

THE GOSPEL

Three Lessons On Evangelism

Lesson 1 -- You And The Gospel

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5, 6

Intro: This lesson will be followed by two other lessons dealing with the subject of evangelism. They will be, the Lord willing:

Lesson 2: God and the Gospel.

Lesson 3: Sinners and the Gospel.

My reason for doing this is fourfold:

- 1) It is a fitting follow up for our studies in the Epistle of James. Throughout that Epistle James has shown his concern for the Gospel, for a true understanding of the Gospel, and for the testimony of the Gospel. Cf. James 1:16-27; 2:14-26; 5:19, 20.
- 2) This is one of the chief responsibilities of the Church, the Body of Christ, in every generation. The Scriptures make it clear that we have three main tasks in the Church:
 - a) To glorify God.
 - b) To edify believers.
 - c) To preach the Gospel to those who do not know the Lord.The Church today needs help in all of these areas.
- 3) It is very apparent that Christians are not really witnessing. There are exceptions, but this is generally true of the people of God. We must also admit that there is much being done in the name of Christ and the Gospel which would be better left undone.
- 4) Because of the methods of evangelism which have been used, we have a situation in our churches which needs to be addressed: It is the problem of having people in our churches, some in places of great responsibility, who have never been saved themselves. They may think that they are, but the evidence is not there.

And so I want to deal with these. It may take more than the three weeks that we have left. If so, we will continue with this when the classes begin next Fall, the Lord willing.

The first that I want to take up is the question of our own salvation. We are very clearly admonished in 2 Cor. 13:5, 6 to examine ourselves. Paul addressed this exhortation to every believer in the Corinthian church, not just to some he had doubts about. This is important for all of us to do. If the evidence is there, it will add to our joy in the Lord. If we look and find that the evidence is not there, what better time is there than now to discover that. We will know very definitely one second after we die, but then it will be too late to make things right with God if they are not right before we die.

What has caused the situation that we have in our churches today?

It should be enlightening to us that this is not a new situation. It was a problem in the early Church. The last two verses of the Epistle of James indicates this. We also have examples like Judas and Demas to serve as a warning. In the parable of the wheat and the tares we can see that the Enemy who has done this is the Devil. In every generation it has been a very effective method that he has used to cripple, and often to destroy, the fellowship and testimony of the people of God. We

have used methods of evangelism that have caused many people to think that they are saved when in many instances they are not! People have been led to believe that they cannot be saved unless they go forward in a public meeting to "confess Christ." Pressures of various kinds have been exerted on people to get them to receive Christ. When Spurgeon saw this coming, largely through the ministry of Dwight L. Moody whom he had invited to England, Spurgeon said that if that method of evangelism took hold, churches would be filled with unregenerate people. And his prediction has certainly come true! One of the greatest problems in the work of the church today is unregenerate church members.

And then we have the fact that many have been raised in Christian homes, have become familiar with Christian doctrines and Biblical terminology, and have thought that this is what it means to be a Christian. So many church members today, professing Christians, have no understanding of what it means to have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

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So there is a great need for everyone who professes to be a Christian to make sure that he, or she, really is a Christian, a true child of God, born again, a new creature in Christ.

This is what Paul was directing the church at Corinth to do in the words of 2 Cor. 13:5:

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;
prove your own selves.

Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you,
except ye be reprobates?

I have already tried to show that there is a need for this. No true Christian should be offended by such a command in Scripture. And anyone who claims to be a Christian, but upon examining himself discovers that he (or she) is not, will be eternally grateful to God if such an examination leads to his (or her) salvation.

Let me discuss this under two headings:

- 1) What are we to do?
- 2) How can we do it?

I. WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

Paul gave two orders here:

- 1) They were to examine themselves.
- 2) They were to prove themselves.

First of all,

A. The examination.

The word in the original is _____. Spurgeon once said, among other things, of this word, that it is a legal term. We are not in this instance to try someone else, but we are to try ourselves, put ourselves on trial. If I claim to be a Christian, and really test my right to make that claim, what will the evidence show?

The word indicates that there is more to being a Christian than

just claiming verbally to be a Christian. We, acting as lawyers, are to conduct a sincere inquiry into the evidence to make sure that we are not "reprobates." A reprobate is one whose case does not stand up under examination. His claim is spurious, false, not genuine. Such a person is a counterfeit. He claims to be a Christian, but he is not. However, it is our hope that this investigation will not show that we are false, but that we are true believers in Christ.

Now we need to be very careful in this examination because of what Jeremiah said about the human heart. I refer to his words found in Jer. 17:9, 10. He was speaking on behalf of the LORD:

The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately wicked: who can know it?

The answer:

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins,
even to give every man according to his ways,
and according to the fruit of his doings.

This would mean that, while we are putting ourselves on trial, we are depending upon the LORD to assist us so that it will be a true examination. Everybody is to some extent self-deceived. But this is one place where we cannot afford to be wrong!

So our prayer should be the prayer of the Psalmist in Psalms 139: 23, 24:

Search me, O God, and know my heart:
try me, and know my thoughts:
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

David's purpose at the time may not have been exactly what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians, but the principle that we need the Lord's guidance in our examination applies in both instances.

Paul used this same word, "examine," in 1 Cor. 11:28 where we read that in connection with observing the Lord's Supper all of us are to examine ourselves, and then eat. So self-examination is something that we all should practise regularly, if not for salvation itself, yet surely to judge and forsake any sin that may be in our lives.

It is interesting that this word _____ is used in Heb. 11:17 of God's examination of Abraham when He called upon him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. It was not with the idea that Abraham would prove false, but that he would come through that examination, as Trenchard said (p. 280) "holier, humbler, stronger" than when he entered into it. And this, hopefully, will be the result of putting ourselves on trial with God's assistance. Even when we have our faith confirmed, we can see weaknesses in our lives, things that need to be changed. And so it can prove to be profitable for all of us whatever the verdict may be.

In conducting such an examination we must give attention not just to our knowledge, but to our practice. And not just to our outward performance, but to the inner man--our thoughts, our motives, the things that are going on in our hearts. We need to look at every aspect of our lives. We need to question our habits, listen to our words, look at our emotions. We need to

raise questions about all that we are and do and say. And we are to do this knowing that God knows the truth, and that is what we want to know. We cannot allow ourselves to be mistaken here.

But notice that the question is, Are we in the faith? This is not just an examination of what we know, but where we are in our relationship with the Gospel and with Christ. It is possible for people to know a lot about Christ without knowing Christ. It is possible to know that He is the Savior, the only Savior, without actually trusting Him to be our Savior! Can we see in our lives the clear-cut evidence that we are in Christ, and that Christ is in us? This is the issue.

One more thing before we proceed to the examination itself: And this has to do with the word, "prove." "Prove your own selves."

B. The proof.

The words "examine" and "prove" in the original Greek are closely related words. They are in some respects, synonyms. But there are also differences between them. Both speak of a testing. Perhaps we could distinguish between them in this verse in this way: The examination is the trial; the proof is the verdict. But in connection with the anticipated verdict, the word "prove" anticipates a good verdict, a confirmation that the one being tried is a true Christian, not a counterfeit!

Now we can look at this in two ways:

- 1) I examine myself, and in the light of the evidence, I am assured that I am a child of God. This is good. Nothing could be better.
- 2) I examine myself in the light of Scripture and discover that I am not a Christian. If through this I realize my need, and turn to Christ, then this, too, is good. Nothing could be better.

So the object of the examination is to be good, whatever the verdict may be. Of course, if a person examines himself and finds that he is a "reprobate," and then does nothing about it, he has not profited at all from the examination.

Now let us proceed with the examination. This is our second point.

II. HOW CAN WE DO IT?

Let me begin by pointing out:

A. What we must not do.

We must not take our own preconceived ideas about what a Christian is. Nor can we afford to go just on what other people may think a Christian is. We must be right! And, if we are to be right, there is only one ultimate and final authority for us to consult, and that is the Bible, the Word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Any opinion which is in conflict with the Scriptures IS WRONG!

Many people have the wildest ideas about what a Christian is.

Some feel that everybody is a child of God. Others feel that all Americans are Christian on the belief that this is supposed to be a Christian country. Others think that if you are a good person, you are a Christian--if you obey the laws, pay your taxes, are a loyal citizen, are a good husband or wife, father or mother, etc. Thousands of people would say that if you are a church member you are a Christian, especially if you have been baptized and take communion. And this is not all of the ideas that you will find, but this gives us a good sampling of the ideas that people have.

Now many of these things are things you expect to see in a Christian, but nothing that I have mentioned in this list actually makes a person a Christian. So we cannot start with any of them to prove that we are Christians.

Does our text give us any help?

Yes, it does. It tells us very clearly that the person who is "in the faith" is a person who has Jesus Christ in him! This is what makes a person a Christian. He has a personal relationship with Christ. He has put his trust in Jesus Christ, he believes in Christ as his Savior, knowing that Jesus Christ, by His death on the Cross offered a sacrifice that is sufficient for the forgiveness and salvation of all who will ever come to Him for salvation. We do not go to church to be saved. We do not take communion to be saved. We are not baptized to be saved. We do not give our money to church to be saved. We are saved because we have personally trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior, and we believe that we are going to heaven because He is our Savior. And yet I have heard people talk about being a Christian who have absolutely nothing to say about the Lord Jesus Christ. I tell you now that they are "reprobates." Cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12.

But can we stop with a person's verbal profession of faith. The Bible say that we cannot! Sometimes evangelists, or their assistants, will give a glowing report that hundreds, or even thousands, have come to Christ. We always hope that their words are true, but no person knows for sure how many have been saved until the evidence can be seen in their lives!

I am not splitting hairs. I am telling you the truth. We are always thankful if people are saved even when the wrong methods are used. God is sovereign, and God is gracious. But while we rejoice that some are saved, think of the people who may have been lulled to sleep eternally because they have done something that some preacher told them to do, but they never really trusted Christ in their hearts. Romans 10:9, 10 says,

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,
and shalt believe in thine heart
 that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;
 and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Now it is this "confession" that we need to be concerned with. IS IT THE PUBLIC CONFESSION AT SOME MEETING THAT PAUL WAS TALKING ABOUT? If so, he never said any more about it. No, that is not what he was talking about. He was talking about the confession of a

life, a life-long confession, a confession of the mouth, to be sure, but also the testimony of a transformed life by which a person gives proof that he has truly been saved, that he is a genuine Christian.

So now we turn to:

B. What we must do.

We must consult the Scriptures. What are the evidences, according to Scripture, that a person is a real Christian, a child of God, born again, a new creature in Christ?

We have already seen the first one:

1. A personal knowledge of and acquaintance with, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do I know what the Bible teaches about Christ? Do I believe it? Is He my Savior, my only hope for heaven? Do I love Him? Do I love to learn of Him? Do I want to be like Him? Do I know that I can only come to God, worship God, and pray to God, in Christ? Is the chief desire of my life that I would please Him in all that I am, do, and say?

How do we answer these questions? Jesus Christ comes first as I examine my heart to make sure that I am in the faith.

As a result of our relationship to Jesus Christ, other things follow. The Book of the Bible that deals with this more than any other is the little Epistle of 1 John. As John was concluding the Epistle, he said what his purpose was in writing it. Here are his words:

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God;

that ye may know that ye have eternal life,

and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

Some of the better MSS omit the last statement, and so some of our translations conclude with the statement, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

So for the rest of this lesson, I want to examine the Epistle of 1 John with you, gathering the evidence that we need to apply to ourselves if our examination of ourselves is to be what it must be if we are to come to the right conclusion. We may find other evidences in Scripture, but what John gave us in this Epistle are the main evidences, and, if there are others, they are somehow related to these.

There are two kinds of evidences: doctrinal and practical. And so we will follow those divisions in discussing them.

2. The other evidences.

- a. The doctrinal evidence: the doctrine of Christ.

Cf. 1 John 1:1-4; 2:22-26; 4:1-6; 5:1a, 5, 9-12, 20.

- b. The practical evidence:

- 1) Walking in the light (1 John 1:5-2:2).

This really is the keynote for the practical life of the child of God. The things that John mentioned after this develop out of this.

- 2) Keeping His commandments (1 John 2:3-6).
- 3) Love of the brethren (1 John 2:9-11).
- 4) He does not love the world (1 John 2:15-17).
- 5) Living righteously (1 John 2:28-3:10). This means being Christ-like, holy, not sinning.
- 6) Love of the brethren (1 John 3:10-24; 4:7-21).
- 7) Keeping His commandments (1 John 5:1-3). This is evidence of our love for God.
- 8) Overcoming the world (1 John 5:4, 5).
- 9) He prays (1 John 5:14-16).
- 10) He does not sin (1 John 5:18).

To summarize the practical evidences,

- 1) He lives by the Word of God.
- 2) He loves the people of God.
- 3) He avoids sin and the worldly life.
- 4) He prays.
- 5) He has the witness in his own heart that, in the light of Scripture, he is a child of God.

Concl: Now apply this test to your own life, and let the Lord show you through His Word if you are "in the faith." If you are, you can praise Him, and ask Him to make you more like He would have you to be. If not, this is the time and the place to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not delay. Turn to Christ, trust in Him, and you, too, will be saved.

Cf. Paul's testimony in Phil. 3.

THE GOSPEL

Lesson 2 -- God and the Gospel

Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14

Intro: In our first lesson on the Gospel I sought, under the subject of You And The Gospel, to point out the importance of making sure that we are really saved. Our text was 2 Corinthians 13:5, 6. We need to "examine" ourselves to make sure that we are actually "in the faith." This exhortation from the Apostle Paul presupposes that it is possible for a person to think that he (or she) is a Christian, when, in fact, he is not! This exhortation also indicates that there are certain, Biblical, God-given ways in which we can "examine" ourselves so as to be able to know that we are truly saved. And so, in applying the test of Scripture, we will either be assured that we are saved, or we will discover that we are not saved.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:16,

The Spirit itself (himself) beareth witness with our spirit,
that we are the children (_____) of God.

This testimony of the Holy Spirit to our spirits is not just a feeling, but it is a conviction arising from the sincere application of the Word to our own hearts and lives. Throughout Scripture we find various tests, but the one book of the Bible which deals with the evidences of salvation in particular is the Epistle of 1 John. We briefly went through that Epistle looking at the various proofs of salvation, such as:

- 1) Walking in the light--the foundational evidence.
- To indicate what that means John went on to mention:
- 2) Keeping the commandments of Scripture.
 - 3) Love for the brethren.
 - 4) Not loving the world.
 - 5) Living righteous, holy lives, which also means, not sinning.
 - 6) Overcoming the world.
 - 7) He prays.

Such an examination in Paul's day (which was also the time when the Apostle John lived), was necessary because even then, as has always been the case, there were those who professed to be saved, but who were not really saved. As we sometimes say, they were professors, but not possessors! The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:19,

They went out from us, but they were not of us;
for if they had been of us,
they would no doubt have continued with us:
but they went out, that they might be made manifest
that they were not all of us.

And we can add to the Apostle John's words, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we find in Matt. 7:21-23:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,
shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;
but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.
Many will say to me in that day,
Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?
and in thy name have cast out devils?
and in thy name done many wonderful works?
And then Will I profess unto them, I never knew you:
depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

The Lord's use of the word, "many," indicates that this was no small problem, and that there were are, and we must assume, still are, "many" who think that they are saved, but are not.

There are many reasons for this:

- 1) The Devil certainly is a master of deception.
- 2) We have a tendency to be "religious," but our hearts are also deceptive.
- 3) We can easily think that because a person's lifestyle has changed, that he has been changed spiritually. Reformation is not necessarily regeneration.
- 4) A person can grow up in a home where the parents are Christians, and can attend a church where the Gospel is faithfully presented, and can mistake a familiarity with the language of Scripture with actual salvation.

Undoubtedly there are other reasons which could be mentioned, but we are thinking in this brief series about the Gospel message itself. And so in this lesson I want us to think about:

- 1) The Gospel in its relation to God.
- 2) The Gospel in its relation to the sinner, i.e., the person who is not saved--those who make no claim to be a Christian as well as those who claim to be, but are not!

In addition to the Scriptures, I want to recommend two books to you:

- 1) Evangelism And The Sovereignty of God, by J. I. Packer.
- 2) Tell The Truth, by Will Metzger. Mr. Metzger has been, and, I assume, still is on the staff of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

You will find both of these books very helpful.

Mr. Metzger uses two terms expressions in his book which, I believe, are very important in analyzing the work of evangelism today. They are:

- 1) Message-centered/Method-centered (p. 35).
- 2) God-centered/Man-centered (p. 38).

Mr. Metzger brings out very clearly that in today's evangelism we are method-centered, not message-centered, and that we are man-centered, not God-centered.

Now, in speaking of evangelism we need to deal with both of these issues. And we need to realize that just as it is possible for people to be sincerely deceived about their own salvation, so it is also possible for us to be sincerely deceived about the work of evangelism. There is no need for us to be wrong IF WE KNOW THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE.

And so I raise the question this morning, What is the Gospel? And I raise a second question: What is our task in evangelizing the world? I may deal in part with that today, but I really want to get into that next week.

Now I am going to be dealing with some themes today which many Christians do not like. Some of you may not like them. You may already be prejudiced against them. But I ask you to ask the Lord to give you an open heart toward what I am going to say. If I do not prove what I am going to be saying from the Word of God, then don't believe me. But if I do, then I trust that, if it differs from what you have been taught in the past, and what you have believed about the Gospel and evangelism,

you will open your heart to the teaching of the Word of God. I can assure you that what I am going to give you today, if believed, will give you a greater burden than you have ever had before to see people saved.

Please turn now to Thessalonians 2:13, 14 (Read.) I would like to suggest that you commit to memory these two verses.

This is Paul's comprehensive statement of salvation. And you can see immediately that it is God-centered, not man-centered. Salvation is a work of God on man's behalf, which God planned even before creation, and a work which God does from start to finish!

Note first of all,

I. PAUL'S THANKSGIVING TO GOD:

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you,
brethren beloved of the Lord ...

See this same expression in 2 Thess. 1:3.

These expressions mean that Paul was indebted to God for the work of salvation that He had done in the hearts of the Thessalonian believers. He did not take the credit to himself. Neither did he commend the believers as being even in part responsible for their salvation. One commentator expressed it this way:

What an unceasing debt of gratitude we owe to God
on your behalf, Brothers beloved
not only of us but of the Lord! (Milligan, p. 106).

Lenski, the Lutheran commentator, wrote this, speaking of Paul's praise in chapter 1, and again in chapter 2:

Like two arms these thanksgivings embrace all that they
encircle and hold it all up to God in deep gratitude
(p. 438).

This expression, when we consider what Paul said immediately afterwards, indicates that salvation is of the Lord--from start to finish!

Paul was the one who had taken the Gospel to Thessalonica. It was through his work that people had been saved, and a church established. But he gave all of the glory to God, and said that his debt to God was never-ending. He took none of the credit for himself. He gave none of it to the Thessalonians. Be sure to note this carefully.

Note secondly,

II. THE REASON FOR HIS THANKSGIVING TO GOD:

... because God hath from the beginning
chosen you to salvation ...

What was Paul speaking about here? He was speaking of the doctrine of election! Cf. 1 Thess. 1:2-4.

How did Paul know their election? Were they marked in some way? Certainly in no way that he could see. Did he have some supernatural insight which we do not have? No! He certainly never

claimed to have anything like that. The only way he knew that they were chosen of God was by the very fact that they trusted the Lord.

What did Paul mean, "from the beginning"?

Let the Apostle Paul himself answer that from his words written later to the Ephesian church. Cf. Eph. 1:3-6. See also 2 Tim. 1:9. So our election was not based upon our worthiness, nor even upon the fact that God knew that we would accept the Lord. It was all "according to his own purpose and grace ... "

Let me say as I have said many times before: God had the right to do anything that He wanted to do in salvation. He could have decided to let all people go to hell. But He did not do that. He could have decided to save everybody who ever lived. Obviously He did not decide to do that. Or He could decide to save some, but not all. And this is what He determined to do.

We all, at least to begin with, have trouble with this. It seems that the Lord, in order to treat men fairly, would treat them all alike. But that is not what God has done! He has not treated us all equally in any other way. Some people are born with poor health; others with good health. Some are born rich; others are born in poverty. Some people have sharp minds; others are seriously handicapped.

God has the right to do whatever He pleases. He owes none of us anything. He has the right to do with His own whatever He pleases. Let me read to you from Romans 9, verses 1-24.

We may have trouble with this truth, but let us believe what the Scriptures say, and trust God to make it all clearer to us as we go on in seeking to understand the Word better than we do now.

One thing we must never lose sight of in thinking of salvation, and how people are brought to Christ. And that is the nature of man. I remind you of what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said in John 6:44.

Why is it that "no man can come" to Christ unless he is drawn by the Father? Because he has been hopelessly ruined by sin. He is dead. He is blinded. He is at enmity with God. He is in bondage to sin and to Satan. He is perfectly satisfied to remain the way he is. So whenever you see a person coming to Christ, you know that God has been at work in his heart.

Can God draw all men, all men without exception? Of course He can. Does He? No, or they would come. Contrary to what many will say, God has not left this matter of salvation up to men. It is not a matter of man's so-called "free will." Man's will is in bondage just like he is! According to Phil. 2:13, "It is God which worketh in us both ... "

But let us go on.

III. THE WAY OF SALVATION:

... through sanctification of the Spirit
and belief of the truth:
Whereunto he called you by our gospel ...

Two mighty powers are exercised by God in the salvation of every person: the Spirit of God, and the Word of God.

Our "sanctification" is by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us in setting us apart for Christ (the primary meaning of the word). But He also continues His sanctifying work in us as we become more and more like our Lord--which is holiness. It is utterly impossible for any person to be saved apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We are "born of the Spirit" (cf. John 3:1-8).

For this work of salvation the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God. The Apostle Peter wrote that we are "born again, ... by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

But the Word must be believed! And here someone will say, "Is this not man's part in salvation?"

It is man's responsibility to believe, but we will see why the Apostle Paul praised God for their faith when we see that faith, too, is a gift of God. Cf. Rom. 10:17; Heb. 12:2; Eph. 2:8, 9. When the Word is presented to a sinner, God, in a way which we do not understand, nor do we need to understand it, imparts faith to those whom He intends to save.

Therefore, in witnessing, as we will see more in detail later, we must be careful to see that THE MESSAGE is carefully and thoroughly presented to the sinner.

But there is one other thing that we need to consider in the salvation of the sinner. It is THE CALLING OF GOD.

We all should realize that there is a general call that is issued to everyone. "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). Also John 3:16. But not all who hear this general call, come.

However, there is also what we have named, the effectual call, or the effective call. This is when a person hears the Gospel, and comes to Christ. He has been "called ... by our Gospel." We do not know when this is going to happen, but we know that it has happened over and over again, in our lives, and in the lives of others. The Gospel strikes the heart of the sinner, and, like Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, all resistance is gone! He was called, and he came. In this we see the sovereignty of God in salvation.

The important thing that we need to remember is that God calls by the Gospel. Therefore, we can use the best (so-called) methods, but unless God uses the Gospel to speak to the heart of the sinner, he will remain in his sins. Romans 1:16 tells us that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And so we must know what the Gospel is, and make sure that that is what we present to sinners.

Now my last point.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF SALVATION:

... to the obtaining of the glory
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the ultimate objective of God in the salvation of a sinner?
It is to make that person like the Lord Jesus Christ.

How is this accomplished?

It is the work of God by the Holy Spirit using the Word of God. It is evidence of God's work in our hearts when we desire to obey the Word, and then actually obey it. It is evidence of God's work in our hearts when we love God's people. It is evidence of God's work in our hearts when we hate and avoid sin. It is evidence of God's work in our hearts when we pray, and when we want to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. And some day we will be like He is!

Cf. Rom. 8:28-30; Phil. 3:20,21; 1 John 3:1-3.

No person with an enlightened mind would ever think that he can make himself (or herself) like the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a work of God, and that work will not be completed until we are with the Lord. But it is absolutely certain that you and I will be like the Lord because it is God Who has planned it, Who is now doing it, and Who will see the work through to the end.

Concl: Let us ask the Lord to help us to understand these truths. When we do, it will fill our hearts with praise to the Lord, and it will give us a greater burden than ever before to see people brought to Christ by the sovereign grace of our Almighty God and heavenly Father.

THE GOSPEL

Lesson 3 -- Sinners and the Gospel

Text: Romans 1:1-17

We, as Christians, today, members of the Body of Christ, have a threefold ministry in the world:

- 1) Our primary purpose must be to glorify God. We do this by seeking to please Him. And we please Him by obeying Him, obeying what He has told us to do in His Word. We refuse to take credit for any way in which God is pleased to use us, but we give the glory, to God.
- 2) We are to be concerned about our own spiritual growth, and about the spiritual growth of every other believer in Christ. This is the main purpose that the local church has toward its people. The Bible speaks of it as edification. Edification is produced by learning the truths of the Bible, by prayer, and by obedience to the Word. None of this would be possible if it were not for the Holy Spirit. Edification is a personal matter with each believer.
- 3) Our commission as far as the world of non-Christians is concerned is that we "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The Lord stated the same truth in Acts 1:8. (Quote.) In the Mark passage we are told to proclaim the Gospel message; in the Acts passage we are told that the message has to do with a Person: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." So it is very clear that we cannot proclaim that message without telling people about Christ--the Lord Jesus Christ!

We have considered together the very great importance of knowing that we are the Lord's. We did that under the subject, You and the Gospel. It is quite ridiculous for us to talk of telling others about Christ if we do not know Him ourselves.

Last week we considered the subject, God and the Gospel. This is a theme that is neglected today. We are not sales people going out to try to win as many people as we can to the Lord--like firemen trying to save as many as they can from a burning building. No, God's work is not as uncertain and indefinite as that. We saw that God determined before the foundation of the world that there would be salvation, what that salvation was to be, and even who would be saved. Salvation might not be what we think that it should be, but that is immaterial. Salvation is what God planned it to be, and that is what is important for us to learn.

Today we come to the subject, Sinners and the Gospel. And I hope that the Lord will let me cover a lot of ground in this hour because there is much to be said.

We have the task of taking the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to sinners. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," Paul said in 1 Tim. 1:15. I do not use that word to indicate that some are sinners, and others are not. We are all sinners. But we use that expression to refer to people who do not believe the Gospel, those who have not received Christ as their Savior, those who are not saved, not born again, not the children of God. Christians are sinners, too, but the Bible speaks of them as saints. So let us understand how we are using the term, sinners.

Now we are ready to ask the question, How does the Bible describe sinners?

I. SINNERS.

To state that question in another way we can ask, How has sin affected every sinner? It is very important that all of us be able to give the right answer to this question. It is really because we as Christians do not pay sufficient attention to this question that we have been satisfied to use a lot of the false methods in evangelism that have become so popular today. How does the Bible describe sinners?

This is a big question, and I do not have the time in one hour to discuss it fully. But let me give some of the main answers to this important question.

- A. The sinner is a child of wrath, i.e., he is under the judgment of God. Cf. Eph. 2:3b.
- B. The sinner is spiritually dead. Cf. Eph. 2:1, 5. This means that he is separated from God, without any ability to do any thing that is pleasing to God. This eliminates any possibility that he could save himself by doing works that would please God. He does not have that capacity.
- C. The sinner is a slave, a bondsman.
 - 1. To his sin. Cf. John 8:34. Solomon stated it this way:
His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself,
and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins
(Prov. 5:22).
 - 2. To the Devil. Cf. Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:3, 4.

When we understand this, we will never again talk about man's "free will." There is no such thing. Man is totally in bondage, and this includes his will.

- D. The sinner is at enmity with God, in rebellion against Him. Cf. Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21. This means that he does not want God, which also means that he does not want to be saved. He does not believe that he needs to be saved. Nothing is more distasteful to him than talk about the Bible, about Christ, and about salvation. His heart even deceives him into believing that he is OK, and perhaps even acceptable to God, without Christ.

Can you think of any situation that is more hopeless than this? We are to carry the Gospel to those who do not want us to come to them, who are not able to understand what we are talking about, who would be unable to come to Christ if they wanted to, and who are perfectly content to go their own way, and to remain in their sin, rather than listening to and considering and believing the Gospel message. This is what we are speaking about when we refer to THE DOCTRINE OF TOTAL DEPRAVITY. People are totally unable to do anything that would contribute in any way to their salvation.

I suggest to you that if seeing people saved were just a matter

between them and us, of our trying to get them to listen to us, and to understand us, and to receive Christ, man being what he is, there would be no more hopeless task in all of the world. The Lord had much more in mind than we usually think when He said that it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Cf. Luke 18:25. A rich man has more resources than one who is not rich. Therefore, if he cannot do it, neither can anyone else!

What, then, is our hope of seeing people saved?

Let us consider:

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Let us remember that when we are talking about the Holy Spirit, we are talking about a Member of the Godhead. He, like the Father, possesses sovereign power. He does not work "on his own," but He carries out the Father's will. He does not fit into our plans; He works according to God's plans. But, because He is God, He sovereignly and providentially leads us to the very people in whose hearts He intends to work. And it is this work of the Holy Spirit that is indispensable in the salvation of sinners.

What does He do?

- A. He convicts. Cf. John 16:7-11. This means that He gets the sinner's attention, enables him to understand his need and the supply of that need through the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives the sinner a desire to be saved, and He draws the sinner by His sovereign power to Christ, enabling him to believe in Christ for salvation. Man wills to come to Christ because the Holy Spirit makes him willing.
- B. He regenerates. This is what it means to be "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5, 6).

Salvation is a sovereign work of God, administered by the Holy Spirit. He gives spiritual birth to the hell-deserving sinner, making him instantaneously into a saint! And it is in this way that the work of the Lord, planned before the foundation of the world, is accomplished.

But is there no more to salvation than this? Where does the Gospel enter into the picture?

So my last point is:

III. THE GOSPEL.

When it comes to speaking about the Gospel, the question is: Where shall we begin? The Gospel message is found in the Bible all the way from Genesis to the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. There is only one Gospel--not two, or three; only ONE! The Gospel Abraham believed was the Gospel that saved the Apostle Paul, the same Gospel by which you and I have been saved.

But we have to take some passage, so let me ask you to turn to

Romans, chapter 1. Cf. Rom. 1:16.

This means that no one is ever saved apart from the Gospel. And so, if we are serious in wanting to see people really saved, as compared with just making a profession of faith, we need to make sure that we understand the Gospel.

Cf. what Paul said in Rom. 1:13-15. It is very clear that he wanted to have fruit, spiritual fruit, when he went to Rome. And it is equally clear that he expected that fruit to be the result of preaching the Gospel.

But what is the Gospel?

Again let me say that I am dealing with some tremendous themes in this lesson. I cannot say all that could be said, but I do want to say what needs to be said. So keep that in mind as from Romans 1 I discuss with you, the Gospel--WHAT IS IT?

A. It is "the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1).

This means it is God's Gospel. It is divine in origin. It did not come from men, but from God. God has been revealing the details of the Gospel all through human history, and we find the full account of the Gospel in God's Book, the Bible, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, we are accountable to Him as to what we are saying when we claim to be preaching the Gospel.

B. It is a message about Jesus Christ.

This is clear from Rom. 1:3, 4. We cannot preach the Gospel without telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ. Make sure you understand that, and that you make it your business to tell people about Christ.

But what are we to say about Jesus Christ?

In answering this question I do not mean to imply that every time we witness to people we have to give them a theological course on Christ. But we must be prepared to speak of Christ and to tell the essential things that have to do with our salvation.

What are they? Again, let me limit myself today to Romans 1.

1. The Gospel message is concerned with the Person of Christ.
 - a. He became a man (Rom. 1:3).
 - b. He always has been the Son of God (Rom. 1:4a).
2. The Gospel message is concerned with the Work of Christ.
Cf. Rom. 1:4b.

Here Paul only mentioned the resurrection of Christ, but obviously we would have to consider His death on the Cross, the crucifixion.

Our Lord's teachings were of the greatest importance. His works, His miracles, were also of supreme significance. But the most significant things that our Lord did here on earth with respect to the Gospel were His death and His resurrection.

Paul did not say here why our Lord died, but it is certainly clarified in the following verses. But we do have Paul's explanation in 1 Cor. 15:1-4 and Rom. 4:25. But let me deal with these in my next point.

3. The Gospel message deals with the righteousness of God. Cf. Rom. 1:17.

This tells us why Christ had to die. The Gospel message is a message that is centered in God. It was for us. It was the work of Christ. But "the righteousness of God" was the issue, and that explains why Christ died, and why only Christ could provide the kind of a sacrifice that was needed.

But there is one more point that Paul made in this passage.

4. The Gospel message has to do with faith, with believing. Cf. Rom. 1:16, 17.

No one is going to be saved who has not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, claiming Him as Savior. Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor when he asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? ... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30, 31). We are to trust in Christ and His work on the Cross as having satisfied the righteousness of God, and as being sufficient for the forgiveness and cleansing of our sins.

But who believes?

In Acts 13 when Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch of Pisidia preaching the Gospel, the Jews of the city turned against Paul, and so he turned to the Gentiles and preached to them. Then Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, said this after he told the Jews, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles":

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad,
and glorified the word of the Lord:
and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed
(Acts 13:48).

How could they believe, knowing what we have learned about sinners?

Listen to what Luke wrote in Acts 18:27, 28 about the ministry of Apollos:

And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia,
the brethren wrote,
exhorting the disciples to receive him:
who, when he was come,
helped them much **which had believed through grace:**
For he mightily convinced the Jews,

and that publicly,
shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Salvation is by grace, all of grace. Cf. Eph. 2:8, 9. That means that there is no part of it that we can take credit for. We believe, but God gives us our faith. When sinners believe "through grace," it means that God gave them their faith. And so the fact that they believed was to the glory of God, not something that they could boast in.

Concl: So, when we speak of Sinners and the Gospel, what conclusion must we reach about evangelizing sinners?

God has people to be reached. He has chosen to reach them through the preaching of the Gospel. That is our task: to preach the Gospel. We must make sure that that is what we are doing. But when we have done it, it is up to the Holy Spirit to use it. He uses the message of the Gospel in accordance with the will of God. And He is the One Who determines where the message will be used, drawing to faith in Christ all of those who have been, by the grace of God, ordained to eternal life.

Anyone who hears and comes to Christ, will be saved. But God in His Word has given us a look behind the scene, so to speak, so that we will understand what it takes to save a sinner from his sins. May the Lord make us faithful in spreading the message of, what the Apostle Peter called, "the true grace of God" (1 Pet. 5:12). I say to you about what I have been trying to teach you today, the same thing that the Apostle Peter said about what he wrote at the end of his first Epistle,
... I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying
that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.