

Basic Training Bible Ministries

“The Missionary Methods of Paul the Apostle”



“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.” Mat 29:19–20

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The Missionary Methods of Paul the Apostle

Note: Much credit for this study belongs to an Anglican missionary named Roland Allen, who wrote the book *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*. Much of the following material was first introduced to me in his book. How I thank God for faithful men who have gone before and left us a blazed trail to follow!

Introduction: Why study Paul's methods?

Some may ask, "Why should we study the missionary methods of Paul? Surely, in all this time, we have grown beyond his old ways and have found better ways of accomplishing ministry." To this I would say, look around at the condition of the church at large throughout the world today, and see if you can find a model of success that compares to Paul. Yes, we have our "mega-churches." They have huge congregations and lots of money, but are they successful in the sight of God? Are they raising up a generation of mature, Bible-instructed believers? I think not. The ignorance of the average believer today is astounding. Many cannot even give a clear presentation of the Gospel message. In a recent survey across the United States, only about 13% of regular church goers said that they believe in hell, and about the same number doubted the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. The church as a whole is in a shambles, and the reason is that we have forsaken the God-given way—exemplified by Paul—to achieve the great commission of "making disciples of all nations" (Mat 28:19). So why should we study the missionary methods of Paul? Let me give five reasons:

1. He was chosen by God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, Act 9:15; Rom 11:13.
2. He is the model, or "*pattern*" given by God for successful ministry.

*"However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a **pattern** to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."* (1Ti 1:16) (emphasis added)

*"Hold fast the **pattern** of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."* (2Ti 1:13) (emphasis added)

In both the above passages, the word "*pattern*" is *hupotuposis*, meaning "a model, example, an outline or ground plan" (*Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*). Both the methods and the teachings of Paul are to be followed.

3. Those who followed Paul's methods in early times saw a repetition of his success.

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord ... so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the Word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place, Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything." (1Th 1:6–8)

The word “*followers*” above means literally to “mimic,” or “to imitate.” Those who imitate the methods of Paul see the success of Paul, along with the sufferings.

4. We are commanded to become his imitators in all things of Christ.

“Therefore I urge you, imitate Me.” (1Co 4:16)

“Imitate Me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (1Co 11:1)

5. Each believer has been called to be a minister and ambassador of Christ, 2Co 5:18–21. We all have family members, friends, and neighbors who need to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Following Paul’s methods will help us in seeking to reach them.

Since the Apostle Paul was called to be the “*Apostle to the Gentiles*” (Act 9:15; Rom 11:13), he is therefore the Apostle to the Church, and the interpreter of God’s Word and will for the Church Age. Just as Moses was the interpreter and example of God’s will for Israel in Old Testament times, even so Paul is the interpreter and example for the Church. If we despise his office, or his example, we do so at our own spiritual peril.

Since we bear the burden of fulfilling our commission in this generation to “*make disciples of all the nations*” (Mat 28:19), we would be wise to study the methods of Paul. For in a period of just over ten years, he was able to evangelize most of the civilized world, establish strong and effective churches, and prepare and send out workers who went to the ends of the earth. Who would not envy such success? Yet it is as available to us as it was to him, according to the gift and calling God has given to us.

Join me in a brief study of the ministry of this great Apostle. Let us see how we might adopt his methods in our own lives and ministries, and see something of the same effectiveness and success that he enjoyed. This success was not due to his uniqueness, or the conditions of his time, but to his faithfulness to do God’s work according to God’s ways. Let me challenge us all with two very interesting texts from the Psalms:

“For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.’” (Psa 95:10)

“The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, and His works to the children of Israel.” (Psa 103:6)

Moses was God’s appointed legislator and expositor of God’s Word to the people of Israel. They were to follow both his teaching and his example. Yet they grieved God, going astray in their hearts, because “*they did not know His ways.*” Yet they had no excuse, for God “*made known His ways to Moses*”! Israel saw His mighty works, but they never understood His ways. How many ministers today are seeing God at work, seeing His mighty hand all around them, yet are missing His blessing on their own work

because they do not know His ways? To believers today, God has also given us an interpreter of His ways, and that is the Apostle Paul. He knew God's ways, for the accomplishing of His mighty works. We would be wise to follow his ways.

I. Preparation: Growing into His Gift.

As strange as it may sound, even Apostles had to grow up spiritually in the faith. Even though the Apostle Paul was given his general destiny at the time of his salvation (Act 9:15-16), and though he received direct revelations of divine truth (1Co 11:23), yet he still had to go through the process we call spiritual growth and maturity.

A. Illustration of the mustard seed, Mat 13:31–32

From the “smallest of seeds” grows a tree in which the birds take refuge. In the Middle-Eastern countries the mustard plant will grow to 10 or 12 feet in height. The birds are attracted to it due to the fragrant aroma of the tree.

B. Spiritual application, Rom 15:1; 2Co 12:9–10

Believers who grow to maturity begin very small spiritually, but in time they gain the strength and stability to sustain their weaker brothers and sisters. Those we call “great” in the history of the faith are merely men and women, who by grace and growth, became a source of strength and encouragement to those attracted by the fragrance of their lives.

C. The spiritual growth of Paul

1. He began simply as a “*brother*” (Act 9:17).
2. He then became a “disciple” (Act 9:18–19, 25–26).
3. Like us, he became a “witness” and began to “evangelize,” or share his faith (Act 9:20, 22, 29). Note he witnessed “*immediately*” (v. 20), powerfully, (v. 22), and “*boldly*” (v. 29).
4. After the second attempt on his life, Paul returned to his home city of Tarsus (Act 9:30 with Gal 1:21–24), where he continued his evangelistic ministry for about ten years (cf., Ramsay; *Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, pg. 47).
5. After about 14 years (10 + 3½ according to Gal 1:18 and Act 9:20–30), Barnabas brings him to Antioch (Act 11:25–26) and, after at least one year, Paul is named among the “*prophets*” (Act 13:1).
6. Note that as Saul he is always named second to Barnabas (Act 13:1, 2, 7) until the crisis of Elymas the sorcerer (Act 13:8–12), at which time Paul steps into the role of “Apostle to the Gentiles,” as evidenced in Act 13:13, where he is now seen as the leader of the mission team.

D. Doctrine of spiritual gifts:

1. Every believer in Jesus Christ is blessed with “*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*” (Eph 1:3).
2. This treasure-trove of blessings includes a spiritual gift or gifts (1Co 12:7).
3. This spiritual gift is bestowed by the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (1Co 12:11, 13, 18).
4. Since gifts are given according to the grace of God, not according to merit, they are permanent, and cannot be lost because of demerit or failure (Rom 11:29).
5. While there are many gifts listed (see Rom 12:4–8; 1Co 12:8–10, 27–30; Eph 4:11–12) all gifts appear to fall into one of two categories: speaking or serving (1Pe 4:10–11).
6. The best way to identify your gift is to grow in the Word, pray for God’s guidance, and serve in any capacity until God promotes you in the estimation of other believers.

II. **Humility: Waiting to be Sent**

This truth has already been anticipated in the previous section, but it is worth emphasizing. Even though Paul had a preview of how God would use him (Act 9:15–16), yet he was willing to “*wait on the Lord*” (Isa 40:31), until God’s perfect time. Too often we see those who are all on fire to serve the Lord, but they run ahead of His plan, and end up discouraged and defeated. Three valuable principles are worth remembering.

A. God uses prepared people.

Even Paul went through a prolonged time of preparation for his ministry. This should be an encouragement to all who have been in ministry for five, ten, or even twenty years. God may be preparing you for a much greater sphere of ministry. Be patient, be faithful, and he will increase your field of service.

B. Unless God promotes you, you have not been promoted.

Ultimately, God will judge the work of each believer. If we were to gain a large and popular ministry, but not according to the purpose and will of God, what is it in the end? It is all “wood, hay, and straw” (1Co 3:11–15). Too often we are eager to be used by God, so we may run ahead of His **plan**, or His **time**.

C. God never lifts anyone up, who is not first willing to be humbled.

This truth is clearly stated in many passages.

“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luk 14:11)

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” (1Pe 5:6)

“For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be despised.” (1Sa 2:30)

If we want to be used in a mighty way, we first must be willing to be despised, hated, and persecuted. Only those who suffer with Christ are fit to reign with Him (2Ti 2:12). Like the Apostle Paul, King David spent nearly 15 years of persecution at the hands of Saul before he was finally given the position God had promised him at his anointing. These times are for our refining, and strengthening. Only in darkness, loneliness, and hardship, can we learn to trust in our God alone, and not to look to men. But if, in all our afflictions, we trust in Him, and rest in His promises, in due time, He will prove Himself to be faithful in all His promises.

Humility is essential in every spiritual undertaking. *“God ... gives grace to the humble”* (1Pe 5:5; Pro 3:34), but He resists the proud.

Even knowing the plan of God for his ministry (Act 9:15–16), Paul still waited for the clear call and promotion of God, which came from other Spirit-led believers (Act 11:25–26, 13:1–4). We must also learn to be patient, learning humility through our times of difficulty and suffering. As the Psalmist says (Psa 84:6–7),

“Passing through the valley of Baca [weeping] they make it a spring ...they go from strength to strength, each one is seen by God in Zion.”

Our God knows our every trial, and He has a perfect purpose for each one of them. As we learn to rest in His promises and wait on Him, He will prove the truth of His Word.

The Priceless Value of Humility

1. Of the seven things God hates most, pride is the first (Pro 6:16–19).
2. Pride is called “the sin of the devil” (1Ti 3:6–7).
3. The Bible tells us that *“as a man thinks in his heart, so is he”* (Pro 23:7).
4. Each of us must choose daily whether we will think and act in pride or humility. If we choose pride, God will resist us, but if humility, He will give us grace and blessing (Ezr 8:22; Pro 3:34–35; Jam 4:6; 1Pe 5:5–6).
5. The Bible tells us that God hears the prayers of the humble (Psa 9:12, 10:17; Luk 18:9–14).
6. Jesus said that those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luk 14:11, 8:14).

7. Because of David's humility, he was called "a man after God's heart" (Act 13:22; Psa 89:20–29).
8. Those who will be greatest in Heaven will be those who have been most humble on this earth (Mat 18:1–5).

III. Message: The Gospel According to Paul

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal 1:11–12)

A. Illustration of the message, Act 16:25–31

Here we have a model of brevity in evangelism. If you had only moments to point someone to Christ, could you think of a better statement? Some would argue that the jailer was not talking of eternal salvation, but of salvation from Roman justice if the prisoners escaped. However, it is clear from v. 28 that all prisoners were accounted for. To be fair, Paul did go on to speak "*the Word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house*" (v. 32). Certainly, no faithful evangelist would pass up the opportunity to explain in fuller detail the truths of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This does not take away from the simple, brief, powerful first truth that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone!

B. The value of simplicity, 2Co 11:3

Simplicity and power go hand-in-hand. The history of great communicators demonstrates that they convey great ideas in simple terms. Complexity tends toward confusion. Paul desired to ground his converts in the "*simplicity that is in Christ.*"

Based on the quote from Galatians above, was there a difference in the Gospel as taught by Paul, and that of other apostles, at least in the beginning? If Paul did not learn the Gospel from other apostles, but from the Lord, was there something new or unique about the Gospel that he preached? What is involved in the curse he pronounces against those preaching another gospel (Gal 1:8–9)? Let us consider several passages that will help to clarify Paul's gospel:

1. Consider Jesus' instructions to the original Apostles in Mat 10:1–8.
 - a. They were not to go to the Gentiles, nor Samaritans, v. 5.
 - b. They were to go only to the "*house of Israel*" v. 6.
 - c. They were to declare "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" v. 7.
2. These instructions were in keeping with the message Jesus had been preaching, which is called "*the Gospel of the kingdom,*" Mat 4:23, 9:35; Mar 1:14. Now we know that "*Gospel*" means "good news," and the good

news here was that, because the King had arrived, the kingdom was being offered to Israel.

3. Even after the resurrection, the apostles were still expecting that Jesus Christ would establish His kingdom in Israel, Act 1:8. Jesus told them that it was not for them to know “*the times and seasons.*”
4. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preaches a very relevant Jewish message to Jewish listeners (Act 2:5, 9–11), proving that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah (Act 2:34–35). This helps to explain why his words in v. 38 differ from the gospel preached by Paul.
5. When Paul came to Jerusalem (Act 15:1–5), he “*communicated to them that gospel which [he] preached among the Gentiles,*” in order to confirm that his labor (to unite both Jew and Gentile believers—see Eph 2:11–18) had not been “*in vain*” (Gal 2:2).
6. Paul clarifies his unique gospel in Rom 4:1–5; 1Co 15:1–4; Eph 2:8–10, which was for all mankind. In Gal 1:8–9, he declares a curse from God on anyone who preaches any other gospel.
7. Paul’s gospel was given to him by revelation, since he was the “*apostle to the Gentiles*” (Rom 11:13), to present the truth of Christ during this present Church Age.
 - a. It was not a message to Israel, but to all men.
 - b. It was not good news of a kingdom on this earth, but of a spiritual kingdom, which can be entered only by receiving Jesus Christ as Savior (Rom 14:17; 1Co 15:50; Col 1:13).
 - c. While the earlier apostles did not understand the “*times and seasons,*” they were revealed to Paul, in what he called “*the mystery*” (Eph 3:1–10; Col 1:24–28). This included the truth that ...
 - (1) The nation of Israel had been spiritually blinded for a time due to their unbelief (Rom 11:20, 25).
 - (2) God’s current plan is working through the Church, “*until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*” (Rom 11:25).
 - (3) In the future, following the Rapture of the Church (1Th 4:13–18), God will again restore Israel through faith (Rom 11:24–27).

Doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

1. The Gospel is the “good news” about who Jesus Christ is, and what He has done to save sinners.
2. Only because Jesus Christ is God, having come in the flesh, is He able to forgive sins and give the gift of eternal life, Joh 8:24.

3. This Gospel is totally founded in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1Co 3:11, 15:1–4. Everyone who believes this Gospel is “in Christ,” 1Co 12:13.
4. The one and only requirement to receive this gospel is to believe it, as illustrated one hundred times in the Gospel of John (cf., Joh 20:30–31). The Apostle John, writing later in his life, is the only one of the four gospels seen in light of Paul’s gospel.
5. All who believe in Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are eternally united with Jesus Christ, becoming members of His spiritual body, the Church, Eph 2:19–22.
6. Failure to “*rightly divide the Word of truth*” (2Ti 2:15) results in the current confusion regarding the gospel message. The effects are the same as what happened to Peter in Antioch—an attempt to bring a Jewish message and practices into the Church, Gal 2:11–21.
7. We should note that John’s Gospel is unique from the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). This is largely due to the fact that John wrote much later, having absorbed the writings of Paul. The Gospel of John presents a very clear message in keeping with the Gospel revealed to Paul the Apostle.

The Five Salvation Works of the Holy Spirit

It is worth mentioning these, as they should be made known to new believers, particularly as an aid to their understanding the security of their salvation in Christ:

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, 1Co 12:13, 18.
The effect of this spiritual baptism is not “speaking in tongues,” as too many wrongly contend today. Rather it speaks of having been placed into the Body of Christ in the place of usefulness according to the sovereign will of God.
2. The regeneration of the Holy Spirit, Tit 3:5 with Joh 3:3, 7.
Regeneration means “to be born again.” This new birth is effected by God’s Spirit in everyone who believes in Christ. The result of new birth is that we are a “*new creature*” in Christ (2Co 5:17), a member of God’s eternal kingdom and the bride of Christ. Once we are born into the family of God, we are His child forever.
3. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:9–11.
The Spirit of God comes to reside in the new creature He has created. There is no such thing as receiving the Holy Spirit at some point after being justified by faith. This passage in Romans shows all such teaching to be heresy. By His indwelling, the Spirit is always at hand to teach, guide, and comfort (cf., Joh 14:16–18, 26, 15:26–27, 16:7–14).
4. The gifting of the Holy Spirit, 1Co 12:4–7.
Just as every believer is placed in the body for maximum usefulness, so each one is gifted for the playing of their part. Each spiritual gift has a corresponding ministry within the Body “for the profiting of all” the members. The teaching gifts are given to prepare and equip each member to fulfill its “*work*” (Eph 4:11–16).
5. The sealing of the Holy Spirit, Eph 1:13–14, 4:30; 2Co 1:21–22.
The work of sealing guarantees that every believer is a marked possession of God and will safely arrive into His eternal presence and kingdom. This is the primary grounds of the teaching of eternal security, which Satan hates with a passion. It is worth pointing out that a clear, simple Gospel message implies eternal security, which is

one reason the enemy of men's souls has worked so hard to confuse and corrupt the truth that is in Christ, as revealed to Paul.

IV. **Evangelism: The Methods Behind Paul's Preaching**

A study of the methods used by Paul in his ministry would be quite extensive. However, there are a few important principles that we can adopt from the record of Paul's missionary methods recorded in the book of Acts.

A. Paul's method stated, 1Co 9:19–23

Paul was always willing to adapt his methods and his means, but never his message. This is far different than many today who will compromise "*the truth of the Gospel*" (see Gal 2:14) for the sake of popularity and personal gain.

B. The method illustrated, Act 13:14, 14:1, 15–18, 17:22

The great missionary apostle could go from the Jewish synagogue, to the marketplace, to the worship centers of the heathen world, and speak the language and adopt—as much as possible—the customs, of those to whom he spoke. He was a model of personal adaptability, genuine sympathy, and spiritual flexibility. Yet he never compromised the message or his personal obedience to God. Every missionary knows the dilemmas this can create, and the fine line one must walk.

C. Some examples to consider

1. Paul went to places where people were seeking for a message from God, or were eager to hear a new philosophy.
 - a. Paul always began with the synagogue, hoping to win his Jewish brethren to faith in Christ (Act 13:5, 14–16; 14:1; 17:1; 18:4). It was Paul's method to go "*to the Jew first, and also [to] the Greek,*" or Gentile (Rom 1:16). Those in the synagogue would be familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and, from them, Paul would prove that Jesus was the Messiah (Act 9:22).
 - b. In Philippi, Paul went to a riverside where people gathered for prayers (Act 16:13). Where people are seeking God, Jesus Christ will be seeking them (Luk 19:10).
 - c. Paul also used supernatural events, or special circumstances, as opportunities to preach the Gospel (Act 16:18, 31).
 - d. In Athens, Paul went to the Agora, the place where people were eager "*to tell or to hear some new thing*" (Act 17:21).
 - e. Paul was very alert to use every occasion or opportunity, such as a monument "*to the unknown god,*" to present Jesus Christ (Act 17:23).

- f. In Ephesus, Paul stayed for two years, preaching the gospel by using the “*school of Tyrannus*” (Act 19:9–10), probably a school of philosophy.
2. Paul made it his policy to support himself, in order to present his ministry free of any expense to his hearers (1Co 9:11–18). Paul wanted his ministry to be a reflection in every way of the free offer of eternal life by the grace of God in Christ.
3. Paul made it a point to keep the Gospel simple and clear, and not to allow anything, even something good like baptism, to confuse the clear and simple message of eternal life simply by believing in Jesus Christ (1Co 1:17–18).
4. Paul built his entire ministry on faith. He believed that God would lead him (see Act 16:6–10). He expected God to win people to Christ through him. He did not have any doubts about his mission or his message. This gave him a boldness (Act 14:3, 19:8; Phi 1:20) and assurance that convinced many of the truth of his message.
5. Finally, everything Paul said or did was clothed in love and compassion (see 1Co 13:1–8; 2Co 5:14; 1Th 2:7, 11). In the Apostle Paul, men could see the love of God shining through, and they responded to it. Men need not only to hear of the love of God, they also need to see it in practice.

D. Evangelism: a simple approach

1. Live the gospel out in your daily life, (Gal 2:20–21).
2. Love those around you, with the love of Christ, (2Co 5:14–17).
3. Pray for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit on them (Joh 16:7–11).
4. Speak the truth of the Gospel as God opens doors of service. (1Co 16:9).
5. Follow up your witness to others, by praying for them after you have presented the Gospel to them (Eph 1:16–20).
6. Don’t stop at winning them to faith in Christ. Our mandate is to “*make disciples.*” Therefore, do what you can to teach and disciple others, and see that they are part of a strong, Bible-teaching church (Mat 28:18–20; Eph 4:11–16).
7. The only way to always be ready to give a defense of the Gospel is to keep the Lord the focus of your daily life (1Pe 3:15).

V. Teaching: The Training of New Believers

The Apostle Paul was supremely successful as a missionary. Within 10 to 15 years, he was able to boast that he had reached the Mediterranean world (Rom 15:19–23), having established churches in all countries where he had gone. These churches were founded on three specific principles:

- They were to be self-governing. Each was under its own eldership.
- They were to be self-sustaining. None were supported from outside.

- They were to be self-propagating. They each were responsible as a mission center.

A. The pattern of Paul’s teaching, Act 14:21–23

In this brief section we see Paul’s evangelism, edification, and equipping of the local church. As illustrated by the Thessalonian church, Paul was able—in a relatively short time—to establish a local church and leave it with the three capabilities seen above.

B. The power in Paul’s teaching, Rom 10:17

From start to finish, Paul relied on the power inherent in the Word of God and administered by the Spirit of God to those who believe. Paul did not train his hearers to depend on him, but to trust in God. He trained men to take his place, and entrusted them to do the work in his absence. Today we seem to have come to the idea that we (ministers) are indispensable, when in reality we are all expendable.

*“All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the
Word of the Lord endures forever.” 1Pe 1:24–25*

If we are to use Paul as our pattern (1Ti 1:16), then we need to follow the pattern of his teaching (2Ti 1:13). Only as we are faithful to the example God has given us in the Apostle Paul, can we hope to have the greatest success in our ministries. The question is, then, how did Paul train his new converts?

1. Paul speaks often about the “*traditions*” which he imparted to the churches, 1Co 11:1–2; 2Th 2:15, 3:6.
2. These traditions appear to be the two ordinances which are practiced in our churches: baptism and the Lord’s Table. Both are rituals which are built on spiritual realities.
3. Baptism is a visual picture of what happens when one believes in the Gospel. In the act of baptism, all the main truths of the Gospel are portrayed. In the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ, we see the holiness and justice of God, the sinfulness of man, and the substitutionary death of our Savior. The Holy Spirit “baptizes” the new believer into Christ (1Co 12:13), so that they share in the benefits of His saving work. This means that all sins are forgiven, the “old man” has died, and the believer is now a “new creature” in Christ (2Co 5:17). Because of this, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9–11) and empowered to live in “*newness of life*” (Rom 6:4).
4. Where baptism speaks of conversion, the Lord’s Table—or Communion—speaks of the Christian life. Baptism is done only once, because we are saved only once. But in the Communion supper, we do it repeatedly to

remember our vital connection with Jesus Christ. Just as we eat and drink daily for physical nourishment; even so, Communion teaches us to eat and drink of Christ daily, through His Word (see Joh 6:53–58). We partake of our Lord’s body and blood as we draw from His Word the daily spiritual nourishment essential for spiritual growth and maturity. Reflecting on His body speaks of His earthly life, as recorded in the Gospels. Focusing on His blood speaks of the benefits and blessings of the cross, as contained in the epistles. If we are to “abide in Christ” (Joh 15:4), we need to abide in His word (Joh 8:31–32, 15:7).

5. As we observe the baptism of new converts, we are reminded of our own union with Jesus Christ through faith, and that our salvation is secure because of His finished work through His death, burial, and resurrection. Every baptism ceremony provides opportunity for the pastor to reteach these vital truths. And when we join together as fellow-believers—members of His spiritual body—we “*proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes*” (1Co 11:26).

There is one other truth that is brought out by these two rituals. That is that the conduct of the Church—or of the individual believer—should match up with what is taught in the Word of God. Our lives should be a true reflection of the character and conduct of Jesus Christ (1Jo 2:6). Only as we live by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the light of God’s Word, will this be true in our lives (Gal 5:16; Eph 3:14–21).

In conclusion, it is important to understand that everything Paul taught about the Christian way of life was rooted and grounded in the work of Jesus Christ. The spiritual union of believers with Christ—through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13)—made possible new power for a new way of life. By faith in the inspired Word of God (2Ti 3:16) and reliance on the indwelling Spirit (Rom 6:9–11), believers are enabled to live as “citizens of heaven” (Phi 3:20), constantly “*seeking those things which are above*” (Col 3:1–4). When believers are urged to live holy lives, without being taught the basis and power of that life, they are left to try—in their own energy—to fulfill such high demands. And, inevitably, they fail. Paul’s ability to bring men and women to faith, teach them for a short period of time, and organize them into a successful church, was due to his careful and accurate teaching about our standing and our resources “in Christ” (see Eph 4:20–24).

By contrast, many Christians today are robbed of their assurance in the finished work of Christ, by having all the focus placed on their sins and failures. Instead of teaching the new convert of his/her security in Christ, they are immediately made to question whether they were “really, truly saved,” or told that if they commit this or that sin, they either were never saved or have lost their salvation. In this environment—which is totally unbiblical—it is impossible for believers to grow and mature. There can be no growth if a

believer is unsure of his salvation, or trying in his own effort to “stay saved.” We need to come back to the absolutes of Scripture:

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (1Jo 5:13)

John makes two very crucial points here. First, if you have believed, you have eternal life, and it is essential that you know that without question. Second, your ability to continue in a life of faith is dependant on the assurance of your salvation. Pastors, I **beg** you to get back to teaching people to rest in the security of their salvation, so that you can then lead them on to maturity!

The Importance of Accurate Teaching

1. The chief task of the spiritual leader is to study, obey, and teach God’s Word (1Ti 4:12–16; 2Ti 2:14–15, 4:1–5).
2. One of the great Old Testament examples of a spiritual leader is Ezra the priest (Ezr 7:6, 10, 11). Note that he first sought to know the law of the Lord, then to do it, and then to teach it to the people).
3. When Paul says to “rightly divide the Word of truth” (2Ti 2:15), it speaks of teaching with accuracy, knowing how to distinguish between Old and New Testament truths, between law and grace, and between command and principle. We must follow the literal approach to interpretation of the Bible.
4. It is only by sound teaching that believers can “grow up into Christ” (Eph 4:11–16; 1Pe 2:2–3; 2Pe 3:18).
5. Paul often urges Timothy to be faithful to “*sound doctrine*” (1Ti 1:10; 2Ti 1:13, 2:1). The word “*sound*” means “healthy, health giving.” Sound teaching produces spiritually healthy Christians.
6. The failure of Christians to grow to spiritual maturity is primarily due to the failure of pastors to teach accurate, sound doctrine (Heb 5:12–14).
7. The best way to teach the Bible is to follow how it is written. In other words, take one book, teach it verse by verse, until it is finished. What we see most today is teaching a verse from one book one Sunday, then another verse from another book the next. In this way, the people will never gain a full understanding of the message in any book. This type of teaching produces confused and immature Christians (1Co 3:1–3).

Some “Rules” on Biblical Interpretation

1. The rule of labor, 1Ti 5:17; 2Ti. 2:15
If we desire faithful and accurate interpretation, we must work hard to ensure it. God will not honor lazy or shoddy workmanship. A class prepared in thirty minutes sounds like a stretched-out, ten-minute lesson. Hours of painstaking study, prayer, and concentrated thought are required for rich, faith-building lessons.

2. The rule of personal surrender, Ezr 7:10
 There is always the danger of the teacher preparing to teach others that which he has not submitted to himself. Since the greatest teaching aid is that of example (1Co 11:1), we should follow the example of Ezra and be the first to benefit from the truths revealed to us. Then we will speak from deep wisdom and not merely superficial knowledge.
3. The rule of context, Joh 7:52–8:1; 13:38–14:1
 In the passages cited above, we have a context which is broken by the chapter division. When we read the first passage, we see the contrast of Jesus spending the night on the Mount of Olives, while others went to their homes—highlighting His words, “*the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (Mat 8:20). In the second passage, we see that Jesus’ promise of a place prepared in Heaven is especially significant to Peter, who has just been told of his impending denials. The immediate context of any verse is the chapter, the intermediate context is the book, and the ultimate context is the entire Bible. This rule leads naturally to the next.
4. The rule of unity, 2Ti 3:16
 Simply stated, this is the law of non-contradiction. The Bible cannot contradict itself. If faithfully observed, this one rule would counteract much false teaching in the world today. It is obvious that one cannot be saved by faith alone and also be required to keep the law for salvation (Rom 4:3; Eph 2:8–9 compared with Act 15:1–5; Gal 2:11–21). It would be equally clear that one cannot receive eternal life as a free gift (Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8), and then be concerned about losing it because of sin. Failure to observe the rule of unity promotes confused and anxious believers—not secure and mature ones.
5. The rule of progression, 2Ti 2:15
 This rule recognizes the progressive nature of revelation. In short, the truth imparted to Moses is not as complete as that imparted to Paul and the New Testament authors. To “rightly divide” the Scriptures requires a literal, dispensational approach. All Scripture is written **for** us (Rom 15:4; 1Co 10:11), but not all is written **to** us. Accurate interpretation requires discerning and diligent study.
6. The rule of promise, Gal 3:16–17; Heb 6:17–20; Rom 4:1–8; Psa 32:1–2
 This principle is based on the absolute declaration that it is impossible for God to lie (compare Num 23:19; Heb 6:18; Tit 1:2 and 1Jo 2:21). The conclusion of Paul in the Galatians passage cited above is simply that God’s promises cannot be violated by any other truth of the Bible. Thus, the promise of eternal life to Abraham is not invalidated by the Law, which came 430 years later. The passage in Romans follows the same line of thought, but with an exciting addition. Rom 4:1–4 talks about our initial salvation by faith apart from the Law. But then Paul takes the same principle and applies it to the one who has already believed in vv. 5–8, using David as an example of one who, in spite of his grievous sins with Bathsheba and Uriah, could rest in his security, knowing that God does not impute the believers’ sins to their eternal account, because they have already been imputed to Christ (cf., 2Co 5:19, 21). In short, God’s promise of eternal life cannot be abrogated by the failure of the believer following salvation.

7. The rule of faith, Rom 11:5–6; Eph 2:8–9

This rule has been stated and used since the early church. In essence, it says that all difficult passages should be interpreted in light of those that are clear and simple. If, for example, grace cannot be compromised by law (Rom 11:5–6), then it follows that all teachings that make our eternal salvation dependent on our conduct are false. Since the above passages in Romans and Ephesians are clear and simple and we take them on faith, we cannot use some “problem passage” (i.e., Heb 6:4–6, 10:27–30) to contradict them. Rather, we should use the simple passages to guide our interpretation of the difficult ones. When we do this, we find that the Hebrews passages are speaking to believers, and are warning them of impending and severe divine discipline—**not** loss of salvation (cf., Heb 12:3–11). It is obvious that the author of Hebrews cannot at one and the same time be speaking to unbelievers and believers, nor can he be warning of severe discipline under the love of God (Heb 12:6), and at the same time be warning that the love of God will be withdrawn.

VI. Missions: Planting New Churches—Where and How?

As we have seen in our earlier studies, Paul trusted the Holy Spirit to lead him to people who were seeking truth. Then, as he proclaimed the Good News of the finished work of Christ, he trusted God to bring people under conviction leading to faith in Christ. As I said before, every aspect of Paul’s ministry was an act of faith in a faithful God.

A. A faith-based ministry, Tit 1:1–5, 2:11–14, 3:4–8

Paul and Titus had been serving together on the island of Crete. Their evangelistic efforts had won a number to Christ, and at that point Paul went on ahead, leaving to Titus the work of organizing local churches. This required identifying qualified men, who were to be appointed as elders (Tit 1:5). The implications of Scripture are that the titles “elder, shepherd/pastor, overseer” all refer to the same office (cf., Act 20:17, 28 with 1Pe 5:1–2, where all three are mentioned of the same people).

As an aid to Titus, Paul includes three sections in the book of Titus, in which the Gospel message is summarized. But more than that, Paul draws out from the Gospel its implications for those who have believed. It is “*the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life*” (Tit 1:1–2), and lays the foundation for “*teaching us [believers] that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*” (Tit 2:12), and “*that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life ... careful to maintain good works*” (Tit 3:7–8). It is all too clear that Paul saw all teaching for the believer to be inherent in the Gospel and consistent with its implications for faith and practice following salvation. In other words, all “sound doctrine” is really the outworking of the practical aspects of

justification and regeneration. This is not only revolutionary, but contrary, to most of the teachings of our present generation.

B. A finished work, Rom 15:14–21

Paul wrote Romans at the end of his third missionary journey, approximately 58 A.D. Since his first missionary journey from Antioch occurred in about 44 A.D., we have a span of 14–15 years. In that brief time, Paul is able to say his work in those areas was done, “*from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum* [modern Yugoslavia and Albania] *I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ,*” and therefore, “*no longer having a place in these parts*” (Rom 15:23), he desired to come to Rome then on to Spain. How was the apostle able to accomplish so much, and leave behind secure and stable local churches, able to stand on their own in the faith? What mission organization today can claim such success? Our modern methods appear to establish churches which are forever dependent on the founder or founding organization. This was not Paul’s way.

When God granted a number of people in any location to believe in Christ, Paul would then establish a local church. In this he was successful in ways that might astound us today. For example, Paul and Silas—having been beaten and imprisoned in Philippi—went on to Thessalonica (Act 17:1–9). Here Paul, according to his custom, began working in the synagogue. We are told that he reasoned with them “*for three Sabbaths*” (v. 2), winning some Jewish, and many Gentile, converts. Soon after, those who rejected his message stirred up persecution, and Paul was forced to depart. Scholars estimate that Paul could not have been in the area more than five or six weeks at most. Yet when Paul left, there was a stable local church established! The epistle of First Thessalonians shows the effectiveness of this local church (see 1Th 1:6–10). When Paul left them, he entrusted them into the hands of God, much as he did the Ephesians (Act 20:32). Though he did not visit them again for five years, they were still strong and growing when he returned.

The epistle of First Thessalonians reveals to us something else. In it, Paul refers to the doctrines he had taught them while he was with them. Dr. C. I. Scofield (in the Scofield Bible) gives us a list of some of the teachings which Paul must have given this church in such a short period of time.

C. Doctrines Found in 1 Thessalonians

1. The Trinity (1Th 1:1, 5–6)
2. The Holy Spirit (1Th 1:5–6, 4:8, 5:19)
3. The Second Coming of Christ (including the Rapture of the Church, 1Th 1:10, 2:29, 3:13, 4:14–17, 5:23)
4. The Day of the Lord (Tribulation—1Th 5:1–3)
5. Conversion (1Th 1:9)

6. Assurance of salvation (1Th 1:4–5)
7. Election (1Th 1:4)
8. Our resurrection (1Th 4:14–18)
9. Sanctification (1Th 4:3, 7, 5:23)
10. Christian behavior (1Th 2:12, 4:1)

D. Paul successful in establishing strong, local churches

The main point to understand from this is that Paul was successful in establishing strong local churches, because he gave them a strong and sure foundation of biblical truth. Our churches today, all over the world, are struggling and staggering because of the famine for good teaching pastors (Amo 8:11–12). In our study on Paul’s teaching, I mentioned that Paul established the churches upon three principles. It may be worth reviewing and expanding on these.

1. Paul’s churches were self-governing.
In his epistle to Titus, Paul said, *“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you”* (Tit 1:5). Paul had clearly given the requirements to qualify for such a position (see Tit 1:6–9; 1Ti 3:1–7). The leadership of the church was entrusted to men who demonstrated a high level of moral character and spiritual maturity. They were not to serve for personal reputation, financial gain, or power (see 1Pe 5:1–4), but rather to care for the spiritual welfare of the saints. Nowhere do we find a congregation placed under the domination of another church. Each church was accountable before God to conduct themselves in a way that would honor Jesus Christ and be a blessing to its community.
2. Paul’s churches were self-supporting.
Again, nowhere do we see churches being supported by other churches. The obvious exception, that Jerusalem did receive offerings from other churches, is explained both by the historical record and by Paul. The church in Jerusalem had been devastated by persecutions (Act 8:1–4). Beginning with the church in Antioch (Act 11:27–30), there was a desire to send a free-will offering to help the poor believers in Jerusalem. As Paul later stated to the Corinthians (2Co 8:1–9), this was an offering to aid suffering brothers. This was, in effect, a missionary offering, not a standard of one church financing another. Churches—like households—must learn to live within the means available to them. It is also crucial that the members of a local church feel a sense of responsibility to support their own ministry. When taught to depend on others to supply the financial need of the church, its members are robbed of the blessing of being a self-sustaining ministry.

3. Paul's churches were self-propagating.

By this, we mean that they grew naturally, as members were faithful to witness to the cross of Christ and win others in their community to a saving faith. In this, the Thessalonian church was extremely successful. Paul says to them, "*For from you the Word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place, your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything*" (1Th 1:8). Imagine this small congregation, after only a brief time of instruction, being so effective in the Gospel ministry that Paul was no longer needed in that area! They had become missionaries to their own world. Their church grew as their members were faithful to win others to faith in Jesus Christ. This is God's way for churches to grow. Far too many churches today grow only as they are able to steal members from other churches.

In summary, the churches founded by the Apostle Paul were healthy churches because they were established on sound teaching and biblical principles of ministry. The more we "*imitate*" Paul (1Co 11:1), the more we may realize the same success in our ministries and missions. In view of Paul's emphasis on "*faith, hope, [and] love*" (cf., 1Co 13:13; Rom 5:1–5; 1Th 1:3, 5:8), we might say that in the offer of eternal life in Christ we find the focus for faith, the basis for hope, and the power for love—thereby encompassing the whole Christian experience.

Doctrine of the Local Church

1. All who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are members of His spiritual body and are called the "*church*," which means "called out ones" (Mat 16:18; Eph 1:22, 3:10, 5:23; Heb 2:12, 12:23).
2. When believers gather together in one geographic location as an assembly of saints, we speak of them as the local church, as "*the saints who are in Ephesus*" (Eph 1:2), or "*the church of God which is at Corinth*" (1Co 1:2).
3. Every church is to be under gifted spiritual leadership, which is variously called "*elders*" or "*pastors*" or "*overseers*" (Act 20:17, 28; Eph 4:11; 1Ti 3:1–7; Tit 1:5–9).
4. As helpers to the spiritual leadership, the church should choose "*deacons*" who are to serve to carry out the decisions of the leadership (Act 6:1–7; Phi 1:1; 1Ti 3:8–13).
5. The primary work of all "shepherds" is to "build up the Body of Christ," both by example, and by the teaching of God's Word (Eph 4:11–16; 1Ti 1:3–5, 6:11–12; 2Ti 2:15, 3:16–17, 4:1–5).
6. Those in positions of leadership are to be respected and honored, especially those who faithfully teach the Word of God (1Ti 5:17; Heb 13:17).
7. Those in spiritual leadership who fall into sin are to be rebuked and corrected publicly, as an example to others not to sin (Gal 2:11–16; 1Ti 5:19–21).

VII. Money: Conduct in Relation to Finances

It is impossible to talk about ministry without also talking about money. While it is true that it takes money for support, it is also true that today money has become a “god” or idol in too many ministries. Jesus said, “*You cannot serve God and mammon*” (Mat 6:24). The emphasis appears to be on money and the constant appeal for people to give. There is far too much of Balaam in the ministry today (2Pe 2:15–17).

I believe that the Bible gives us an entirely different approach to money and the ministry. When we follow this method, we are living by faith in God, not in the wealth of this world. We should not follow the business practices of this world, but the biblical view as outlined below:

A. Every church, and pastor, should offer all ministries of the church free of charge.

When Jesus sent the first apostles out, He gave them specific instructions regarding money. I believe these instructions hold true for us today, and if we will follow them, God will see that our true needs are met.

“Freely you have received, freely give.” (Mat 10:8)

God has never charged me for any of His many gifts and blessings. In fact, at the moment that we trusted Christ, He freely gave to us every spiritual blessing that was available in Christ (Eph 1:3). How then can I turn around and charge others for what God has given freely to me? This idea was picked up and continued by Paul.

“What is my reward then? That when I preach the Gospel, I may present the Gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the Gospel.” 1Co 9:18

Paul was committed to offer the truth of the Gospel and the teaching ministry of God’s Word—free of charge. How many ministries today would succeed if they followed this practice? Surely only the ones God was pleased with!

B. Every pastor and ministry should be supported by the free-will offerings of their flock.

This is the first duty of a congregation.

The Apostle Paul was not opposed to ministers receiving financial support. In fact, he made it clear that this is God’s way of sustaining ministries.

“Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel.” (1Co 9:14)

If we do a careful reading of the ninth chapter of First Corinthians, it is evident that *“those who sow spiritual things should reap material things”* in return (1Co 9:11). But the key is that whatever financial support comes must be voluntary, as believers are moved by God to support the work. Believers need to be taught the duty and blessing of giving. They need to be taught that *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”* (2Co 9:8). But still, their offerings must be given by free will, without necessity or coercion of any kind (2Co 9:7), for *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* Actually, our giving is a reflection of our appreciation for Jesus Christ, who *“became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”* (2Co 8:9).

C. All finances must be handled in a way that leaves no room for suspicion of misuse.

Paul was extremely careful how money collected for ministry was handled. In fact, he refused to have anything to do with the receiving or disbursing of finances, so that no charges of greed or graft could be leveled against him. His standard regarding money was ...

“Avoiding this; that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is being administered by us—providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.” 2Co 8:20–21

A careful reading of 2Co 8:16–24 shows us just how careful Paul was. In order that there be no question how the money was handled, he sent Titus, along with *“the brother whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches”* (v. 18), whom most scholars identify as Luke. Then there was also *“our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things”* (v. 22), who was apparently a member of the Corinthian church. Paul chose men who were renowned for their integrity and faithfulness, and he sent three, so that *“by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established”* (2Co 13:1). I believe if we were more careful to follow the practices of Paul, we would begin to see how God blesses His Word and proves His faithfulness to those who obey Him.

It was the great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, who chose to follow these principles. When he was asked about the support for his mission, his reply was, *“God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies.”* This is what it means to live by faith, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ as not only our Savior, but also our supplier. With all the riches we have been given from God's matchless grace, is it right that we should become beggars in matters of this world's money? If we fix our eyes on giving freely from all God has given to us, I trust that He will be faithful to freely and abundantly supply our needs. And it is important to point out, that while many believers quote the promise of Paul in Philipians ...

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Phi 4:19)

yet it is often overlooked that this promise was given in light of their gracious and abundant giving ...

“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again for my necessities.” Phi 4:15–16

It is evident that the promise God makes to the Philippians was based on their faith in regard to giving. God was simply fulfilling the promises He had made that ...

“Whatever a man sows, that will he also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.” Gal 6:7–9

We need to learn to sow in faith, to trust the God we serve, and to rest in His provisions for our need. I have often heard that this will not work in poor countries, yet everywhere that it has been tried, it is proved to work wonderfully. As is often said about true Christian living, *“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried”* (G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World*, 1910). Let us commit to live by the grace of God, without any intrusion from the devil’s world, or of his ways, at all!

D. Doctrine of Ministry and Money

1. The first rule regarding money for the minister is found in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, *“You cannot serve God and mammon”* (Mat 6:24; Luk 16:13). The word *“mammon”* means *“riches,”* but it speaks here of the idolatry of money.
2. The shepherd or pastor does not serve for financial gain, but to fulfill the call and the will of God. When Jesus sent out the apostles, He gave them strict instructions about money and ministry, *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Mat 10:8, see also 1Ti 3:3).
3. The Apostle Paul boasted that his ministry was offered free of charge (1Co 9:18; 2Co 11:8–12).
4. Although Paul did not seek pay for his ministry, yet he did receive financial support which was freely given (2Co 11:8; Phi 1:5–7, 4:10–18).
5. Paul declares that it is right and proper for ministers to receive financial support for their labors (1Co 9:9–14; 1Ti 5:17—here the words *“double honor”* include the idea of financial support).

6. While money is necessary for living in this world, it is never our motive for service. Money makes a good servant, but it is a terrible master!
7. No amount of earthly riches can compare with the spiritual riches and eternal rewards that God has for those who are faithful in the ministry (1Ti 3:13; 2Ti 2:12; Mat 25:21; Luk 19:17; Phi 4:1; 2Ti 4:8; 1Pe 5:4; Jam 1:12; 1Co 9:25).

VIII. The Motive Behind the Ministry, 1Co 13:1–3

In the eyes of God, **why** we do what we do is as important—perhaps more so—than just what we do. While man looks at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart (1Sa 16:7). Because of this, one of the chief components of Paul’s success was his inner motivation. Paul was driven by the love of Christ. He taught that it was the work of the indwelling Spirit to supply it (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22) and he lived and served in the faith that He would do it.

A. The love of God defined, 1Co 13:4–8

In 16 descriptive phrases, eight positive and eight negative, Paul defines the love of God. The wealth of truth contained in this short passage is amazing. It is impossible to exhaust the implications contained in it. But the one immediate and inescapable conclusion is the impossibility of producing such love from our own resources. Nothing short of the miracle of God’s grace, by the power of His Spirit, could make this kind of love a reality in our lives. The first and last phrases are instructive: *“Love suffers long ... love never fails.”* No one who comprehends the depth of this love could ever suggest that we are saved by grace, but then are kept by our own good conduct. A love that is no stronger than that is unworthy of even the human level of love.

B. The love of God demonstrated, Luk 15:1–2, 11–24

It is crucial to see the setting behind the telling of the parable of the prodigal. In vv. 1–2 we see the Pharisees and scribes condemning the love of Christ. *“So He spoke this parable to them”* (actually a series of three parables with the same meaning). The purpose of the parable was to attempt to open their hardened hearts to the love of God.

The real focus of the parable is not the son—it is the Father’s love. In fact, it is shown to be the same—both for the prodigal (representing the tax collectors and sinners) and for the elder son (representing the Pharisees). The story moves quickly from the self-will of the son (vv. 11–13), to his attempt at self-help (vv. 14–16, the same thing Adam and Eve tried), to self-denial (vv. 17–19), and finally to the point of the story—the selfless love of the Father (vv. 20–24). The point is clear: nothing the boy could do would ever change the Father’s love. His love was based, not on the good or bad conduct of either son, but rather on His own nature as a loving Father.

It always amazes me to hear Christians say (as I recently heard in a conference in Peru): “we are saved by grace, but if we sin we may lose it.” When pressed, they will say, “well we all sin, but this loss comes for really bad sins (drunkenness, adultery, drug addiction, murder).” Then when presented with biblical examples of believers who committed such things, the last refuge is “but if they die without repentance then they lose their salvation.” Yet when I asked the audience in Peru if the prodigal son had died in the pig pen, would the Father have ceased to love him, the answer is, “No, because he is a Father.” The implication is that the love of God is somehow less than humans can muster!

C. The triumph of the love of God, Rom 8:31–39

I do not know how anyone could read this portion of Scripture and ever doubt the love of God. How could any pastor truly believe the promises of this passage and ever think that our puny conduct could affect God’s love? As we read in the book of Job (Job 35:6–8), in what way can our piddling righteousness add **to** Him, or our often sinfulness detract **from** Him?

If Christ died for us as His enemies (Rom 5:10), will He now do less for us as His children? God is for us, as His children; He will never again be against us. No person, or thing, or condition, or even failure will ever sever us from the love of God in Christ! We are “*more than conquerors through Him*,” not because we overcome, but because He has overcome (Joh 16:33). If we could ever get our eyes off our own prideful, stumbling selves, and take a clear and honest look at the love of God, how our lives would be changed! What courage would be ours when encountering danger? What confidence would be ours, even in failure? What obstacles could be overcome, what endurance would we display, what triumphs might we win? How I pray that each of us would read and re-read this passage, then meditate and contemplate on it, and stretch it to the fullest possible extent, and we still would not grasp the greatness of its scope!

D. The love of God in ministry, 2Co 5:14–21

It is easy for us to speak of the love of God when we barely even demonstrate the love of this world (Mat 5:43–46). What is defined in 1Co 13:1–13 and demonstrated in Luk 15:1–32 is what God requires of us in His ministry.

E. A compelling love, 2Co 5:14–15

The word “*compels*” in the original means “to drive forward under pressure.” Paul was driven by the love of God. Nothing else could have motivated him to suffer so much for Christ and for the lost (2Co 4:8–11, 6:4–10, 11:23–33). When we go forth in the love of God, we cannot count the cost, for nothing is

so costly—nor so worthy—as the love of God. The first evidence that we are moved by this love is that we “no longer live for self, but for Him who died and rose again.” Life takes on a new and daring recklessness when lived in the love of God.

F. A conforming love, 2Co 5:16–17

Those transformed by the love of Christ see others through His eyes. Jesus Christ does not look at us as we are, but in light of what He will make us. He “sees the end from the beginning.” In the same way, we no longer see men according to the outward appearance. It is not their beauty that draws us, nor their ugliness that repels us. We are unmoved by their wealth or power, and undeterred by their poverty and weakness. Rather, we see in them the potential of a “new creature” in Christ, a glorious being of infinite power and potential, designed for the purpose and glory of God. Whether friend or foe, all are seen in the same light, because Christ loves and died for all.

G. A convicting love, 2Co 5:18–21

As messengers of Christ, we confront men with the eternal realities of condemnation or redemption. We carry an uncompromising message—one that convicts and repels at first—but then gradually displays the strangely magnetic power of the cross of Christ (Joh 12:32). It is worth noting that in order to “reconcile the world to Himself,” it was necessary that sins not be imputed to sinners, but instead, to Jesus Christ. In His redemptive work, He bore the penalty for all men (1Jo 2:2), desiring that all might believe (1Ti 2:4, 6; 2Pe 3:9), convicting all (Joh 16:7–11), yet leaving each to choose his or her eternal destiny. How great is the love of God!

IX. Conclusion

It is evident to even casual observation that far too much of this world’s thinking and methods has infiltrated into the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is high time for the true church to return to the first principles—the basics of ministry—as exemplified by the Apostle Paul. If we seek to imitate his amazing success in spreading the Gospel of the grace of God, and in establishing strong, lasting churches, we must do it as he did. Our God—in contrast to modern business practices—is not only interested in results, but also in methods, and behind those, even the motives of those who serve. I believe if we are moved by the love of Christ, and faithfully follow the model laid down for us in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, we will surely see the blessings of God on our labors. My prayer is that this short study will serve to guide many faithful servants of our Lord and King in that direction.

May God richly bless each of you as you explore the ways of grace and truth!