indeed a wonderful hope, this gospel of the God of hope! So we see how vividly the dark picture of hopelessness is drawn? We look at the details - the terrible picture of the Gentiles and the Jews painted in the first chapters of this letter, and the hopelessness of the situation for both. Yes, despair indeed - and then written over it all, Hope! The good news of hope stands above all this, in spite of all this, because hope rests on the fact that God has decided before all things about something He will carry out, and which He demonstrated through the Cross of His Son, Jesus Christ. We know, don't we, that when faith has acted in relation to the Cross of the Lord Jesus, something begins in us that completely reverses the natural course of things. Now faith grows, faith develops, we learn the way of faith, we are enabled to trust God more and more. Everything has changed, obedience is now possible. And there is another life, another nature, another power, in us, which is made by hope.

A contradiction of the Christian faith is a despairing Christian, a hopeless Christian, one who is not characterized by this great thing that is eminently characteristic of God - hope. He is "**the God of hope**". The Lord makes it true, that we are filled with hope, "**joy in hope**".

ROMANS 12:12.

"rejoice in hope; be patient in tribulation; persevere in prayer."

2.PAUL'S GOSPEL IN THE EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS.

We may be surprised to learn that the word "*gospel*," or, as it would be in the original, the term "*good news*," occurs no less than twenty-two times in these two letters. We need a fairly solid foundation on which to base our conclusions, and I think that twenty-two occurrences of one special word in such a space forms a pretty sound basis. Whatever these letters are about, they should be about that. Much of what you read in these letters may make you think it was not like that at all - it looks very bad, but still the "*good news*" is clearly present.

The summary of the letters.

There is one very famous sentence that sums up the entirety of the two letters. It appears, of course, at the end of the second letter.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:13.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen."

This is sometimes called "*the blessing*". This is, of course, the human title for it. But it is not just an appendage to a discourse - a conventional way of ending things, a nice thought. Nor was it used by Paul as a kind of closing good wish or praise with which to end a meeting, as it is now commonly used. I suppose there is a blessing in that, but we need to look much deeper than just these phrases.

It was really a prayer, and a prayer in which the whole of the two letters written by the Apostle was summed up. In Paul's wonderful way of expressing much in few words, everything he penned down through these two letters is summed up in this way.

The Order of the Summary.

It is perhaps important to note the order of these three clauses. The grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This is not the order of the Godhead. If this was the order of the Deity, it would have to be changed:

"The love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit".

But we don't have to try to correct God - to try to improve on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's order. This is not the order of the Godhead. This is the order of the Divine process. This is the path along which God moves to reach His end, and this is exactly the summary of these two letters. The whole way through God moves to an end, and this prayer of Paul is according to the principle, the order, of Divine movement. Now let's get to the words themselves, and see if we can find a bit of the gospel - the "good news" of these two letters - broken down into these three phrases.

1. The Grace of the Lord Jesus.

What was the grace of the Lord Jesus? Well, if you look back in this second letter, to chapter 8, verse 9, you have it.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:9.

"I do not say this as an order, but to put the authenticity of your love to the test through the zeal of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that you may become rich through his poverty."

There are three very simple elements to that statement. The Lord Jesus did something - **He became poor, and what He did was voluntary** - because grace always carries that characteristic at the beginning. This is what is completely voluntary. Not required, not required, under no obligation, but completely free. The grace of our Lord Jesus meant first of all a voluntary act. This grace is very simple, but it goes to the heart of things. So that's what He did - He became poor. And then the motive, why He did it; "**so that through his poverty you may become rich.**"

I think this is a simple, and a very beautiful, analysis and synthesis of grace. He became poor - He did it without compulsion - and thus His motive was that we might become rich. We are not talking about material wealth here, but spiritual wealth. Here we see in the Lord Jesus a Person and a nature completely, complete and final, unlike any other human being. A nature completely at odds with the nature of man, as we know it. Human nature as we know it is to be rich (material), do anything to get rich (material), and anyone else can be robbed to make us rich. There is no need to take a pistol and put it to people's heads. There are other ways to gain benefits for ourselves, at other people's expense or otherwise.

There is actually no "grace" in man, as we know him. But the Lord Jesus is so different! Christ is completely different - a completely different nature. Now the whole first letter to the Corinthians is full of the self-principle. I assume that we are more or less familiar with these letters. I cannot go through every page, not even verse by verse, but we can draw our conclusions as a result of a careful reading of this letter through a period of time previously passed. So we see that the whole first letter to the Corinthians is just full of the self-principle - self-justification, law enforcement to get their own rights, self-seeking, self-interest, self-satisfaction - even at the Lord's table - self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-glorification, self-love, assertiveness, and everything else. You find all these things in that first letter, and more. The "own me" colossal is written all over the first letter. It is nature, the old nature, that shows itself in Christians. Everything that is contrary to "the grace of the Lord Jesus" comes to light in that letter, and the Lord Jesus stands in such strong, clear, terrible contrast to what we find there. In the previous chapter we tried to show that, in revealing the glory of the good news as the good news of the God of hope, the Divine method was to paint the hopelessness of the picture as it really was and for human nature is. Now, in order to achieve the Divine end, the Holy Spirit does not cover the faults, the weaknesses - even the sins, the horrible sins - of Christians. The grace of God is strengthened by the background against which it stands. We see, this is the good news of the blessing. The good news here is found right at the beginning of the letter. God knows everything about these people. **He doesn't just find out - He knows the worst.**

Dear friend, the Lord knows the worst of you and of me, and He knows it all, and it is a poor kind of everything! Now, He knew all about these Corinthians, and yet, under His hand, Apostle Paul took the pen and began his letter with--what?

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3.

"Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and the brother Sosthenes, to the church of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, together with all who call upon the name of our Invoking Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both them and our Lord: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!"

Is it make-believe? Is it putting blinders on and saying nice things about people? No, not at all! God knew all this, and yet said, "**sanctified in Christ Jesus... saints**". Now we can say that we do not understand it at all. We would never have called this bunch of Corinth "**saints**" in eternity. Yet God does it. It's an extreme example of His grace through His Son Jesus Christ. Now, we don't call such people saints. We reserve that word for people of a very different kind. We say, "**Ah, he is a saint**" - to distinguish him, not from unsaved people, but from good people. Now, God came right to these people, knowing this whole black, dark story, and said, "**saints**"; and those other words, "**sanctified in Christ Jesus**" are just another form of the same word "**saints**". It means "**set apart**" in Christ Jesus. You see, the very first thing is the position in which the grace of the Lord Jesus places us.

This is positional grace. If we are in Christ Jesus, all these lamentable things about us may be true, but God sees us in Christ Jesus and not in ourselves. This is the good news, this is the gospel. The miracle of the grace of the Lord Jesus! We are considered by God to be set apart, sanctified in Christ Jesus. This is where God begins His work with us and places us in a position in His Son where He ascribes to us all that the Lord Jesus is.

Now, you can break it up in this letter.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:30.

"But through Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and salvation."

He was made for us righteousness, sanctification, salvation. I fear that some Christians are afraid to make too much of their positional grace. They think that it will take something away from their Christian life if they make too much of it, because they put such a tremendous amount of emphasis on the necessity of their sanctification, actually, as far as their condition is concerned, and they are so introspective about this matter of what they are in themselves and try to deal with it, that they lose all the joy of their position in Christ by grace. We must maintain the balance in this matter. The beginning of everything is that the grace of the Lord Jesus comes to us - even though we may be like the Corinthians - and places us and looks at us as in a place of holiness, "**sanctified in Christ Jesus**". You can't describe it.

Grace is beyond our ability to describe, but there is the miracle of the grace of the Lord Jesus. The fact of the matter is that we really only discover what horrible creatures we are after we are in Christ Jesus, and after we have been in Him for a long time. I think the longer we are in Christ, the more horrible we become in our own eyes. Therefore, if we are in Christ Jesus, it does not mean what we are in ourselves. Our position is not based on whether we are truly, literally, perfect. The good news has to do primarily with our position in Christ.

However, it doesn't stop there. The grace of our Lord Jesus can make the state different - can make our state lead to a new state. This is the grace of the Lord Jesus. This can make our own actual state closely match our positional state. Grace is not received only in the position of acceptance without merit. Grace is an active force to conform us to the position into which we have been brought. Grace has many aspects.

Grace is acceptance, but also grace is power to work.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9.

"And He said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Much rather I will therefore glory in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

It is the mighty word of strength in need. The grace of our Lord Jesus is indeed good news - good news for all Christians.

2. The Love of God.

After "the grace of the Lord Jesus" comes "the love of God". Now the second letter to the Corinthians is just as full of the love of God as the first is full of the grace of the Lord Jesus. It is a wonderful letter of the love of God, and of His mighty triumph, His mighty power. The love of God is God's contemporary method of showing His power. If it won't do it, nothing will. What God does in this dispensation, He does through love. Let it be settled. Not by judgment, not by condemnation.

The Lord Jesus said He did not come to condemn, He came to save.

JOHN 12:47.

"And if anyone listens to my words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world."

JOHN 3:17.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."

Yes, it is the love of God that is the method of His power in this dispensation. The method will change, but now is the day of the love of God. Paul has already, towards the end of the first letter, given that classic definition and analysis of the love of God - 1 Corinthians 13. There is nothing to compare with it in the whole Bible as an analysis of - not your love, not my love, we are not interested in that - but the love of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7.

"Love is long-suffering and kind; love is not jealous; love does not talk loudly, is not puffed up, does not act obscenely, does not seek its own interests, is not embittered, does not count evil, does not rejoice over iniquity, but rejoices with the truth. It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, bears all things."

There the love of God is set forth. We will find that we cannot stand up to it. No man can fully stand against it. **"Love never fails"** - never gives up.

Here is the quality of Divine love.

Now see it in the second letter to the Corinthians, and see the mighty triumph, the power, of the love of God. See it first as triumphant in the servant of the Lord. Paul gave in various places in his writings very wonderful, very beautiful, very glorious revelations of the grace of God in his own life, but, considering the setting, I don't think there is anything anywhere in the New Testament that is so wonderful does not set forth the triumph of the love of God in a servant of God, as this second letter to the Corinthians. If ever a man had reason to give up, to wash his hands, and despair, to be bitterly angry, to be anything but loving, Paul had reason for such a response in regard to the Corinthians. He could well have been justified in closing the situation in Corinth and saying: **"I am done with you, I have washed my hands, you are incurable. The more I love you, the more you hate me. Okay, get on with it, I'm leaving you now."** Look at this second letter: the outgoing, the overflowing love for these people - to these people - about that situation.

What a triumph of love, the love of God, in a servant of God! This is how God accomplishes his purpose.

Yes, but it wasn't left there. You can see it in the Corinthians themselves, as he talks to them about the result of his strong pleading, his rebuke, his exhortation. The terms he uses about them are their sorrow, their godly repentance, and so on. It was worth it, the love of God that prevails in such a people, and you know that this is what made possible the wonderful, beautiful things that Paul was able to write to them in the second letter. Paul could never have committed himself to writing some of the things that are in this second letter, but for some change in those people, in their attitude, in their nature, in their spirit, but for the fact that he gained this basis of triumphant love. For this second letter has to do with ministry, with testimony, and Paul would be the last man in the world to ever suggest that anyone can have a ministry and a testimony who knows nothing of the conquering love of God in their own nature not. Paul was not that kind of man. Unfortunately, it is possible to preach and be a Christian worker, and know nothing of the Lord Jesus' grace in your own life - to be just a contradiction. There are way too many of them. Paul would never have accepted such a thing. If he is going to talk about the ministry and about witnessing in the world, he will demand a foundation, that grace has done its work at least in measure, so that the love of God is now revealed in this way. There is now humility: Something has broken, something has given way. There is now something of the grace of the Lord Jesus, in self-emptying, in the denial of self-life. This is the triumph of Divine love in such a people.

This is the gospel, the good news! That's good news, isn't it? The gospel is not just something to bring the sinner to the Savior. This is it - but the gospel, the good news, is also this, that people, Christians like the Corinthians, can be changed by the love of God. Good news!

The glory of the triumph follows, in words we love so much.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14.

"But thanks be to God who always makes us triumph in Christ and who spreads the fragrance of his knowledge through us everywhere."

It is the triumph of grace and love.

It's a different Paul, isn't it? - A different Paul than the first letter. He now has the wind in his sails, he runs before the wind, he is in triumph. He speaks of everything being a triumph in Christ, a continual celebration of victory. What made Paul change? Well, the change in them! Yes, it was always like this with Paul, his life was connected with the condition of the Christians.

1 THESSALONIANS 3:8.

"For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord."

"And the love of God".

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6-7.

"For God who said that light should shine out of darkness—it is He who shone in our hearts to bring the enlightenment of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

But we have this treasure in earthen jars, so that the excellence of the power may be from God and not from us."

We are poor creatures, Corinthians: I am, ye are; but God shone in our hearts. Something has been done in our hearts. The love of God entered. Fragile vessels as we are within ourselves, that love shines forth - **the glory of the love of God.**

3. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

"**The fellowship of the Holy Spirit**". Did a people ever need the meaning of community more than the Corinthians? Is Paul touching a place that was a very, very sensitive place? Community?

He wrote.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:12.

"I mean this, that each one of you says: I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ."

Is there any community in that, any community in that? No. When you live in the flesh, there is no fellowship, there is no communion, you are all in pieces and all fly into each other. So it was. What is God looking for? Community, communion, among believers, and it must be the community, the community, of the Holy Spirit, that is, community constituted and established and enriched by the Holy Spirit. This is the result of "**the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God**" - unity. Let us clearly recognize that this is the deepest work of the Holy Spirit. Much was said earlier, in Paul's first letter, about the Holy Spirit.

They made much of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts attracted them. They were in love with power to do things, signs, wonders, and mighty deeds. It was very much to their heart; these gifts of the Spirit, and many more which were only external, brought a great deal of satisfaction to their souls. But when you come to the highest end and deepest work of the Holy Spirit, you find it in the unity of believers. It requires the deepest work of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this, seeing that we still have a nature that is an old nature. We can still be Christians, and yet Corinthian Christians. There still lurks - and not always in hidden corners - the 'I', the self-life in one form or another. Seeing that it is there, it takes a mighty work of the Holy Spirit to unite even two believers inextricably. But to unite an entire church like that is something wonderful. Nothing less or other than that is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Something of that appears to be in Corinth. Oh, wonder of wonders, the difference between these two letters! It is an inner triumph over nature, and it shows real progress. This is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul began his first letter, he said.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4.

"And I, brothers, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to little children in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with solid food, because you were not yet capable of it, and you are not yet capable of it, because you are still carnal; for since there is jealousy and contention and bickering among you, are you not carnal and do you not walk after man? Because if one says: I am of Paul; and the other: I of Apollos—are you not carnal?"

Babies are always scratching and fighting. It was the Corinthians. But they got past the baby stage, through "**the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God**". Things changed, they grew up. It takes the Holy Spirit to make us grow spiritually in this way. The measure of our spirituality can be very quickly and clearly indicated by the measure of our mutual love, our community. After all, we are spiritually small people if we are always different. It takes great people to live with certain other great people without arguing about everything. It requires "**the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God**", to lead to "**the communion of the Holy Spirit**". This fellowship of the Holy Spirit is therefore essentially corporate. Perhaps you thought that this last clause, "**the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**," meant your fellowship with the Holy Spirit and that of the Holy Spirit with you. It doesn't mean that at all. Paul perhaps just gently strikes back to the old state, and touches that old state. "**What you Corinthians lacked more than anything else was fellowship**". There was no fellowship. Now we have come on the path of the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God "**and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**" is found among us. This is what it means. It is corporate, and it is a mighty work of the Holy Spirit. It must be in more than one of us. Now of course you think it must be in the other person! No, it has to be in more than one of us, not just the other person. It must be in you and me - it must be involved in everyone. Well, that's the gospel, good news to a nation in pretty bad shape!

We never get anywhere by acknowledging the deplorable state and just going for it - start beating people around, swinging the sword or the sledgehammer and smashing things, bringing people under condemnation. We never get anywhere like that. If Paul had dealt with Corinth in this way, he would have got everything right, but that would have been the end of it. But love found a way, and while there was brokenness, it wasn't the end. Something, "**beauty for ashes**", came from it - because "**the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**", was the principle on which Paul himself lived and according to which he worked. You and I must be people of good news. We have good news for any situation, even if it is as dire as that in Corinth. Believe it! Good news! Good news! This should be our attitude towards everything, by the grace of God, not discouraged, not given up. No, good news! The Lord makes us people of the gospel, the good news.

3. PAUL'S GOSPEL IN THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS.

We now turn to the letter to the Galatians, where we actually have the phrase that is basic to this consideration - "**the gospel that I preach**". The phrase is found in the second chapter and the second verse, and in another form in chapter one, verse eleven - "**the gospel which was preached by me**". We noticed how many times this word "**gospel**" appears in Paul's letters. The word is sprinkled throughout his letters, indicating by the frequency of their occurrence that this is after all what he is really writing about. The same thing is true in this short letter to the Galatians. In the noun form - that is, where the whole body of Christian truth is called "**the gospel**" - it occurs eight times in this letter, and then in the verb form - "**preach the gospel**", but only one word in the original - in the verb form it is used six times found in this letter, so that we have here fourteen occurrences in a very short letter.

The situation among the Galatian Christians.

Now, if we could reconstruct the situation presented by this letter, or actually come down to it, what should we find? If we were to suppose that the situation represented here existed somewhere today, and we visited that place where this thing was going on, what would we encounter? Well, we should find a tremendous controversy going on, with three parties involved. On the one hand we should find a group of men who are extremely and bitterly anti-Paul.

On the other hand, we should find Paul stirred and stirred to the depths of his being, since we never find him anywhere else in his writings or in his travels. And between these two parties there would be the Christians who are the immediate cause of this tremendous struggle that is going on. Much bigger issues than the local are at issue here, because it is about the far-reaching and lasting nature of the gospel. Now, Paul, in the struggle, commits himself to a restoration of "**the gospel he preached**", against those who tried to undermine, neutralize and completely destroy his ministry. What was it all about? Well, first, take the anti-Pauline party. What is their trouble? What is it that they are trying to establish? In short, in a word, their aim is to establish the old, Jewish, religious tradition. They stand vehemently for the permanence of that system. They argue that it comes directly from God, and what comes directly from God cannot be changed or set aside. This thing has the backing of antiquity. It is the thing that has acquired and existed for many centuries, and therefore it carries the value of something that is not, like Paul's teaching, something entirely new. It was established in the past centuries. They would go further and say that Jesus did not abolish the law of Moses: He did not say anything that the law of Moses was set aside. Well, there is all this argument, and much more. Their position is that Judaism, the Law of Moses, is binding on Christians.

"Be Christians, if you want, but you must add the Law of Moses to your Christian faith, and you must come under the rule of all the Dos and Don'ts of that tradition and that system; you must conform to the teachings and customs of the Jewish system, of the tradition of Moses." This is their position in a nutshell.

On the other side there is Paul. He is no stranger to Moses, no stranger to the Jewish system. Born, bred, brought up, trained and very thoroughly taught in all these, yet here he is found directly and positively opposed to their position. He argues that the Law was indeed given by God, but it was only given by God to point out man's weakness and sin. The real value and effect of the Law is to show what man is like - that he just cannot keep it. How hopeless man is in the presence of God's demands! How helpless he is before this whole system of commandments - You shall and you shall not! And though Christ did not abolish the Law, set it aside and say, "**It is all finished,**" Christ was in Himself the only One, the only One among all men who ever walked this earth, who could keep it, and He kept it. He satisfied God in every detail of the Divine Law, and after He satisfied God and fulfilled the Law, He established and established another basis of relationship with God, and so the Law is set aside in that way. Another foundation of life with God is brought in by Jesus Christ.

This is Paul's argument in a nutshell. Of course, there are many details in it, but Paul comes to the opposite conclusion that these Judaizers have reached. The Mosaic law is no longer binding on Christians in the way it was binding on the Jews. Paul's argument is that in Christ we are freed from the Law. The big word in this letter is freedom in relation to the Law. From the strong terms used in this letter, we can deduce how intense the feelings of those involved are. Of course these Judaizers are very, very strong. They followed Paul wherever he went. They tried by every means, by personal attack and by argument and persuasion, to undo his work and to lead his converts away from him and bring them back to Moses.

Paul is found here, as I have said, in a state of perfect vehemence. This Paul, so capable of forbearance and longsuffering and patience, as we saw in our last chapter in the case of the Corinthians, where every kind of provocation to anger was encountered by him—the wonderful, wonderful patience and forbearance of Paul with those people - yet the man here seems to have been stripped of all such tolerance, here he literally hurls anxiety over these men. Twice over, with a double emphasis, he says, **"Let him be cursed... so I say again, Let him be cursed"**

Now, when Paul gets like that, there must be something involved. For a man like Paul to be worked up like that, you have to conclude that something serious is afoot. And indeed there is, and this very anger of the Apostle indicates how serious was the difference between these two positions.

The answer to the situation.

Now, in the letter we may feel that there is a lot of mysterious material. For example, in using Old Testament types, Paul uses the example of Hagar and Ishmael as an allegory. We know the details, we won't go into them at all. There seems to be a lot of mysterious material that Paul uses for his argument. But when we've read it all and considered it and felt its impact, what does it all come down to? When we have studied it and are impressed with its seriousness, what are we left with? Is this just a conclusion about legalism - that the Law no longer enslaves us, and we are freed from it? Is it that a dispensation of liberty has been introduced in that respect, and that its principles are no longer binding on us?

Is it just the position? Is it that Christianity is something without obligations in terms of truth and practice? Is it that grace will dominate all our breaking of laws and violation of principles? - a false interpretation of grace indeed! - but is that it? what is it You see, it is possible to very truly grasp the value of a letter like this, but that it remains only a theological matter, a mere matter of learning. Yes, the letter to the Galatians teaches that we are no longer under the Law of Moses, and that we are free as children of God. Very beautiful, very beautiful! But where will it lead you? What does it come down to? All that is negative. I wonder - and this is the whole point - I wonder how many of us really live in the enjoyment of the mystery and heart of the gospel, as it is presented in this letter. Paul says a lot here about the gospel or the good news. What really is the gospel, or the good news, as it is found here in this letter and in this particular context? After all, it is not just that Christians want to be "*liberated*" - freed from all restrictions, from all slavery and all obligations, only to do as they please, to follow their own inclinations. It's not that at all. You and I want to know something more positive than that. We cannot be satisfied with mere negatives.

Christ Within Us.

What does the gospel amount to here? Paul says: "This is the gospel".

It is summed up in one fragment of this letter, a very famous passage of Scripture, which we all rejoice over -

GALATIANS 2:20.

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And what I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me."

It is the heart of the whole matter, it is the answer to the whole argument, it settles all the questions, it deals with all the difficulties - the gospel, the good news, of the indwelling Christ. And when you think about it, it is the most important and fundamental factor in Christianity. No wonder Paul saw that, if sacrificed, Christianity stood for nothing. The Judaizers would carry everything away. Christianity would have no meaning. So he fought for Christianity on one point only - but one that included the whole. The whole is wrapped and tied together with: "Christ lives in me". If this is true, you don't need to argue about anything at all, all the argument is settled.

"Christ lives in me". Christ! What is Christ? Who is Christ? What does Christ mean? What does He embody? Well, everything that satisfies God is found in Christ! In His Son Jesus Christ, God has His full, final, complete answer. Christ can fulfill every demand of God, and has done so. Christ can bring the full and complete favor of God wherever He is. Oh, we could dwell on it for a long time - what Christ is, how great Christ is, how wonderful Christ is! And **"Christ lives in me"!**

Christ, that Christ of eternal glory, that Christ of self-emptying, humiliation, that Christ of the triumphant life, that Christ of the mighty Cross, of the resurrection, of the return to glory and of the ascension now, is in you and in me! What more do we want - what more can we have - what greater thing than this?

The Power of Christ Within Me.

Now Christ is a real, living Person, not an abstract idea, a historical figure, but a real, living Person. ***"Christ lives in me".***

I don't wear a crucifix of a dead Christ on the outside. I have a living Christ within, the good news of a living Christ within.

You can read it, or hear how it is said, and you can nod your head and say: ***"Yes, Amen"***: you agree with it! But I know people who have heard it for years, and agree with it as wholeheartedly as you do - and then one day wake up to it. ***"You know, after all I've heard about it, I've only now come to realize that it's true that Christ really lives in me!"*** It is something more than the doctrine of Christ within - it is the experience. Paul focuses his entire history as a Christian and as a servant of God on that one thing.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6.

"For God who said that light should shine out of darkness—it is He who has shone in our hearts to bring the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

GALATIANS 1:15-16.

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, so that I would proclaim him among the Gentiles, immediately I did not have flesh and blood not consulted,"

GALATIANS 1:11-12.

"But I make it known to you, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not after man. Because I neither received nor learned it from a human being, but through a revelation from Jesus Christ."

How did it happen? Not only objectively and outwardly, but inwardly. "**God shone from within**". "**Christ lives in me**". The most amazing thing that ever happened to a man in the course of human history was what happened to Saul of Tarsus that afternoon when he realized that Jesus of Nazareth, whom he thought was finished, was dead and buried, is actually alive. Remember how very alive He was. And Paul says: "**That One lives - and not only in glory - He lives in me!**" A Living Person, a living real power within, yea, a real power within, is Christ.

The Intelligence of Christ Within Me.

Furthermore, He is a true Intelligence, possessing the full knowledge of all that God wills, and, with that, residing in me, is the repository and vehicle of God's full will for my life. Full intelligence through Christ within me!

All the knowledge which Christ possesses is within, and if this is true, if Christ is within - the Apostle is of course speaking here not only of Christ within, but much of the Holy Spirit, to which we shall now come - as the indwelling Christ has its course, then what He is becomes actual in the life of the child of God, the fact that He is a living Person, the fact that He is a mighty power, the fact that He is a full, Divine Intelligence is.

Christ within me is the knowledge of the will of God.

We would like to have all understanding in our mind, all knowledge and intelligence in our reason. We don't have that, but we have a different kind of intelligence. The true child of God has another kind of intelligence, quite different from that which is of reason. We don't know how to explain and interpret it, but somehow we know. We can only say: "**We know**". We know what the Lord does not want concerning us. We find it impossible to be comfortable along any line that the Lord does not want, and so often we end up in that position. We put it in different ways, but we must say: "**I know the Lord does not want me to do that, or to go on that path. It is as deep in me as anything. To do so would be to violate something related to my life with God.**" This is on the negative side. And on the positive side, if the Lord really wants something, we know it, despite everything we know it. If we will just wait for it, it will be so sure. The problem is that we cannot wait on the Lord. We get so confused about these problems of guidance. But when the Lord's time arrives, there is no question of it at all. We know. How do we know? This is spiritual knowledge, this is spiritual intelligence.

It is Christ who dwells within, possessing the whole mind of God. Now, here are these poor Galatian Christians, divided between the Judaizers and Paul. They don't know what to make of this. These, on the one hand, are so strong about their line of things, and on the other hand, here's Paul saying they're all wrong! What are they doing?

The answer comes: "If Christ is in you, you will know - you will know what you ought to do". And that is the only real way to know what you ought to do - what is right and what is wrong. Christ in you. But you will know.

Christ within me the power of perseverance.

Now you say: "I didn't realize it, I don't feel it, I don't see it; I don't have all that intelligence, I don't feel all that power".

You see, as Paul always tries to point out, there is such a big difference between the human kind of knowledge and spiritual knowledge. We have knowledge of this kind, not by information, but by experience. Some of us have been on the Christian path for years. If it was left to us, would we still go on with the Lord? If we had to go on, fight through, fight it out, on our own resources, would we still be here? I think I can tell you as I tell myself, Definitely not! We wouldn't be here today. We would not abide in the Lord and continue with the Lord. If Satan could have his way, we would not be here, for both in ourselves and in Satan we have found every conceivable thing that is against Christ, to make it impossible for us to go on with the Lord. Everything in ourselves is spiritually against us.

Everything in Satan is against us, and everything he can use is thrown into the battle for our destruction. But we are here, and this is the proof that Christ in us is a living power, and it is found - **though not yet in fullness** - in experience, in reality, and not only in our sense of it. We would like to have the sensations of this great power, to feel it, but no, there is often the concealment of His power, and it only comes out in facts - often in quite long-term facts.

The Nature of Christ Within Me.

Power, intelligence, knowledge, and then disposition. This is one of the realities of the Christian life. When Christ is within, we have a completely different attitude. We tend to new things, tend in new ways. Yes, our nature has changed. The things we once saw as our life no longer attract us. We are no longer inclined to them. This is the world's problem with the Christian: "**Why don't you do this, that and the other?**" And the only answer we can give, but which never satisfies them, is: "**I have lost all taste for that kind of thing. I'm not like that anymore. I have a completely different nature.**" It is like this: another attitude - Christ within. **This is Christianity!**

You see, Moses says: "You must do this, and you must do that, and you must not do this, and you must not do that"; and my attitude is completely opposite to that of Moses.

Moses says: "**You must do it**" - I don't want to do it. It may be perfectly right, it may have come from God, but I just don't find it in my nature, in my mindset, to do it.

Moses said, "I may not do it", and my attitude says, "I want to do it - that's the only thing I do want to do!" Somehow, in myself I am just like God in every way.

What is the solution to the Act? Christ in you. If Christ is in you, then you will be inclined to do what God wants you to do, and you will fulfill the Law. If Christ is in you, you will have no inclination to do what God does not want you to do, and you will again fulfill the Law. But, you see, you fulfill it on a completely different basis. You fulfill it, not because Moses said so, but because Christ is in you. Not because you have to, but because Christ gives you a different attitude. This is the gospel, the good news, of the indwelling Christ.

The Work of the Holy Spirit Within Me.

Now, when you turn to the teaching about the Holy Spirit in this letter, you find that it amounts to the same thing. Christ in you is the Holy Spirit's standard and He works in you based on the indwelling Christ to align you with Christ, to build you up according to the Christ that is in you. The Holy Spirit is the energy of Christ within, the energy to make us like Christ, to enable us to be like Christ. Therefore to be fulfillers of all that is right in the eyes of God, and avoiders of all that is not. There is an energy by the Holy Spirit to do this.

The apostle speaks of the fruit of the Spirit.

GALATIANS 5:22-23.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The law is not against such things."

The Spirit, you see, is within, and He is the Spirit of Christ within to cause the fruit of Christ to be borne in us, or, shall we say, the fruit of Christ showing itself in all these many ways. The fruit of Christ is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control", the fruit of the mighty energy of the Spirit of Christ within us. And what about the law? Yes, the Spirit works according to law.

Before he finishes, the apostle says that tremendous thing, that terrible thing:

GALATIANS 6:7-8.

"Don't go astray; God does not allow himself to be mocked; for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. He who sows in his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh; but he who sows in the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal life."

The law of the Spirit, you see, is this. Sow, and you reap; what you sow, you reap. Sow in the Spirit, and you will reap eternal life. If you sow to the Spirit - that is to say only in figurative language, If you adapt to the Spirit's energy, the Spirit's law, the Spirit's government, or to Christ in you - you will reap Christ, you will reap life. There is a law here, and "free from the Law" does not mean that we are freed from any necessity to recognize that God has formed His universe, our bodies and souls, according to principles, but it does mean that Christ in us makes it possible for us to obey the principles, when otherwise we would violate them all the time.

"The gospel that I preach", says Paul: After all, it comes down to this - after all your arguments about legalism and Judaizers and the rest, it comes down to this: - "Christ lives in me". This is good news, this is hope - **everything is possible!**

4. PAUL'S GOSPEL IN EPHESIANS.

EPHESIANS 1:13.

"in whom you also, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom you also, after you believed, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance to redeem his property to the praise of his glory."

EPHESIANS 3:6-7.

"that the Gentiles are joint heirs and fellow members of the body and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel of which I have become a servant, according to the gift of the grace of God given to me according to the working of his power".

EPHESIANS 6:15.

"and as shoes for your feet the readiness for the gospel of peace."

EPHESIANS 6:19-20.

"and for me, that a word may be given me if I open my mouth to boldly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, so that I may speak boldly in it as I should speak."

When we come to consider "**the Gospel according to Paul**" in the letter to the Ephesians, we find that we have the word "**gospel**" four times in the noun. Many people have the idea that when you reach the letter to the Ephesians you have left the gospel behind, you are beyond the gospel, you really must have come a long way past the gospel.

I don't think we can get beyond this letter as far as Divine revelation is concerned, as we will see it does take us a very long way into Divine things, but it is still the gospel. The gospel is something very great, very comprehensive, indeed very far-reaching. This makes us note that the letter to the Ephesians is the letter of superlatives. An expressive adjective has come into vogue in recent years, by which people try to convey the idea that a thing is very large, or of the highest quality. They say it is "**super**". Now here, in this letter, is everything - may I use the word? - "**super**!" The whole letter is written in terms of what is superlative; and I must take it for granted that you can remember something of what is here. Superlatives relate to almost everything in this letter.

There is the superlative of time. Time is completely transcended: we are taken into the realm of timelessness. Through this letter we are taken back to the eternal past, before the foundation of the world, and further to the eternity to come, to the ages of ages. This is the superlative of time - passing time. There is the superlative of space. One phrase runs through this letter - "**in the heavens**". When you get into the heavens, you are just amazed at the vastness of the vastness. In the natural realm this is true, isn't it, even of the very limited "**earthly heavens**", as represented by the earth's atmosphere. If you travel a lot by plane, you go through the airports and see the planes come and go, come and go, every few minutes, all day long and all night long and day after day - and yet when you take off in the sky you rarely meet another plane. It's quite an event to pass another plane in midair, so vast are the heavens in their expanse.

And this letter was written in the realm of the superlatives of space, in the spiritual heavens, completely above the limitations of the earth.

There is the superlative of might. There is one clause here, so familiar to us, which affects it:

EPHESIANS 1:19.

"and what is the exceeding greatness of his power for us who believe, after the working of the power of his strength."

There is much about that power, superlative power, and its operation, in this letter.

This letter in content the letter of the superlative. How to approach and explain it is extremely difficult. You see, some of us have been talking, giving speeches, giving addresses, about this letter to the Ephesians - and it's only a little letter as far as actual chapters or words - for over forty years, and we've not even come close to the no end of it. I challenge you to exhaust the contents of this letter. It doesn't matter how long you keep at it - you will always feel: "**I haven't begun to understand it yet**". But when you look at it and consider it, you find yourself in the realm of superlatives in terms of content, and it starts with;

EPHESIANS 1:3.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavens in Christ,"

Again, this is in the realm of the super-mundane. The earth here becomes a very small thing, and all that goes on in it. All its history and all that is here becomes very small indeed. The earth is completely transcended.

It's super racy, as we'll see in a moment. It's not just about one race or two races. It's all one race here.

It is supernatural. Look again, and you find that everything here is on a level far beyond the natural. You cannot understand it naturally, or explain it. This is Divine revelation. It is through "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation". It is supernatural. The knowledge that is here is obtained supernaturally.

And what more can I say about the "super"? The list can be expanded very easily. Have I said enough? Can I go on to point out what area it's in, what range? You see, you have some very good verses here.

I give you three of them.

EPHESIANS 3:8.

"To me, the least of all the saints, this grace has been given to preach among the Gentiles the gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ,"

This letter is written in terms of the unsearchable, the untraceable.

EPHESIANS 3:19.

"and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

"The knowledge-surpassing love of Christ". Here we have the incomprehensible.

EPHESIANS 3:20.

"And to Him who is able to do far above all that we pray or think, according to the power that works in us,"

Here it is the transcendental. These are big words, but you need big words throughout for this letter, and I'm trying to make an impression on you.

The greatest crisis in religious history.

This letter represents in its content perhaps the greatest crisis in the history of religion. That says a lot. There have been many crises in religious history, and many great ones, but this letter represents the greatest of them all. Before the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead and went to Heaven, and the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, there were only two classes of people on earth. The whole human race was divided into two classes of people, the Gentiles and the Jews. When the Holy Spirit came, a third class arose which, from God's point of view, is neither Gentile nor Jew: it is the Church of God. They are taken from the Gentile nations and brought out from among the Jews, but as far as God is concerned, they are neither Jew nor Gentile, or as Paul puts it, "neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28). "Greek" was a representative word that described the Gentiles and was understood by them. When the Lord Jesus comes again, during the rapture, and takes away the Church, the other two will remain here.

There will be a return in the earth to what was before. The whole world will be divided again into Gentiles and Jews. So this that arose on the day of Pentecost, this third and spiritually completely separate class of people called the Church, represents the greatest of all crises in human history for this reason, and in this way - that that Church is not something just is not of earthly history. The Apostle makes it perfectly clear, right at the beginning of this Ephesians letter, that this Church had its existence in the foreknowledge of God before the world. This Church is a supratemporal thing, transcends all time and transcends the earth. This Church, the Apostle makes clear, will be there for ever and ever, still above temporal, above earth, when Jews and Gentiles continue. Yes, there will be saved nations on earth, but these others continue in a relationship that is completely out of this world and out of time, and it is in regard to this particular class, this people, this Church, that all these things in this letter be said. It is this Church that assumes the character of all these superlatives. It is itself something superlative, it is the highest thing in the economy of God, it is the highest thing in all God's sovereign activities from eternity to eternity. We live in the dispensation of something absolutely transcendent - God takes from the nations, both Jew and Gentile, this people called the Church, which is "**the body of Christ**".

A superlative vessel and a superlative calling.

Now this superlative vessel or instrument or people has a superlative or transcendent calling. The Jews had an earthly calling to serve an earthly purpose, a calling of time on this earth.

Many believe very strongly that they still have to serve such a purpose. There are others, and among them eminent Bible teachers, who believe that the day of the Jew is over as in the economy of God, and that everything has now been transferred to the Church because of the Jew's failure. I believe that God is not finished with the people of Israel at all, but is only sharing with the church at this moment. The fact remains that the Jews were raised to serve an earthly and temporal purpose in the economy of God. But this Church, eternally saved - eternally chosen, as the Apostle says, in Christ Jesus before the world was - it has a superlative calling to serve the purpose of God in Heaven. It is something timeless, superlative in calling, in purpose. This is a tremendous thing happening here. We have often put it this way, and indeed this is what the letter to the Ephesians teaches—we must touch upon it in another way presently—that this world, in its conduct, is influenced by a whole spiritual hierarchy. Even men who do not have a great deal of spiritual discernment, men whom we would hardly think of as Christian men, in the essential sense of born-again children of God, have recognized and seen, that behind the conduct of this world there is one or some other sinister force, some evil power, some wicked intelligence. They may hesitate to name it, to call it Satan, the Devil, and so on, but the Bible just calls it that. Behind the course of this world's history as we know it—behind the wars, the rivalries, the hatred, the bitterness, the cruelty, all the clash and noise of interests, and everything else—there is an evil intelligence. A power at work, an entire system that seeks to destroy the glory of God in His creation.

And it is said here that that whole system is in what is called "**the heavens**," that is, something above the earth, in the air, if you will, in the very atmosphere. Sometimes you can sense it. Sometimes you can almost "**cut the atmosphere with a knife**", as we say. Sometimes you know there is something in the air that is wicked, evil. You can't just put your finger on it. There is something behind the people, something about the situation that is different. It is very real - sometimes it seems almost tangible, you can almost smell it - something evil and unholy. This is what governs this world system and order. Now what is here in this letter is this, that this Church, eternally begotten, foreknown, chosen and established in its beginning on the day of Pentecost, and growing spiritually through the ages since - this Church must take the place of that evil government above this earth. It is to put it down and drive it out of its domain, and take that place itself to be the influence that rules this world in the ages to come. This is the teaching here, a superlative calling, a superlative position, because of a superlative people in their nature. There is something different about them than other people. This is the secret of the true Christian life - of the true in Christ: there is something about them that is different.

To this world, Christians are a problem and a mystery.

You cannot place them in any earthly class. You can't just put a Christian in a cubicle. Somehow they elude you all the time. You can't make them out. Now, in this letter Paul speaks first of all of that superlative calling, and then he says that, because of the greatness of that calling, this Church must act accordingly.

EPHESIANS 4:1.

"I exhort you then, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called,"

Behavior must be adjusted to vocation. Oh, those Christian people behaved according to their calling - to their great, eternal, heavenly calling! But because of this calling, this destiny, this position, that mighty evil hierarchy is set to destroy this vessel called the Church, and therefore there is a tremendous and terrible conflict going on in the air about this thing , and Christians meet it. The more you try to live according to your calling, the more you realize how difficult it is, and what is set against you. **It is fierce and bitter spiritual conflict.**

Superlative resources.

Now, you notice, this is what Paul calls the gospel - all this is the gospel! Have you ever had such an idea of the gospel? have you ever thought of the gospel in such terms? Yes, it is still the gospel, the same gospel, not another, the same. Now, because all this is true as far as the gospel is concerned, the demands are certainly very great. The reaction of so many, when you say things like this, is, **"Oh, I can't get to it - it's completely beyond me, it's too much for me, it's overwhelming, it's tremendous! Give me the simple gospel!"** But I wonder if we realize what we are getting ourselves into when we talk like that. Because it is just there that the true nature of the gospel comes into this whole letter. Yes, the calling is great, is tremendous. The behavior must be at a high level. The conflict is fierce and bitter. And it makes tremendous demands.

If this is the gospel, then how will we stand up to it, how will we face it, how will we stand up to it, how will we get through it? Well, we come back to the phrase with which I sum up the whole letter.

It is here: "**to 'good news' the unsearchable riches of Christ**". It is translated "**sermon**" in our Bibles, but it is the same word, as you know, in the verb form. "**Unto 'good news' the unsearchable riches of Christ**". The good news is that the riches are unsearchable! Oh, it's something for us to rejoice in, hard pressed, hard put, we feel we'll never get to it, never get on with it. The superlative wealth is for a superlative calling and for a superlative conflict and for superlative behavior. "**Unfathomable Riches**". Now this is a distinctive word that you find scattered throughout this letter. Wealth! Wealth! In chapter 1, verse 7, it is "**the riches of his grace**". That phrase is enlarged in 2:7 - "**the exceeding riches of his grace**". And then in 1:18 it is the inheritance - "**the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints**". It only means that the saints are the inheritance of Jesus Christ, and in them, in His Church, He has a tremendous wealth. Now, if He is going to have riches in this Church, it is He who must provide the riches, and it is "**according to the riches of His grace**" that He will find "**the riches of his inheritance**" in the Church. Much more is said about it. In 3:16 the word is used again - "**the riches of his glory**". Wealth! Wealth! Very well, if the demands are great, there is a great supply. If the need is superlative, the resources are superlative. All this sets and indicates the basis and the resources of the Church for its vocation, for its action and for its conflict. So what is "**the gospel according to Paul**" in the letter to the Ephesians?

This is the gospel of the "**unfathomable riches**" for superlative claims, and if you have said it, you are left in a mighty ocean. Go to the letter again, read it carefully, pay attention. Yes, here is a high standard, here are great demands, tremendous things in view here, but there is also the riches of His grace, the unfathomable riches of His grace for all of this. There is the riches of His glory: it is put like this - "**according to the riches of His glory**". Now, if you can explore, fathom, exhaust God's riches in glory, then you put a certain limit on possibilities and potential. But if, after you have said all that you have tried to say in human language, as the Apostle did here, you find that you do not have enough superlatives at your disposal when you speak of the resources that are in God through Christ Jesus, then all things are possible - according to the riches of his grace and of his glory. It's a gospel, isn't it? That's good news, that's good news! And, dear friends, we will get through - and we shouldn't just scrape through. As dit so is, behoort ons superlatief deur te kom. Die Here bring ons in die goeie van die superlatiewe van die evangelie, van die goeie nuus.

5. PAUL'S GOSPEL IN THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS.

Continuing our investigation into what the apostle meant by his words "**the gospel that I preach**", we take in our hands the letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians. Although this was one of the last writings of the Apostle - it was written from his imprisonment in Rome shortly before his execution, at the end of a long, full life of ministry and work - we find him still speaking of everything as "**the gospel**". He didn't grow out of the gospel, he didn't get beyond the gospel. Indeed, at the end he is more than ever aware of the richness of the gospel that is far beyond him.

Here are the references he makes to the gospel in this letter.

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-5.

"I thank my God every time I think of you - and I always pray for you all with joy in all my prayers - for your fellowship with the gospel from the first day until now,"

PHILIPPIANS 1:7.

"as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I carry you in my heart, since you are all my partners in grace in my fetters as well as in the defense and confirmation of the gospel."

PHILIPPIANS 1:16-18.

"the first proclaims Christ out of ignorance, not with pure intentions, with the intention of adding tribulation to my bonds; but the others out of love, because they know that I am destined for the defense of the gospel. But what does it do? In any case, in all kinds of ways, whether it is under a pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice and I will also rejoice."

PHILIPPIANS 2:22.

"But you know his experience, that, like a child towards his father, he served with me in the gospel."

PHILIPPIANS 4:3.

"And I also ask you, sincere companion, be helpful to these women who fought with me in the gospel, also with Clemens and my other fellow workers whose names are in the book of life."

PHILIPPIANS 4:13-15.

"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Yet you did well when you shared in my affliction. And you Philippians also know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church had a share in my account of expenses and income, except you alone."

You see there is a lot about the gospel in this letter. I say "**little**" note. This letter is like a beautiful jewel in the crown of Jesus Christ, or like a beautiful pearl whose colors are the result of beautiful pain and suffering. It is something very expensive and very precious. In terms of actual chapters and verses, it is small. It is one of the smallest of Paul's epistles, but in its intrinsic worth and value it is immense, and as a real exposition of what the gospel is, there are few, if any, things in the New Testament that can compare with it become What we are really getting at in this letter is not just an exposition of what the gospel actually is, but an example of what the gospel is in effect.

Look at it again, consider it with an open heart, and I think your verdict will be - it surely must be - "Well, if this is the gospel, give me the gospel! If it's the gospel, it's something worthwhile!" This is surely the effect of reading this note. This is a wonderful example of the gospel in expression.

The letter of the joy of triumph.

But as we read it, we find that it resolves itself into this. It is, perhaps more than any other letter in the New Testament, the letter of the joy of triumph. **Joy runs throughout this letter.** The Apostle is full of joy to overflowing. He seems barely able to contain himself. In the last chapter we spoke of his superlatives in relation to the great calling of the Church in the gospel. Here the apostle finds it difficult to express his joy. Just look at the first words, his introduction, and see. But it runs right to the end. This is the letter of Paul's joy in Christ, but also the joy of triumph, and triumph in a threefold direction. The triumph of Christ; triumph in Paul; and triumph in the Christians at Philippi. It really sums up the whole letter: the threefold triumph with its joyous and exuberant outpouring.

The triumph of Christ.

First, triumph in Christ and of Christ. It is in this letter that Paul gives us that unparalleled revelation of the great cycle of salvation. The lofty course which the Lord Jesus took in His work of salvation. We see Him first in the place of equality with God. Equality with God, and all that means - all that it means for God to be God. How wonderful is that! - how full, how high, how majestic, how glorious! Paul says here that Jesus was right there with God.

And then, "who did not consider it something to hold on to, to grasp, this equality with God, He emptied Himself". He emptied Himself of it all, let it go, laid it aside, gave it up. Just think of what He will have in return. These are thoughts that are almost impossible to comprehend. God, in all His infinite fullness of power and majesty of power, in His reign of glory and eternal fullness, allowing men of His own creation, even the meanest of them, to spit on Him, to mock. He put it aside. He emptied Himself and took the form of a man, found the form of a man, and not only that, but still lower in this cycle—the form of a slave, a slave-man. A slave is someone who has no personal rights. He has no freedom of life, he has no title. He is not allowed to choose for himself, to go his own way, and much more. Paul says here that Jesus took the form of a slave.

And then he goes on to say that "He humbled Himself, became obedient unto death": and not a glorious death at that, not a death that people talk about in terms of praise and admiration. "Yes", says the apostle, "**death on a cross**" - the most shameful, shameful death, with all that it meant. You see, the Jewish world, the religious world, of that day, had it written in their Book that he who hung on a tree was cursed by God. Jesus was obedient to the point that he was found in the place of someone cursed by God. This is how they looked at Him - as cursed by God. And as for the rest of the world, the Gentile world, their whole conception of what should be worshiped was one that could never be defeated, one that could never be found in a situation that would put it to shame. , one who could stand before the world as a success - that was their idea of a god.

But here is this Man on the Cross. Is He a success? This is no sign of success. This is no indication of human strength. This is weakness. There is nothing honorable about it - it is shameful. This is humanity at its lowest.

And then the cycle is reversed, and the Apostle breaks in here, and says: **"That is why God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name that is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow".**

Sooner or later; either willing to acknowledge Him Lord, or forced to do so; sooner or later, in the decided counsel of Almighty God, it will be; **"and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father."** What a cycle! What a circle! What a triumph! You cannot find triumph fuller or greater than this, and Paul calls it the gospel. This is the good news of Christ's tremendous triumph. He triumphed in that circle, and all that is included in the triumph is the gospel. We cannot stop to dwell on it, on why He did it, or what He accomplished by it, what He secured in it. All that is the gospel. But the fact is that Christ won a tremendous victory in that way. In the whole circle of Heaven and earth, from the highest height to the lowest depth, He has triumphed. Paul finds unspeakable joy in thinking about it. This is what he calls the good news, the gospel - triumph in Christ.

Triumph in Paul's own spiritual history.

Paul then comes in himself, and gives us a lot of autobiography in this letter. He tells us something of his own history before his conversion, about who he was and what he was, and where he was and what he had. Of course it was nothing compared to what his Lord had and let go.

But Paul himself, as Saul of Tarsus, had much by birth, by inheritance, by education, , by status, prestige and so on. He had quite a lot. He tells us about it here. All that man would boast of - he had it. And then he met Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ met him; and the whole thing, he said—all that he had and possessed—became in his hands as ashes, as rubbish! "**I count it as dreck**". Many people have this false idea about the gospel, that if you accept the gospel, if you become a Christian, if you are converted, or however you want to put it, you're going to have to lose or give up everything. you have to give it up and you have to give up something else. If you become a Christian, it will just be one long story of giving up, giving up, giving up, until sooner or later you are stripped of everything. Listen! Here is a man who had much more than you or I ever had. We cannot stand in the same street with this man in his natural life, in all that he was and all that he had, and all the prospects that were before him as a young man. There is very little doubt that, if Paul had not become a Christian, his name would have gone down in history along with some other very famous names of his time. But he says - not in these words, but in many more words than these: "**When I met the Lord Jesus, that whole thing became like mud for me.**" Give it up? Who would find any sacrifice to give up a candle when they have found the sun?

Sacrifice in it? Oh, no! "Compared to Christ, I consider it just the biggest dreck".

What a victory! What a triumph! You see, this giving up - well, put it that way, if you will - but Paul is very happy about it.

That's the point. This is Paul's joy, the joy of a tremendous victory within himself.

Triumph in Paul's ministry.

But further, here it is the story of the great victory in his ministry, in his work. We remember the story of how he went to Philippi. He decided to go to Asia, to preach the gospel there, and was on his way, when in that mysterious providence of God which declares itself only afterwards and never before, he was forbidden, checked, hindered, stopped. The day ended with a closed road, a stopped journey. He was confused about the meaning of this, he did not understand it. As he waited on God that night, he had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia - Philip is in Macedonia - saying: "**Come over to Macedonia and help us**" (Acts 16:9). **And Paul said, "We tried to go out... concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them".** Therefore he turned away from Asia, turned towards Europe and came to Philippi. Sometimes disappointment and upset of plans can be the foundation of a great victory. God can gain much by setting aside our cherished plans and making everything for us through each other. - But we continue. Paul came to Philippi. And the Devil knew that he had come and was at work and in effect said, "**Not if I can prevent it, Paul! I will make this place too hot for you to stay here!**" And he sprang to work, and before long Paul and his companions were thrown into the innermost dungeon of the prison, their feet bound, chains on them, bleeding from the beatings they had received. Well, that doesn't seem to say much for Divine guidance! **Where is the victory in this?**

But wait. The very jailer and his household were saved that night. They came to the Lord and were baptized. And when Paul, years after, in this other prison in Rome, wrote this letter to the saints he left behind in Philippi, he put it in a phrase like this:

PHILIPPIANS 4:1.

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, for whom I also long, my joy and crown, stand so firmly in the Lord, beloved."

I like to think that the jailer and his family are included in this. "my beloved brothers, whom I also long for".

And in the same letter he says:

PHILIPPIANS 1:12.

"And I want you to know, brothers, that what happened to me, rather resulted in the advancement of the gospel,"

It's a picture of triumph, isn't it? - the triumph in his life and in his ministry.

Triumph in Paul's suffering.

And he triumphed in his suffering. He says something about his suffering in this very letter, the suffering that was upon him as he wrote, but it is all in a note and spirit of true triumph.

He says:

PHILIPPIANS 1:20.

"according to my longing expectation and hope that I shall not be put to shame in anything; but that Christ with all boldness, as always so now, will be magnified in my body, whether it be through life or through death."

This is triumph. Yes, it is triumph, it is joy.

PHILIPPINES 1:13.

"so that my bonds became manifest in Christ among all the imperial bodyguard and with all the others,"

A wonderful thing, that! Brought to Rome, chained to a Roman soldier, never allowed more than a certain amount of freedom - and yet you cannot silence this man! He has something that "will out" all the time and he says it went through the entire Imperial Guard. If you knew anything about the Imperial Guard, you would say, "**This is triumph!**" In the headquarters of Caesar, and a Caesar as he was, the gospel is triumphant. The entire Imperial Guard is talking about it! Yes, there is triumph in his suffering, in his bonds, in his tribulations. It's not just words. It is a glorious triumph, and it is the gospel in action, the gospel in practice.

Triumph in the Philippian Christians.

And this triumph was not only in Christ and in Paul, but in the Philippians. This is a beautiful letter of the triumph of Divine grace in these Philippians. You can see it first in their reaction, and you really have to know something about Philippi in those days. You only get a small idea of what happened to Paul. You know about the heathen temple with its terrible system of female slaves, and everything connected with that horrible thing. As Paul and his companions passed through the streets of Philippi, one of these young women, described as a spirit of Python, a divination demon, a true possession of Satan, kept following them and calling out. This is the kind of city that Philippi was, and Paul finds it possible to write a letter of this kind to believers in such a city.

Isn't that triumph?

I think that there should ever be a church in Philippi is one thing, but a church like this is something more. And it is not only in their reaction to the gospel, which has cost them so much. Look at the letter again and see the mutual love they had for each other. It is indeed a jewel in the crown of Jesus Christ. This letter has been called Paul's great love letter. The whole thing overflows with love, and it's because of the love they had for each other. Love of this kind is not natural. This is the work of Divine grace in human hearts. This speaks of a great triumph. If there is anything to add, we can remember that, when Paul was in need, it was these people who thought about his need and sent help. They are concerned about the man to whom they owed so much for the gospel. Well, all that constitutes this tremendous triumph. It's a letter of triumph, isn't it? We proved our point, I think. I repeat: **This is the gospel!**

But Paul says that these people at Philippi, these believers, are exemplary - they are an example, and so what we must do at the end of this review is to ask, "**What is the gospel concerning this letter?**" What's the good news here, the good news? How can this kind of thing be repeated or reproduced?

The secret of the triumph.

We are not dealing with people of peculiar virtues, a particularly good type of person. It is only man, poor, weakened humanity. From that something like this can be repeated, reproduced? Can we hope for such a thing now? It would be good news if it could be proven to us that there is a way to reproduce this situation today, wouldn't it?

Knowing what we do know, it would be good news if we could be shown that this is not just something related to an isolated group of people who lived centuries ago, but that it could be true today - that this gospel, this good news is for us. How then? Is there a key phrase in this letter? We have tried in our studies in these letters to collect everything in some characteristic phrase of each. Is there such a phrase in this letter that gives us the key to all this, the key to enter ourselves into Christ's great victory and all its value? Can we find the key to open the door for us in the position that the Apostle held - that all that this world can offer and that can be made available to us is tough, petty, insignificant compared to Christ? Is there a key that will open the door for us to what these Philippians experienced?

I think there is, and I think you find it in the first chapter, in the first clause of verse 21:

PHILIPPIANS 1:21.

"For to me life is Christ and death is gain."

This is the good news of the all-conquering Christ.

When Christ truly captivates, everything happens and anything can happen. So it was with Paul and with these people. Christ has just handcuffed them. They had no other thought in life than Christ. They may have had their businesses, their trades, their professions, their various walks of life and occupations in the world, but they had one overriding thought, concern and interest - Christ. Christ rested for them on everything.

There is no other word for it. He just handcuffed them. And I see, dear friends, that - **as simple as it may sound** - it explains everything. It explains Paul, it explains this church, it explains these believers, it explains their mutual love. It solved all their problems, cleared up all their problems. Oh, that's what we need! After all, nine-tenths of all our problems can be traced back to the fact that we have other personal interests that influence us, control us and govern us - other aspects of life than Christ. If only it could be true that Christ has captured and captivated and mastered us, and become - yes, I will use the word - an obsession, a glorious obsession! I think this is what the writer of the hymn meant when he wrote: "**Jesus, Lover of my soul**", and when he goes on to say: "**More than all in You I find**". When this is so, we are filled with joy. There is no regret that you have to "**give up**" things. We are filled with joy, filled with victory. There is no spirit of defeatism whatsoever. This is the joy of a great triumph. This is the triumph of Christ over life. Yes, it was, and because it was, it can be again. But it needs something more than just some kind of spiritual assessment. We can so easily miss the point. We can admire the words, the ideas. We may think of it as a beautiful presentation but, oh, we need the captivating to erase ourselves - our reputations, all that is associated with us and our own glory - so that the One who captivates the only One can behold be, the only One with a reputation, and us at His feet. This is the gospel, the good news - that when Christ really captivates, the kind of thing that is written in this letter happens, it really happens. Shall we ask the Lord for that life prisoner of His beloved Son?

6. THE GOSPEL OF PAUL IN COLOSSIANS.

As we come to this letter to the Colossians, by way of foundation we will read a few verses from the matchless first chapter.

COLOSSIANS 1:9-20.

"That is why we do not stop, from the day we heard this, to pray for you and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual insight, so that you may stand before the May the Lord walk to please Him in everything and may you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God, and be strengthened with all power according to the power of his glory to all patience and longsuffering with joy, and the Father may give thanks who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light— He who delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have salvation has through his blood, namely the forgiveness of sins. He is the Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation; for in Him all things were created, which are in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, thrones as well as dominions and principalities and powers—all things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things endure. And He is the Head of the body, namely the congregation; He who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He may be the first in all things. For it pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell and that through Him He would reconcile all things to Himself after He had made peace through the blood of his cross—I say through Him—the things on earth as well as the things in the heavens."

Now, that makes quite a good foundation for talking about the gospel - and note that it is the gospel. All that Paul calls the "good news". This is the thing that Paul preached - "the gospel that I preach". In this letter that word does not appear as many times as in other letters, but with a peculiar twist. It occurs in this first chapter, verse 5: "... because of the hope that is laid up for you in the heavens, of which you heard before by the word of the truth of the gospel,"; and then in verse 23: "...if at least you remain grounded and firm in the faith and do not let yourselves be carried away from the hope of the gospel, which you heard and which was preached to all mankind under heaven, of which I, Paul, have become a servant." - and here is the same word in the verb form - "proclaimed in all creation under heaven" - "good news", in all creation under heaven".

Good news in an emergency situation.

Now, if anything is to be good news, if it is to have a very sharp edge, there must be a situation to which it brings relief, assurance, comfort or satisfaction. If it doesn't matter, then it's not good news. For example, suppose someone, with whom your life and heart are closely connected, is in a very serious and critical illness, and you call for medical help. You are under a great burden of anxiety, it matters a great deal to you which way it goes, and you wait for what seems like an eternity for the doctor to come down and give you a report. When he comes down and says, "It's all right, you don't have to worry; things are going to be alright, it will be alright". This is indeed good news. It has an edge to it because your heart is connected to this cause.

If there is a big decision in the balance, which will somehow affect your future, your career, your life, and a committee sits on it, and you wait outside with your heart, as we say, in your mouth, very anxious about how it's going: when someone comes out and says, "*Okay, you've got the job,*" that's good news. It brings you a tremendous sense of relief. If there is a fight going on, the issue of which will be serious for all concerned, and someone comes back from the scene of the fight, and says "*It's okay, it's okay, we're going to get through!*" - well, that's a tremendous relief. This is good news. It affects us, it means something to us. There must be something in the nature of an emergency situation to give good news.

The emergency situation at Colossians.

Now, in the case of almost all of Paul's letters, there was an emergency situation. Something arose in the nature of a threat to the Christian life of those with whom his heart was closely connected, something arose which caused many of those Christians real concern, worry and anxiety. They were in real trouble. The future was in doubt. It was to meet such emergencies as this that Paul wrote his letters, and in all of them he uses this word "*gospel*", or "*good news*" - good news for an emergency, good tidings for this critical situation. In this letter to the Colossians it is particularly so. There was a real emergency among the believers at Colossae. But it was the same emergency taking different forms at different times - it is present today in its own form.

What it came down to was,, that there were certain people who considered themselves to be very knowledgeable, wise, intelligent, learned people, who were immersed in very mysterious things, and they tolerated their high-sounding ideas and theories to these Christians. It had everything to do with the vastness of life.

First, there was no less a matter in view than the meaning of the created universe. Now, of course, this may be an area for philosophical speculation, but you know that in some ways it is very close to the Christian heart. Is there a design to everything, or is everything either just a mechanical course, or is it perpetuated by some mysterious forces harmful to human welfare? Is there any real design behind this created universe? To push it one step further: Is there a purpose to everything? Sooner or later Christians come up against these questions. Under duress, trial, pressure and suffering, we sometimes do not know what to make of things. It seems like a fascinating universe, full of enigmas and contradictions and paradoxes, and we're having a bad time about it. Is there a plan in it - is there really a Divine control of everything in this universe, in human history and in everything that happens? Is there, to use a word which I think we do not fully appreciate, a Providence for all and in all? - that is, are all things made to work together according to design and purpose, and work out to a great, Divine, beneficent end? Now, these people argued about it, and the Christians at Colossae were greatly troubled by it all. And then it came closer to their own Christian existence. It touched their lives as children of God.

Now, if any people in the world should be absolutely sure about these matters—that there is a Divine purpose and Divine pattern and Divine Providence—it is Christians, and the life of the Christian is affected by whether it is so or not. . The matter of our assurance, our confidence, our tranquility, our strength, our testimony, rests on having an answer to these questions. The meaning of this entire universe, the order and purpose in it, its design and control, the Providence over all events and happenings in the course of human history - these are things that come very close to the Christian. If we have any doubts about them, our Christianity will be for naught, the very foundations will be swept away from under our feet, we will not know where we are.

This was the emergency with the Colossians.

The life of the Christians, the life of the Church, is threatened. And if his life is threatened, his growth is threatened. The whole matter of the spiritual growth of the Church and of the Christians is at stake here - growth, development and maturity. If it is threatened, something else will be threatened. The whole thing will disintegrate, will fall apart; its unity and cohesion will collapse; the whole thing will be scattered in fragments. And so the very hope of the Church and of the Christian is struck, their hope and their destiny. These are not small or impractical matters. They may come very close at some point, and they need an answer.

The answer to the situation.

Now, it was to meet this whole situation, to answer all these serious questions and issues, that Paul wrote this letter, to confirm the Christians, to establish them, to sustain them, to encourage them, and he calls it "*good news*", and it is. If you can give something to answer all this, that is indeed good news, isn't it? This is indeed "*gospel*!" You see, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ touches the very limits of this universe, and covers everything within those limits. Including human history, human events, world events, the course of things, the design of things, the end of things. The gospel touches all this at every point. So Paul answers it, and he answers the whole of it in one word. His answer is: Christ. *Christ is the answer*. That answer is found inclusively in those words in chapter 3, verse 11, the last clause: "*Christ is all and in all*." And what an immense "*everything*" Christ is when He covers the whole earth! If He reaches out and embraces all those mighty issues, what a Christ He is! The comprehensive fact is emphatically and categorically stated by the Apostle in this letter. He states this in many sentences, but in this one statement he gathers it all. The answer to all of this is Christ. Christ is the explanation of all the events in human history. Christ explains this universe, Christ gives character to this universe, Christ stands behind all the course of events in this universe. Christ is the integrating Person of all, the One in whom all things hold together.

"Christ is the end, because Christ was the beginning;

***Christ the beginning, because the end is Christ.*"**

The proof that the answer is satisfactory.

But perhaps you can say, "It is all well and good for Paul to make such a categorical statement, but what is the evidence?" Well, the evidence is quite real. And it must be said that, if we ask for the evidence, something has gone wrong with us! We should be the answer, we should be the proof, because the witness of this is first of all the personal, spiritual experience of the child of God. You can leave the vast universe for the moment, if you like, and come to the small universe of your own life - because, after all, what is true in the microcosm is only a reflection of what is true in the great cosmic realm. God brings His evidence from the periphery to the center of the individual Christian life, and the answer is there. What is the experience of a truly born again child of God? Now you can test whether you are born again through this, and, thank God, I know that many of you will be able to say: "**Yes, this is true in my experience**". But I ask you: What is your experience as a truly born-again child of God? When you really came to the Lord Jesus - however you may put it, when you let Jesus come into your heart or into your life, or when you surrendered your life to Him. When there was a transaction with Him, a rebirth, whereby you became a child of God - not by any "**sacrament**" applied to you, but by the inner working of His Spirit. When you became a child of God in a living, conscious way, what was the first consciousness that came to you, and has stayed with you ever since?

Wasn't it, and isn't it, that.

There is a purpose in life now, which I never knew before, there is a purpose in things. Now I have the feeling - indeed I know - that I was not only born and raised in this world, but that there was a

purpose behind it. There is design in things; a sense - you may not be able to explain it all, what it all means - but you have the sense now that you have arrived at, or at least begun to realize, the real purpose of your existence. Is it true? When the Lord Jesus finally has His place in our hearts, the great question of life is answered - the great question of the "**Why**" of our existence. Until then, you wander around, you do all kinds of things, you fill time, you use heart and mind and hand, but you don't know what it's all for. You may have a very full life, a very full life indeed, apart from Christ, and yet come to the end without being able to answer the question: What is it about?

One man, who had enjoyed such a full life, who became famous in the schools of learning, a great figure in the intellectual field, cried out in his dying moment: "**I am taking a terrible leap in the dark**". He had no answer to the question. But the simple child of God, immediately they come to the Lord, has the answer in consciousness, if not in explanation, in his or her heart, and this is what is called "**rest**".

MATTHEW 11:28.

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Rest in this: "Well, I was a wanderer, but now I've come home; I sought - I found; I was looking for something - I didn't know what it was - but now I have it".

There is a purpose in this universe, and when Jesus Christ comes in His place, as this letter says, then you know there is a purpose in your universe, and there will be a purpose in the universe all if they only will come. And not only purpose, but more - control. The child of God very soon begins to realize that he or she has been taken under control, brought under a mastery, that there is a governing law set up in the consciousness, which is rigid, which says on the one hand: "**Yes**", the glorious "**Yes**" of many freedoms, on the other hand, "**No - careful, steady, look!**" We all know that. We do not hear those words, but we know that this is what is being said to us in our hearts. The Spirit of Christ within just says: "**Watch your steps - be careful, be vigilant**". We came under control. It is extended in many ways throughout life, but it is a great reality. This universe is under control, it is under the government of Jesus Christ. The evidence of that is found in our own experience when Christ comes to His right. And you can extend it to the future ages, when the whole universe will be like this, under Christ's control. And then again: "**in whom all things exist**". The wonderful thing about the Christian life is its integration, or, if you prefer another word, its unification. How scattered, how divided, were we before Christ took His place! We were "**all over the place**", as we say - one thing after another, looking this way and that, hearts divided, lives divided, we divided within ourselves, a conflict within our own person. When the Lord Jesus really finds His place as Lord within me, life is unified. We are just gathered, ready, concentrated on one thing. We have only one thing in mind. What Paul said about himself comes true: "**but one thing I do...**" (Phil. 3:13).

We are people of "**one thing**". Christ unites life. What about life itself, the life of the child of God? When the Lord Jesus is in His right place, the life of the child of God is secured, established, confirmed and grows. There is spiritual growth and maturity. This is a wonderful thing. If this is not realized as a fact in some Christian lives, it is for very good reasons - or for bad reasons! - but if the Lord Jesus is truly "**all and in all**", in life, if He "**has the preeminence in all**", it is wonderful to see the spiritual growth. Those who have much association with, or experience in dealing with, young Christians have found this one of the most impressive things - how, where the Lord Jesus only gets His way, they progress spiritually, they grow. They come to understanding and knowledge that so many of the scholars seem to have missed. They came to a true spiritual understanding. While other people are trying to get on in other ways - intellectually and so on - these young people, who don't, many of them, have the background of intellectual or scholastic training - they are just simple people - just leap forward spiritually. This growth in spiritual intelligence and understanding is not based on anything natural. This is because Jesus has such a great place, and He is the source and center and sum of all spiritual knowledge. In contrast, it is possible to have great acquisitions and qualifications in the academic realm, to do great things in that realm, and yet to find that the simple things of the Lord Jesus Christ are like a foreign language to you. You don't know what it's about - you can't follow or join at all. It's sad, but true. There are Christians, yes, true Christians, who just cannot talk about the things of the Lord.

If there is to be growth, it can only happen by giving Jesus His place fully and without question. And then, as to fate. The statement is that the destination of this universe is with the Lord Jesus, and that destination is universal glory. But it's just a beautiful idea, an enchanting view, isn't it? How are you going to prove it? In your own heart! Is it not equally true with the other matters we have already considered, that, when the Lord Jesus actually takes His place, you have a foretaste of that glory? No one can understand the Christian who does not have the Christian's experience, but there it is. It's not just that we make out that we have a good time. It is something that comes from within. This is something of a foretaste of the glory to come. We have the answer to all these tremendous questions right in our own spiritual experience.

The Witness of the Church.

But then the Apostle moves to the Church, and speaks about the Church.

COLOSSIANS 1:18.

"And He is the Head of the body, namely the congregation; He who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He may be the first in all things."

How does the Church bear witness to the fact, this great fact, that Jesus is the answer to these immense questions? I think the Church gives the answer both positively and negatively.

It gives the answer positively - although not as positively as it might have been done - but it does give the answer in this, that after all the Church (and what an "**everything**" of these two thousand years!) still exists. Think of that outpouring of the forces of antagonism and hatred and murder upon the Church in its *infancy*, with the determination of the greatest empire the world has ever known to wipe it out. After all, it is that empire that has perished, and the Church continues. Think, too, of all that has set out during the centuries since to bring the Church to an end, to destroy it, and is still intent on it. Oh, that one was not so blind as to misread history! If those powers in the world today, great kingdoms, great empires, would only read history correctly, they would see that they are on a most futile mission. It is indeed a fool, to try to destroy the testimony of Jesus on this earth. It is they who will be destroyed. Yes, the continued existence and persistence of the Church is proof that this is true - that Jesus Christ is the key to this universe, that He is the answer to all these questions. I say, the Church does not give the answer as clearly as it might. If only it had continued as it began, what an answer it would have been!

But it gives the answer negatively as well as positively.

It answers this in the negative by the fact that, while it once rose triumphantly against the world, having triumphantly weathered the storms, it has now moved away from its center, the Lord Jesus Christ, and has brought in substitutes for His absolute headship and rule.

It made other things its ruling interests. The result was disintegration, division and all the rest. Yes, the thing is answered in the negative, and it always will be.

Let us be very clear.

It is not that the truth has broken down. If these things ever become a question with you, it will not be because they are open to question, but because something has gone wrong with you as it has gone wrong with the Church. It is not in the truth, but in that which is supposed to represent the truth, that the question lies. These substitutes for the headship of Jesus Christ, whether they be men or institutions or religious interests or Christian activities, whatever they may be, if they come in the place of the Lord Jesus Himself, lead to nothing but discord and division not. To put it more positively, if only, leaders and all the rest would say: **"Look here, all our institutions, our missions, our organizations, all our interests in Christendom, must be subservient to the absolute rule of Jesus Christ"**, you would find a unity that comes into being, a unity that will last. We should all flow together in that area. It is the mighty tide of His dominion that will heal it all. Go down to the sea shore. The tide is right out, and all the breakwaters are bare, dividing the entire coastline, as it were, into sections. But as the tide rises, the breakwaters, the dividing things, begin to disappear. You come back at full tide, and you don't see any of those breakers. The rising tide covered them all. And when Christ everything and in everything **"has the preeminence in all things"**, all those things that belong to the low tide of spiritual life, the ebb and flow of spiritual life, will just disappear.

The proof is in the Church.

There was one consuming passion to put Christ in His place at the beginning of life; all the different sections were found concerned with it. The key to that is just this - ***Christ all in all.*** Perhaps we can now see why the mention of the gospel in this letter is limited to one emphasis - "***the hope of the gospel***". Yes, the only occurrence of "***gospel***" or "***good news***" is in that connection - "***the hope of the good news***". The hope of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is all and in all. Hope is a Person, not an abstract nature within us - "***being hopeful***" - which amounts to little more than a periodic, variable optimism. Hope here is a Person. The hope of the good news is: He has the preeminence in everything. This is where hope lies for you, for me, for the Church, for the world, for the universe. ***This is the hope of the gospel.***

7. PAUL'S GOSPEL IN THESSALONIANS.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:5.

"For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full assurance, as you know how much we have been among you for your sake."

1 THESSALONIANS 2:2.

"but although before, as you know, we suffered and were mistreated in Philippi, we had boldness in our God to preach the gospel of God to you under many struggles."

1 THESSALONIANS 2:4.

"but as we were deemed worthy by God that the gospel should be entrusted to us, so we speak, not to please men, but God who tests our hearts."

1 THESSALONIANS 2:8-9.

"While we longed for you so much, it pleased us to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you have become dear to us. You remember, brothers, our labor and effort; for while we labored night and day not to burden any of you, we preached the gospel of God to you."

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-2.

"Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we decided to remain behind in Athens alone; and we have sent Timothy, our brother and servant of God and our co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen you and encourage you in your faith,"

2 THESSALONIANS 1:8.

"in fire and flame, when He takes vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

2 THESSALONIANS 2:14.

"to which He called you through our gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We see that the Gospel has quite a place in these letters. We are now trying to discover the real meaning of the gospel, that is the essential meaning of the good news, from the point of view of these letters and the Thessalonian believers, and we will be helped to that understanding if we look at the spiritual. The history, life and condition of these believers in Thessalonica.

The Thessalonian Christians An Example.

You will see at a glance what special regard Paul had for them. He uses words like this: "**We always thank God for all of you**". Both in the first and second letter he speaks like this. And then he says about them a very wonderful thing, which gives us a definite direction in this consideration. He says in the first letter, chapter 1, verse 7: "**You have become an example to all who believe in Macedonia and in Achaia**". This is something to say about a company of the Lord's people, and it immediately makes us ask the question: How were they an example? It was evidently not only to those immediately referred to, in all Macedonia and Achaia, for these letters remain to this day, and they therefore represented that which is an example to all the people of the Lord.

If it was true of them, then the gospel must have meant something very much where they were involved. It must have had a very special form of expression in them, and therefore we try to answer the question: How were they "an example to all who believe"?

A Pure Spirit and a Pure Heart.

We find the answer in the first place here in this very first chapter. It was in their realism in receiving the gospel. "For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full assurance."

And again.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:13.

"Therefore we also thank God without ceasing that, when you received the word of God which was preached by us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is true, as the word of God which also work in you who believe."

Now this represents a very clean beginning, and if we come to the place of these Thessalonian believers, if the gospel is to have that expression in us that it had in them, if it is going to be true in our case that we set an example is for everyone who believes, then it is very important that we have a clean start. For us, of course, if we have progressed in the Christian life without becoming such exemplary believers, it may mean retracing our steps to start again somewhere where we went wrong, clean up a lot of mess and start again on a certain point to start. But I also think of young Christians who have recently started.

You are really at the beginning, and we are most concerned about you, because you may meet many old Christians who are in no way an example to all who believe. I'm sorry to say this, but it's completely true, and we don't want you to be like that. We want you to be exemplary Christians; those of whom the apostle Paul, if he had been present, could have said: "**I thank God always for you**". It would be a great thing, wouldn't it, if it could be said of us? "**Thank God for him! Thank God for her! Thank God that we ever came in contact with this one and that one! I always thank God for them - they are an example of what Christians should be!**" Now, this is the desire of the Lord, this is our desire for you, and this must be the desire of our hearts for ourselves. Although we may not have succeeded, let us not give up hope that some may still be thankful for us, that we may be an example, that in some things at least it may be true of us as it was of these.

Paul says here.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6.

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord in that you received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,"

The Lord helps us to be such an example that we can invite others, at least in some respects, to follow us, without any spiritual pride. Well, if it is to be, the beginning must be clean. You see, quite clearly, as these Thessalonians listened to Paul preach the good news, their minds and hearts were free from prejudice.

They would not have come to the conclusion they did if there had been any prejudice, if they had already closed the matter in their minds, or come to a fixed point of view. They were open-hearted from the beginning, ready for all that was of God, and this created an ability to discern what is of God. You will never know if a thing is of God if you are prejudiced, if you have already judged it, if you have already come to a fixed position. If you are fixed in your mind, closed in your heart, harboring suspicions and fears, you have already sabotaged the work of the Holy Spirit, and you will never know if the thing is of God. You must be open-hearted, open-minded, free from suspicion and prejudice, and ready in this attitude - **"Now, if there is something from the Lord, something from God, I am ready for it, no matter by whom it comes, how it comes come, where it comes. If it is from God, I am ready for it".** It creates an attitude of which the Holy Spirit can testify, and makes things possible for the Lord. Now, as we shall see, this is exactly what these Thessalonians were like. They received the word, yes, in much tribulation, but they received it as the Word of God, not as the word of men. Because of their purity of spirit, they had the sense - **"This thing is right, it is of God!"** It was a good start. As I said earlier, some of us may have to come back somewhere to get it started again. To anyone who reads these words, who may be of advanced years in the Christian life, I would say: Dear friend, if you have been in any way touched, infected, affected by prejudice and suspicion anywhere along the way, you have the door closed to anything further from God. Let us understand this clearly.

We have not yet exhausted everything that the Lord has to show us in his Word, but He will only show it to the pure in heart. "Those who are pure in heart... will see God" (Matt. 5:8).

So these Thessalonians had a pure spirit from the beginning.

Reciprocity and maturity.

The next thing we notice about them, after their realism in reception, was their reciprocity and maturity - two things that always go together. In both of these letters what the Apostle talks about perhaps more than anything else is the wonderful love between these believers.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3.

"We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers, as it is fair, because your faith increases greatly and the reciprocal love of each one of you increases,"

He talks about their mutual love throughout. And with that was their spiritual growth. You see, love always builds.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1.

"Knowledge inflates, but love builds."

This kind of love, mutual love, always means spiritual growth. We can see how true this is if we look at it from the opposite point of view. Small, personal, petty, selfish, isolated, individual Christians, or companies or bodies of Christians who are exclusive and closed, and have not a wide open heart of love for all saints—how small they are, how narrow they are. It is true.

And it is in this mutual love for one another, and growing and increasing love for one another, that spiritual growth takes place. Don't forget it. If you are concerned about the spiritual growth of your own heart, your own life and that of others, it will be along the lines of love, mutual love, and you are the one to initiate it. Reciprocity and maturity always go together.

Suffering and Service.

And then, in the third place, you will find that they are characterized by suffering and service, and this is a wonderful Divine combination. It is something that is not natural. The Apostle had much to say about it, as you will see if you underline the word "*suffering*" in these letters, and notice his references to their sufferings and their trials.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6.

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord in that you received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,"

He talks about their suffering, and he describes that suffering. They in Thessalonica suffered in the same way and for the same causes as their brothers in Judea.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:14.

"For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Christ Jesus in Judea, because you also suffered the same things from your own tribesmen just as they suffered from the Jews,"

Now, in Judea, that is to say in the land of the Jews, you know how the Christians suffered. Christ himself suffered at the hands of the Jews. Stephen was tortured by the hands of the Jews. The Church encountered its first persecutions in Judea, in Jerusalem, and they were scattered by the persecutions that arose over Stephen, and Paul says: "**Now you suffer like this**". Apparently in Thessalonica there was a lot of persecution, a lot of opposition, threats, and all kinds of trouble - the kind of thing, maybe, where it was very difficult for them to do business and find work, all because the business was in the hands of those who had no place for this Christianity and for these Christians. But with all that severe suffering, and with all their "**many trials**" they did not become introspective. This is the danger of suffering. If you suffer frustration, opposition, persecution, or if the best work is given to someone else, etc., the natural thing is to examine yourself, to feel very sorry for yourself, to start nursing your trouble and to be completely occupied with yourself.

But here suffering led to service.

The Apostle says that the Word went out from them, not only through the whole region of Macedonia and Achaia, but through the whole country. **Their suffering - what did it do?** This made them turn outside and say: "**There are others everywhere in need, in hardship, like us, let's see what we can do for them**". That's the way to respond to the gospel, isn't it? This speaks of the glorious gospel! The gospel became such good news to them that it had the effect of freeing them completely from all self-pity in the deepest trial. Let us take this to heart.

Patience and Hope.

Furthermore, the Apostle speaks of them.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:3.

"and unceasingly keep in mind the work of your faith and the labor of your love and the patience of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father,"

And it simply means that they did not give up easily. That counts for something, you know. You are experiencing a difficult time; everything and everyone is against you. It is so easy to give up - just to give up, to withdraw from the race, or throw up your hands in the fight and say: "**It's no use - better give it all up**". But no, these Christians had patience and hope. They did not give up easily, they "**kept at it**", and we will see that they had a hope that they kept at it. It was they who were "an example to all who believe". In it we see the ingredients of exemplary Christians, and these are the true characteristics of the gospel. You see, the gospel is in trouble for Christians! It is not only for the unsaved, but for Christians when they are in trouble or suffering. This is still good news. If we lose the "**good news**" element in the gospel, if it loses its sharp edge as "**good news**" for us, we become old, we get to the place where we "**know it all**". If we lose that sense, then we give up when trouble comes, let us go, but if, to come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, for us still the greatest thing in the whole world and the universe is, then we'll get through it.

Difficulties Due to Temperament.

Now, because difficulties always correspond to our attitudes, that is, what we are always gives rise to the nature of our trials, so it was with the Thessalonians. Nothing is a trial to you unless you are made a certain way. Something that is a trial for you may never be a trial for me. Or it could be the other way around. What might be a terrible thing for me and knock me right off balance, other people can go through quite calmly, and wonder what I'm making such a fuss about. Our problems and our trials arise very largely from the way we were made. Now I want you to follow it. The thoroughness of these Thessalonian believers led them into peculiar tests. And this is always the case. If you are not thorough, you will not have thorough problems. You will get through more or less easily. If you are thorough, you will meet thorough tests. They arise quite naturally from your own attitude or your own nature. Now you know that human nature and constitution are made in various ways. You know in general that we are not all alike. It's just that good! But we can classify human nature to a very large extent into different categories - what we call temperaments. Basically there are seven different temperaments, or categories of human constitution. I'm not going to go into detail about that, but there is a very useful point here on this matter. These Thessalonians were very clearly of the "practical" temperament, and the keenness of their particular suffering was found largely because they were so. Of course, I don't mean that other people don't suffer, but they suffer in different ways. You see, the standard of living of the practical temperament is quick and immediate returns.

We need to see something for our money very quickly! This is the business temperament, the temperament of commercial life. The things that govern this temperament are quick successes. "**Success**" is the big word of the practical temperament. It is success that succeeds. The successful ones are the idols of this particular type of composition. There is not much sentiment here. These people cannot stop for sentiment. Things that are not practical that they call, are considered by them as just "**sentimental**". Of course they are not like that, but that is how Martha responded to Mary. Maria was not sentimental, but Martha thought she was, because Martha was so eminently practical. Again, there is very little imagination in this composition. It challenges all sensibilities. It doesn't stop thinking about how people feel about what is being said, it just goes on. And then sometimes it makes terrible mistakes - it confuses things. For example, it confuses curiosity with depth because it must always ask endless questions. The "**practical**" people always ask questions, questions, questions; they keep you going with questions all the time, thinking that this is a proof of spiritual depth. They think that they don't just take things at their surface value, they are very practical as well as deep. But there is a big difference between curiosity and depth. It is very possible to confuse things. Now we want to understand these Thessalonians and the effect of the gospel. Can't we introduce them now in light of what I said? They responded quickly and in a very practical way and in a very thorough way. One of the main themes they responded to was the coming of the Lord.

Right at the beginning Paul says: "You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to expect his Son from heaven" (1:9,10). It was a big thing with them, this coming of the Lord, and they came to the conclusion that the Lord's coming would take place in their own lifetime at the latest. This was their practical response to the gospel, and it was good in its way. But you know that these two letters of Paul are almost entirely about correcting a false element in that response. Now you find them in trouble—trouble of their own making—in this matter. They said something like that to themselves. "The Lord is coming - we were told the Lord is coming, we accepted that" "the coming of the Lord is near" and we accepted that it will happen any day; and we are told that when the Lord comes, all his own will be carried away to meet him. We came to the conclusion that all believers would be caught, raptured and thus enter into glory together. Oh, what a wonderful thing - all go together into the presence of the Lord! But some of our friends died, yesterday, last week, and people are still dying. It seems as if this whole matter is being overtaken by everyone together and upset." They were thrown into confusion and consternation, because instead of the Lord coming and gathering them all to Himself, there were people among them who went into the grave. It was a setback for their practical composition, you see. Now, the Apostle writes to them. He writes to them the gospel, the good news, to people who are in confusion and sorrow because of disappointment in this way, and he says, "I want you to know, beloved brothers, I want you to understand that it makes no difference in the final event."

When the Lord comes, they will not have gone before us; and when He comes, we will not go before them. It just doesn't make any difference. Those who fall asleep in Jesus and we who live and remain will all be taken away together. You don't have to let this thing bother you anymore. You must not mourn as those who have no hope, or who have lost their great hope - as those whose great hope for the coming of the Lord has been struck by the death of these believers. There really is no room for any element of disappointment in this. It is good news for those who have lost loved ones - it is good news in the matter of life and death - that we will all go up together "to meet the Lord in the air: and so we shall always be with the Lord." It's just wonderful."

So we see that Paul was able to bring in the gospel - the good news, the good news - to overcome a certain difficulty that arose because of their composition, their nature.

A help to know one's own nature.

Let's pause there for a minute. You know, we should get over a lot of our problems if we knew what our temperaments were. If we would just sit for a minute—and this is not introspection at all—sit down for a minute and say, "Now, what is my peculiar disposition and makeup? What is the thing that I am most inclined to, because of my nature? What are the factors, the elements, that make up my temperament?" If you can put your finger on it, you have the key to many of your problems. Asaph, the psalmist, had a very bad time on one occasion. He looked at the wicked and saw that they were prosperous.

He saw how the righteous were having a hard time - himself included - and he became very discouraged about it all. It's not the Lord, it's not the truth - it's just me, it's my tendency to go down in times of trouble.

This is how I was made; this is my response to trouble.

Now, maybe that sounds like a very naturalistic way of dealing with things. But I'm not done yet. If you and I will understand this thing - that much of our trouble comes because we are made a certain way - it is really in our own nature - we will have a ground on which to go to the Lord. We will be able to go to the Lord and say: ***"Lord, You know how I am made; You know how I naturally react to things. You know how, because I'm made that way, I'm always caught in certain ways. Oh know what it's like for me to act under certain pressures. You know me, Lord. Now Lord, You are different from what I am. Where I am weak, You are strong. Where I am flawed, You are perfect."*** Do you not see that the Lord Jesus, the perfect Man, is the perfect balance of all the good qualities in all the temperaments, that in Him are none of the bad qualities of any temperament, and that the Holy Spirit can make Christ to be to us that which we are not in ourselves? This is the great wonder, the great mystery, the great glory, of the meaning of Christ as mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. This is the wonder of His humanity. A perfect masculinity without any of these things that bother us. Look at Him under duress. He doesn't go down. Look at Him from any standpoint of testing and trial: He passes through. But He is human. He does not pass by virtue of His Deity.

He passes through on the basis of His perfect humanity, and it must be mediated to us. Spiritual growth means that we become something other than what we are by nature. Isn't it so? Of course we can tend to be pretty miserable people - always with a miserable outlook, always down in the dumps. Now, when the Holy Spirit takes control of us, the miserably inclined people rejoice, although it is not natural for them to rejoice. This is the wonder of the Christian life. We become something we are not naturally. Of course we would very quickly go under some kind of criticism or persecution and nurse our problems, but when the Lord Jesus is in us, we can take it and carry on. We're not going down, we're going on. He makes us different from what we are. This is the work of grace in the life of the believer. These Thessalonians suffered greatly because of their practical temperament. They expected that what they were initially told would come immediately. They said to themselves, 'The Lord will come - He can come today, any day - and that will be the end of all our problems. But time goes on, and people die, and things get harder and harder. It doesn't look much like the Lord is coming... They may have been almost at the point of breaking and scattering. And at that time a new presentation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus came in, bringing the hope of something other than what they naturally were. What is true in the case of the practical temperament is true in all other temperaments. We can take this as a principle. If we only understand this, the Lord deals with each of us in this way. He deals with us according to what we are. It does not help to try to stereotype or standardize the dealings of God with people.

God's dealings with me may not be very troublesome to you, but God's dealings with you may well knock me right off my feet. He deals with us according to ourselves, so that there may be that of Christ in us which is not of ourselves. I say again, this is the work of grace. This is the mediation of Christ - this is the meaning of being conformed to the image of Christ. It is to partake of His nature - something completely different. But it is a terrible process. Now we must come through as these people came through. Is this good news? I think it is. I think this is the gospel, "**good news**". This is good news for the man who is always too ready to drop out and give up and be miserable. This is good news for those who, because of their own natural expectations and reactions, are disappointed in what is really happening. It is good news that Christ is something other than what we are, and that we can be saved by Christ from what we are. It's very practical, you see. How are we saved from what we are? By Christ! Not by Christ just coming and reaching out His hands and pulling us up. This is what we all want Him to do. We appeal to the Lord to come and do something like this, to literally show us where we are. What He does is to displace us, and put Himself in our place in an inner way. It is a process, a deep process, and it may not be until years later that you can see more of Christ. That person used to be so-and-so, but now there is a difference, you can see Christ now. They are not what they used to be, they get over it. They are "**changed into the same image**". This is good news. Good news for the Thessalonians, and good news for us.

The test at the end.

But there is one more thing with these Thessalonians. Things in the world have become more and more difficult. They went from bad to worse. These dear people saw things happen, they saw forces at work, and they thought; It does not seem as if the Lord is coming, as if His Kingdom is coming. Satan seems to do it his own way. Things go from bad to worse; and as for things being changed, that there is "**a new heaven and a new earth**" and a new world government, all these things which we thought would come with the coming of Christ and his Kingdom, we see no sign of it at all. Rather, it goes the other way around. The world is getting worse, evil people are getting worse and worse. There seems to be more and more of the Devil than ever before.

Now, the Apostle wrote his letters about it, and he said, "**Look here, it doesn't mean that things go wrong; it does not mean disappointment for your expectations. The Lord will not come until those things have happened and come to fullness. The mystery of lawlessness is already working**".

Before He comes, two things must happen.

"First of all, there must take place a great falling away."

A big fallaway? Christians falling away? Professing Christians who fall away, go away from the Lord, turn back? It is not very practical for these people! Yes, that is exactly what will happen towards the end. The closer the coming of the Lord is, the more the test will be.

There will be a falling away, there will be many people - professors - who will say: "**We are not going with this, we cannot continue with this any longer**". They will go stop following the Lord. It was always like that. It was so in the days of our Lord's flesh. In the end it will be so. "**Oh, how disappointing!**" Ah, yes, but understand that this is how it will be, and that it does not mean that everything has gone wrong. It's just going to be like that. When the Lord does take a people away, it will be a people who continued with Him to the end, and He tests, tests. "Now, you Thessalonians, understand that what He is doing is testing you whether you will continue right to the end." It must be made clear whether the root of the matter is in believers, or if it is only confession. So don't misunderstand the signs of the times.

And then the second thing.

Antichrist, that man of sin, the Devil seems to be getting more and more of his own way, they thought. And it was so. "**But**", said the apostle, "**the Lord's day will not come until that man of sin, the Antichrist, is revealed.**" "**Oh, we thought Christ was coming, not Antichrist!**" Ah, but Christ will not come until the Antichrist has come. Don't misunderstand things. If there is a powerful movement in this world by Satan, the Devil is apparently incarnate, a great incarnation of him - it can be in human form or system form, whatever - who is dead set on all that belongs to Christ to wipe out is not a bad sign. This is a good sign - the Lord is about to come! This is the good news in the day when the Devil seems to carry everything away. This is disastrous.

The Lord's coming is at hand.

LUKE 21:28.

"And when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your salvation is near."

So if suffering increases, if patience is tested, if Satan seems to get his way and get the power in his hands, don't be deceived - don't let it say to you, "**Well, our hope is not being realized.**" Turn it around and say, "**These are the things that say our hope is about to be realized.**" This is good news for the day of trouble, good news for Christians in suffering, good news when Satan does his worst. The Lord's coming is at hand!

The summary of the whole matter.

But where should we sum it all up? We've always been looking to find a little fragment in which to wrap it all up, and I think we have it here:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:24.

"He who calls you is faithful; He will do it too."

Here is the conclusion and summary of the whole matter. Yes, loved ones die, go to the Lord. Time is running out. The Devil seems to be gaining power and doing his worst. We, the Lord's people, are in suffering: God is nevertheless able to see us through. "**Who would do that either.**" What more do we want?

Against everything else - "**He will do it too.**" This is good news! After all, and in the final summary, the good news is that it is not left to us. **It is the Lord's business.**

What remains for us is to believe God, seek to understand His ways, be steadfast, hope to the end, and then the Lord takes over. "**Faithful is he who calls you, who will also do it.**"

Good news!

8. THE GOSPEL OF PAUL IN TIMOTHY.

1 TIMOTHY 1:11.

"according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God which was entrusted to me."

2 TIMOTHY 1:8.

"Then do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me, his prisoner, but suffer tribulations together for the gospel according to the power of God."

2 TIMOTHY 1:10.

"but which has now been revealed by the appearance of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,"

2 TIMOTHY 2:8.

"Remember that Jesus Christ, from the line of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel,"

We now come to our closing thoughts on what Paul called "**the gospel that I preach.**" "**The gospel of the glory of the blessed God**". Paul is not talking about what the gospel is about - the content of the gospel. He speaks of the gospel which has to do with the manifestation of the glory of God. This may sound a little technical, but it is very important.

Let me repeat.

What Paul has in mind here is the gospel, or the good news, which deals with the manifestation of the glory of God. The glory of God in manifestation - **this is the gospel.**

Note something else.

"The gospel of the glory of the blessed God". There is a translation that changes that word, and uses the word "happy" instead of "blessed": "the gospel of the glory of the happy God". But that doesn't sound quite right, does it, to our ears? And yet, if we understood the real meaning, we should realize that it is not an entirely inappropriate word. There are two Greek words that are translated "blessed" in the New Testament. One, which is much more common, literally just means "well spoken of". This is its literal meaning, but in the New Testament it is used almost exclusively in the sense of "happy", and is translated as such. However, that is not the word used here. The word used here - the second of the two words I referred to - is one that occurs much less frequently. It is a word that expresses that which properly speaking is true of God alone. That is to say, the uniqueness of God about what He is in Himself, completely apart from what people think about Him or say about Him. It is just what He is in Himself. You may think what you want, and say what you want, but God it is. This is the word that is translated here as "happy". The word really means that solemn, calm, peaceful, eternal joy that fills the heart of God. If you can get the feel of that definition, you have understood somewhere close to the meaning of the word translated "blessed" here. This is the gospel of the glory of the calm, peaceful, confident joy of the heart of God. The good news, the good news, about it.

The good news of the glory of God.

What is this glory of God that becomes that gospel, that good news? This is the glory of God in the revelation of Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. The revelation of Himself. In the Old Testament, the glory of God has a symbolic form, as we know. For example, in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle, between the cherubim on the mercy seat, the glory was found. The glory covered the mercy seat. It was a light that shone on the mercy seat, on the ark of the covenant; shine down and focus there. It was heavenly brilliance. It was just a symbol. What it symbolized is here - the light of God shining on and through His Son Jesus Christ. This is the glory of God. Paul writes it to the Corinthians like this: "**the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is what is in the Lord Jesus of God's perfectly calm, peaceful, abiding satisfaction.

The glory of God in man.

Now, here is a very remarkable thing. You bear the glory of God. Much is said about it, and you are told that this is what you will find in the Bible; that, if you go to the Bible, you will find there much about the glory of God. When you open the Bible in search of the glory of God, what do you find?

A Man!

You find yourself confronted with a Man. You can't get away from that Man. The Old Testament always points, with numerous means and methods and ways, to a Man. The New Testament, from beginning to end, has one Man in view, a Man always in view.

So that you have to say: "This is the answer to my quest. I am searching for the knowledge of the glory of God, and God's answer to the search is a Man." This is but an exposition of this phrase, "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God," which is the revelation of God in His Son, Jesus Christ. God is represented here as being in a state of perfect tranquility, calmness, lasting assurance and contentment and joy, and all that can be summed up in the word "**blessed**". God is represented as blessed, God is set to be, in that state. What is the basis of that state of God? It's just that God found a perfect, a complete expression of Himself in a Man. Yes, we know who that Man was. I don't overlook His Deity, His own Deity, or put it aside, but I don't even think about it now. You see, God created man with very, very high goals. Indeed, man was created to answer and satisfy the heart of God, and when we say this, we say tremendous things. To satisfy the heart of God! There are some people who require a lot of satisfying. Indeed, they never seem satisfied. Things always fall short of their standard and their ideal. But you can go a long way, you can go as far as it is possible to go with any human conception of satisfaction, and you still fall far, far short, infinitely short of God's idea. God is so much bigger, so much more wonderful. In the fallen creation we have but a faint reflection of how wonderful and great God is. But even when we see this very creation as it is, with all its faults and weaknesses and variations and so forth, we must stand in awe and worship. We can only see a faint indication of what a wonderful God He is, and of how much it must take to please Him.

Yet He is here in a state of absolute contentment, calm, peaceful, happy, because all those thoughts of His, all those desires of His, all those intentions of His, and all those first undertakings of His, are now accomplished. and perfected—not in creation in general, but in a Man. That Man answers to God's very last requirement of that infinite Mind. How great is Christ! God therefore finds His happiness, His bliss, His contentment, His tranquility in it.

A Representative Man.

Perhaps you might be thinking, "That's a beautiful thing to say, that's a lot of wonderful thoughts to express, but where's the practical value of that?" Ah, that's just the gospel, you see. Do you think that the Lord Jesus, God's Son, came through and took the position of man, and was perfect to God's utmost and final satisfaction, just so that God would have it in one Man? No, the gospel is this, that the Lord Jesus is representative of all the people that God will have. He is representative and He is inclusive. The old and beautiful beginning of the gospel, which you and I, after long familiarity with it, still often need, for our own peace of mind, to understand more perfectly, is precisely this. That Jesus Christ, God's Son, is a sphere into which we are called, invited to enter by faith, so that we are hidden in Him because of what we ourselves are; God sees only Him and not us. A wonderful thing! You must put aside all your arguments and all your questions and accept God's fact. That this phrase, "*in Christ*", occurs two hundred times and more in the New Testament must surely mean something.

God sees us in Christ.

The first, and perhaps the most all-encompassing, thing this means is that, if you are in Christ, God sees Christ instead of seeing you. I have a piece of paper here. Let it represent you or me in ourselves, what we are. I put it in a book, and that book represents Christ. You no longer see the paper, you only see the book. This is our position "*in Christ*". This is what Christ means. All His satisfaction to God is put on our account. This is the gospel: when you and I are in Christ, God is pleased with us - peaceful, happy, blessed. Oh, wonderful gospel! You cannot comprehend or explain it, but the fact is stated. This is the gospel of the glory of the pleased God. To put again the test we applied in a previous chapter in other connections, it is just this: that, when you and I really come into Christ and find our place in Christ, one of the first things we are aware of that all the tension has disappeared; we came to rest. A wonderful tranquility, which is not natural, has come into us. We feel the battle is over between us and God. This is great; a blessed, happy state. Now, this is our experience, but what is its meaning? It is the Spirit of the happy God who testifies to God's happiness in our hearts. "*The gospel of the glory of the blessed God*". Its first phase is a position. *We are in Christ.*

Christ In Us.

The second phase or the second aspect of it is that Christ is in us. But we must not pursue it to the same conclusion as in the last point. This does not mean that we are seen and Christ is hidden.

No, Christ is in us and we are in Christ: an impossible thing to explain, unless perhaps we can put it that way. Christ is in us. Why is He in us? He is in us as that very satisfaction for the heart of God, so that the Spirit of God can work in us to conform us to Christ. And this introduces another aspect of the Christian life: that, as you and I continue on the basis of Christ within us, our joy increases. This can be put to the test. Stop going on with the Lord, and see what happens to our joy. Go away from the Lord, and see what happens to our blessing. It is not necessary. Continue with the Lord Jesus on the basis of God's satisfaction with Him, and the bliss increases. God's happiness increases in our heart. Christ is installed within as the pattern, standard and basis upon which God works.

Now, here is something fundamental.

Oh, how long it takes us to learn it! It's simple, I know, but it's fundamental and it's something we always stumble over. If we start to proceed based on who we are, God stops. When we come to our own ground, what we are in ourselves—our wretched, wretched self, which regards God as a corpse and a stinking corpse—forgive me for saying so—for it has been dead for two thousand years (it may sound amusing, but it is actually extremely serious): if you come from the ground of "Christ in you" about what you are in yourself, God says: "I will not go any further". All Divine operations cease. We can only continue as we started. We began in the belief that Jesus Christ was our substitute, took our place with God and answered for us to God. It was our faith that brought us into Christ.

We must go straight on to the end with the same faith in the Lord Jesus, and no faith in ourselves, and God will go on if we go on in His domain. The good news is that God is ready to go straight ahead with increasing blessing if we will just stay in His territory. His glory is in His Son, and He has no glory in man apart from His Son.

So Christ is our sphere, Christ is our center, and Christ is our model.

We are conformed, says the Apostle, until Christ is fully formed in us. **Simple, basic:** God's glory in Christ is manifested in believers, in the Church, because believers rest on God's satisfaction with His Son. Only this and that is the way of the glory of God and the expression of God's blessing, God's happiness.

This is the gospel.

You see, it all comes down to focusing on this. What is the gospel? When you have said all you can about it, it is included in, and surrounded by, this - God's perfect satisfaction, rest, tranquility, concerning His Son, made available to us. Oh, that you and I may live without struggle with God, because we abide in Christ! Brother, sister, when you start feeling miserable about yourself, reject it. **"Yes, I know all about it. If I don't know all about it now, it's time I did. I know all about what I am; I know where it will lead me if I start to consider it. I put it aside. It is a fact - God did it - that so long ago I was crucified in Christ, died in Christ, buried in Christ, raised in Christ. It is all in Christ. This is where I stand."**

Maintain that position; **abide in Christ**. Go out of it on any other ground, and the glory departs, the bliss, the happiness, is arrested.

Good news for young people.

Paul spoke to Timothy about the gospel, and Timothy needed good news, good news. To begin with, Timothy was a young man. A young man who is a Christian has his own personal problems - he has many difficulties and problems within himself. A young man represents the sum of a life at its beginning: all the problems of life reside there.

To such a young man the apostle says: "It is all right, Timothy: you may be afflicted by all these problems and these difficulties, you may have all these problems spiritually in these different ways, but Jesus Christ is equal to the whole situation!"

Remember, young man, young woman, that the Lord Jesus is God's answer to all the problems of youth. That's good news, isn't it? Timotheus was not only a young man, but he was a young man in trouble of a particular kind because of his position in Christian work. Trouble came at him from three directions. First, there was the pagan world. What a challenge it must have been for a young man in those days! It was a world that had no place for God, no place for the Lord, no place for the things of God, and all the opposing power of that world must have seemed concentrated on this young man. Second, there were all the troubles of the Jewish world. Paul alludes to them here. These Judaizers pursued Paul throughout the world, with the determination:

"This man will have to be brought to an end - this man's work will have to be completely obliterated!" In every way these Judaizers were intent on destroying Paul and his work and his converts, and Timothy was associated with Paul.

Paul says: "Do not be ashamed... of me". Association created many problems for Timothy. The answer is: "Good, Timothy: there is good news for you! The Lord Jesus is equal to that - He will carry you through it all".

Timothy was a young man with tremendous responsibilities in the work of the Lord. Especially in the local congregation. If you know anything about this responsibility then you also know that you need a very solid foundation for such a responsibility. Your trust must be established in Christ. Timothy came into contact with many difficult Christians. These "older" Christians think that because they have been on the road longer than the younger Christians they know much more. These Christians are more in the way than on the road. That's the reason why Paul says to Timothy: "Let no one despise your youth." There were certain wise men--people who thought they were something--who tended to say, "Oh, Timothy's only a young fellow, you know--you shouldn't take too much notice of him." They despised his youth. It's quite a hard thing to bear. Today we still have the same problem where so-called "older" Christians think they know everything. Now I am not talking fleshly age but spiritual age. They have been on the road longer than this "young" Christian. Timothy was in that position, but this is the gospel for Timothy: "It's all right: the Lord Jesus is equal to that situation - He can also carry you through it". After all, it really is just that.

This is what the Lord Jesus "was made for us... of God": God's satisfaction. Oh, thank God that the Lord Jesus covers our faults and weaknesses and defects.

We may make a mess of things; we do, if left to ourselves. We upset much, do much harm; we are so imperfect, so faulty: and then the Lord Jesus comes, in this blessed way, and corrects our deficiency, the Father answers for us, corrects our shortcomings - how? - with Himself, only Himself.

This is the answer; this is the good news - "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God".
