

A MAN WITH ONE PASSION
1 Corinthians 9:16

Intro: There are many verses in Paul's epistles which help us to understand why he was the man that he was, and why he did what he did with such intense and continuing zeal. I am taking one of those verses as my text for tonight, but, in considering it, I want to branch out into other related statements which he made. The verse is 1 Cor. 9:16. (Read.)

Paul's passion, that which literally drove him all during his life as a Christian, was the preaching of the Gospel. He was never happier than when he was preaching the Gospel, and he counted no sacrifice too great in order to be able to preach the Gospel.

To illustrate, let me call your attention to Acts 20:24.

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. He was meeting with the Ephesian elders for the last time. They were concerned for his safety because they knew that imprisonment, and possibly death, awaited him at the end of his journey. They tried to keep him from going. Listen to his response:

But none of these things move me,
neither count I my life dear unto myself,
so that I might finish my course with joy,
and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus,
to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

The key to what he told the Ephesian elders is found in those words: "my course...the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus." And this is what Paul must have had in mind when in our text he wrote, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel."

Paul was not the only one who had this call. This was given to all of the apostles, all of the disciples, all of those who made up the early church, and this commission from God has been passed on to every generation of the Lord's people from that day until this. But there have been relatively few who have pursued that calling like the Apostle Paul did. He could be arrested, could be beaten, could be deprived of food and drink, but none of those things brought greater "woe," greater distress to his heart, than not to be able to preach the Gospel. And so when he was in prison, or when he was free, we find him always preaching the Gospel.

Now we need to remember that preaching does not always mean standing behind a pulpit to deliver a message. It can mean that, but there are probably many more opportunities to preach the Gospel where a pulpit is not involved. The word preach as you have been told many times before simply means

to proclaim, to announce, to declare a message--the good news of the Gospel. This can be done with a group of people of any number, or it can be done with just one person. Paul seemed to take special delight in proclaiming this message when he was with just one other person. It may no difference to Paul whether that person was a man or a woman, a Jew or a Gentile, a king or a slave. He felt constrained to tell all people anywhere and everywhere about the Gospel, the good news of salvation. It is both exciting and condemning to see the zeal of the Apostle Paul as we read his history in the book of Acts, or as we read what he had to say about the Gospel in his epistles. He was probably more like the Lord Jesus in this than any other person who has ever lived, although many have felt the same way about the Gospel that the Apostle Paul did.

In the context of our text for tonight Paul was speaking about the responsibility of the church to support the servants of the Lord. But Paul had not asked people to support him. He did not want anyone to think that that was the reason he was in the work of the Lord. He needed food, and he needed clothing, and he needed a place to sleep, but those were not the reasons that he preached. His attitude in 1 Cor. 9 was very similar to what I once heard Dr. William Criswell, who for many years was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, say about his work. He said, "I would rather do what I am doing for nothing than to get paid for doing anything else." Paul was not in the ministry to make a living; he was in the ministry to preach the Gospel. And his words, "Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel," tell us that that which brought the greatest distress, the greatest misery, to his heart, was the inability to preach the Gospel.

Why did he feel this way? Why was he so zealous to preach the Gospel when it seems that it takes so much courage for us to get our mouths open to proclaim the Gospel?

Let me give you several reasons.

I. WHY PAUL WAS SO ZEALOUS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL.

Our text gives us the primary reason, and we see it in the words, "Necessity is laid upon me."

The call of God was upon Paul's heart. He knew that this was his mission in life. He knew that this was one of the main reasons that the Lord had left him on the earth, and that why his life had been miraculously spared so many times. What a difference it would make in all of our lives if we felt like the Apostle Paul did. We may not be called to do what he did

in going from place to place to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. We may support ourselves and our families in some other way. But nevertheless, this is our work, too. The Gospel is not just for us, but it is for the whole world. And every person in every generation needs to hear the good news. This was Paul's calling, and this is our calling. How wonderful it would be if we felt the same way about it that he did.

Let me mention a second reason.

Paul knew what it was to live without the Gospel. He knew what it was to be religious without the Gospel. And we have his testimony in Phil. 3. Those "good" things which meant so much to Paul before he understood the Gospel suddenly meant nothing to him in the light of the truth that he had come to understand. He had spent his life trying to please God, trying to make himself acceptable to God. But he learned that the message of the Gospel is a message of what God will do for us, and that there is no other way that we can be saved. Paul knew that there were more people in the world like he used to be than there were who really understood the truth of the Gospel--and so he felt a special burden to carry the true message to them.

Listen to those words he wrote at the beginning of his epistle to the believers in Rome:

I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians;
both to the wise, and to the unwise.

So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also (Rom. 1:14, 15).

And remember that Paul's obligation was not to the world, but an obligation of love to God for what the Lord had done in his heart through the Gospel.

Let me give you a third reason.

Paul felt constrained to preach the Gospel because he knew that there was no other way for people to be delivered from their sins, and the consequences of their sins.

Listen to what he wrote in Rom. 1:16, 17. (Quote.)

Paul did not believe that the Jews were to be left alone just because they were zealous toward God. Nor did he believe that Gentiles were to be left alone because they followed some kind of religion. Paul knew that people can be sincerely wrong, and they needed to be told the truth. He knew that zeal without knowledge could only bring people to one place, and that place was HELL! He knew that the only true and

eternal hope for salvation was in the Gospel, and he was intent on getting the message to everyone who would listen to what he had to say.

Let me give you a fourth reason. There may be many more, but I am going to stop with four tonight.

Paul knew that preaching the Gospel was his responsibility, the church's responsibility; how that message affected people's lives was in the hands of God. He also knew that we may not see the results of our work. We may have only a part in what God is doing in people's lives. He told the Corinthian church this when he wrote about the work there: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). God could save everyone like he saved the Apostle Paul--striking them down with a light from heaven. But that was an exception, not the usual way of the Lord. The usual way is for one person to tell the Gospel to another, and then it is that God uses His Word to save that person, if that is His will. So Paul zealously scattered the Gospel, trusting God to give a harvest, that, at the very least, some might be saved. The Gospel never returns void.

But now let us turn to another aspect of Paul's ministry of the Gospel.

II. WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

I have purposely avoided saying too much about the Gospel itself, but this needs to be made clear. It has probably been true in every generation that the word Gospel has been used by religious people, but they do not use it as it is used in the Bible.

What is this good news that we are to proclaim to the ends of the earth?

Let me answer this in several parts.

First, it is a message of Christ.

Let us think first about Christ as a Person, and I don't know of any better statement that we have than that which Paul made at the beginning of his letter to the church at Rome.

Cf. Rom. 1:1, 3, 4.

People are not preaching the Gospel which Paul preached if they say anything other or less than what Paul declared about the Lord Jesus Christ. Who was He? He was God's Son. What did He do? He became a Man. Why did He become a Man?

Because, as is implied in Paul's statement, He had to die. What happened to Him after that? He was raised from the dead. What was He like after His resurrection? He was still the same, eternal Son of God--and His resurrection proved it.

So the person who says that Jesus Christ was a good man, a good teacher, but not the Son of God, is not preaching the true Gospel. And the person who denies that Jesus Christ arose from the dead, or even if he just fails to mention the resurrection of Christ, he is not preaching the Gospel which Paul preached, the true Gospel.

It is very, very important to listen to what people have to say about the Lord. If He were only the son of Joseph and Mary, then He needs the Gospel Himself, and is unable to help us.

I hope this is clear in all of our minds. It is absolutely essential that we believe that Jesus of Nazareth was God manifest in human flesh.

Let us move on to a second point.

We have spoken of Christ's resurrection, but why did He die?

We have the answer many places in the Bible, but let me select one which is very clear. It is found in 1 Cor. 15. The whole chapter applies, but let me call your attention to just the first four verses. (Read 1 Cor. 15:1-4.)

I don't know how it has been in past generations, but I would assume that it never has been much different from what it is now as far as the word sin is concerned. We have practically ruled it out of our vocabulary. We don't call lying a sin. We don't call murder a sin. We don't call adultery a sin. We don't call unbelief a sin. We don't call pride a sin. In fact, we encourage pride with such expressions as self-worth, self-love, etc.

But God's Word tells us that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures," that is, just like the OT said He would. He took man's sin upon Himself, and paid the penalty in full for all who will ever believe on Him. If He hadn't done this, there would be no Gospel. This is why the Gospel is good news. We cannot do what God requires to have a single sin forgiven. But Christ, by His death for sinners on the Cross, has done everything necessary for sinners to be saved.

And so in 1 Corinthians Paul said,
For the preaching of the cross

is to them that perish foolishness;
but unto us which are saved
it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

And later on in that same chapter Paul wrote,
For the Jews require a sign,
and the Greeks seek after wisdom:
But we preach Christ crucified,
unto the Jews a stumblingblock,
and unto the Greeks foolishness;
But unto them which are called,
both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God,
and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

And so when we preach the Gospel, we do not preach what people are looking for and want to hear; we preach what they need to hear--the Gospel about Jesus Christ, His death and His resurrection.

There is much more that can be said. The Gospel includes all that God does in our hearts, all that is involved in that great word, salvation. But for tonight let me just say one more thing about the Gospel.

A few moments ago I called your attention to Rom. 1:16. I want to take you back to that verse and point out five words which we cannot afford to overlook.

The Gospel teaches us that we could never do enough for our own salvation from the eternal judgment of God. But it teaches us that God has done all that we will ever need to guarantee our eternal salvation. However, the words which I would emphasize with you from Rom. 1:16 as I close are these five words: "to every one that believeth."

The Gospel is not the power of God unto salvation to any but to those who believe. This is what our Lord said in John 3:16. (Quote.)

What does it mean to believe? It means that you put your trust in Christ to save you through His death on the Cross, and that you forsake all of your own efforts to save yourself. It is good news to know that we are not saved because of what we do for God, but because of what God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ and His death on the Cross. He is the Savior; we are not!

Do we deserve to be saved? No. That is why it has to be "by grace." Do we have any part in it because of who we are, or because of what we can do to help? No. That is why we trust in Christ to save us. He is the only Savior, and He does all

of the work of salvation for us. God saves us through Christ, and keeps us saved. He forgives our sins, and makes us new people. The more you and I know about the Gospel, the more we realize that it is good news, the best news ever to reach the hearts of sinners.

Concl: The question is, Is the Lord Jesus Christ your Savior? Do you believe what the Bible says about Him? And do you believe what the Bible says about you? Are you trusting Him, and Him alone, for your salvation?

Remember, young people, you are not saved because your parents know the Lord. And you are not saved because you have been raised in Trinity Bible Church. Neither are you saved just because you know what the Gospel is. You are saved only when and because your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And those of us who are older need to remember the same thing. It may make us feel good to go to church, but there are many people who feel good about themselves who will never make it to heaven.

All of us, whether we have been raised in the church, or out of it, need to know what the Gospel is, the good news about salvation, and to make sure that we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to save us. Make sure of that tonight. There is nothing more important in all of your life. God's Word tells us that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we will be saved. If you do not believe, come to Him tonight, and put your trust in Him to save you.