

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

PAUL’S PERSISTENT PERSUASION

“**Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men**” (II Corinthians 5:11)

Paul was dedicated to the proposition that all men everywhere should have an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and he purposed with deep sincerity of heart to do all within his power to make the glad good news available. He was a pressing protagonist, an ambitious advocate who had nothing but a reckless regard for personal discomfort and inconvenience as he pushed to unprecedented points with the Word of Life. He had an ear to hear the cry of the lost and a heart to pity the fallen sons of Adam’s race.

Nothing so challenged him to exercise every faculty as the opportunity to tell others about Christ. Men, to him, were not merely integral parts of humanity, but each had a never-dying soul to be saved. His indomitable purpose was to snatch as brands from the burning each one whom he was privileged to contact.

Preaching was his artful occupation. It called for a specialized usage of the various forms of discourse, and argumentation was made prominent in his gospel presentations. He seemed to possess a natural aptitude for adducing evidence, the material of proof. He did not have time to engage in futile disputations which edify not, but he gladly coordinated his several abilities and divine gifts in a convincing and constant challenge to deluded souls.

Where fair play was respected; his arguments prevailed, and he won for himself the coveted distinction of being the greatest known preacher, excepting his Lord “**who spake as never man spake.**” Of course, it was never purely an academic procedure. He was not interested in the matching of wits; his aim was to reach hearts with the *dunamis* of the gospel—that marvellous force of recreative potentiality. He knew his subject, had proved its premise and experienced its effect. He was qualified to speak with certainty.

It was the persuasion of reason.

“**If one died for all, then were all dead**” reasoned the Apostle in his appeal to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 5:14).

The conclusion was obvious, but it is strange how unspeakably blind people can be with regard to the revealed truth of God. Paul was leading up to the substitutionary work of Christ on Calvary. He wanted them to see that the dead could only live through the Living One's death.

His premise showed what was done and why. Someone died because all were dead, for **“God hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”** (II Corinthians 5:21).

When once this truth dawns with all its sacred involvements, it becomes reasonable that the sinner should acknowledge and accept his Substitute.

He argued further that, **“if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost”** (II Corinthians 4:3).

The reality of the gospel was attested by a great cloud of competent witnesses, in which category Paul insisted upon being classed. His point was, that, if men could not see the reality of the gospel, it was due to an obscuring veil upon their hearts precluding a recognition. That is, if it could be experienced and was not being experienced by them, then it was the most reasonable thing to believe there was some hindering force. He pressed home his contention by explaining; that the **“god of this age”** had established an obscurity lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine through to enlighten their souls with the Light of Life. It would be utterly irrational for any one with the facts available to remain behind this satanic veil and lose the value of heaven's free and abundant offer of grace.

Paul was confronted with many and varied objections. He was once asked to explain why it was the Jews could be the repository for the oracles of the faith and yet so many of them refused to accept Christ as their own personal Saviour. His quick retort was, **“What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?”** (Romans 3:3).

This same question, adorned in modern apparel, is still a stratagem of Satan. Why do not more highly educated believe? Why is it that more scientists do not endorse and accept the propositions of the gospel? All the composite faithlessness in this highly incredulous world, whether it be of the literate or illiterate, cannot confound the faithfulness of God. Paul pleaded with men to cease their unreasonableness lest they barter away their hope of glory.

It was the persuasion of revelation.

More important than reason is the fact of divine revelation. Reason is faulty and finite, while revelation is factual and infinite. Reason has its place as is proved by Isaiah 1:18, **“Come now, and let us reason together saith the Lord,”** but such reasoning is on the basis of His written Word.

All that man needs to know relative to God's plan for his eternal good has been set forth as holy men of old wrote, being moved by the Holy Ghost. Someone has ventured, and rightly so, that one ounce of God's revelation is worth more than tons of men's empty speculation. The Word of God is yea and amen—final in wisdom and authority.

God reveals the total depravity of a natural man. In spite of his very obvious observations, the average individual is reluctant to acknowledge this sad status. Paul employed special emphasis in declaring that **“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). This is a sweeping indictment, solemn and without exception.

Intuitively, this Apostle to the Gentiles anticipated their objection that God was for the Jews only. **“Is he the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also”** (Romans 3:29).

What revelation to a people alien to the commonwealth of Israel and outside the sphere of covenant relationship! This supersedes reason and transcends human knowledge. Yet, it is a glorious reality, for **“When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”** (Romans 5:6). This covered Jew and Gentile alike and holds out a hope for all mankind.

What eye cannot see nor ear hear, God has been pleased to reveal to His own by His Spirit that **“we might know the things that are freely given to us of God”** (I Corinthians 2:12).

This is the great impetus behind Paul’s powerful persuasiveness. He had the revelation. He knew how empty his life would be without Christ and how hopeless. He knew just as well how great was the lack in those who knew Him not as their own all-glorious Lord. Thus, he placed before men the awe-inspiring Truth as it came from God, that in its Light, they might find their way out of the darkness of unbelief.

It was the persuasion of love.

Paul rivaled the Apostle John in his dissertations on love. **“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love],”** he declared, **“I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.”**

It was love, then, that gave the fine tone quality to his ministry which was meaningful and memorable, though militant and sometimes misunderstood. What men were prone to call excessive enthusiasm in his ministry elicited from him the comment, **“For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause, for the love of Christ constraineth us”** (II Corinthians 5:13, 14).

This was the propulsive force which sent him through untold hardship to lay the message of love at the door of men’s hearts. Nor was he content to leave it there. He knocked at the door and besought an earnest reception of his message, pleading, **“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”** (I Timothy 1:15).

Love can accomplish what force can never attain. Hardened hearts of criminals have been broken by a touch of love when force had driven them to the depths of viciousness. Authenticated records corroborate this statement.

Paul wanted men to know about the love of all love, the love that was divine, the love that melts calloused hearts, the love that awakens latent affections in our souls.

Men may be partial in their display of affection and variously influenced, **“but God,”** Paul contended, **“commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). Through the persuasiveness of God’s love and the winsomeness of the Holy Spirit, Paul became the human agent in the salvation of great numbers of people.

It was the persuasion of necessity.

This was both subjective and objective. **“For though I preach the gospel,”** Paul confessed, **“I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!”** (I Corinthians 9:16).

- It was necessary in order to discharge, even partially, the heavy debt he felt upon his heart for the soul salvation of all men.
- It was necessary to satisfy his own heart that he was doing the Lord’s will which was always paramount in his mind.

While he was considered the apostle to the uncircumcision, or the Gentiles, it was necessary, according to divine plans, for him to go first to the Jews. One sabbath day, in the midst of a large congregation, some of the Jews became envious and openly contradicted the messengers of God. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, **“It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles”** (Acts 13:46).

Objectively, the apostle was driven to evangelize because of the unspeakable need for the gospel. He saw those who were bound by Satan, whose glory was their shame and whose end was destruction. What they needed above all else was Christ and His power to save. Evil men and seducers were waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The devil was ensnaring men, leading them captive at his will and trafficking in their blasted hopes. To such deluded souls, the Apostle cried with alarming concern, **“Christ in you is the hope of glory. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”**

How could any Christian, who has any degree of vision, be complacent when people are plunging at the rate of five thousand an hour into eternity and only a very small percentage is prepared to reach heaven. No evangelist has excelled the beloved Paul in showing the great necessity for salvation. He pressed the claims of Christ with convincing logic and constraining sincerity. He pleaded for an immediate decision, saying, **“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”** (II Corinthians 6:2).

It was the persuasion of exclusiveness.

Copyrights and patents are legal guarantees for the coveted exclusiveness which people claim for their inventions and productions. Such rights are often violated and the products imitated, but who could claim for his wares what Paul could aver for his message:

“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4, 5).

And the convincing point inheres in the fact that it will ever be so, **“for there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”** (I Timothy 2:5).

Paul’s able colleague had very aptly treated of this matter in an address before the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem when he insisted, **“Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

This exclusiveness of the message was of decided value to Paul and gave him the advantage always. What men needed above everything else had but one source and was obtained in one way only. Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me”** (John 14:6).

- Adam and Eve tried to make aprons of fig leaves;
- Isaiah’s people sought to weave webs of good works;
- Judaizing doctors advocated a mixture of law and grace at Galatia, but these are spurious and profitless.

There is but one way. While the means are exclusive, the offer is inclusive. It is not God’s will **“that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (II Peter 3:9).

Paul was constantly pointing the lost to Christ who died for our sins and Who, alone, can cleanse the guilty and grant peace and pardon. He knew how Satan had cleverly established allurements which distorted the vision and corrupted the understanding; and, while facts are sometimes hard to face, he told them, **“There is none that understandeth . . . they are all gone out of the way”** (Romans 3:11).

He only has life who has Christ, for Christ is the only Saviour and the only source of salvation. This was Paul’s appeal.

It was the persuasion of responsibility.

“He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

This was but one of a series of important questions which Paul raised before a Roman audience. He was showing the amplitude of God’s provisions. God makes His abundant blessings available but man must appropriate them. This is ever a nontransferable responsibility.

No one, however willing, can believe on Christ for another, thereby making salvation possible. That is why Paul showed the personal, individual claims of the gospel, saying,

“If THOU shalt confess with THY mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in THINE heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, THOU shalt be saved.”

King Agrippa seemed to sense the personal responsibility each one has with regard to one's soul salvation. He withered beneath the telling force of Paul's personal testimony. Here was a prisoner at the bar of justice, who, instead of pleading for his own life, pressed a plea for the welfare of the judge on the bench.

He related the details of his conversion, how this greatest of all responsibilities was unregretfully discharged by the committing of his soul to the Lord as unto a faithful Creator. His intense earnestness and evident assurance were almost irresistible. The king was moved, moved by inward conviction, noticeably moved as he confessed, "**Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.**"

Paul had witnessed faithfully. He could do no more but express to the king his sorrow that he was not altogether, instead of almost, a Christian. There is but a brief step between the almost and the altogether, yet it is infinite.

"Almost cannot avail;
almost is but to fail."

There is a great company of "near Christians", but they are just as lost as those who were outside Noah's ark. Jesus said to one, "**Thou art not far from the kingdom.**" He could say that of a great company today who, somehow, are failing to see their solemn and sacred responsibility of caring for the need of their souls, simply by reposing faith in the crucified One. We must persuade men that this is a pressing, personal responsibility.

It was the persuasion of judgment to come. Paul told the Romans "**we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth,**" and added, "**Thinkest thou this, O man . . . that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?**"

Then, reaching a high peak in the seriousness of the matter, he emphasized that, by the stubbornness of their impenitent hearts, they were daily laying up in store the wrath that would fall with crushing force upon them in the day of judgment (Romans 2:2, 3, 5).

It was the future of lost men that animated him so greatly in his evangelistic efforts. He knew that for them, though their eyes were now blinded to the gravity of it all, there was "**a certain fearful looking for of judgment,**" for "**it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God**" (Hebrews 10:27, 31).

How very rare today, but, oh, how eminently needful, for preachers to exhibit the same heartfelt concern which Paul manifested before the people of Corinth, as indeed elsewhere, in his plea for their salvation. Entreatingly, he enunciated the words, "**Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.**"

This was not an excuse; it was a reason. He was never vindictive nor apologetic. Knowing the terror of impending judgment was sufficient reason to become intensely exercised for those who were not sheltered from the awful fate that lay ahead.

He seemed to sense the indescribable plight of one standing before the Great White Throne, totally unprotected from divine wrath, the name not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, facing the dread Judge of the quick and the dead, there condemned by sins unforgiven and **“cast into the lake of fire.”**

This grand old friend of sinners was more intensely concerned about people than people were concerned about themselves; but, then, that is what brings the average individual to Christ.

- Someone saw your need before you felt it.
- Someone prayed when you were unconcerned.
- Someone told you about heaven when you did not appreciate the kindness.

God bless the persistent, prevailing persuaders!

- Suppose that extra appeal had not been made.
- Suppose that second approach had not been ventured.
- Suppose those added supplications had not been placed tearfully and lovingly at the Throne.

One thing is crystal clear upon the pages of sacred history, Paul fell in love with Jesus and His heart so bled for those in sin's fetters that he was willing to spend and be spent, here and there, under all kinds of conditions, beseeching men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.

Go thou and do likewise!

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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