

your only hope of salvation. Others may fail, but Jesus never fails. I challenge you to trust Him as your Saviour, and to spend the rest of your life growing

into the kind of person which you feel that every Christian should be. In so doing, you shall strengthen your weak Christian brethren.

A PARTING BENEDICTION

March 27, 1960

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."—Romans 16:25-27

For the past eighteen months it has been my privilege to come to you each week with a gospel message. In deep gratitude I have endeavored to do so. Now for the next six months the Radio and Television Commission is granting me a period of rest and refreshment. During this interval three of my brethren will be your Baptist Hour preachers. It is my earnest prayer that you will support them with your prayers and mail as you have done for me.

So for the closing message of this series I would give to you a parting benediction. It is the greatest of all of Paul's benedictions. Coming as it does at the close of Romans, it is the jewel which he places in the crown of the gospel of grace which he has set forth to his readers. Let us consider it as we note, first, the purpose; second, the means; third, the goal.

THE PURPOSE

First, note the purpose. "Now to him that is of power to stablish you" (v.25). This is the purpose for which Paul has presented the gospel in such detail. In Romans 1:11 the apostle says, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye

may be established." This is to be done through "the mutual faith both of you and me" (v.12). Having never seen the Christians in Rome, he resorts to the pen that he might establish them by an exposition of the Christian gospel which they had believed.

Now in his closing benediction, Paul commends them to God who alone is able to make them stand (14:4). The word "stablish" renders a word meaning to make stable, place firmly, set fast, to strengthen or make firm. It is a first aorist active indicative form, indicating the certainty of a definite work of God within them.

Hérein is a lesson for every teacher and preacher of the gospel. Paul is writing to a group, all of whom he assumes to be saved people. Yet he sets forth in minute detail the gospel in its larger sense of the word. He has expounded the doctrines of condemnation, justification, sanctification, and glorification, applying them to the practical aspects of life both spiritual and social. He says that it is to the end that they may be established in their faith. Some of them were new converts. Others were still plagued by rituals and customs of their pre-Christian lives. The more mature ones were impatient with the babes in Christ. All faced the problem of the relation of Jews and Gentiles to God's redemptive purpose. They all needed to be firmly fixed and strengthened in their Christian calling. So Paul expounds the basic elements of the gospel in order to do so.

Every preacher knows how it feels to stand before a congregation, the vast majority of which is Christian. What will

you preach to them? All too often you are tempted to feed them on themes which have little nourishment for the soul. Paul says that you should preach the gospel to them. Set forth the sinfulness of sin. Remind them that their redemption is by justification through faith. Keep ever before them the larger aspects of salvation, not only of the soul but of the Christian life. Picture to them their promised glorification and wondrous joys of heaven. You cannot preach the gospel without touching upon all the doctrines of our faith and upon every facet of Christian living.

After a service in which I had preached on tithing, a woman said to me, "Thanks for confirming my faith in something which I already believe in." Unless we remind our people of the lost condition of every person outside of Christ, they will lose their sense of compulsion to witness to the lost. If you fail to remind them of their freedom in Christ, heretical rituals and practices will creep in unawares. Your failure to preach on sanctification results in false concepts of this great doctrine and in stagnant Christian lives. Ignoring the "blessed hope" of every child of God causes them to be swept away in the maelstrom of worldly cares and temptations. In preaching the gospel you will not only strengthen those who already believe. You will also point out the way of life to the lost who wait on your ministry.

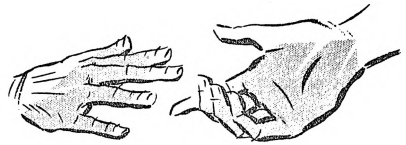
THE MEANS

Second, consider the means. Again the means is the gospel. Paul says, "According to my gospel" (v.25). The apostle reminds us that it is a gospel given to him not by man but by Christ Himself (Gal. 1:11). But it is his gospel in the sense that it is characteristic of Paul. It contains his sense of the absolute nature of the gospel: the absolute and universal judgment upon sin; the absolute and universal availability of salvation; the absolute and universal freeness of salvation by justification through faith in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, this gospel is a mystery.

The word "mystery" refers to something which has been hidden but now is revealed and understood. It is God's purpose and plan of redemption for all men. It is something which man did not fashion out of his intellect, but which is given to him as a direct revelation from God. It was something which had been "kept secret" or, literally, kept in silence since the world began. The Greek phrase reads "through times eternal," or the eternal ages before creation (v.25). It was contained in the prophetic writings, but fully unveiled in the person of Jesus Christ. Throughout Romans Paul has quoted from the Old Testament, but only to show that God's eternal purpose of redemption was "made manifest" or made visible in Christ Jesus. And this by the express command of the eternal God that it be preached to all nations to the end that they might give obedience to the faith thus proclaimed (v.26).

Now note that all this is summed up in "the preaching of Jesus Christ" (v.25). This is not specifically the preaching done by Jesus. Instead it is Paul's preach-



ing which had Jesus Christ at its center. No preaching worthy of the name can do otherwise.

Now, every Christian, preacher or otherwise, should profit by Paul's example. After preaching a simple gospel sermon to a group in a college chapel service, one of the professors said to me, "You fed my soul. The mistake so many chapel speakers make is to feel that they must speak to the intellects of the faculty. They fail to realize that we need preaching to also."

ONE MESSAGE

One of the most subtle temptations which comes to a preacher or Sunday school teacher is to think that he must dwell upon some current or novel theme. Like the Athenian philosophers, he spends his time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing (Acts 17:21). Paul's answer in Athens, and everywhere, is to preach Jesus as the only means of redemption and eternal life. Present it in striking and unique ways—yes! But you have but one message!

There are those who hold that Paul did otherwise in Athens. But an analysis of his sermon will reveal every basic element of the gospel. He simply presented it in the context of their own thought processes. He began with the environment of pagan and philosophical Athens, but he centered it all in "the preaching of Jesus Christ."

I repeat a story which some of you heard me tell before. A woman criticized Charles Haddon Spurgeon, saying, "I do not like to hear you preach. All you talk about is Jesus." To which the great preacher replied, "Yes, no matter where I begin, I climb fences, jump ditches, and cross fields. I run as fast as I can until I come alongside Jesus. Then I begin to preach."

What this world needs today is Jesus. When the preacher turns to book reviews, political and economic theories, or to any other worldly theme, he is in another's field wherein he is a novice—and often appears as a ridiculous one. But when you preach about Jesus, you are a prince upon your throne. From there and there alone can you sway the hearts of men toward Him who is King of kings and Lord of Lords!

THE GOAL

Third, note the goal. The goal of Paul's preaching was "to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen." (v.27). This should be the only goal of your Christian witnessing. Beware of the siren song of the pew's praise for the preacher!

Now wherein lies the greatest glory to God? Not in nature with its unspeakable splendor. The supreme glory of God is realized in His redemptive will and purpose. When Jesus was born the angelic choir sang, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). Facing the cross Jesus prayed that thereby His Father would be glorified (John 12:27 ff).

So Paul says that to God is to be glory "through Jesus Christ." Recently in Korea one of the native pastors paid to Dr. Ramsey Pollard, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the greatest compliments I ever heard given to a preacher. He said, "All he talks about is Jesus."

Let that be said of you, my preacher brother! Let that be said of you, my fellow-Christian! In so doing you will bring glory to God.

Now all of this has been directed to my Christian listeners to the end that the lost may be saved. So, in closing may I say a word to you who know not Jesus as your Saviour. In denying Him you heap shame upon God. You say that God was mistaken when He said that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that the wages of sin is death, and that you can be justified from sin only by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. You say that God's Word is wrong when it says that you cannot save yourself. Thus you give the lie to Him who is the only all-wise and eternal God. Now, you do not mean to do so, but that is the truth of the matter.

So in this closing moment let your mind review the glorious theme of Romans. You have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death. Your only hope is through justification by faith in Jesus Christ. God has done all that He can do to save you. The rest is up to you. So I lay God's case in your hands. Right now, wherever you are, submit yourself to Him in simple, childlike faith. In so doing you will say in truth, "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."