

Privilege of the Gospel
The Paradox

Introduction: Week #3 of the Privilege of the Gospel (Week 1=The Wonder; Week 2=The Nature)

Review:

1. What is the Gospel? *“The good news of God at work in Christ, taking on Himself the likeness of humanity, laying down His life on the cross in our stead, becoming sin for us and taking the penalty of death that was due us, then rising again to conquer forever sin and death for those who embrace and by faith receive that Good News as theirs.”*

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 NKJV

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8 NKJV

- God’s work completely
 - Our reception by faith still necessary (confess...believe)
2. Paul devoted his life to the Gospel.
 - Not ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16)
 - In chains because of the Gospel (Philippians 1:12-14; Ephesians 6:20)
 - Some try to pervert it (Galatians 1:6-7...still today)
 - Called to proclaim the exclusive Gospel (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Today: The Paradox of the Gospel

1. What is a paradox?

“Any person, thing, or situation exhibiting an apparently contradictory nature.”

2. Paradoxical Statements

- “It’s hard work doing nothing.”
- “Less is more”
- “Wise fool”
- “Deep down, you’re really shallow”
- “This is the beginning of the end”

3. Biblical paradoxical statements

- Die to self
- Rejoice in sufferings
- Pray for enemies
- “Sermon on the Mount”

NOTE: Gospel-saturated lives are paradoxical to secular-driven lives...Living by the principles of the Gospel looks different than living by worldly principles.

- Dual citizenship

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:20 NKJV

Context

1. Since Paul lives by Gospel-standards, the Corinthians challenge his authority and integrity.
2. Gospel in Corinth was perverted.
3. Paul’s Gospel-living experience communicates the power of God.
4. Today “rejoice in sufferings,” “dying to self,” “sharing in Christ’s sufferings” are not preached, yet are such an important privilege of the Gospel.

What is the paradox of the Gospel?

Three paradoxical truths...

I. Gospel people are FACED with opposition but privileged with Divine PRESENCE.

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NKJV

- A. Paul embraced Gospel-living, yet faced severe opposition, hardship, and challenges.

1. Stoned and left for dead by the Jews from Antioch and Iconium (Acts 14:19)
2. Suffered for Christ

The present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 NKJV

3. Near fatal experience while in Asia

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 NKJV

4. Summary of his sufferings (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

B. Paul testified of God's presence WITH him through his sufferings.

1. God delivered Paul from death.

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us. 2 Corinthians 1:9-10 NKJV

2. "Sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in" (v. 8)

"There are all kinds of pressure on us, but we are never in so tight a corner that there is no way out. It is the characteristic of the Christian life that there is always an element of spaciousness in it."—Commentary

3. "We are at wits end but never at our hopes end" (v. 8)
4. "We are persecuted by men but never forsaken by God" (v. 9)

- a. Daniel
- b. 3 Hebrew Children
- c. Psalm 23
- d. Jon of Arc abandoned

"It is better to be alone with God. His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength, I will dare and dare and dare until I die." (Joan of Arc)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? Psalms 27:1 NKJV

5. “We are knocked down but not knocked out” (v. 9)

- a. Fall but rise again
- b. Beaten but not defeated
- c. Lose battle but not the campaign

C. Embracing the gospel does not eliminate suffering, hardship, or pain (may intensify), but it **DOES GUARANTEE** God’s eternal presences with you **IN** suffering.

1. John Chrysostom

“John Chrysostom, the golden-tongued preacher, driven by unscrupulous enemies from his cathedral in Constantinople, was hunted like a beast through the inhospitable wastes of Armenia, until, after enduring extreme torments of mind and body, he succumbed to his sufferings on 14 September, 407. He too, though hunted for Christ’s sake, rejoiced in the knowledge of not being forsaken, as his dying words attest: “Glory to God in all things. Amen.”

2. William Tyndale

William Tyndale, whose only crime was a determination to obey his call from God to translate Holy Scripture into the English tongue, was another who, hounded into exile, again by fierce adversaries of the truth from within the Church, and hunted from place to place on the Continent, was enabled, like Paul and Chrysostom and numberless others in every age, including our own, to finish his course with joy as a martyr for the sake of his Redeemer, on 6 October 1536.”

“To be at the end of man’s resources is not to be at the end of God’s resources...”

Paradox: Opposition WILL come but God’s presence is guaranteed.

II. Gospel people are FORCED to die but privileged with a Divine PROMISE.

Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you. 13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4:10-15 NKJV

A. “Carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus.”

1. All deprivations afflictions, and persecutions Gospel people encounter are participation or sharing in the sufferings and death of Christ. “No cross, no crown.”

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:10-11NKJV

2. Constant dying is consistent with Gospel living

As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Romans 8:36 NKJV

“Always carrying about”

3. Martyrdom is not confined to final hour; but is expressed daily in dying-living experience.

B. The dying of Jesus in the body reveals the life of Jesus in the body.

1. Constant deliverance NOW demonstrates the resurrection life of Jesus in mortal body (2 Corinthians 1:9-10)
2. The “life of Jesus” will be fully revealed at the appearing of Christ when bodies are transformed into the likeness of His glorified body.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Philippians 3:20-21 NKJV

This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. 2 Timothy 2:11 NKJV

NOTE: The promise of heavenly glory not present suffering must dominate the Christ-follower’s life.

C. Constantly delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake.

1. Thrown alive to wild beasts in arena (Persecuted Church)
2. Suffering and death have no merit apart from Jesus (Acetism)

D. Life of Jesus manifested in the body

1. Dignity of the human body—God’s creation
2. Body is temple (house) for the Holy Spirit
3. Jesus came to save/redeem soul and body (Gnostics—body evil)

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E. Our constant “dying” for Christ can be life for others (2 Corinthians 4:12)

1. Paul in chains for Christ (Philippians 1:12-14)
2. Paul preaching to Festus and Agrippa
3. Paul’s endurance brought the Gospel to the Corinthians
4. Live Dead—many sacrificing, experiencing hardship, so Gospel will reach the unreached

REFLECTION: Is it possible that my complacency and comfortable position are hindering the advancement of the Gospel:

I have not been called to simply live, but to die.

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:38-39 NKJV

(ILL) Boulder Dam (Hoover) Scheme

- Brought fertility to vast areas in the southwest that were desert
- In making many lost lives in accidents and disasters
- Tablet with names of deceased
- “These died that the desert might rejoice and blossom as the rose.”

NOTE: Suffering—even death—can be endured when it is for Christ’s sake,

F. The promise of resurrection is available to those transformed by the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:13-15)

1. Paul quotes Psalm 116—Psalm of Thanksgiving for deliverance from death
2. Paul has confidence in “the God who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9-11)
3. Christ, Risen Lord, is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20)
4. For Corinthians benefit NOW and ultimately will result in thanksgiving to God

“By believing they laid hold of life, and by speaking they found death...but death in which a corruptible body is sown and incorruption is harvested.”—Herveius

NOTE: Just as Christ’s life and death was for our sake so he who labors for Christ’s sake labors for mankind.

REFLECTION: Am I living a Christ-centered life for Jesus’ sake gladly spending myself for the sake of others?

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 2:15 NKJV

III. Gospel people are FIT with mortality but privileged with Divine PERSPECTIVE.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NKJV

A. The outward-inward man paradox for Gospel people (v. 16)

1. Outward (visible) man is in a continuing process of decay (to grave).
2. Inward (hidden) man is being renewed daily.
3. Light of eternity shines in the heart of a Christ-follower—can't be extinguished (v. 6).
4. Present sufferings aren't comparable to future glory (v. 17)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:18 NKJV

5. Decay—not renewal—is the ONLY reality for the unbeliever.

“The decay of the outward man in the godless is a melancholy spectacle, for it is the decay of everything.”—Denney

B. The present affliction—future glory paradox (v. 17)

1. Affliction for Jesus' sake is REAL and can be severe.
2. Affliction for Jesus sake is “light” and only for a moment.
3. When weighed against the mass of that glory—inheritance received through grace.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. 1 Peter 1:3-6 NKJV

C. The Temporal-Eternal Paradox (v. 18)

1. Gaze fixed not on present-outward decay (suffering)
2. Gaze fixed upon future glory—seeing our Redeemer face to face—transfigured into His image (3:18)

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 1 John 3:2 NKJV

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. 1 Corinthians 13:12 NKJV

3. Gaze fixed on eternal while enduring present tribulations (Philippians 3:14)

REFLECTION: Is my “gaze” fixed on my present afflictions, or future glory?

NOTE: Not a call to abandon present responsibility but instead know that present sufferings because Christ is preached is for the sake of others and won't be of concern in eternity!

Conclusion:

End of the Spear