



REFRESHING TIMES

Unleashing The Power
Of The Gospel Of Grace

DICKSON

Refreshing Times

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Chapter 1

Fullness Of The Time

Restoration must be generated from within a society by the constant and consistent preaching of the gospel. It is difficult to import restoration movements from outside a culture or society simply because the movement is often attached to some expatriate beliefs and behavioral religious traditions that are mixed with the simplicity of the gospel message. So for this reason, God destined the incarnation of His only begotten Son into the flesh of a Jewish man in a prepared Jewish society that resided within a specific location on planet earth—Palestine (Jn 1:14).

The entrance of the Son of God was as a babe who would grow from childhood to adulthood within the Jewish culture of Palestine. His coming was directly from heaven, a fact with which there could be no argument, though most of the early Jews vehemently denied this. To most of the Jews, Jesus was just another self-appointed Jewish Rabbi. Add to this the fact that He came from an obscure Jewish village called Nazareth. Nevertheless, the Jews could not deny that Jesus was of Jewish origin, though most denied He was of heavenly origin.

The incarnate Son of God was born a Jew, born in a Jewish barn, grew up as a Jewish carpenter in a small Jewish village, and preached and taught only within Jewish territory. He never made a “mission trip” outside Palestine. His mission trips were always confined to His own people, the Jews. He then died as a condemned Jew outside the capital city of the Jews—Jerusalem. He was all Jew, and thus, never sought to change His Jewish heritage that had been laid as the foundation for the revelation of the gospel for fourteen hundred years before His coming into this world. And thus, the first “gospel restoration” that took place in history was among the Jews, as stated by

the apostle Paul: The gospel “*is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek [Gentiles]*” (Rm 1:16).

When we read the Holy Spirit’s statement of Galatians 4:4, it is incumbent on us to think more historically about the meaning, rather than the fulfillment of prophecy. So when the Holy Spirit said, “*when **the fullness of the time** came, God sent forth His Son, born of a [Jewish] woman, **born under law**,*” our understanding of the statement goes far beyond the fulfillment of prophecy. Prophecies were fulfilled because the religious, social and political times were right for the intervention of God into the world of humanity. But just as important, God had prepared for centuries the right time in history for a social order to receive His Son.

The “birth” in the fullness of time was not inconsequential. That Jesus came into this world was certainly in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. But the statement of Galatians 4:4 does not infer that we should consider the “fullness of the time” with the same meaning of a similar statement that is commonly made throughout the gospel records: “*That it might be fulfilled . . .*” (See Mt 1:22; 2:15,17,23; 4:14; 5:18; 8:17; 12:17). This statement in the gospel records refers exclusively to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in reference to Jesus. But the emphasis of the Galatians 4:4 statement is on “**the time**,” not the fulfillment time of prophecy.

Galatians 4:4 focuses on the fact that it was the right time in history for the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Redeemer into the society of the Jews in Palestine. It was indeed a time of fulfillment, but we believe that something more was in the mind of the Holy Spirit when He made the statement of Galatians 4:4. (If we understand Galatians 4:4 correctly, then we will be looking around the world for similar peoples who are religiously, socially and politically receptive to the preaching of the gospel and a restoration to God through

the Lord Jesus Christ.)

The “fullness of the time” referred to the religious, social and political circumstances that prevailed at the time the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the coming of the Redeemer. Because the religious, social and political environment was suitable for the coming of the Messiah into the world, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John thus revealed “*that it might be fulfilled*” in reference to all the Old Testament prophecies that directed the minds of the Jews toward the coming of the Messiah and Savior of the world (Lk 24:44). Their minds had been prepared for refreshing times to come from the presence of the Lord (At 3:19).

The preceding meaning of Galatians 4:4 was in the mind of the angel who delivered to shepherds the following message concerning the birth of Jesus: “*I bring you good tidings [gospel news] of great joy that will be to all the people. For to you a Savior is born **this day** in the city of David, who is Christ [Messiah] the Lord*” (Lk 2:10,11). It is interesting to note that the angel did not wait until the second day after Jesus’ birth in order to make this first gospel proclamation. On the contrary, this first announcement of the birth of the Redeemer was far more important than to tarry around for twenty-four hours until it was made. It was urgent that a gospel announcement of the incarnational entry of the Son of God into this world be made immediately. The religious, social and political environment in which the shepherds lived, as well as all the Jews at the time, demanded that the announcement urgently be made the very same day in which the birth event of the incarnation took place. The times were in their fullness in order that the Messiah and Savior of the world be announced and received. The time of refreshing had appeared from the very presence of the Lord, and thus, it was time for a spiritual restoration of the people to begin.

It is important to understand the “time” in which the Son of God came. The Holy Spirit turned on the light bulb

of understanding to this time by what He had Paul inscribe in Galatians 4:5. The Son of God came “*to redeem those who were under law*” (Gl 4:5). The word “law” in this statement does not carry with it the definite article “the” in the Greek text. Therefore, in the context, reference was to all legal religious laws under which we often bring ourselves into bondage, whether Jews or Gentiles. This is true because the mission of the Christ was to be a Redeemer. He would bring into freedom those who had brought themselves into the bondage of self-righteous law-keeping.

Since the redeemed—that is also us—could not redeem themselves through any self-sanctify works of any religious laws, or meritorious obedience to any law, whether the Sinai law or some man-made law, then they could find redemptive power only in the sacrificial offering of the crucified Redeemer. But as the Jews at the time of the coming Redeemer, who would represent all religionists throughout history, they had bound upon themselves all sorts of religious rites and rituals that brought them into bondage (See Mk 7:1-9). Their bondage was so severe that the Jewish religionists of Jesus’ day were doing as Jesus said of them, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own [religious] traditions*” (Mk 7:9).

When this spiritual condition prevails within a society, then it is time to call for a restoration in order that refreshing times might come from the presence of the Lord (See At 3:19). The only way to generate such refreshing times is to preach the gospel message that a Redeemer has appeared on earth in order to release us from our own self-imposed bondage. Redemption, therefore, refers to more than redemption from sin. Our Redeemer frees us from sinning in our self-righteousness that we assume we have in obedience to our own invented religious laws.

The Redeemer of Galatians 4:5, therefore, came in a time when the Jews had rejected the law of God in order to enslave themselves in the bondage of their own religious legal systems of law. **We must never forget, therefore,**

that in our obedience to the freedom-giving nature of the gospel, we are being redeemed from our own misguided self-justification through an attempted perfect keeping of either law or self-imposed religious rites and rituals. And thus in our response to the gospel, we “*are no longer a bondservant*” to our own manufactured religiosity (Gl 4:7). For this reason we cry out “Abba, Father” in thanksgiving that we are saved by the gospel of God’s grace, not by any self-imposed religious rites and rituals that we might meritoriously impose on ourselves (2 Co 4:15). Glory HALLELUJAH!

Chapter 2

Stirrings In The Religious World

Much of the religious world of Christendom around us that stakes a claim to some belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is in transition. It is a transition toward a tremendous opportunity for those who know and understand the simple gospel. Old norms of traditional religion are being broken down and cast away. At least in our nation of South Africa, rigid walls that encouraged denominationalism among believers are crumbling. To some extent, we would assume in general that the religious soil of Christendom is being prepared for great things to come.

If we ourselves can remain focused on events that transpired over two thousand years ago which revealed God’s intervention into this world in order to take us out of this world, then we are facing a great sociological open door. We are living in exciting times, therefore, that are not that different from the early first century when the gospel journey of the Son of God occurred. It is imperative, therefore, that we go back there in our study of the historical document of the New Testament. We must go back in order to discover those times and the reasons why there was such a phenomenal expansion of Christianity out of Jerusalem.

In our studies of the explosion of the gospel into the first century that is recorded throughout the historical document of Acts, we learn what it takes to create the same response to the gospel in any part of the world today. Our own personal experience of similar restorations among Bible-loving people in these times makes it easy for us to understand what Peter meant when he spoke to religious Jews in Jerusalem. These were Jews who were religiously in upheaval at the time because of the “pandemic” of Roman oppression, as well as the bondage of their own religious leadership. On one occasion Peter stated the following to an assembled group of these Jews:

“Repent and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (At 3:19).

This was a call for restoration in the hearts of religious people who had allowed themselves to be carried away from God by their own manufactured religiosity (See Mk 7:1-9). In order for a refreshing restoration to come from the presence of the Lord, Peter, in his plea to these religious people, mentioned conditions that must take place in the hearts and lives of those who would experience the release of the power of the gospel in their society.

A. Repent:

Repentance in the context of Peter’s declaration meant that the religious audience must change their religious ways by changing their beliefs. They were fanatically religious people, but they had been misdirected in their faith by creating religious beliefs and behavior after their own traditions. In reference to their faith, Peter called on them to literally change the behavior of their faith. The obvious conclusion is that **religion will bring one to a dead end in his or her relationship with God.**

When we make our religious traditions the law by which we would seek to justify ourselves before God, then we know that something is wrong with our “system” of religion. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that something is lacking when we seek to validate our faith on the basis of the performance of our “system” of religion. And being honest with ourselves, we all know that our performances always fall short of what we feel we should be and do.

Religion subsequently brings one to a plateau of faith, but stops there. Our religious performance can take us no further than the level of our personal satisfaction that we receive from the performances of our religion. The honest religionist, however, realizes that his or her religious behavior is a legal system of self-righteousness that is performed in order to give one a sense of “spiritual” satisfaction. This is especially true of the experiential religionist who often has a shallow biblical foundation. It is for this reason that his or her faith is also shallow because there is no biblical foundation (See Rm 10:17). It seems that the more shallow the religionist is in Bible knowledge, the more extreme he or she becomes in either trusting religious traditions or becoming emotionally out of control in some religious cult.

Because religion is often an amalgamation of performed legal rites that gives one a sense of experiential self-righteousness, both self-righteousness and experimental religiosity must be discarded in order to accept the righteousness of God (See Rm 10:1-3). In order to do this, repentance is necessary.

Sometimes, those who seem to be sincerely religious must be the first to repent. They must repent of their man-made religious traditions that keep them away from focusing on the commandments of God. This is also true in reference to experientialist who trust in his or her self-righteous emotional outburst. Instead of legally obeying traditional religious laws, experientialist obey their emotions.

Therefore, those who sincerely trust in the performance of their own religious traditions, as well as those who trust in their self-righteous experiential behavior, must repent of their faith in themselves to correctly perform their religion. They must repent in order to trust in the grace of God. They must repent in order to focus totally on God to save them. There is no room in the gospel of the grace of God for self-righteous beliefs and behavior.

At least this was the case in the first century when Jesus approached the very traditionally religious scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. Their confidence was so grounded in the ceremonies of their traditional religion that they set aside the word of God in order to keep the commandments of their own constructed religiosity (See Mk 7:1-9). Paul, who once lived as a Jewish religionist, referred to their religion as “Judaism,” or the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13,14).

B. Convert:

Since self-righteous religiosity leads one further away from the grace of God, then there must be a change in direction in reference to how one establishes his or her relationship with God. Instead of meritoriously trusting in one’s own performance of religious catechisms in order to self-justify oneself before God, being converted means that one must change to trusting totally in the grace of God. Grace must be allowed to cause thanksgiving in one’s heart for the grace of God (2 Co 4:15).

Grace causes obedience in response to the word of God as opposed to one’s legal performance of manufactured religious rites and rituals. If one would establish a faith-based relationship with God, therefore, he or she must trust in God as opposed to trusting in the performance of one’s own religious rites and rituals.

C. Blot out sins:

Since the religious audience to which Peter directed his message in Acts 3:19 must both repent of their existing religious self-righteousness, and then turn to the righteousness of God, **then we must also conclude that self-righteous religious behavior is sin.** It is sin because one focuses so much on meritoriously performing the legal rites and rituals of one's religion that he or she ignores what God instructs in His word (See Hs 4:6). This sin can be blotted out only when one repents and is converted in response to the gospel of God's grace.

D. Times of Refreshing:

In the face of millions of misguided people throughout the world today who are in the bondage of their own fabricated religiosity, our plea is as Peter's to the same world of religious people who would restore themselves to God and His word. The plea to open the door for times of refreshing from the Lord can come only when there is repentance and conversion in the hearts of religious people who have been misled by their own self-righteous religiosity.

When Paul rehearsed his ministry of preaching the gospel, he stated that he preached that both Jews and Gentiles "*should repent and turn to God [convert] and prove their repentance **by their works***" (At 26:20). In other words, the Jews could not carry on with their animal sacrifices, and the multitude of the religious traditions of Judaism (See Gl 1:14). They had to repent and turn to God through obedience of the gospel. In the case of the Pharisees and scribes, this meant that they had to sacrifice their "system" of religion for the liberty that they would receive in their obedience to the gospel. Only by making this sacrifice would they enjoy a new future in Christ.

In the same way, the idolatrous Gentiles could not carry on with their idol worship behavior when they obeyed the gospel. Both Jews and Gentiles must manifest through their obedience to the word of God that they had repented in their

hearts and converted to the imputed righteousness of God that came through obedience to the gospel. When this happens in a religious world as a whole, then come the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Restoration in our beliefs and behavior, therefore, ushers in the times of a refreshing relationship with the Lord. And once in the times of refreshing, we must continually remind ourselves of what the Holy Spirit reminded the Galatian Christians: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gal 5:1).

Chapter 3

Building Toward Refreshing Times

In order to inspire and continue a restoration to the gospel of the reigning Lord Jesus Christ, we must review how the Holy Spirit inspired such in the first century. Since the Spirit’s way of leading the ancient world into accepting King Jesus as the center of the lives of people, then without question we assume that His way of inspiring and continuing a restoration of the gospel today will produce the same results. Here are just a few strategic principles of the Spirit’s way that we must remember in order to start and nurture a restoration in our area:

A. Much teaching:

By the time Peter made the plea of Acts 3:19 to repent and be converted in order to bring in the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, John the Baptist had for six months been teaching in Judia that the prophesied One was coming. When the Spirit came upon Jesus at the time John baptized Him, then John knew that Jesus was the One about whom the prophets spoke (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10,11; Jn 1:29-34). At the end of John’s ministry, Jesus, when he

was about thirty years of age, began His earthly ministry of teaching. He continued for about three and a half years before going to the cross. During His ministry, Jesus also sent His disciples throughout Palestine to a greater audience (See Mt 11:1; Lk 10:1).

After the gospel resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and for about three years after the events of Acts 2, the first disciples in Jerusalem continued to preach to the Jews the good news of the incarnational entry of the Son of God into this world (At 5:43). They even scattered from Jerusalem in order to preach this message (At 8:4). Therefore, the people who were addressed by Peter on the occasion of Acts 3 had heard a great deal of information about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We would conclude, therefore, that much teaching must be accomplished in order to lay the foundation to inspire a general restoration movement of people. Some may respond immediately to the message of the gospel. However, a movement of people in great numbers in obedience to the gospel will take a great amount of teaching in order to generate a large response within a society. Therefore, preachers of the gospel must be persistent and consistent in their efforts to educate the community as a whole concerning the gospel journey of the Son of God. This is particularly true in those religious communities wherein many people trust in the religious traditions of their fathers, plus the simple gospel, which is in reality, according to the Holy Spirit, another gospel (See Gl 1:6-9).

B. Gospel focus:

The first message that was preached in the first century to bring the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord was the simple message of the gospel. The gospel came with no added legal rites and religious ceremonies. The simple gospel was the key that unlocked the door for times of refreshing. Preaching of the same simple message

today will result in the same response, especially among those who have cluttered their faith with years of religious traditions from which they seek freedom. And for those who have sacrificed their demeanor as self-controlled disciples for out-of-control emotional hysterics, they too seek freedom from themselves.

Most of the teaching concerning the behavior of gospel-obedient disciples in the first century came later through the epistles. In fact, all the information that we have today concerning the function of the church was not written until about thirty years **after** the initial message of the preaching of the gospel in A.D. 30, though information concerning the church came in part through the apostles and the prophets (teachers) on whom the apostles had laid hands in order to teach the early disciples (At 8:17).

We must not reverse this order by first preaching “church,” and then preaching Jesus. The gospel of Jesus is the only foundation upon which the church is built. The church is not the foundation of the gospel. This point was made perfectly clear when Jesus responded to Peter’s confession that He was the Christ and Son of God: “*Upon this rock [Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God] I will build My church*” (Mt 16:18). In other words, church exists because Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. We must not reverse this order of truth. Jesus does not exist because He was the invention of a church of religious minds.

Preaching the gospel is the foundation upon which any restoration is generated. Response to this good news is the foundation upon which the church is established. If the gospel is not the primary focus of our initial message to religious people, then we often present ourselves as some master theologians who know all the truth of the church. Subsequently, we are sometimes too eager to promote church rather than Christ. As a result, religiously sincere people will sometimes turn away from our message of the gospel, realizing that the behavior of the church is always

flawed, since the church is composed of flawed people.

On the other hand, preaching the simplicity of the gospel will draw people to Jesus in whom there is no flaw (Jn 12:32). When we preach what we may consider our master plan of church theology, however, we often fall into the trap of drawing people to ourselves (church), and not to the Lord Jesus. It is for this reason that we must always preach the gospel of Jesus to those who “believe in Jesus,” but have been led astray by their added ceremonial religious rites and rituals into some system of man-made religion. The preaching of and obedience to the gospel of Jesus unites people, whereas the traditional religious practices of men as “church” divides people into denominational groups.

C. Written message:

The Holy Spirit knew that written material concerning the incarnate Son of God and the church must eventually come in the restoration of thousands who had been led astray by institutional religion or idolatry. As a result of His planning in this matter, there is some masterful wisdom revealed in what the Spirit historically did. Through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, the early teachers and preachers of the gospel were able to deliver a common message of the gospel, as well as edify the new disciples (See Rm 1:13-16). But the Spirit waited for a little over two decades before putting pen to paper in reference to correcting the behavior of those who obeyed the gospel. He waited for the right time to put into print for posterity an accurate account of the gospel journey of the incarnate Son of God.

The Spirit’s plan was that the simple message of the gospel of the incarnate Son of God first be preached. The result of the gospel message and personal testimony resulted in the establishment of a universal assembly (church) of baptized believers who fellowshiped around Jesus (See 2

Jn 7-11). This was the church (assembly) of Christ (Rm 16:16). In this way the Holy Spirit sought to glorify Jesus first, not Himself or the church (See Jn 16:13,14).

After assemblies (churches) of the baptized believers existed in many regions of the Roman Empire, it was then time for the Spirit to write in letters instructions for gospel living to all those disciples who would eventually come for the next two thousand years. The letters did not confuse the early disciples in reference to the simplicity of the gospel message, which message was preached before the letters were written. On the contrary, the letters that explained the simple gospel in detail united the universal church of believers. Therefore, if we would use the information that is included in the letters to divide gospel-obedient members of the body, then we do not fully understand the power of the gospel to unite believers.

The letters that explained the gospel in detail subsequently became the foundation upon which the members of the body accessed the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, Peter instructed that in our study of the Scriptures we must grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). Essentially, this instruction by Peter was to move Christians to study what Paul also revealed concerning the mystery of the gospel. Paul stated to the Ephesians “*how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery [of the gospel], as I wrote before in few words*” (Ep 3:3). But before there were any letters written that explained the gospel, the gospel was verbally preached throughout the early Roman world. But when the letters were written, then the letters of the Holy Spirit became the sole source of information about the gospel journey of the Son of God.

The Act 3 message of Peter is a good example of what historically happened first in reference to the revelation of the truth of the gospel. When Peter addressed a Jewish audience in the context of Acts 3, he could not quote a book, chapter and verse from the New Testament, for the New Testament was not yet written. His, as well as the other

apostles, was the simple gospel message that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God who came from heaven, went to the cross, was resurrected, ascended to the right hand of God, and at the time he was preaching, was reigning as King Jesus in heaven (See At 2:14-36). Jesus was the Christ, and the Messiah. The Messiah for which the Jews had been waiting for centuries had come in the person Jesus who came from Nazareth.

The apostles were then inspired by the Holy Spirit in reference to the function of the first gospel-obedient disciples. For this reason, the first disciples continued in the apostles' teaching, which teaching was later put into print (See Jn 14:26; 16:13; At 2:42; 1 Co 14:37). We subsequently continue in the first gospel Bible class of the apostles by continually studying the Textbook that as written by the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 2:15).

D. Gospel power:

By first presenting to people the simplicity of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit allowed the early religious audiences, both Jews and Gentiles, to be touched by the power that is inherent in the salvational journey of the Son of God. In this way, people responded to the incarnate Son of God who came from heaven, and was revealed in the flesh of man (Jn 1:1,2,14). The fact that thousands in the first century believed that the Son of God came in the flesh of man in order to have that same flesh nailed to a cross for their sins, moved people to respond. This was the power of the gospel. People were moved by the sacrificial offering of the Son of God. It was not that they were moved by a quotation of Bible verses from the Old Testament, though all prophecy in the Old Testament foretold the coming and offering of the Son of God. They were surprised that Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies (Lk 24:44). But it was the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God that moved them to respond to the manifestation of

the heart of God at the cross. The power was in the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God. It is this same power that transforms lives today (See Rm 12:1,2).

The record of this gospel journey of the incarnate Son of God is recorded in the Bible. It is this written record that keeps us on track concerning the historical accuracy of the gospel journey of the incarnate Son of God. If we ignore the Bible in these matters, then in our ignorance we will lead ourselves back into vain religious beliefs and behavior that we will create after our own religious desires in order to again make an attempt at self-justification before God (See Hs 6:4).

E. Time to consider:

As previously inferred, restorations need time to develop within a society simply because the inherent power of the gospel journey of the Son of God is so profound, and more often, totally contrary to self-righteousness. Years were involved in the early restoration that was generated by John the Baptist, Jesus, Jesus' first disciples, and the apostles. No restoration among the masses of people was generated by a single meeting of gospel preaching.

Acts 2 was only a restorational spark of about 3,000 who initially believed and obeyed the gospel. We must not forget that on that Passover/Pentecost occasion in A.D. 30, it is estimated that over one million Jews came to Jerusalem. Three thousand initial responses, and then later 5,000, was just a small spark. Those who led in that restoration, therefor, exercised great patience with the people. The heart of God had been imputed in their hearts for over three years. Jesus had convinced them that He was the Messiah, and thus the redemptive King who would reign on David's throne in heaven.. The Jewish audience on the Pentecost occasion of A.D. 30 had been considering Jesus as the Messiah for over three years before Peter preached the total gospel message on that day (See At 2:22-37). The hearts of

many in the audience, therefore, had been prepared to receive Peter's message.

Though today preachers as Peter may be years along in their restoration faith in the gospel, they must be patient with their immediate audiences. Sometimes, those in the audience must first consider the task of digging themselves out of decades of misguided religious traditions. Some will initially respond to the gospel, but others will come later as those in the audience of Peter in the historical context of Acts 3:19. Even among the religious leaders, it sometimes takes time for these influential people to eventually obey the gospel. It was at least five years after the Pentecost of A.D. 30 when Luke recorded the following historical statement concerning those who held out until the gospel had penetrated their hearts:

So the word [of the gospel] of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (At 6:7).

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Gospel Restoration, Book 79
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Chapter 4

Energizing The Power

(Romans 1:13-18)

Familiar passages must always be reexamined. And one of those passages that must always be reexamine is the commonly quoted statement of Paul in Romans 1:16:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel [good news], for

it is the power [dunamis] of God unto [eis] salvation to every one who believes”

The context that explains this verse begins in verse 13, where Paul informed the Roman Christians that he had planned to come to them. He explains, however, that for some reason—we are not told—that he was hindered. To fully appreciate the significance of verse 16, therefore, it must be clearly understood that in the context Paul was writing his comments to Christians, not unbelievers. He was planning to go to Rome to meet with Christians who had previously heard and obeyed the gospel, possibly on a visit of some Roman Jews to a Pentecost/Passover feast in Jerusalem since A.D. 30, the first time the full gospel was preached on earth (See At 2:9,10).

The fact that these were Christians to whom Paul planned to visit in Rome clarifies what he wanted to do when he arrived in Rome. He wanted to start a gospel Bible class in order to energize the affect of the gospel in their lives. He explained this objective when he stated that he wanted to visit them in order *“that I might have some **fruit** among you also, even as I have among the other Gentiles”* (Rm 1:13).

His use of the word “fruit” would be better understood if he were going to unbelievers and preaching the gospel (See Ph 4:17). But in this context, the “fruit” **refers to that which he wanted to produce in the hearts of Christians, not unbelievers.** This is a very interesting use of the word “fruit.” The word “fruit” explains what he meant in verse 16 in reference to the “power” of the gospel. The gospel is able to continually produce fruit in the hearts of Christians.

Paul’s use of the word “fruit” in Romans 1:13 is similar to how he used the word in the context of Philippians 1:9-11. He desired that the Philippians *“**abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment . . . being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus***

Christ” (Ph 1:9,11). Paul likewise desired the same in the lives of the Christians in Rome. He wanted to bear the fruit of righteousness in them that began when they first responded to the gospel. Therefore, they would continue to grow spiritually by their continued study (knowledge) of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So herein lies the key to why Paul wanted to go to Rome. He wrote in verse 15, “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you [Christians] also who are at Rome.*” This is a very interesting statement in view of the fact that the good news (gospel) of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and coronation of Jesus Christ is a message that is normally preached to unbelievers, not to those who already believe and have obeyed the gospel by immersion into Christ for the remission of their sins. But in Paul’s desire to go to the Christians in Rome, he wanted to continue teaching Christians matters concerning the gospel. Therefore, we **preach** the gospel to unbelievers, but we **teach** the gospel among ourselves as gospel-obedient believers.

Some analysis is thus in order. What confuses some is that most translators use the English word “preach” in Romans 1:15. This word is used to translate a Greek word that is not the common Greek word that is used for “preach” in the New Testament. The common word for “preach” is *kerusso*. This is the Greek word that is used to convey the thought of making a general public announcement or proclamation about news that affects the entire community. When proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers, therefore, the word *kerusso* is the most appropriate word. Preaching is a public announcement of good news to unbelievers, whereas “teaching” is a word that would emphasize instruction.

The word that Paul used in verse 15 is not *kerusso*, but the Greek word *euaggelizo*. This Greek word is used to convey the concept of carrying on discussions concerning good news. This is the word that is used when emphasis is on teaching Christians matters concerning the good

news of the Son of God coming into this world, His atoning sacrifice, and His present reign at the right hand of God the Father (See At 5:42; 8:4,12,35; 10:36; 11:20). The gospel was initially preached (*kerusso*) to the Romans while they were unbelievers. But now it was time for instructing them (*euaggelizo*) further in the good news that they had heard and obeyed.

The contexts in which *euaggelizo* is used emphasize that the teacher is explaining the gospel to an audience or individual, particularly an audience of Christians. This brings us to the context of Paul's statement in Romans 1:16. He wanted to go to the disciples in Rome in order to instruct them further in matters concerning the gospel. In the context, he had already pointed out to them the reason for his trip; he wanted to produce the fruit of righteousness among the disciples in Rome. But there is also another understanding that we must take away from Romans 1:16.

Paul wrote that the gospel "*is the power [dunamis] of God unto [eis] salvation.*" The Greek word for "power" in this statement is *dunamis*, the word from which the English word "dynamite" is derived. We could metaphorically take the function of dynamite back into the statement that Paul made in reference to what a growing knowledge of the gospel does in one's heart. As dynamite moves great obstacles, so the gospel of the incarnate Son of God moves obstacles in our hearts. In other words, the good news of the incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, and present reign of King Jesus, is God's motivational dynamite to move unbelievers into the realm of salvation, and subsequently, move believers into a continued transformation of their lives.

The gospel is not the salvation, it is the dynamite that motivates hearts to do that which is necessary in order to bring one into the realm of salvation. For this reason, Paul used the linear action of the participle of the Greek word our "belief" (believing). That is, if one begins and continues to believe, then the gospel continues to be the motivat-

ing power that leads to a life of continuous behavioral transformation. It is for this reason that Paul could mandate continued spiritual growth in the lives of Christians: “**Be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rm 12:2).

If one does not continue to believe and grow in the historical events of the gospel, then he will lose his salvation (See 1 Co 15:1,2). If we continue to believe the gospel, therefore, we will continue to allow Christ to be formed in our lives. This was Paul’s fatherly concern for the first generation disciples to whom he had preached the gospel in Galatia. “*My little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you*” (Gl 4:19).

Christ is not completely formed in one immediately at the time he or she obeys the gospel in baptism. “Forming,” or “transformation,” is a lifetime project for those who continue to believe and behave the gospel of Jesus. This point is what makes the statement, “Just believe on, or accept Jesus as your personal Savior,” so shallow in reference to one’s lifetime struggle to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, and though it is a lifetime struggle, Christians must follow the mandate of Peter to grow spiritually in grace and the knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18).

The gospel was an historical event that revealed the grace of God wherein only there is salvation. In an obedient response to this divine journey of the incarnate Son of God, the “beginning believer” repents and is baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3-6; Gl 3:26-29). And if we are continually motivated by the death, burial and resurrection of the incarnate and reigning Lord Jesus Christ, then we will walk in the abundant life in this life (Jn 10:10), but also into eternal life when the Lord Jesus returns for His own.

It is the gospel that motivates those who are willing to believe, and thus be brought into the realm of God’s grace through their obedience that is manifested in baptism. Bap-

tism, therefore, is not an action in reference to simply obeying a law, but a **response to the gospel**. If it were simply a response to law, then we might feel that we have merited our own salvation through our legal obedience to law. But if baptism is a personal response to the gospel, then what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:15 comes alive: *“For all things [in reference to the revelation of the gospel] are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people **may cause thanksgiving** to abound to the glory of God.”*

In Romans 1:16 Paul linked gospel and salvation with one Greek word, the word *eis*. Simply believing in the gospel is not enough to bring one into the realm of salvation. There is no such thing as “faith only” salvation in the New Testament. The gospel must be the motivational power to stir one unto obedience of the gospel, and subsequently come into the realm of salvation in God’s grace. It is at the point of baptism that one’s sins are washed away by the gospel offering of the blood of Jesus (At 22:16). It is thus at the point of baptism that one is raised with Christ into a salvational relationship with God (Rm 6:3-6).

The historical event of the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God will stir belief in the hearts of sincere people. But this belief must be a parteciple of action, not a once-off statement of belief in self-declaring one’s own salvation. The active belief about which Paul wrote in Romans 1:16 was an action that must continue throughout one’s life (See Rm 12:1,2). Baptism for remission of sins, therefore, is not a conclusion, but the beginning of a new life of continued transformation.

This same thought was stated by Jesus, but in different words: *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mk 16:16). The believer will come into the realm of salvation only when his faith is stirred into action. He will come into this realm through obedience to the gospel wherein one’s sins are initially forgiven. It is also at this time that one’s cleansing of sin begins and continues throughout life if one’s belief does not wane (At 2:38; 1 Jn

1:7). For this reason Paul wanted to go to the Christians in Rome and remind them again of the gospel to which they had responded. His mission to the believers was as Peter's commission that Christians, who are in the realm of God's grace, must continue to "*grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pt 3:18).

The good news of the Son of God coming into this world, going to the cross, and His present reign, is the power that moves hearts from the time one first believes this message, until his last dying breath. This is the power that moves one into (*eis*) the realm of God's grace, wherein he or she is saved. And thus, "*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves [through meritorious law-keeping], it is the gift of God*" (Ep 3:8). When the gift of God's Son becomes awesome in our hearts, it is then that we are moved with thanksgiving throughout our lives. Paul's going to Rome in order to conduct a gospel Bible class, therefore, should generate perfect Bible class attendance on the part of the Roman Christians.

Chapter 5

Life-Changing Power

We stand in awe at the profound historical statement that the Holy Spirit made through the apostle Paul: "*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God*" (2 Co 4:15). This would be **all the redemptive work of the Son of God** from the incarnation to the crucifixion, and finally, the Son's ascension to the right hand of God. This gospel journey of the Son of God is all for our sakes. When an individual understands this truly indescribable blessing of grace from God, he or she is **caused** to respond with dedicated thanksgiving.

The word "abound" in the text assumes that something is done; something happens in our lives. This is more

than a performance on Sunday morning. This is a living thanksgiving, a response to the gospel that causes transformed lives (See Rm 12:1,2). As will be noted later, this was an appropriate statement to be written to some of the Corinthian Christians who were not living up to the motivational standard of the power of the gospel.

A. Discovering the nature of true Christianity:

In order to prepare His immediate disciples for this life-changing motivational power that was soon to come after His ascension, and before sending them out on mission trips during His earthly ministry, Jesus said, “*Freely you have received, freely give*” (Mt 10:8). Unfortunately, this statement of Jesus is commonly misunderstood. As a result of this misunderstanding, a “colonial churchianity” is often allowed to creep in among those who should be abounding in thanksgiving in response to the gospel.

When the gospel was first preached to former colonial possessions of the past, many of the formerly colonial citizens in those countries did not fully understand the implications of the 2 Corinthians 4:15 statement of Paul, as well as what Jesus said in being a generous giver. Subsequently, many of the first legally converted people by the early missionaries simply carried on with their former colonial behavior.

What makes it difficult for some to understand Jesus’ statement to freely give as one has freely received is the colonial culture that has been carried forward to the church today in some societies. The colonial empires of the past freely gave to the nations of their empires, not realizing that they were creating a dependency culture within the culture of the nations that made up their empires. Citizens subsequently developed a culture of freely receiving, but never really learning how to freely give.

When the first evangelists (missionaries) went to these colonial “possessions,” they often enabled the colonial prac-

tice of freely giving everything to the local folks. Unfortunately, they were somewhat weak in teaching the local folks that the heart of the gospel inspires one to abound in freely giving. Nevertheless, the local folks were very thankful for the free schools, free church buildings, free Bibles, free tracts and free books they were freely given. But because the local folks lived in a colonial culture of dependency, they often found it quite difficult to freely give to others locally in response to the free gift of God's grace they had received.

B. Discovering that receiving assumes giving:

So maybe it would help to insert some interpretive comments in the text of Jesus' statement to His disciples. Therefore, we would read the Matthew 10:8 statement of Jesus in this way: "*Freely you have received [something], freely give [something].*" On the occasion of Matthew 10, Jesus gave His disciples a message to proclaim to the people to whom they were being sent. The message was that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mt 10:7). With the message that the kingdom was at hand, the messengers were also freely given the gifts of healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, and casting out demons (Mt 10:8).

On both of the occasions of sending out disciples in Matthew 10 and Luke 10, the disciples received something freely. They were subsequently to give freely from the blessings that they had freely received in order that others be blessed by their blessing. If we would apply the principle of "freely receiving-freely giving" to ourselves as disciples of Jesus, then freely receiving all things that have been given to us through the gospel of God's grace assumes that we will freely give in a responsive thanksgiving for God's grace. In this way our thanksgiving will abound to the benefit of others.

We must emphasize this point because this is the very heart of Christianity, and thus, the definition of Christian

behavior. Because Jesus was incarnate in the flesh of man, He paid a great price for being in the physical presence of His disciples in order to freely give them something. The giving of His presence assumed that they in turn should freely give themselves to others. He freely gave up heaven in the form of God in order to be in their presence in a state of poverty (See Ph 2:5-11). *“Yet for your sakes He became poor so that you through His poverty might become rich”* (2 Co 8:9).

There was thus a great price paid for the free gift of grace that was given. The condition for their receiving freely was the great price of His incarnation. But Jesus alone paid this price. In order to freely give, Jesus’ disciples must likewise pay a great price of freely giving what they had freely received. This is grace abounding in action. Christians realize that they have been *“justified **freely** by His grace”* (Rm 3:24). They realize that they have received the Holy Spirit from God so that they *“might know the things that are **freely** given to us by God”* (1 Co 2:12).

C. Discovering grace-oriented givers:

This is the way grace abounds. This is Christianity in action. See if this is not true in the context of Jesus’ sending forth of the early disciples that is recorded both in Matthew 10 and Luke 10. Jesus instructed on both occasions, *“Carry no money bag, no wallet, no [extra] sandals”* (Lk 10:4). *“Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two coats, nor sandals, nor staff, **for the worker is worthy of his food”*** (Mt 10:9,10). Those messengers who were sent out by Jesus were not to rely on themselves. **They were to present themselves as an opportunity for others to freely give.** In this way, the messengers would be able to identify in the villages to which they went those who were inclined to freely receive, and thus, freely give.

This is quite amazing. The messengers were going

into villages throughout Palestine to which neither Jesus nor themselves had previously gone. So when they proclaimed, as John the Baptist, that the time of regeneration had come, and the sovereignty of God was soon to be revealed, **those willing recipients of this message within the villages freely received the messengers into their homes and freely provided for them living quarters and food.**

We must not miss this point. Those who received the messengers, freely did so. They were thus qualifying themselves to also be messengers of the free grace of God. They freely received Jesus' messengers, who freely gave themselves and a message of good news to the household. As the hosts freely received, they in turn freely gave to Jesus' messengers (See the behavior of Gaius in 3 Jn 1-6).

This is what grace does, and this is what Jesus meant when He initially stated to His messengers, "*Freely you receive, freely give*" (Mt 10:8). Grace generates thanksgiving within the hearts of those who have freely received. This thanksgiving motivates the receivers to freely give something to others. As a price was paid by Jesus to freely give Himself on the cross, a price must also to be paid by the disciples of Jesus to freely pass on the gift of grace. **If the recipients did not freely receive Jesus' messengers, then certainly they would not be motivated to freely pass on to others that which they freely received.** If they did not freely pass on that which they had freely received, then they would be behaving contrary to the behavior of grace. They would not have truly understood the nature of the grace of God. And by not truly understanding, they disqualified themselves from receiving the precious message of the gospel. So Jesus instructed His "missionaries" in such situations to kick the dust off their feet and move on.

So what about those who do not discover the blessing of a grace-motivated life? If one does not fully understand the gospel of God's grace, then he or she often becomes a religious leech who always wants to freely receive, but never

freely give. So in sending out His disciples, Jesus cautioned them on this matter: “*And whoever will not receive you [freely] or hear your words [freely], when you depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet*” (Mt 10:14). In fact, on those who do not join in the fellowship of thanksgiving in freely receiving and freely giving, Jesus pronounced in judgment, “*It will be more tolerable for that land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city*” (Mt 10:15). These are indeed frightful words.

Chapter 6

The Macedonian Miracle

Thanksgiving for the free grace of God through the sacrificial offering of the Son of God should cause thanksgiving in the hearts of those who claim to be Christians. This helps us understand why the Macedonian disciples, who were at the time Paul wrote the Corinthians, new in the faith (At 16:12). It explains why these new disciples gave so sacrificially when opportunities arose for them to abound in the grace of God, and thus, freely give.

Because the Macedonian disciples had discovered the power of the gospel of grace, Paul used them as an example to a church with some stingy members in Corinth who would not be caused to give in thanksgiving for the grace of God that was revealed to them (See 2: Co 4:15). Because Paul used them as an example, we have the Macedonian disciples in Holy Scripture today because their sacrificial giving was a true testimony of people who abounded in the grace of God.

A. Overcoming stingy behavior:

Paul wrote to some stingy Corinthians the following grace-responsive example of the disciples in Macedonia:

“We make known to you the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia” (2 Co 8:1)—**one does not know if he or she is abounding in the grace of God until he or she is freely giving to others out of a thankful heart.** Notice in Paul’s preceding statement that he referred first to the “grace of God” that was given to and received by the Macedonian disciples. They received through Paul the message of God’s gospel of grace. But their free reception of the grace did not stop with saying “amen” to Paul’s sermon. On the contrary, *“in a great trial of affliction, and the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality”* (2 Co 8:2). They abounded in their liberal contributions to fellow brothers and sisters who were suffering from famine in Judea.

If the sacrificial response to grace by the Macedonian disciples teaches any clear lesson, **it is that even if one is in deep poverty, he or she is still obligated to abound in living the grace of God.** Assuming that we are in poverty is **no** excuse for not giving in a thankful response for the grace of God. There are no poverty-stricken grace-purchased Christians. Even if one is totally without something to give, at least he or she can give himself or herself in service to others. We must not forget that during the ministry of Jesus, a poor Jewish widow in Jerusalem gave her last two coins, and this before the revelation of the whole gospel was carried out by Jesus (Lk 21:1-3). She was then in poverty, having given her last two coins.

The disciples who were in famine were certainly in poverty, but they originally had freely made it possible that the Corinthians receive the gospel, for it was through the Jews that the free gift of God’s grace came into the world. And now for the Gentile Christians in Corinth, it was pay back time (See Rm 11:7-21).

So Paul continued to shame some Corinthians: *“For I testify that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord”* (2 Co 8:3). Paul

did not beg the Macedonians to give to the famine victims in Judea. On the contrary, they were cheerful givers because they had freely received and comprehended the free grace of God. Those who truly understand the grace of God **do not have to be asked to give blessings to others who are in need. They need only to be directed toward opportunities to release their desire to give.**

It is for this reason that legally motivated givers often become grudging givers. Grace-responsive givers, however, are always cheerful givers, always looking for some need upon which they can release their sincere gratitude for the grace they received freely through Jesus (2 Co 9:6-9). And once the opportunities are made known to grace-driven disciples, they do as Paul testified of the poverty-stricken Macedonians, “. . . *begging us with much urgency that we would receive the gift* [of their contribution] *and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints* [in famine in Judea]” (2 Co 8:4).

B. Learning to beg to give:

It is this last statement of Paul that shames some today who persist being constrained by a culture of dependency in reference to their behavior as Christians. Their function as disciples is the opposite to how the Macedonian disciples functioned in reference to giving in order to relieve the famine victims of Judea, the occasion (opportunity) for making the contribution.

And—this is important—in order to be in fellowship with all grace-motivated Christians around the world, **the Macedonians begged Paul to receive their contribution.** They understood that if they did not freely give, **then they would not be in fellowship with the universal church of Christ.** Disciples who continually seek to receive, therefore, can never be in fellowship with the universal church of Christ simply because they persist in being takers and not givers.

The Macedonians “begged” to give; they did not beg to receive. This is what grace does to one’s heart. **If a Christian continues to beg to receive, then he or she is masquerading as a Christian, having either forgotten or never understood the motivating power of the gospel of God’s grace.** Maybe such a person never really understood the nature of the gospel, and thus was baptized only legally in following a command to be baptized. We must keep in mind that if one legally goes down into the water, he or she will often come forth from the water and behave as a legal-oriented disciple. He or she may be a good law keeper, but not so much a grace-motivated disciple.

On the other hand, those who are grace-responsive to the gospel are seeking opportunities to freely give as they have freely received the grace of God. If we desire to be a “colonial disciple” in a formerly colonial nation in which we might find ourselves today, that in the past some foreign government built all our roads, schools and hospitals, even supported the government officials, then the continuation of this foreign dependency culture will cripple us in freely giving. The disciples who live in former colonial possessions are often cursed with a sense of dependency that cripples their willingness to give freely.

We had to smile when we recently listened to a BBC broadcast out of London that was made by a reporter who was in the former colonial possession of England. The setting for the broadcast was that Jamaica was seeking to follow the example of the West Indian island of Barbados. (Keep in mind that these countries are near to our hearts, for during the 1970s and early 1980s we lived and worked in the West Indies.) But now some of these island nations are seeking to leave the trade relationship of the British Commonwealth in order to be totally on their own as a republic, which in reality is a good thing.

So the BBC reporter was out on the streets of Jamaica, interviewing residents concerning Jamaica’s move to be a self-sufficient republic, and thus totally detached from the

“mother country.” One old Jamaican resident responded to the reporter, “They [England] never gave us anything; we might as well be a republic on our own.” This is a laughable statement in view of the fact that when we visited Jamaica on several occasions while living in the West Indies, we drove down England-built roads; we met in England-built schools, having passed by numerous England-built hospitals. We bought countless articles in the market that were imported duty-free as a result of the country being a colonial possession in the past and now a part of the Commonwealth. We even spoke English, a blessing from England. And for this particular person to say that England had never given them anything, was simply a failure to remember and appreciate the past history of Jamaica.

Jamaica is a good example of the colonial arrangement of those nations that were created as a part of the Empire of England. At one time, a quarter of the population of the world was a part of this Empire. But during the 1950s and 1960s, and under the queenship of Queen Elizabeth, the Empire disengaged from its former colonial possessions. We lived in the West Indies when many of these island nations were informed by England that they were being given their independence. They were thus instructed to get their constitutional and financial houses in order for they had to stand on their own. England would no longer hand out free roads, free schools, free hospitals, etc.

Jamaica was released to be a free nation on August 6, 1962. There was no revolutionary war where the Jamaicans fought for their independence. After England had given her resources to the country for over a century and a half during the post-slavery era, it was time to truly release the slaves. The people were subsequently freely given their independence. By the grace of England, these island nations of the West Indies, after being granted independence, were allowed to remain in the free-trade arrangement of the British Commonwealth in order to continue to receive duty-free imports from England and other Commonwealth

member nations. So England was expected to continue to give, but the now independent nations were not expected to give anything back to England in return.

(For those of you who might be interested in this matter of history, BCC reporter Jeremy Paxman recorded a five-segment TV series from 2015 to 2020, which TV series was first broadcasted on the BCC network. The name of the series was entitled, *Empire*. The entire series is now online.

At the end of the magnificent series, we noticed carefully what Paxman stated in one sentence in summation of the entire series: **“If we really want to understand who we are [as former citizens of Empire], it is time to stop pretending that Empire has nothing to do with us.”**

Paxman’s statement will help Western minds to understand better the shallow statement that was made by the old Jamaican gentleman in the previous BBC comment, as well as the colonial mentality of many of those older Christians who continue to hinder grace-motivated giving in the present church in all the former British possessions of the Empire.)

Nevertheless, throughout the years we have had the privilege of working with some very dedicated free givers in Africa, even those in countries that were formerly a part of the Empire. They have overcome their culture of colonial dependency of the past by responding to the grace of God.

We have found it interesting that as the poor Macedonians, those who qualify themselves to accept the free gift of God’s grace have no fear of impoverishing themselves further in the matter of giving because they are often already poor. For example, we recently sat down on a Sunday here in South Africa and turned on our TV to a channel that was dedicated to religious broadcasting. And there for the next thirty minutes was a second generation brother on the other side of South Africa whom we had known for over forty years. The “poor” churches in his area had

scraped together enough funds to support him on a live TV broadcast. This is the Macedonian marvel in action.

This was a case where Macedonian like-minded Christians had discovered the joy of grace-motivated giving to the preaching of the gospel. As the Judean church in the beginning of the gospel had sent out Jewish missionaries who ministered the gospel to the Gentiles in Macedonia and Achaia, so those who obeyed the gospel in Macedonia in turn contributed to minister the gospel to a greater audience in their own region and beyond. It was as Paul wrote of them, “*And you [Macedonian Christians, specifically, you in Thessalonian] became imitators of us . . . so that you were examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For the word of the Lord was sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad*” (1 Th 1:6-9).

Chapter 7

The Power Of Grace

We must never underestimate the power of grace to motivate Christians who sincerely seek to serve God. It is because of the Macedonian church example that the principle is taught that **no Christian can ever give an excuse of poverty in reference to contributing to the preaching of the gospel**. It is for this reason that whenever a group says, “Give us something because we are poor,” we immediately turn away from them, unless they are, as in the case of the Judean Christians, in the midst of a famine. As the villages who would not receive the messengers of Jesus, they disqualify themselves from understanding how grace must work in the hearts of the humble. Therefore, Jesus’ messengers today must do as Jesus instructed His first messengers when He sent them out during His earthly ministry. He instructed His messengers that if they were not received by a particular individual or village by not supplying them

with bread and a bed, then they were to turn away and shake off the dust of their feet in rejection of that individual or village.

If people do not reveal through sacrificial giving that their hearts are fertile soil for the gospel of grace, regardless of how poor they may be, then they have disqualified themselves to be worthy of the offering of the incarnate Son of God, who, though in the form of God, emptied Himself into the poverty of a fleshly body in order to go to the death of the cross (See Ph 2:5-11). Anyone who does not sacrificially give in response to His eternal sacrifice cannot truly understand the grace by which God offered His only begotten Son. He or she may be baptized legally, but may always find it difficult to give freely.

But in reference to the grace of God that should cause thanksgiving in our hearts, **this grace is contrary to colonial thinking and behavior that continually moves us to be dependent.** Grace moves us to look for opportunities where we can give, not get. It was for this reason that Jesus warned and cautioned those who would seek to be His disciples: “*For which one of you, intending to build a tower [that is, become My disciple], does not first sit down **and count the cost**, whether he has enough to finish it*” (Lk 14:28). Discipleship comes at a cost.

Nevertheless, there are those who often seek to be takers, whereas grace-driven disciples seek opportunities by which they can freely give the gospel of grace to the world through their free-will support of evangelists or materials to be sent to those who are yet to hear the gospel. So in order to shame the stingy “takers” of the Corinthian church, Paul again reminded them of the grace-motivated givers of Macedonia:

Have I committed an offense in humbling myself [while in your presence by supporting myself through making tents] so that you might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God without charge [your

support]? *I robbed other churches [who supported me], taking wages from them, in order to serve you [freely]. And when I was present with you and in need [of support], I was not a [financial] burden to anyone [in Corinth], for what I lacked [in funds] the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied [my needs]. And in all things I have kept myself from being [financially] burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself* (2 Co 11:7-9).

There were some among the Corinthians who were taking financial support for themselves. But Paul said of these charlatan apostles, “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ*” (2 Co 11:13). Deceitful workers who would use the church as an opportunity to receive financial gain, are false. The church must financially support those who preach the gospel to the lost (1 Co 9:13,14). However, the church must never become the occasion for the money-making schemes of masquerading takers.

It was for this reason that Paul did not pass through the Corinthian church immediately, but instead wrote a letter of warning in advance to his coming. He did not go immediately to the church in Corinth in order “*to spare you, I did not return to Corinth*” (2 Co 1:23).

As a Christ-sent apostle, Paul, as Peter, had the authority to inflict physical punishment on those who would conspire against the preaching of and obedience to the gospel (See At 5:1-11; 3 Jn 9,10). Therefore, Paul did not want to use this “rod” when he went to Corinth. If we went to them while they were continuing in behavior that was contrary to gospel living, then his coming would not have been a joyful occasion (See 2 Co 2:1-4). By not going immediately to Corinth, Paul thus spared some Corinthian members from being disciplined because they had involved themselves in using the church as an opportunity for financial gain (See 1 Co 4:21).

On the other hand, those who would impoverish them-

selves in order to freely give the gospel to others, as they freely received, are true and sincere (See 3 Jn 1-6). Paul impoverished himself for both the Corinthians and Macedonians. The Macedonians discovered the blessing of this life-changing behavior of grace. And for this reason, when Paul went on from Macedonian, the Philippian disciples sent support once and again to him, even when he was in Corinth (Ph 4:16). They even impoverished themselves in order to give to the famine-stricken brothers and sisters in Judea (2 Co 8:1-4).

Chapter 8

Motivation For Gospel Teachers

When Paul expressed his desire to go to Rome in the context of Romans 1:13-16, he was driven to assume a teaching ministry with the disciples in Rome. He sought to be the Roman Christians teacher in reference to instructing them in the realm of the grace in which they dwelt, in order that they grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). Since they had no written information on the subject, he was compelled to be their verbal “Bible.” The gospel, therefore, would be the subject of his first Bible class in Rome, and he would function as their teacher. The Roman letter that he sent to them prior to his coming would function as the textbook for the Bible class.

The context of Romans 1:13-16, therefore, places Paul in the function of being a teacher of the gospel to those who had already obeyed the gospel. We would certainly assume, however, that if he had the opportunity to stand before unbelievers in Rome, he would assume the ministry of preaching the gospel. But in the context of his desire that he proposed in Romans 1, he wanted to teach the gospel to believers, and such should be our desire in reference to our knowledge of the gospel. Leaders stand before the church as teachers of the gospel, not preachers of the gos-

pel. It is for this reason that we need many people to stand up as teachers of the gospel to the flock of God in order that we continue to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3:18).

We were once passing through the state of Kansas in America many years ago, visiting churches and informing them about what God was doing in Brazil, where we lived during the middle 1970s. By invitation, we went to a small town of about 2,000 in population, in which there was a small group of faithful disciples. On Wednesday night we showed up for **Bible class**, after which we were given the opportunity to inform the folks about the gospel being preached and taught in Brazil.

At the beginning of the Bible class, the regular teacher of the class stood up and said to those present, "Let's all turn to 2 Kings and continue our study."

This small church had existed for at least one hundred years in this small Kansas town. Nevertheless, this group of about 10-15 Bible-loving people were studying their Bibles in an organized Bible class environment. We were encouraged, and thus reminded again that if we would promote a continued restoration, and thus, usher in the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, we must persist in their study of the Bible, especially our study of the gospel.

We must be obsessed about gospel Bible study. Gospel Bible studies must be the focus of our faith, for "*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ [God]*" (Rm 10:17). Those who are ignorant of the Bible can never experience the joy of a spiritual restoration simply because they cannot grow in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3:18).

Bible classes are not the way it is today in many religious groups throughout the world. We live in a religious world in which there are thousands of dedicated faithful people who are following the mandate of the Holy Spirit in 2 Timothy 4:2: "***Preach the word!***" However, being born

out of, and having sat at the feet of their forefathers who only preached, they seem to have come short in the Holy Spirit's added mandate to the young Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2: "*These things **teach** and exhort [preach]*" (1 Tm 6:2). We have a great number of preachers, but fewer teachers. And for this reason, there are few Bible classes conducted among many churches of the religious world. This is especially true in reference to Bible classes that are centered around the subject that Paul wanted to teach when he went to Rome.

Some very religious people have forgotten that there is a difference between preaching and teaching. In view of this, it is interesting to note the example of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Jesus went forth "*to **teach** and to **preach** in their cities*" (Mt 11:1). Unfortunately, we live in a religious world today with thousands of eloquent preachers who know how to preach the gospel from pulpits, but they often suffer in their ability to "*commit to faithful men who will be **able** to **teach** others also*" (2 Tm 2:4). Because some do not make a distinction between teaching and preaching, there is sometimes a lack on the part of some preachers of the ability to teach others effectively the word of God. What usually happens is that some preachers gather a group of people to conduct a Bible class, but then start preaching, not teaching.

It is for this reason that there are a host of churches in the religious world today who have no Bible classes, and subsequently, they are weak in their knowledge of the word of God, and especially, the gospel. The leaders of these particular religious groups know how to preach to an assembly, but they have little ability in teaching the Bible in a systematic and understandable manner in a Bible class environment. These preachers are great exhorters who preach with great gusto, but sometimes they lack in their ability to be educators in the word of God. For this reason, eloquent preachers sometimes stand before audiences of people when both the speaker and audience are somewhat weak in their

knowledge of the word of God.

Most churches of the religious world, particularly independent churches, have no Bible classes because they have no Bible teachers. Because their preacher is a second, third or fourth generation preacher, he did not grow up at the feet of a good Bible teacher. So when these faithful men went forth and started other churches, the only model they had to follow was that in which they had grown up. The result of their mentoring, therefore, is that they gather an audience together who sits with endless unanswered questions, as well as a single interpretation of a particular text—the preacher’s interpretation.

We must not think that only the modern-day church has some difficulty in this area. We must remember that Peter had to exhort his first century readers to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3:18). He wrote that he was not ashamed to remind his readers again of the first principles that he had taught them (2 Pt 1:12). We must never conclude that we can conclude a gospel Bible class.

The church in Rome had the same problem in reference to their knowledge of the gospel. They understood the basics, but they needed to be taught more in the gospel in order to “*grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). This is the assembly scenario of many churches throughout the world today. We have many great preachers who are very eloquent in preaching the gospel, but lack somewhat in the area of being great Bible teachers of the gospel.

Those few young men who sit Sunday after Sunday at the feet of one who does not know how to lead through teaching, will simply continue the model of that which they have experienced. If these young men seek to establish a church, they simply follow the example of a leader who knows how to preach eloquently, but is somewhat challenged in the area of teaching a Bible class effectively on the subject of the gospel. Too often, therefore, church es-

tablishment is a dedicated individual who simply goes forth to repeat only that which he has experiences. He goes forth and does the same as the one who mentored him as a preacher.

This is the religious world in which we live. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit is having a difficult time reaching the hearts of people through His inspired textbook, the Bible. In fact, many religious groups of the world today have sidelined the inspired word of the Holy Spirit in order to concentrate on their own spirit in experiential assemblies. They have led themselves to believe that encouragement for another week comes from how excited one becomes on Sunday morning, rather than the encouragement that comes from a greater study of the gospel journey of the incarnate Son of God.

Epilogue

We are calling for a restoration of Bible study in a Bible class environment that focuses on a study of the gospel. This means that there are thousands of good preachers out there who need to follow Jesus in this matter, as well as the instructions of the Holy Spirit in 1 & 2 Timothy. We need more gospel teachers for the simple reason of what Jesus said we must do after preaching the gospel: “... *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*” (Mt 28:20). He did not say, “preaching to them to observe all things.” Jesus used the word “teaching.” Teaching assumes instruction, and instruction assumes that there is a resource from which instruction must come.

Preaching is for the purpose of announcing the gospel (good news) in a community of unbelievers. **Teaching** is for the purpose of continuing to instruct those who are obedient to the gospel. This is exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The apostles first preached the gospel to the multitudes. The gospel subsequently generated a response from the people: “*Men and brethren, what will we do?*” (At 2:37).

Gospel preaching to unbelievers on this day resulted in about 3,000 people enrolling in the first gospel Bible class (At 2:41,42). It was a time for the apostles to change their ministry. In order to do what Jesus commissioned them to do after people were baptized, they switched to the ministry of teaching. So we note carefully what they did: “*And they [the new converts] continued steadfastly in the apostles’ **teaching***” (At 2:42).

The apostles were teaching the teachings of the apostles. Since the word “teaching” in the statement of Acts 2:42 is a **participle** of action, we would not assume that Luke wanted us to understand that he meant that the new converts were continuing in the apostles’ “doctrine” (teachings). If this were the case, then the word “teaching” would be plural. But in Luke’s use of the participle he wanted us to understand that the apostles, after they preached the gospel, switched to the ministry of teaching the gospel. The apostles were certainly instructing the people in new “teachings” (Bible truth), but they were doing so through the ministry of teaching.

Therefore, Acts 2:42 could be interpreted in two ways: (1) The baptized believers continued in the teachings (doctrine) that the apostles taught, or (2) the apostles continued to teach the people who had obeyed the gospel. In either case, there was teaching going on by the apostles after an audience of gospel obedient people had been generated by the initial preaching of the gospel.

In view of the Matthew 28:20 mandate of Jesus, we must understand Acts 2:42 from a historical point of view. The apostles continued to teach the people all things that Jesus had taught them, thus fulfilling the promise of Jesus to the apostles in John 16:13: “*When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you [apostles] into all truth.*” It was this “truth” that the apostles continued **to teach** the new converts on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus had also promised the apostles, “*The Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will **teach** you*

all things and bring all things to your remembrance that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). This is exactly what the apostles did in the context of Acts 2:42. After the preaching, it was time for Bible classes, especially on matters of the gospel that Jesus had taught the apostles throughout His earthly "Bible class." This is exactly what Paul wanted to do when he went to Rome (Rm 1:13-16).

The apostles did continue to teach the gospel to the unique gathering of baptized believers in Acts 2. The initial preaching of the gospel produced the students for their Bible class, wherein gospel-obedient disciples could be taught in the grace in which they now lived. They were thus taught more information concerning the gospel that they had obeyed (See Rm 1:13-16; 2 Pt 3:18).

The continued teaching by the apostles laid the foundation for the continued coming of the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord (At 3:19). The scenario that developed on Pentecost was that the initial preaching of the gospel produced the students for the apostles to open up the first gospel Bible class, wherein they continued to teach the gospel, as well as many other things that were revealed to them by the Holy Spirit in order to usher in the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

We call for those who will remain true to the example of Jesus and His instructions in Matthew 28:20, as well as the mandates of the Holy Spirit to Timothy. We seek to encourage those who will follow Paul to Rome in order to teach the gospel to those who have already obeyed the gospel. Therefore, we seek those who are **able** to teach the gospel to others also (2 Tm 2:2). We can overcome the dearth of gospel ignorance that prevails in the religious world today only by a concentrated effort on both preaching and studying the gospel.

Since the gospel of the incarnation, sacrificial offering, resurrection, ascension to the right hand of the Father, and the glorious kingdom reign of King Jesus, is the foundation of our salvation, we seek those who will join with us

in our efforts to both preach and teach this gospel. And since the gospel is the foundation of our faith, and the spiritual magnet that draws gospel-obedient people together as the one universal body of Christ, then it is incumbent on all who have believed and obeyed the gospel to proclaim it to the world. When thousands of preachers and teachers focus on preaching and teaching the gospel, it is then that God will bring in times of spiritual refreshing from His presence, for it is through the gospel of His incarnate Son of God that He links with humanity.

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 Book 109: *A New Future*
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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**