

LESSON ONE

THE EVANGEL FOR TODAY

Our Lord's ministry recorded in the four accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was to the people of Israel, and not to the Gentiles (Matt.10:5,6). The book of Acts is concerned with the question, "Lord, art Thou at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:7).

But with his severance from the other apostles, Paul began to herald a message of grace which was to the nations as well as the sons of Israel. He had been called through grace (Gal.1:15) and was given over to the grace of God (Acts 14:26), laying a foundation centered on grace (1 Cor.3:10). He heralded the evangel that a man is justified in grace (Rom.3:24), saved in grace (Eph.2:8) with all offenses forgiven in accord with the riches of God's grace (Eph.1:7). It is important that we see that this evangel (or good news) stresses the work of GOD in man, which brings glory to God, whereas the message of law-keeping involves the efforts of the flesh and exalts man. The evangel of grace centers in God's achievement through the faith and obedience of Christ.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

After his severance in Antioch Paul's first distinctive message of good news was concerned with jus-

tification (Acts 13:39). This message is developed in Romans 3:21-4:25. This is what he termed “the evangel of God” in Romans 1:1. It was “promised before” through the prophets as is shown by the quotations from Old Testament scriptures in Romans 1:17; 4:7,8, 9,16-22, but it was not heralded before in this complete form. Justification is always based on the blood of Christ, but the means by which it is given is faith alone in the evangel for today. There is no place for works as Romans 4 clearly shows. We are justified gratuitously (freely, or without a cause in ourselves) in God’s grace (favor).

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

Paul’s teaching concerning the cross of Christ is unique. He showed that the cross ends all fleshly privileges and allows no place for the achievements of man. Today, too many are occupied with the terrestrial (earthly) things, and even believers are often enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil.3:18-20), by which we are crucified to the world and the world to us (Gal. 6:12-14). Note that it is not “enemies of Christ” but enemies of the “cross of Christ.” Christendom claims friendship to Christ even as Israel did, but not the cross of Christ with its shame and humiliation. The cross is the dividing line between the world, the primitive creation, and the new creation in which the flesh has no place (Gal.6:15; Phil.3:3).

Paul suffered much for the sake of the cross of Christ and for the ecclesias (churches) he established

(Col.1:24). Suffering is the avenue through which God leads all His own to Himself by the cords of affection. Christ suffered on the cross, and as His own we long "to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, conforming to His death" (Phil.3:10).

THE SECRET OF THE EVANGEL

In Romans 16:25-27 Paul speaks of a secret which was hushed in times eonian, yet manifested now. This secret concerns the removal of the barriers of enmity between God and mankind and the opening up of the way of access to God in peace (Rom.5:2). The key word is conciliation (Rom.5:10,11; 2 Cor.5:18-21), which refers to the change from estrangement to peace. Again, "all is of God" (2 Cor.5:18); man had no part in the opening of the approach. It was all of God, through Christ. The work of Adam had closed the approach. The work of God's Son on the cross opened the gates of peace.

THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD

Since the evangel which we receive centers on God's achievement and not man's, it leads to His glory. "The evangel of the glory of the happy God" (1 Tim.1.11) is a message that tells us God will not be frustrated in His will to save all mankind (1 Tim.2:4). Man cannot eternally oppose his Creator's will, especially when this will is based on the blood of the cross of God's beloved Son (Col.1:20). God has a secret of His will

which gives Him delight (Eph.1:9) and that is to head up the universe in the Christ (Eph.1:10). He cannot be defeated in this happy purpose.

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CLASS PROJECTS

1. Look up the word **grace** in the Keyword Concordance and consider especially the references listed under the heading **Paul** (bottom of second column, p.132, and first 7 lines of first column, p.133). What is the significance of grace to Paul's ministry?
2. Discuss the difference between the "basis" of justification and the "means" by which it is given to us today.
3. Examine the contexts of Galatians 6:12-14 and Philippians 3:18-20 to test the statement that "the cross ends all fleshly privileges and allows no place for the achievements of man."
4. Find where the phrase "the secret of the evangel" appears in the Scriptures. Does the context accord with the message of conciliation in Romans 5:1-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21?
5. Outline the subject of The Will of the Happy God in Ephesians 1:3-12 under the three headings: The Delight of God's Will; The Secret of God's Will; The Counsel of Gods Will.

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