

51-01-01 --The Life of the Gospel
prayer, Christian lifestyle, community, hope
Col 1:3-6

The Gospel is a new way of thinking for a new way of living.

INTRODUCTION:

--President Clinton recently called for an investigation into the 3 billion dollars wasted in space-program failures over a 6-yr. period. Could it be that God has allowed these failures in our conquest of outer space because we have neglected our more obvious need to conquer inner space? Millions of children on our planet still go to bed hungry every night and many of them never reach adulthood because of the ravages of curable diseases and malnutrition. Year after year wars rage between nations, as do civil wars within nations. In our own country crime, addictions and family breakdown are blatant symptoms of a morally eroding culture. The disease-process behind all this is rooted in the inner space of the human heart. The ultimate conquest of the problem is to find God's answer to cure the human heart of sin and selfishness, for "out of it are the issues of life."

--The Gospel hits the heart of humanity's problems: the need for release (forgiveness) from sins. But it's more than pardon, it's a release from an old pattern of living into a new way of life.

--Repentance means "a change of mind" but if it doesn't lead to a "change of lifestyle," it's not true repentance.

--What is the new way of living that Gospel thinking gives to us?

I. A Life of Community, v.3-4

- A. Mutual prayer, with gratitude= the glue that welds relationships together.
- B. Mutual faith, in Christ= the common ground of relationship within the Kingdom of God; trust in the King!
- C. Mutual love, for "all the saints"= caring for an extended family far beyond our personal preferences.

TRANS: Christian community is a powerful statement to a world riddled with alienation. Division among Christians is a sign and symptom of departure from Gospel thinking. **The Gospel is a new way of thinking for a new way of living**, and part of the life of the Gospel is a life of community...

II. A Life of Hope, v.5

- A. The Gospel is a *way of thinking* based on lasting truth--
 1. A battle for our thinking: relativism vs. absolutes (relativism sells consumer goods, absolutes buy a good character; Relativism says, "Follow *popular trends*." Absolutes say, "Follow *principles of truth*.")
 2. Paul calls "*the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you*."-- for Christians, the Gospel is not a belief among other beliefs, but an Absolute truth that measures all other relative truths.
- B. A Gospel lifestyle is "*faith and love*" which "*spring from...hope*"--
 1. Much of the chaos in people's lives is because they feel there is no hope for the future (Despair a major cause of suicides and of relational murders)-- Jer 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
 2. Our hope is "*stored up*" for us "*in heaven*"--
 - a. Not a hoping so..., but an expectation of reality (Edgar A. Poe's poetry is saturated with a mixture of *hoping so* and *doubting so* = deep despair)
 - b. Not an uncertain confidence, but one based on a strong reasons for trust (Christ's Resurrection proved that His Cross worked--sin & death defeated!)
 - c. Not an earthly hope, but one anchored in eternity

TRANS: Longfellow's poem, "The Old Clock on the Stairs," depicts an old courthouse clock watching the coming and going of humanity as time passed. The clock's pendulum says at the end of each stanza, "Forever -- never! / Never -- forever!" What this clock is really saying unfolds in the last three stanzas:

From that chamber, clothed in white, The bride came forth on her wedding night; There, in that silent room below, The dead lay in his shroud of snow; And in the hush that followed the prayer, Was heard the old clock on the stair,-- "Forever -- never! Never -- forever!"	As in the days long since gone by, The ancient timepiece makes reply,-- "Forever -- never! Never -- forever!" Never here, forever there, Where all parting, pain, and care, And death, and time shall disappear,-- Forever there, but never here! The horologe of Eternity Sayeth this incessantly,-- "Forever -- never! Never -- forever!"
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Earthly hopes of success and happiness *never* last. *Never here!* Our hope in the Gospel, our hope in Christ's atonement for our sins and His defeat of death

through resurrection, this is a hope that last *forever*. *Forever there!* The life of the Gospel is a life lived in that hope.

III. A Life of Growth, v.6

- A. How do we know we have Gospel faith? If it's the faith of the Church catholic (universal) "All over the world" (Denominations should fulfill their God-given callings without pulling apart the Body of Christ, otherwise their growth is more like a cancerous tumor than a true member of the Church catholic)
- B. How do we know our Gospel faith is alive?
 1. It's "*producing fruit*" both spiritually and numerically (Remember, some fruit grows underground and will only be seen later)
 2. It's "*growing*" both in strength and in size (Trees not only mark their growth with bark rings, but increase the strength of their trunks, which in turn provides a base of support for growth in the branches.)
- C. How do we keep Gospel faith healthy? (a dual responsibility)
 1. "*God's grace in all its truth*" is His job: a constant outflow...
 2. Once we've "*heard it and understood*" it, our job is to keep on listening and learning about it: a constant inflow...

CONCLUSION:

--Charles Murray was a student at the Univ. of Cincinnati in 1967, training as a high diver for the 1968 summer Olympics. Another student began to share the Gospel of forgiveness with him, and since he had no church background, it fascinated him. Although he felt his need for the Savior, he was not yet ready to trust Christ.

Being in training for the Olympics, Charles had special pool privileges. One evening, after reading some NT verses about salvation, he decided to go practice a few dives. The pool facility was dark, but the moon casts its light sideways to the far wall. As he climbed to the highest platform to take his first dive, the Holy Spirit began to convict him of his sins. The Scripture verses and the words of his witnessing friend flooded his mind. He was standing on the platform backwards to make his dive, spreading his arms for balance, when he looked up to the wall and saw his own shadow caused by the light of the moon. It was the shape of a cross. He could bear the burden of sin no longer. He sat down on the platform and prayed for God to forgive him and save him.

Suddenly, the lights in the pool area came on. The attendant had come in to check the pool. Charles, staring down from the platform, saw an empty pool which had been drained for repairs. He had almost plunged to his death, but the cross had stopped him.

--The Cross of Christ has saved us. It has changed our way of thinking. Let's this Good News transform our way of living.