

THE GOSPEL LIGHT

What kind of difference has the Gospel of Jesus Christ made in your life? Were you once a slimy sinner? Were you once an adulterer? Were you once a lousy husband, or a lousy wife? Were you once completely in the dark about what lies beyond death? What kind of difference has the Gospel made in your life?

I stand amazed at the Grace of God in my life. I am speaking specifically about God's wonderful revelation of Himself, His pulling back the curtain of death! I hope that you have been blessed with the same grace, the grace of knowing the mind and the love of Creator of the universe. Only believers can experience this wonderful grace. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6.)

But, there is another aspect to God's wonderful grace that every human being has experienced, even those without faith! God's **wonderful providence and care is available** to every person in the world. That's right! Jesus taught that God "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45.) There is not a person living who has not experienced the **general** benevolence of the Creator of the universe. The problem is that some people do not recognize that their existence in the world is part of God's grace. A person must be taught and trained NOT to believe in God! And some people call that "education."

But let's go back to my first point that God's grace has drawn back the curtain of death. There are many things that you and I can have in common. We both have been born of a mother. We both have lived and breathed in this present world until now. We both will die unless Jesus comes. If Jesus comes while we are alive, we both will experience His coming for we all shall see Him as He is in all of His glory. We both will enter eternity whether through the portal of death or through the sudden coming of Jesus Christ. All of these things we have or will experience. Notice the difference between believers in Christ and unbelievers. Unbelievers were also born of a mother. They also have lived and breathed in this present world until now. They too will die unless Jesus comes. Whether through the

portal of death or through the coming of Christ, people who do not believe in Jesus Christ will also enter eternity. Well, all of these items are the same for believers in Christ and unbelievers; so what's the difference? Unbelievers don't know the truth about what happens after death. Unbelievers don't know the true connection between the way they live on earth and what will happen to them in eternity.

In 2 Corinthians chapters 4 and 5, the apostle Paul writes about time and eternity. Beginning today I want us to study a series of lessons from Paul's teaching in these two chapters of 2 Corinthians.

¹ Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.
² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor 4:1-2 ESV.)

Paul is talking about his job of preaching. Preaching doesn't make sense unless there is eternity. But preaching can have its heartache. Nevertheless, Paul says "we do not lose heart." Why would Paul be tempted to lose heart? Well, for one thing, not everyone believes it. It can tempt a preacher toward discouragement when people don't listen to the message! That's right! Have you heard the expression: "You may as well be talking to a brick wall as to be talking with that person!"? Some folks stubbornly refuse what gospel preachers teach from God's revelation. It is true that not all preachers for Christ preach from God's revelation. Peter predicted, "there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction."² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed." (2 Peter 2:1-2 ESV.) Neighbor, you can experience the fulfillment of this prophecy any or every day that you turn on Trinity Broadcasting Network. Peter continues, "in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." There are many people in this

world who rejoice when they hear false teaching that tickles their itching ears. Peter says that greed is behind it all.

Nevertheless, Paul says “we do not lose heart.” “We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor 4:2 ESV.) Paul maintained his integrity by preaching the truth even while others ran on ahead with their tampering of God’s word.

But why will so many people willfully reject the truth and accept a lie instead? Well, obviously, these people believe that what they hear is the truth. How could they be so deceived? Paul addresses this question in 2 Corinthians 4 when he wrote:

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Cor 4:3-4 (ESV)

The “god of this world” is Satan, the Devil. The Jewish people in New Testament times called him Beelzebub, the prince of devils. Jesus called him the “prince of this world”, recorded in the book of John. Paul also called him “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). What does the “god of this world” do? He deliberately blinds people in order to keep them from seeing the light of the majestic Jesus who is the image of God. But how can this happen? It happens because Satan is giving people what they want to hear. He entices them with their own desires. James says that “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” (James 1:14-15 ESV.) You see, promiscuous people do not want to hear that fornication is sin. They call it an affair, or living together, or cohabitation, or some such name. They have desires that must be fulfilled and so they change the vocabulary to make what they do sound nice. People don’t like the sound of “abortion” so they call it “pro-choice.” People want their own

“church” so they fashion some institution that suits them and call it by a name that suits them, rather than follow the revealed facts found in the New Testament. Oh friends, the god of this world is very busy!

In the face of these trials Paul would not allow himself to lose heart. But he had even more temptation to feel discouraged. What about the way he personally was treated? How could someone who has the light of the gospel be so mistreated? Paul likened Christians to “jars of clay.”

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 2 Cor 4:7-11 (ESV)

Christians are to give their bodies to the Lord as a “living sacrifice.” (Rom 12:1.) Christians can do this because they see the connection between the way they live for Christ here in this world and what happens after death. They are enlightened by the light of gospel. There is a light that shines on their path. There is a beacon that calls them forward through the circumstances of this world.

¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," [Psalm 116:10] we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 2 Cor 4:13-14 (ESV) Yes, God and Jesus have drawn back the curtain of death! They have revealed that there is life after death for the followers of Christ because Christ is the One who saves us from our deathly sins. He paid the penalty of sin for us. ¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer [man, KJV] is wasting away, our inner [man] is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the

things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are [temporal], but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Cor 4:16-18 ESV.)