***The Power of the Gospel

Colossians 1:3-8

COL-047***

Our subject is "Thanksgiving for the Colossians," segment number 25 in Colossians 1:3-8.

Spiritual regeneration is a product of personal salvation through trust in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for one's moral guilt. God the Holy Spirit brings conviction to the mind of the unsaved on three issues which lead to the acceptance of Christ. First of all, it is the conviction about sin. The person understands that he is totally depraved. He has moral guilt upon him before God the Judge. And the reason for that is because he is a lost sinner, and has not believed in the gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ as his Savior. The second element is righteousness – the lack of the possession of absolute righteousness which is required for entrance into heaven, and which is no longer visible in the person of Jesus Christ on earth. And third is the element of divine judgment upon Satan of suffering forever in the lake of fire, along with Satan's demons, and all of the unsaved people who follow him, instead of following Jesus Christ.

Now, we who are born again spiritually are commissioned, as you know, to be the ambassadors of God, witnessing to the lost with the gospel of free grace salvation. The gospel is explained with the bad news / good news approach. The lost person is told to believe it, and to receive Jesus Christ as His savior. The Holy Spirit will use a true gospel presentation to bring conviction upon the lost person about his terrible condition, and thus to move him to accept Christ.

Now, it should be understood that no human effort; no sincerity; no technique; no gimmick; or, no salesmanship can get a person to believe the gospel. Only God the Holy Spirit can bring about that conviction and that faith in Christ. What we do is to evangelize the lost person and tell him to believe the gospel. Then we step out of the way, and the Holy Spirit takes over. But that is an essential part of a person being saved. He must be told an uncontaminated gospel message. Then God the Holy Spirit comes in with His convicting work, and closes the deal successfully.

Now, with salvation comes the duty of we, who are the ambassadors of God, to direct the newborn Christian to feeding on the Word of God, in order to develop spiritual maturity and spiritual strength. Bible doctrine from the pastor-teacher in the local church is God's provision for nurturing believers to maturity. Nothing and no one in your life should ever take precedence over attending Bible instruction in a church service. If you sit in a church service and the doctrines of the Word of God are not taught, never return. You should not be robbed of your access to the mind of God. And that's all the local church is for. Now, because we live in a very rich country, we have access with money and facilities to do things that the YMCA also does, and other entertainment agencies do. But we are not in the business of entertaining people. We are in the business of leading people to a knowledge of the Word of God so that they can survive in the devil's world.

It's no fun to be a spiritual casualty. It hurts, and it is devastating to the individual, and it is absolutely unnecessary. Once you're born-again Christian, you don't have to be the devil's fool, but you will be, if your life is not oriented on Sundays, especially, to being instructed in the Word of God. This is done through the structure, then, of the local church. Nothing and no one should interfere with that.

If you find yourself attending preaching which is sweetness and light; providing entertaining social programs; somebody who speaks and makes you laugh; playing to the desires of the sin nature (which the Bible calls "scratching the itching ears"); throwing out inspirational challenges; and, avoiding speaking about controversial things, or the deep things of the Spirit of God, that is the kiss of death to a believer's walk with God. That kind of a context will doom you.

Also remember that you are your own priest. You come to be instructed. The exposition of the Word is first. Sometimes there's application. The main application is God the Holy Spirit. But you should not resent application which the speaker might make to you. He might bring something that'll trigger a line of thought that you that you should be thinking about. And in any case, because you're your own priest, you can dismiss anything you don't believe is right, or anything that you don't think applies in your case. But somebody recently said to me, "When you say those things, it just makes me feel guilty, because that's what I do." Well maybe you shouldn't be doing those things. But if you think you should, that's okay with me. My job is to alert you. Your job is to stand before God on your own two feet, and go from there. If we give you these things that are to your self-destruction, then you should resent it. And if I tell you something about our youth, you should not resent it if maybe you have a little different style or a different slant on it, because they are your children, but they're also my spiritual children. So, don't get mad at me when I go to bat for them. I play ball with God on that issue.

You'll have no resistance to the devil. You'll be unable to find fulfillment of the mission for which you were born into life. And you'll find yourself weeping at the Judgment seat of Christ for what might have been. You need to be told what God thinks. And you need to move on to spiritual growth. And the only way you can do that (to know what He thinks, and go to maturity, so that you are a stable human being – a godly man and a godly woman) is that you need to be instructed in the Word of God, and you need to expose yourself to that instruction.

**The World System**

I'm going to ask your patience while I read something. This is an article that I think sets the background of what we want to talk about today, which is growth in spiritual maturity. Everyone is born into the Christian life as a zero. He is spiritual because he's in the inner circle, until he sins, and he's out of it, and he's lost his spirituality – but his maturity is zero. He's an infant. He should not be thrown out to the world system without being cared for. What are we talking about in the world system? What are we talking about that our young people are exposed to in America today? Here's an article from the Conservative Digest, January 23rd by Brent Bozell. It's entitled "Almost All Quiet in the Gay Rights Front:"

Someone recently told me that they were in a church where there were, in the foyer on the table, handouts (printed material) that was promoting homosexuality in some degree (in some way). This was in the church, and it was justifying that. One of our women this morning told me that she was having a discussion with a man who is a homosexual. And she said, "The problem is that the Bible condemns that as sin, and so we can't pass that off." He said, "Where did you read that in the Bible?" "Well," she says, "it's very prominent in the book of Romans." He said, "Who wrote Romans?" And she said, "Paul." He says, "Well, I don't believe anything Paul says." She says, "Well, you can't believe most of the New Testament then." And it didn't hit her at the moment, but later, when she mentioned this to her husband, he said, "The reason he didn't like anything that Paul says is because Paul is very clear that homosexuality and lesbianism is abomination to God. We see that plainly in the first chapter of the greatest dissertation on justification by faith – the book of Romans, written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The red-letter Bible doesn't mean that only the words of Jesus are inspired. That's a false notion. It's useful to know exactly what words the Lord is using and commenting on, but all of the Bible, including the red-letter part of the Bible, was guided by the Spirit of God when it was recorded.

So, here's this subject. This is what our kids are up against. This is the society through which they have to move, and through which you have to move, and through which you must have courage:

"The January episode of NBC's megahit sitcom "Friends" wasn't about Rachel and Ross's on-again / off-again relationship. Rather it centered on a different kind of romance: specifically, the wedding of recurring characters Carol and Susan. Yes, the episode featured a lesbian marriage ceremony, which was all the more poignant in as much as "Friends" aired, as usual, at 8:00 PM, which once was the family hour. Outright liberal advocacy on prime time television is way down, as is violence. Sleazy daytime talk shows are on the run. It's fair to say that these trends have developed in part because the public held executives' and producers' feet to the fire. The market challenged them to improve, and they did. Or did they?

"Entertainment television's treatment of sex (hitherto: homo-marital; premarital; and, extramarital) has become rampant in the past few years. The problem is exacerbated all the more by the shift this season of such sex-obsessed shows as "Friends," "Sybil," and "Melrose Place" into the 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM slot, when impressionable youngsters are likelier to be tuned in.

"No series exemplifies this loosening of standards better than "Friends." Admittedly, it's cleverly written, and well-acted. But if you deleted the sexual humor from the average episode, it would run 10 minutes long, as each friend (and they're all single) has been sexually active at one time or another – constantly in search of the next sexual rush.

"However, with the Carol and Susan characters showing up occasionally, it was only a matter of time before heterosexual promiscuity would take a backseat, if only for a week, to promote homosexual rights. As if the wedding weren't enough of a hook, the ceremony's minister performing holy matrimony was played by lesbian activist (Newt's half-sister) Candace Gingrich, a fact that was heavily promoted. Her character's first line was: 'Nothing makes God happier than when two people, any two people, come together in love.' I don't know which denomination this minister was supposed to represent, but it must be one that disregards what the Bible says about homosexual acts. Evidently, her god isn't hung up on morality.

"There were no overt gay-rights statements in the episode. A handful of characters manifested some uneasiness with the wedding, but they either became more tolerant, or were rebuked in no uncertain terms. In general, a state of affairs was dealt with matter-of-factly, which apparently was the point.

"That this was no big deal was the message of a lengthy CNN report the day before the episode aired. The story featured sound bites from Candace Gingrich, and from Jane Sibbett, the actress who plays Carol. Those who believe that a homosexual wedding on prime time may be a bad (perhaps even a damaging) idea were talked about, but none of them was invited on camera to articulate such views. Interviewed on the CNN report, Candace Gingrich clearly relished the attention. She saluted the entertainment media for reflecting, finally, what she maintains the public has already accepted. The homosexual lifestyle is mainstream in today's society.

"She may be right. In years past, attempts to promote far less blatant homosexual themes were met with a furious public denouncement and squashed. But this full-fledged lesbian wedding brought no complaints. The pro-family organizations were absent. The pundits’ pens were empty. The talk show community went silent. Those offended by the message were either resigned to it or no longer cared.

On the other hand, the "Friends" episode could be the death knell of homosexual promotion on television. This kind of material exists only because it's a cause célèbre in nature. Without a controversy, there's no point. When it isn't shocking anymore, those agitating for its inclusion lose their reasons for touting it. Like so many liberal causes before it: abortion; the environment; and, homelessness, it will disappear. But if gay rights is now in the mainstream, regardless of how long it stays there, we need to remind ourselves of what that means.

"Many of those taking part in the values debate are overlooking the most harmful poison in our culture. It's not trashy daytime talk, or even desensitizing media violence. It's moral relativism in its many manifestations. In the case of friends, it's the assertion of the moral equivalence of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

"Asked recently to name an acceptable program for his pre-adolescent children to watch, NBC entertainment boss Warren Littlefield cited "Friends." I wonder if he let them watch on January 18th. I hope not. We're talking here about the pollution of minds and souls: those of Littlefield's children; of my children; and, of your children."

The state of Hawaii has passed the law legalizing homosexual lesbian marriages. It's going up to the Supreme Court. Every state in the union is standing by, and watching, and waiting to see what happens. Now, if God says this is an abomination, then you and I can't say it's all right. Nobody can say it's all right. The word "abomination," as you know, in Scripture is one of the most loathsome words that God uses to describe human beings that thumb their nose at Him, and that what is good for people. There isn't anything in the Bible that God places as a moral restriction that isn't good for the people. It is good for you. It is good for me. It is good for all of our lives, from our earliest to our latest days. It is not only good; it is the best. And to violate it is to bring about our own self-destruction and enormous misery.

So now you're born again. God has brought victory into somebody's life to whom you have testified. The issue now is to take that babe in Christ and move them into a context where they can go to spiritual maturity; grow up; and, be able to deal with sin; with the sin nature; with the world system; and, with Satan himself.

Please open your Bible to 2 Peter 3:18. The apostle Peter says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Here is a call to move from the spiritual immaturity of a new Christian to the spiritual maturity of a stable believer with Christ as one's Lord. You cannot make him your Lord until He is your Savior. After He is your Savior, He should become the one who is in charge of your life to Whom you are loyal in every thought and in every action. This is a call to deepen your spiritual experience of God's grace, which brought you salvation, through the learning of doctrine. That is how you deepen your relationship to God – through the learning of the doctrine of Christ, our Lord, and our savior.

In the book of Ephesians 4:15, the apostle says, "But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." Did you hear that kids? You are to grow up in all aspects on this earth in your human experience to be just like Jesus Christ.

There was a book written many, many years ago called In His Steps, in which the writer considered what Jesus would do in various situations. And the theme of the book was: follow the steps that Christ would follow as the guide for your life. Well, for you to be able to do that. You have to know the Word of God. You have to know doctrine. You cannot follow Christ if you don't know the principles of the Word of God, because that's what He would do. You cannot pretend on your own that you would know what he would do. That's what the liberals do. The people who abandon the Scripture – they make up their own ideas of what He would do.

Jesus Christ, as you know, is always your Lord in position. He is the Lord. He is Lord over the unsaved. He is Lord over the Saved. But he is only your Lord in your experience when you're in that inner circle of temporal fellowship with God the Father. And you enter that, as you know, by admitting to Him when you do something that's out of line with His Word; with His principles; or, with what He has burdened your heart for (1 John 1:9). And being surrounded by the filth of the world system, you have to be selective in what you're going to let splash into your eyes; your ears; and, your experience. This is why I say that Christian education, as we have in BCA, is the most significant whole missionary enterprise we have. This is battling for the minds of young people, where the battle is the most intense, and where Satan can be the most destructive to a young person before they get their feet and their lives firmly established and together. The Lord Jesus Christ is positionally your Lord. He is not your Lord experientially unless you are subjected to His direction, and to His will, and to His word.

He is, of course, also, positionally, as you know, your Savior, because He is, in fact, the Savior of all men. This is what 1 Timothy 4:4-10 tells us. Please understand this. Don't miss this point: "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, Who is the Savior of all men, especially a believers." He is the Savior of all men. He is potentially the Savior of all men. His death covered the sins of everybody, but He is especially the Savior of the believers. He is actually the Savior of those who trust in Him. He is potentially everybody's Savior, but in experience, only those who believe the gospel. He is potentially the Lord of everybody, but only of those who subject themselves to the guidance of the Word, and to the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In 2 Peter 3:17, Peter says, "You, therefore, beloved," speaking to Christians, "knowing this beforehand beyond, be on your guard, lest being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness." I've just read to you an article that very ably describes unprincipled men. The purpose of this growth (the spiritual maturity) is expressed in this verse 17. A believer living in carnality is going to be the slave of every lust of the old sin nature within him: "Therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard that if Christ is not your Lord, then you'll be carried away easily by sin, and you'll be carried away into the era of whom?" "Unprincipled men." Who are unprincipled men? These yo-yos who have no subjection to the moral code of God. They will deliberately violate the moral code of God, and they will see how many others they can get to do it with them. Those are the unprincipled men. And what will happen?

You'll fall from your own steadfastness: "I'm a Christian, I'm loyal to Jesus Christ. I'm determined to be obedient to God. I don't want discipline on my life. I don't want disaster to overwhelm me. I want to be subject to the will of God." But you are constantly surrounded by people who are trying to dissuade you. They're the agents of the devil. And some of these are Christians. And you must understand that if you yourself are not stable as a Christian, but you have been born again, and someone has helped you to get on the track to spiritual maturity, you're going to be flapping in the breeze there for everybody that comes along with some wind of doctrine, and some unprincipled concept of evil. And when everybody around you is acclimated to evil, it is very hard to stand up and say, "No, I won't do that."

What did Joseph do? When he was tempted to an act of immorality, and Potiphar's wife says, "Nobody will know – it's just you and I here," Joseph said, "How can I perform this great sin against God? How can I take part in this great sin against God," because God was there, and God was aware, and Joseph had this unprincipled woman who was trying to rip apart his nobility as a saved young man. That's the point of verse 17. Develop the capacity so that you will not fall from your steadfastness in Christ.

Then verse 18 tells you how to do it: "You are to proceed in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The grace that brought you to salvation will now take you into spiritual strength and maturity. And it will come through the knowledge of Christ, and that's the knowledge that you get from learning the principles of the Word of God.

This same ideas in 2 Peter 1:9: "For he who lacks these qualities is blind (or shortsighted), having forgotten his purification from his former sins." A saved person who lacks these qualities of spiritual maturity. What qualities? Well, look back to the beginning of this chapter, beginning at verse 2. He enunciates in verse 2 and I'll take the time to read it. If this is not true of you, then verse 9 will be true of you. You will lack these qualities, and there's the most terrible word in the Bible, that I spoke of earlier – to be "blind," or "short-sighted" to spiritual things, and to have lost sight of who you are as a member of the royal family of God. That is the problem.

2 Peter 1:2-4: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, in order that, by them, you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Because of your trust in Christ, the promise of God, relative to salvation has come through for you." The devil no longer has control over you. The Spirit of God can take over, and you have escaped being a slave to the corrupt system that Satan has put together in this world, and through the lust patterns of the old sin nature that constantly want to attract us.

2 Peter 1:5-7: "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence in your faith, supply moral excellence; and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control; and in your self-control, perseverance; and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness; and, in your brotherly kindness, love."

You see the chain reaction there. You begin there with salvation. Then in verse 5, you begin with diligence in your faith – diligence in your reception of the Word of God so that you have supplied to you moral excellence. You know what's right, and what's wrong. And in your moral excellence, you now have knowledge. You know what to do. And out of your knowledge, you have self-control. It may be attractive. Sin is always attractive. And sin is fun. But lack of control into sin pays a bitter price in time. And in your self-control, you'll have perseverance. You'll have the capacity to keep doing right. And in your keeping doing right, you'll become a godly person. And in your godliness, you'll be a very kind person. You'll develop what we would say is winsomeness. You'll be the kind of person people will like to be around. The girls will admire you, and the men will hold you in esteem. And in your brotherly kindness, you will develop love – genuine, mental-attitude goodwill.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." "However, the other side is 2 Peter 1:9 – that this is not true. It's all downhill. So the believer who lacks these Christian virtues is spiritually out of touch with God – in carnality. He has lost the awareness of who he is, and he has been forgiven and cleansed from the enslavement to his sin nature." Carnal ways indicate a problem with doctrine. Always remember that. When we step out of the will of God, it's a problem of doctrine. When you are not there to perform an area of your Christian service, it's a problem of doctrine. It's a problem of your orientation to reality. When it comes time for you to report into your employer, on which your livelihood is dependent, the doctrine of being there, and being there on time, is very clear, because you understand the consequences. And you take that doctrine seriously.

When you are indifferent toward Christian service, or you do it in a slovenly way, you have lost your orientation to the doctrine of: "Do all things unto the Lord," to act with great diligence. When your life steps out of line, as something that everybody else should be able to imitate, because you are imitating Christ, it's because you forgot the doctrine of what Christ is like. And this slovenliness that we see in Christian service (coming late to the things that we ought to be on time to), it's a problem of doctrine. Every time you have lost your orientation to who you are, and to the fact that you're serving God, and your eyes are not looking to the things above but to the things of this earth. It's easy to do, because we're so oppressed with the burdens of this life.

The carnal Christian lacks spiritual discernment. He is short-sighted in his thinking and his conduct. And he is fruitless in God's service. He has no focus, and he has no drive for his divine mission. In the Bible, carnality and fruitlessness are not signs that you are unsaved. And I don't want you to think I'm saying that. We have people who want to jump on that bandwagon right away, and say, "Some Christian is carnal Christians, so he's not saved. Some Christian is fruitless. He's not productive of any Christian service. If he died, we wouldn't miss him." That's not a sign of being unsaved. It is a sign of being spiritually sick, so that you cannot enjoy the blessings of God which come from godly living.

However, God continues, always, to lead His erring children, to restore the prodigal to His blessing and service. And you should not resent the fact that He will use people to help try to get you back online. Without the regular intake of doctrine, and positive volition to it, there can be no spiritual maturity; there can be no godliness; and, there can be no consistent divine good service. And what 2 Peter 3:18 calls us to do is impossible. We cannot grow in grace. We cannot grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We cannot bring glory to Him unless we are feeding upon this spiritual food. This is the reason (I'm sure you can understand) for my agony in not getting years of unedited doctrinal instruction which sits on those shelves up there in the tape room. I have very great agony. There are years of instruction so that people, like the letter we read this morning, blew us out of our seats, if you have any spiritual sensitivity at all. And yet, that's just one letter that represents who knows how many people who are in that same position, shouting, "Hallelujah, Glory to God for Berean Church."

People everywhere long for what is on those tapes. They long for the spiritual substance of death. They long to get away from the forms of religion. But we are unable to distribute it. We don't have the personnel, and we don't have the time. And this is not going to change unless the Berean dream becomes a reality, and God supplies the means to do it.

So again, I would encourage you to not just blow this off, but pray about it, because He can make it happen.

Perhaps we should think of it this way. Perhaps we should get our sign painter to put these words together, and put it up here in the front, so that we can all remind ourselves how important it is, young and old alike, to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, so that you may grow in His grace, and you may grow to be a powerful person that the world will look to with great respect, even though they may hate you, and they may dislike you, and they may reject what you stand for. But you will stand there as a prince among the commoners. Perhaps we should put it this way: Let no believer under the shepherding care of Berean Memorial Church ever say at the Judgment Seat of Christ that he has suffered great loss of eternal rewards because we did not equip him with Bible doctrine to live victoriously in the angelic warfare, and to realize his life's potential in God's service in fulfilling his divine mission for which he was born. That sums it all up. And let no one under our shepherding care be able ever to turn and point to us and say, "I'm here with loss because you didn't do the job of courageously and faithfully pointing me to the Word." And as our lady who wrote the letter that we read earlier said, "The Word, and the Word, and the word."

Christians, in short, are to pursue growing in God's grace and the knowledge of God's Son as their Savior and Lord, until they are someday welcomed home to heaven as heroes of faith. And that's what's going to happen. 2 Peter 1:10-11: "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you. For as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble. For in this way, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." That means that you're going to come into heaven with the bands playing, and the flags flying, and the angels cheering and shouting until they're hoarse, because a faithful hero of the living God has just come into their midst. Why not? Every one of you are fully capable of being just exactly that. But it all comes from not eating straw, but from eating real spiritual food – the Word of doctrine.

If you're not getting that, don't blow it off. It's not just okay if you don't get it sometime. You know what happens if you don't eat sometime.

I've been trying to reduce my weight, so I only eat a grapefruit in the morning. If you ate nothing but grapefruit, you'd lose weight rapidly. Then there's someone at my house, when noon comes, and it time for another grapefruit, and she tempts me with something: "How about a little bit of this chili here with this cheese and beans?" Well, I might say, "Okay, I'll eat the grapefruit tomorrow." And my intention and my resolve is undermined. It's just one meal. Yeah, that's all it took. And the scale is still there where it was the day before. It is important that, if you want to be spiritually mature, you stay on the diet that brings you to strength.

Now, coming back to the book of Colossians 1, having covered the magnificence of the gospel and our growth in the things of God, verse 6 moves on to talk about the gospel: "which has come to you." We've looked at that. That means that the gospel is present in our lives, as the foundation upon which we build our lives. Then it says, "Just as in all the world, it is constantly bearing fruit." "Just as in all the world" – this refers to the gospel moving out from Jerusalem and going out to the world. This is the world of the Roman Empire that is in view here. As the gospel was present in the city of Colossae, so it was widespread in the New Testament known world. In fact, Colossae was a significant city of the ancient world. And the impact of Colossae was widespread. So, if the gospel were widely spread around the city of Colossae as it was, that meant that it was a lighthouse that was influencing areas of the Roman world in all direction.

Colossae was not just a rinky-tink country town. It was a significant city in the ancient world. And this Word of God has been all over this city. It has had great impact. And now it has spread from there, under its impact, to the areas of the Roman Empire.

Here are a few examples of that being mentioned in Scripture. Take a look at Acts 19:10: "And this took place for two years so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Now what this is talking about is that another center of spiritual enlightenment was the city of Ephesus. And the apostle Paul had entered there in the city of Ephesus, and for a while he taught in the synagogue (for about three months), and then they threw him out. What was he teaching? Lies? No, he was teaching the Word of God. He was teaching the truth. And when you don't want to hear the truth, you have to silence the communicator. You do that in two ways. You stay away from synagogue meetings, so you don't listen to him, and you don't hear the truth, as people do today; or else you try to kill the communicator. You get rid of him. You silence him one way or another. Here, they decided finally to kill Paul.

So, in order to get out from that friction, he moved out. And when he moved out of the synagogue instruction, a lot of the people who had listened to him, and had become convinced from the Old Testament Scriptures that what Paul was teaching was true about Jesus Christ, and they went to a school which was run by a man named Tyrannus, and for two years Paul taught in that school. That was a long stay for him in one place. And it was constantly instructing the Word of God. And then, what he instructed people carried with them throughout Asia. We call it Asia Minor. It's a great province – one of the provinces of Asia: of the Asia Minor sector. And Asia was an important area of the ancient world. And Jews and gentiles all over Asia heard the gospel. The gospel spread amazingly through that ancient culture.

We also had this told us in 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9: "For the Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Acacia, but also in every place." This is a Greek peninsula: "In every place, your faith toward God has gone forth so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." There you have an example again of the repentance we taught you about in the previous session. The only way you can repent is you turn from evil to the truth. That means that you turn from dead idols to Jesus Christ as Savior. And Paul said, "All over Macedonia (all over Achaia) – major provinces of Greece, the Word of God went out, and we got word of it."

Philippians 1:12-13 also indicates how the gospel bore fruit in the ancient world: "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well-known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard, and to everyone else." The Praetorian Guard in the Roman military was an elitist force. It would be in our culture like the Green Berets in the army, or the Marine Corp. And the Praetorian Guard was assigned to guard Paul. They had duty rotations in guarding him. He is a prisoner here in Rome because of the fracas that developed in Jerusalem. And he has gone to Rome to demand that his case be tried before the emperor himself. Paul says, "This was a bad thing, but God has turned it to good, because my imprisonment and my testimony has permeated the Praetorian Guard, and has permeated the military, and has permeated the upper echelons of the Roman administration. That was great. That was the first inroads of Christianity into the governmental circles. So, here again is the stress upon the progress of the gospel.

One more example, in Colossians 1:23, the last part of the verse: "If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established, and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister." Now, this is a hyperbole. He is speaking in a general term. He is saying, "The gospel has just gone everywhere" – not exactly, literally everywhere, but its impact and its spread was astounding, because they didn't have the kind of medium of communication that we have today. This had to be person-to-person, and travel-to-travel – people moving, and taking the Word with them.

One of the history writers quotes one of the early church fathers. These were the people who followed the apostles, and for the next two hundred years of Christianity, this same spreading of the gospel bearing fruit was characteristic of the Word of God. This writer says, "This rapid progress of the gospel in the early days has ever been the amazement of the historian. Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, wrote, 'There is no people, Greek or barbarian, or of any other race, by which appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgiving are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things.'" Justin Martyr, one of the great ancient historians, says, "You can't go anywhere among cultured Greeks or ignorant barbarians, but where you find people addressing prayers to the living Creator God because of Jesus Christ.

The writer goes on and says, "Half a century later, Tertullian adds: 'We are but of yesterday and yet we already fill your city's; islands camps; your palace; senate; and, forum. We have left you only your temples." On the basis of all the data available, it has been estimated that by the close of the apostolic period, the total number of Christian disciples had reached a half-million. That's with no radio; that's with no television; and, that's with no books. By the end of the death of John, at the end of the first century, there were already half-a-million Christians already in the ancient world, spread everywhere.

So, this is what's behind Paul's statement that this gospel, which is now present in us as our foundation for our lives, is known in Colossae, but it is also known in all the world of humanity, and it is: "bearing fruit." The word "fruit" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the Greek word "karpophoreo" (kar-pof-or-eh'-o), K A R P O P H O R E O. "Karpophoreo" means reproductive energy – reproductive energy which is inherent in the gospel of free grace salvation. The gospel is a supernaturally reproductive organism. The gospel has a power, and that's why you must present it, because, as Paul says, "It is the power of God." Mark, when he wrote his gospel, in Mark 4:26-29, he says, "And He was saying (Jesus), 'The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil, and goes to bed at night, and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows. How, he himself, does not know. The soil produces crops by itself: first the blade; then the head; and, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." Here, the point is that the farmer knows that he can plant the seed, and he will get a crop, but he doesn't know how that happens. The seed and the soil have an inherent power. It is a "karpophoreo" condition.

This is also indicated in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 55:11 says, "So shall My Word be, which goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me empty without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." What is that scripture saying? It is saying that the Word of God is a seed which you plant, and it will bear its fruit. That's why Christian education is our front line of defense for our children. This is why, at the earliest days, we teach them the Word of God. That seed becomes their frame of reference. That seed grows into the guidance point in their lives. And all you have to do is listen to some of these little kids that run around here, whose parents are faithful in alerting them; in planting the seed of the Word of God in their minds; in, giving them guidance in learning and memorizing scripture; and, in interpreting it for them. So, they, like Jesus, stand up, and they amaze adults with what they know about doctrine. And I hear them talking about it sometimes, and I'm amazed that these little kids know that much about the Word of God. Is it because they're all smart? Not necessarily. It's because there is an inherent power in the Word of God. You put it in your child's mind, and I guarantee you it will sprout. And he should at least have the chance to know the direction that his life should take.

The gospel had great exposure through some of these large cities of the ancient world, and it spread from them, and it bore its fruit. The spread of the message of grace-gospel salvation, of course, was always under satanic counterattack in Paul's day, and it is even more so in our day. The devil does not take this kindly. And you'll find that anytime you try to reach out to people with the gospel, the devil will be there to counter you in some way. You must not get discouraged. You must not take it personally. It is bearing fruit.

There was never a time when the fruit-bearing of the gospel was dependent upon people. Its effectiveness does not require human gimmicks. You don't have to do something with the gospel to make it attractive or to make it operative. This is the way evangelists often do. They bring in somebody who's a famous person in society, and he gives a testimony in order that they can prove to people that the gospel is significant, and true, and should be considered. That is wrong. Many times those people are new Christians, and they don't even know what they're talking about. The gospel is a seed that is inherently powerful. That's the meaning of the word. And all it has to do is to be planted.

**Paul**

There was never a more effective agent in proclaiming the gospel than was the apostle Paul, who himself knew the power, because of how it had transformed him personally from an enemy of God to a martyr. This apostle Paul did not depend upon his rhetorical skills in presenting the gospel. It was powerful. He was the reason it spread so rapidly. He was powerful in his presentation of the gospel. But you remember in the book of Corinthians, they made fun of him by saying, "He is weak in his words," from which we get the suspicion that he wasn't too good at getting up and speaking to people; and, that he wasn't too good at being able to speak smoothly and not stumble around and whatever. But when he presented the gospel, the power was not in his words. And he said, "I didn't come to you with rhetorical powers, but I came to you with the power of the Word of God." Paul understood the life-bearing power of the gospel of the grace of God as the only way to eternal life in heaven.

So the gospel keeps bearing his fruit today. People are saved as God intended them to be. But if you put in a false gospel, it doesn't save anybody. It just dooms them to hell. What a wonderful, wonderful thing it is that this gospel has this power. And this Greek word "karpophoreo" is constantly bearing fruit. It means that it just keeps doing it, and keeps doing it. And this word in the Greek language is in the middle voice, which means that mankind itself is benefited by the fact that the gospel bears fruit. It affects society because Romans 1:16 says, "It is the power of God."

So every one of you should clearly get in mind the bad news / good news presentation of the gospel. I've been happy to see several of you come running up to the overhead projector after we made that presentation to jot down the word and the Scriptures so that you can get it up in your mind, so that you can suddenly use it when you should. And this goes for you young people too. You may be confronted with the need to give the gospel just like that. You can't stumble around; you can't misdirect it; and, you can't cause it to be confused in people's minds. You may not have that much time.

Many years ago, when we used to go to Tennessee in our bus for our summer camping program, there were no interstate highway systems. And it would be an all-night drive from here, 800 miles I think it was. And some of those Arkansas roads that we would go through were just small regular highways. And very often there was a section that we'd go through with a lot of rivers and swamp areas. There is a lot of swamp stuff in Arkansas. And the sides of those roads would have these concrete abutments. They were bridges.

Well, early one morning, dawn was coming up, and we were all tired. I was at the wheel, and all of a sudden we came over a hill, and there's the bridge, and there's the car that had smashed itself into the side of the abutment. The man had gone through the windshield, and he was lying out on the pavement. The woman was trapped in the car. So we stopped the bus, and while somebody flagged the car down to alert the police and get an ambulance there, I got in the car and talked to this woman, while somebody else was trying to help this man. The first thing I smelled was the alcohol. So, I had an inkling as to what was happening and what this lifestyle was.

So, I spoke to this woman and asked her how she was, and she mumbled something. And then I thought she died, but she just passed out. She moved again, and I got her attention. I said, "Do you know who Jesus Christ is?" And she says, "Oh, yes." And then I went on from there. And speaking just as quickly as I could, I told her. "He has a great life for you. Are you interested in that?" And she kept passing out, and I kept thinking she died. But it was a situation where I had to go right to the point. And whether she was saved or not; whether she accepted Christ or not; or, whether that was a seed which was planted or not, it was a true seed. And it didn't take my words or my cleverness, but it just had to be a clear presentation of the gospel. It was planted. And if she's one of God's elect, the power of the gospel words themselves will bear their own fruition.

So, consider yourself privileged that God has taken you into His family, and enabled you to bring the gospel in as the foundation of your life. Consider yourself privileged that you are not asking people to invite Jesus into their hearts; you're not asking people to give their lives to Jesus; or, you're not asking people to do all those cutesy pop-Christianity phrases that are meaningless, and that keep people out of heaven. If you're ever in a church service, and somebody gets up and gives the gospel, and invites people with phrases like that, your blood should chill. And you should realize that you are in a terrible context of delusion, and break yourself off from it, because if that delusion is there on the gospel, you can count on delusion at every critical point of the Christian life, and it will bring you down. Thank God for the gospel, for it is the power of God and the salvation.

Father, we thank You for this close of the Lord's day, and for the good things that we've shared with one another. We pray that these believers will look back from eternity and be especially happy that they were here this day. May we take the Word of God seriously. May we have a new and deepened depreciation for the gospel, and for the fact that it is the foundation for us to build upon.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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