

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (7)

Quality of being and the gospel

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “Quality of being”, the seventh message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Moral quality of being is at the heart of what God seeks to bring about in His creation of moral beings. It is central in the goal of the message of the gospel, as well as the way to bring across the message of the gospel.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

If you have never seen a soccer match before, and you do not know what it is all about, one day you go to a soccer match and you watch what they are doing, after a while, it is very likely that you will come to this conclusion: that all the players are very interested in only one thing and that is, to make sure that the ball goes into the goal mouth. They make great efforts; they suffer, they run, they get tired and sometimes, they fight, in order to make sure that the ball will go into the goal mouth.

For a soccer match, the goal is central. In the World Cup, you can receive the Cup only if you are able to score the most goals in comparison with your opponents. And so all the training, all the hard work, all that they do is geared towards that. Even if you have a team of very good players, if they are not able to score the goal, you will lose.

Well in life, we all have our own goals. And many of these goals are like this – what you see on the soccer match. You may win, you may shout, you may be happy, but it means nothing. At the end of it, it is just a game and there is nothing of significance. In life, we are also chasing many of these things. We have many different goals we think are important, but they all end up as nothing.

God in His creation of man has a goal and within that goal, there are many important things that He wants to accomplish. But many of us miss that goal. If you kick the ball somewhere else, even if you are very accurate – you want to strike the goal post, you can strike it many times accurately – and yet, you will lose the game: You are hitting the wrong place. So also in our lives: We aim at the wrong things, we give ourselves for the wrong things; we end up in the wrong place; we will not find the fulfilment in our lives.

So it is important for us to appreciate what is the goal of the gospel. Why did God suffer so much in order to have the message of the gospel for the whole world for us to benefit? If we miss that goal, we miss God's purpose.

Secondly, it is also important for us to know not just what the goal is, but how can we also help others to find that goal. We need to find the goal for ourselves and to know what it is, but we also should help others to find that goal. So how do we do that?

From the Scriptures, it is very clear that both of these aspects – the goal of the message of the gospel, as well as the way to bring across the message of the gospel – centre on quality of being. And if we do not appreciate this, we may labour in vain; we may live our lives in vain.

So what is the goal of the gospel?

The Scriptures make it clear that the goal of the gospel is to bring about the transformation of our being so that there would be true and enduring quality of being. It is in such a context that God's purposes can be fulfilled.

There are many things that God wants to do, but these cannot be fulfilled if we do not develop that quality in our being. Yes, there are many principles, issues, different areas that God wants us to understand, to know, to appreciate, to cooperate with Him. But at the heart of it, this is central.

Without quality of being, we cannot labour with God, we cannot appreciate what He is seeking to do, we cannot properly cooperate with Him; we cannot properly transmit His life to others.

And so, the apostle Paul put it very simply in **1 Timothy 1: 5**:

1 Timothy 1: 5

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

We know the apostle Paul laboured very hard. He went through many difficulties, hardships, pain, suffering, but he was very intent on achieving his goal. He spoke, he preached, he counselled, he taught, he wept – all for what? He says, “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” This is what he sought to bring about.

The goal of the gospel that he was preaching was intended to bring about love from a pure heart – a heart that desires, that loves what is truly good; a heart that is prepared to nurture what is of true quality for eternity even when it is costly, difficult and painful; a heart that is similar to God’s heart.

“A good conscience” – where we will do all the things that we recognize are good and right, whatever we understand is pleasing to God, whatever is the right path and meaningful path; and if we go astray, we come to God and ask for His forgiveness; we are repentant, we seek His forgiveness when we fail. We maintain a good conscience, a life where God can be pleased to dwell with us – a humble and contrite spirit.

“A sincere faith” – not one of pretence but genuine: We love God and we mean it. We know who God is, we appreciate Him. We are not just worshipping Him because of selfish interests. We worship Him in sincerity because we know He is good, He is perfect, not just almighty but absolutely, morally perfect; so we trust Him. In the midst of difficulties, whatever problems we face, we are prepared to walk with Him.

This is the kind of effect the gospel is meant to produce. It is not just meant to make sure that everyone goes to heaven. It is not just to make sure that everyone acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world.

Yes, when we properly acknowledge the Lord as our Saviour, when we truly love Him as we should, we will go to heaven. But the central aspect of the goal has to do with the transformation of our being, to become what we ought to be. And from there, to do what we ought to do.

So this was the emphasis and concentration of the apostle Paul in all his labour and his ministry.

This is the goal of true spiritual service in bringing the gospel to others. We need to know that this is the message of the gospel.

Likewise, we see in **Colossians 1: 28-29**, the apostle Paul tells us his approach, his focus, his emphasis.

Colossians 1: 28-29

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The apostle Paul proclaimed the Lord Jesus. He admonished others, he taught them with all the wisdom that God had given him with this purpose: to present every man complete or perfect in Christ. Wholesome, complete, perfect – that is, Christ formed in us, His character developed in us.

The apostle Paul worked so hard, he strove with all the power of God in order to bring about the highest quality of being in every man.

“For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power” – the power with which God empowered the apostle Paul was intended for him to bring about this result. That power worked mightily within him in order to help everyone who hears the gospel to respond and to move in this direction: to become perfect or complete in Christ.

We also know that in the message of the gospel, the Lord Jesus tells us that when He goes away, He will send the Holy Spirit into the world. He will glorify Christ, He will speak to us, He will teach us, He will empower us; He will enable us to become what we ought to be.

And what is that?

Galatians 5: 22-23

- 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
- 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The Holy Spirit was given primarily to enable us to develop the fruit of the Spirit, the beauty of the character of God, the moral perfection in the being of God.

Very often, we concentrate on many other things than the fruit of the Spirit. We pursue many of the things in this world or the things that we want to do, but we neglect the development of the fruit of the Spirit.

If we are to be effective in bringing about fruit in other people's lives, in being effective in our ministry and service and witness, then we must first develop the fruit of the Spirit within us.

We must experience the reality of the message of the gospel; we must know what it is in us before we can properly transmit that gospel to others.

So while the Holy Spirit may teach us many things about the Scriptures, about who the Lord Jesus is and how we can draw near to God; He may teach us many things, but at the very heart of it, His primary purpose is to help us to be transformed in our being so that the moral character of God can be formed in us.

Then we look at the second area: the way to effectively transmit the gospel, the way to effectively bring across the message of the gospel.

What is that?

That way is through those who have been transformed and can testify to the reality of the meaning of the gospel.

“Being shod with the readiness OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE” speaks of our being properly equipped by having developed ourselves according to the reality of the message of the gospel, that it is real in us and we have something to say that carries weight; there is meaning, there is reality.

We are not meant to just simply tell the world: “The Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross. You can be saved. Repent.” Anyone can say that; anyone who is taught to say these things can do that. We can even use a machine to say that.

But who can testify to the reality of that message, that it is true, it is real, it is good? Only the one who has experienced and known the benefit and the power of the gospel in his life and he lives according to the reality of that message.

And in this regard, it is helpful for us to look at a passage that helps us appreciate more clearly how important this is.

We are keen to help others to know the Lord; we want to save the world from perishing. But how do we do that? The way we go about it is very, very important.

The apostle Paul gives us an example in his own life.

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-12

- 1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,
- 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.
- 3 For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit;
- 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.
- 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness--
- 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.
- 7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children.
- 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.
- 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
- 10 You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;
- 11 just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children,
- 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

The apostle Paul, in preaching the gospel, was calling upon the people to walk in a manner worthy of the God who has called us.

God has called us with a very high calling. God is a God of true love and He is worthy of our worship. The apostle Paul preached to call upon the people to truly walk... worthy of God. He himself did so in his own life as part of the presentation of the gospel – the life and the power behind the gospel, a life transformed by the Lord; a living reality of the power of the gospel being communicated.

And so he says, “our coming to you was not in vain... we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi”. He was prepared to go through the difficult times – the suffering, the pain, the opposition.

“But,” he said, “we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.” There was much opposition; the evil one would definitely not allow the apostle Paul to freely preach the gospel. There would be opposition in many different ways, “but,” he said, he “had the boldness in our God to speak... the gospel”.

Why was he so bold?

He said, “For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit”. He was bold because he knew what he was doing was right, he knew what he was doing was good. He was not tainted by selfish, wrong desires; he was not seeking for anything for his own selfish interests. He was prepared to communicate faithfully what God had entrusted to him. It did not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit.

“But,” he says, “just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak”. He was faithful to communicate the gospel in the way that God intended it to be communicated.

“Not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts” – the apostle Paul was very conscious that when he preached the gospel, God examined his heart. God saw his motive, God saw what he was doing – was it meaningful, was it right; was he transmitting the message of the gospel in the right spirit? He was confident because he knew that he spoke with the right spirit.

“For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness-- nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others” – he was very clear: in all areas, he had no wrong motives.

He said he “never came with flattering speech”. There are those who will flatter you in order to deceive and to take advantage. The apostle Paul did not do so. He spoke what he ought to and because of that, there would be many who would be angry with him. He followed his Master. The Lord Jesus said many things that angered many people because He spoke with righteousness, in accordance with the message that God had given to Him to bring to all mankind.

He did not speak with the pretext for greed and that again is one of the motivations in many a person who seeks to serve God – greed in one form or another, self-gain. He said, “God is witness”. God saw his heart; God knew what was within him.

“Nor did we seek glory from men” – this again is a major area where what we do, we want praise from men, we want glory from men. He says, “either from you or from others”. There was no such desire.

“Although as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.” He could have asserted his authority because God had appointed him an apostle, to serve, but he did not assert his authority for wrong purposes. Instead, he said, “we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children”. Many people may not perceive of the apostle Paul as a tender, loving *mother*. They think of him as a very fierce, very harsh, very strict kind of person. But here, he reveals his heart. He loved them, he cared for them; he was gentle among them.

But we also know that the apostle Paul could be very fierce. He could be very harsh when it comes to standing for the Lord and for what is right. He was very angry with the false teachers, he took his stand against all those who would deceive others and lead them astray. He was very angry with them.

But for those who could be helped, for those who desire to respond to God, he was gentle and he sought to care for them in order to help them, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children.

And he said, "Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." He was not just seeking to communicate the message of the gospel in telling them, "This is what you should do; this is what God is expecting of you" but he gave of himself in order to benefit them, to help them in their need.

And so he went on to say how he laboured night and day as he proclaimed the gospel of God. And he could call upon the Thessalonians to bear witness. He says, "You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers".

His life communicated the message of the gospel because the gospel was real to him – it had transformed his life. And as he sought to bring the gospel to help others to be transformed, he was at the same time showing to them how this ought to be, how it ought to be lived. And it was in that context then that he called upon them, he exhorted them, he encouraged them, he implored each one of them that they would walk in a manner worthy of the God who had called them into His own kingdom and glory.

This is something very important for us to appreciate. If we want to bring the gospel message to others, we must know what it is and we must communicate it in accordance with what God intends. The gospel message is not just: "Christ died on the cross for us and we must repent."

We must appreciate the cross, we must understand: What God is seeking to accomplish, why the cross, how serious is sin, how important is righteousness, what must we do with our lives, how are we to respond.

The message of the gospel was preached most powerfully when the Lord Jesus died on the cross. At the cross, the message of the gospel was preached: We see the sacrifice of His life, we see the power of His love, we see the holiness of God. That is the message of the gospel transmitted through the Lord Jesus Christ as He died on the cross because of His love of us, because of the holiness of God, because of what God wants to bring about.

And so we read in **Philippians 1: 21**, a most familiar verse but so refreshing to ponder over:

Philippians 1: 21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The apostle Paul sought to express the whole way he lived his life: For to me, to live is Christ.

He was no longer living for himself. He was not seeking his own glory; he was not seeking his own interests. He was concerned about what was in the heart of Christ. He was concerned about what God sought to do when He brought Christ into this world. He understood the glory in Christ, all the riches of the glory in Him.

He lived his life to honour Him, to magnify Him, to exalt Him. He lived his life with the power of Christ. He lived his life to bring the message of Christ, he lived his life to bring Christ to the world, that they may know him.

And so the apostle Paul tells us what he gave in order to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, and being conformed to His death. He sought to live his life this way and as he lived this way, when he preached, that reality would come forth to his hearers. They would appreciate, they would recognize this is the message of the gospel: We are to become like Christ; we are to repent and we are to come to God for forgiveness; we are to decide and to be determined to change our lives to be like Him.

So the power of the message of the gospel comes from a life that is transformed by the message.

We all know that in many instances where people want to sell something that they say is effective... there are many ways that they can do so. They can have advertisements of different forms and many people can be deceived by very well thought-of advertisements.

But the most powerful way to bring across an advertisement is from people who have used that product and who have found it to be really good and can testify honestly to its effectiveness and its helpfulness. When people who know them and can trust them, and know that what they say is true, they are prepared to purchase it, even when it is very costly.

In the spiritual realm, this is far more important. We can say many things that draw people to Christ, we can say many things that appear very attractive for people to come to Him and people may respond on the wrong basis. They may think it is like that when actually, it is not. So the most powerful message that we can bring to them is to help them recognize this is true, this is real and this is what it means. And from there, explain to them what God has said and what it is meant to do.

So, to appreciate this, we see the contrast – the contrast of people who do it the wrong way: the false teachers, the false prophets. Their approach is basically one of self-seeking for personal gain and they make use of the message of the gospel in order to gain something for themselves.

2 Peter 2: 1-3

- 1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.
- 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;
- 3 and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

The false prophets are not true to God. They are false teachers. They have no intention of honouring God, of truly preaching the gospel. And so what do they do?

They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them. So they proclaim that the Lord Jesus is their Master, they claim that He is the Master, but in reality, they are introducing destructive heresies. And how do they do it? Secretly... they do not do it openly; in their outward form, what they say seem to be right, but in reality, they are introducing destructive heresies.

There are many things that the Lord Jesus says that are so very important in the kingdom of God, but just a little twist can cause the direction to be totally different. While praising the Lord, they can in fact be denying Him by misrepresenting Him, who He is, what has He done.

Many will follow their sensuality. This tells you their approach. Many will follow – they can deceive many.

And they follow their sensuality – that is to say, their emphasis is not on meaning, on reality, on truth, on what is right and what is good. Their emphasis is sensuality: emotions, feelings – to feel good, to enjoy it, to like it. That is the emphasis: self-seeking, enjoyment. They are not seeking for what is truly good and right before God.

So, they can manipulate your emotions – whether it is by the kind of music that they produce or by the words that they may say – in order to flatter and to deceive. They create situations that can make you feel good, but it will destroy you if it does not help you to become like the Lord Jesus. So because of them, the way of the truth will be maligned: People will think that this is the message of the gospel when in reality, it is not. They misrepresent the Lord.

Over the years, I have met various non-Christians, a number of whom were serious, sensible people and who spoke to me very solemnly. And they said words to this effect: “I am very disappointed with the Christians and I do not want to be like them. They say things, but they do not live by them. What they say seems so good, but it is not true.” And they do not want to listen because of what they have seen. It is not real, the things that they say: they are not true in their lives. And this will hinder them from appreciating the real message of the gospel. We need to take care that we do not allow the wrong approach, attitudes to affect the message of the gospel.

The apostle Paul says, “in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words”. Their purpose is to exploit. It is for selfish gain, it is not for your well-being.

The true message of the gospel is always proclaimed with the intention of bringing about the well-being of the listener.

God wants to help us, He wants to give us the very best. And so, when the gospel is presented, it must have this thrust: it is for the well-being of the listeners – true well-being. But the false gospel gives you a false sense of well-being, gives you something that may seem to be so attractive and so good, but in fact, it will destroy you because it moves you in the wrong direction.

These same people who are stumbled by the wrong message being communicated will also be willing to listen when they can see that it is meaningful and good and right. If they can see that it is meaningful, they are prepared to listen and to consider.

But the sad thing is that for many of them, even when they come to recognize the true message of the gospel and they can agree with it, many of these people will not be prepared to live by it either. And there are those who tell me, “Yes, I agree this is right, this is good. But I am not ready, and I do not want to be a hypocrite.” So they say they do not want to be hypocrites; at least to them, they are being honest. They recognize: “This is what it costs, this is what it means, but I am not ready to live like that.”

Well, whichever it is, it is not adequate. If you say you are stumbled by those who profess to be Christians and you do not respond, you are going the wrong path because you do not look at these people, you look at the Lord Jesus Christ – what is the true message of the gospel. So that is where they are wrong, even though they are sensible people generally. When they recognize the message of the gospel and they say, “I am not ready to respond”, they are also wrong because they know what is right but they are not prepared to live by it. It is also wrong.

So the only way is to respond to the true message of the gospel whenever we recognize it. So even if people do not transmit it properly, let us look beyond that and see what is the true message that we ought to recognize and we must live by that. We respond to God, we respond to what is truly good. But it is important to recognize that the way we go about it can affect others very seriously.

We also need to bear in mind that if we want to transmit the gospel to others, we can expect the evil one to oppose the message of the gospel. He will do everything he can to oppose.

So, unless we develop quality in our being, we will not be able to withstand his attacks. And we will not be faithful to God and what He has entrusted to us. So this again is an aspect that we need to recognize: In order to transmit the gospel properly, we need quality of being.

1 Peter 5: 8-10

- 8 Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
- 9 But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.
- 10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

It is in the context of spiritual warfare that we learn to grow and to develop the quality of our being, if we are prepared to truly follow the Lord. We also need to recognize that it is in the context of spiritual warfare that God intends us to communicate the gospel.

If you can communicate the gospel where the evil one pays no attention, then it is very likely you are not truly communicating the gospel – that is to say, the evil one knows that what you are saying has no power, no impact. He can let you say all that you want and in reality, it will bring about a negative outcome.

But if what you say is important to God, if what you say will help people truly deeply, the evil one will take note and he will oppose the work. So we need to be sober, we need to be alert. The evil one prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. He will destroy us as much as he is able to do.

So we are to resist him, firm in our faith. Firm in our faith tells us that we need to develop quality; there needs to be strength, there needs to stability.

Is our faith in God firm, stable, or do we trust Him sometimes, sometimes doubt Him? When things are easy, we trust Him; when things are difficult, we doubt Him? When we enjoy life, we thank Him; when life is painful and difficult, we complain? If our life is like that, how can we stand firm to resist the evil one? He can easily bring various thoughts to us: "God does not care for you. You are not important to Him. Your life is of no value." And in that state, we can very readily believe him.

But if our focus is on God, we appreciate who He is, we know who He is personally, we have responded to Him, we stand by Him, we stand with Him; if we live our lives like that, then we can resist the evil one. We are not afraid of him because we know we are on the right path, we know that God is with us and we can do all things through Him who strengthens us, we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us; this will be true of us.

And the apostle Paul tells us, "knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world". All those who desire to walk in the path of holiness will suffer persecution. All those who desire to be faithful to God will be opposed by the evil one.

If you are prepared to follow God, you will not be afraid of the evil one. But neither will you take it lightly; neither would you think that it is so easy to overcome him. He is a very powerful, very cunning and very capable enemy. We have to keep close to the Lord. We have to depend on Him. We have to trust Him. We have to be prepared to give of ourselves to Him. It is in that context that we can stand firm.

And so he says, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you." The apostle Peter spoke from experience. He understood what it meant. He was at one time wavering. At one time, the Lord called him, "You of little faith". He understood, he struggled with it, he cried when he denied the Lord. He repented; he sought the Lord for forgiveness, for help. He suffered persecution. But he learnt to develop quality in his life.

He said, "After you have suffered for a little while". Some of us may think it is a very long while: many years, many difficult situations that we go through again and again. But the apostle Peter appreciated the same principle that the apostle Paul mentioned, that our suffering in this body on this earth is just a little while and it is a very small thing in comparison with the eternal weight of glory. So here, the apostle Peter says, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ..." That is a comparison: the little while on earth compared with the eternal glory in Christ. Are we prepared to take our stand in that way?

However long we may live, it is still a little while. Whatever the pain and suffering that we may need to go through, it is worth the while. It is meaningful and not only that, it is not suffering without a purpose. It is suffering either for our own development or suffering for the sake of the development of others.

And generally speaking, we will always develop well when we suffer with the right attitude, if we are prepared to learn, to grow. And even when we are suffering for righteousness' sake, it will help us to grow stronger.

And so notice the way that the apostle Peter ends in **verse 10**. He says, "the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you." Why did he use so many words? Why did he not just simply say, "God will help you"? It is because this is so important - it is so wonderful and so significant.

He says, "will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you." And all this is in the direction of a life of quality, a life of meaning, a life of stability, a life of reliability in the midst of the opposition of the evil one. If we are to transmit the message of the gospel properly, then we need to learn to develop quality in our being to withstand the evil one and in the process, to grow stronger and stronger and to develop, to be transformed... from glory to glory.

So these two aspects in terms of the meaning of the gospel (what it intends to accomplish) and the way to transmit the message of the gospel need to be appreciated together. We should not concentrate on one to the neglect of the other.

If we want to transmit the gospel effectively, we must keep on learning and growing and developing in our appreciation of the goal of the gospel, what is it; and keep on deepening in our experience of that reality of it. The more you know of it, the more effective will you be in communication of the message of the gospel.

Likewise, the more we appreciate the message of the gospel in our lives, what God intends for us, the more we will seek to be careful in the way we transmit that message, that it is in accordance with what God intends and that our lives will help to support, to illustrate, to emphasize this direction.

I will just go on to one aspect of the direction of the message of the gospel and also in what context people will benefit and when they will not. There are other areas I cannot consider with you today because of time. But for the moment, we just look at two passages that can help us appreciate some of these areas.

Ephesians 4: 17-24

- 17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,
- 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;
- 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.
- 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way,
- 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,
- 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,
- 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
- 24 and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Here, the apostle Paul is writing to the Ephesian Christians and he is exhorting them to be transformed in their being. And as he exhorts them to be transformed, we appreciate the goal of the gospel.

What was he emphasizing, what was he telling them? He told them, "You must not walk in the same way as in the past, as the Gentiles also walk... futility of the mind... darkened in... understanding, excluded from the life of God... ignorance... hardness of... heart... callous". These are characteristics of a life where we go our own way, we do not submit to God.

Given... over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness: We see that these are characteristics of the false teachers. They work in that kind of direction; they encourage this kind of life.

“But,” he says, “you did not learn Christ in this way”. The message of the gospel, the proclamation of Christ is to help us to see this is not the way to live. We are to turn away from this way of living; we are to be transformed. We are to be rid of the former manner of life, characterized by the lusts of deceit. We are to be renewed in the spirit of our mind; we are to put on the new self or the new man.

So this is the path that as Christians, we should pay great heed to. It is not just to say, “I receive the Lord Jesus Christ. I am a Christian, I am going to heaven. Now, I can go and tell everybody this message.” Certainly, we should want to tell everybody this message that they can be saved. But we must at the same time pay great heed that we are listening to this message ourselves all the time: that we are being transformed.

And this new man is being created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. The central emphasis is righteousness... holiness in the truth.

Central in the context of God’s being, what God has declared and shown to us that we can understand and appreciate, is the quality of our being – this is the direction that we are to be working towards. So as Christians, we must be working in this direction.

So, we can appreciate when we want to bring the message to non-Christians, we have to help them to understand this is the path. When you say you want to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, you must understand that this is the path.

Not just to say, "Lord, forgive me. You are my Saviour. I accept you, I can go to heaven." Are we prepared to give up the old way of life? Are we prepared to follow the new path that the Lord is calling us towards?

And so, we can see that this is clearly illustrated by the parable that the Lord Jesus told. I will read through quickly **Luke 8: 11-15**.

Luke 8: 11-15

- 11 "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.
- 12 "Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.
- 13 "Those on the rocky *soil* are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no *firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.
- 14 "The *seed* which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity.
- 15 "But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

The Lord Jesus is telling us that God wants to bring the word to all mankind. The seed is the word of God, what God wants to say to us – at the heart of it, we can say, the message of the gospel. God wants to bring this message to all mankind, but we can see that the outcome is different for different people. It is the same word, but different effects and different outcome. Why is it so?

He tells us it is because of the differences in the heart of the people. Even in the state where we are not yet believers, even in a state where we have gone astray, we can recognize what is right, what is wrong, what is good, what is bad. We can recognize what ought to be, what ought not to be. We can recognize these.

The question is: Do we want it or not? How do we respond when we see more clearly what ought to be?

So if we are preoccupied with the things of this world, we want the enjoyment in this world, when the word of God comes, we will not be paying much attention. This will be like the seed that is sown along the road. The devil will just come and take it away because you are not paying attention, you are not absorbing it; you are not receiving it into your heart: The heart is hardened. It is like the road, it cannot bear fruit. The evil one will just take it away.

Those on the rocky *soil*, they receive the word with joy, but they have no *firm* root. There is no depth. There are those who have a certain desire for what is good. When they hear it, they are so happy: "I can be forgiven, I can be saved. I can go to heaven." They respond; they are so eager.

But when temptation comes, they fall away. When difficulties come, when there is a cost, when they realize what it means to follow Christ, they say, "No, no, this is not for me. I want a life where I can be peaceful, happy and joyful in the way that I can appreciate in my own terms." But when it comes in the form of opposition from the evil one, when it comes in the form of God's standards and requirements, they are not prepared to stand, so they fall away.

Then there are others, they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity. There is some degree of response, but they do not persevere, they do not deal with the things that distract and so, they cannot bear fruit.

All these are indications of the attitudes of our hearts and this is up to us. Whether we want to respond deeply to God or not is up to us. It is the value that you nurture in your heart; it is the things that you pursue. What do you want? So how do you live?

So the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. All these are indications of the right attitude, the right choice – the right commitment. Honest – you face it honestly. Do not run away from it like Adam and Eve. When God came into the garden, they ran away. Come to God. If you have done wrong, acknowledge it, then you can be forgiven; face it.

A good heart – the direction of wanting what is right, what is meaningful, what is pleasing to God, what is of eternal value; and once you have recognized it, you hold it fast. You take time to ponder over it; you take time to absorb it, to assimilate it, to live by it, to let it bear fruit in your life.

With perseverance: it is a long term thing. It is not just for the moment you find it good, you are happy, but you continue through all kinds of situations; you persevere.

So the goal of the gospel is to bring about quality of being from which God's purposes can be effectively fulfilled in all its fullness. Without that, it cannot be properly accomplished.

But for that goal to be achieved, then the listeners must want it, must be willing to listen, to be humble, to be honest, to be contrite, to respond and to be thankful to God.

And as you respond, as you come to appreciate how wonderful it is and you want to bring this gospel to others, you must be careful to nurture it in your own life... that it grows in quality, in reality, in meaning and you know what you are saying, you know what you are communicating. When people hear, they can recognize it is true, it is real.

There are various other aspects that we can consider to appreciate it more clearly and if it is suitable, we will consider further in this area: quality of our being and its relationship with the gospel.

The gospel is very central in what God wants to accomplish and at the heart of it, it has to do with quality of our being. Those who are pure in heart will see God. We are called upon to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. We are to be holy as He is holy. It is central in what God wants to accomplish and it is in that context that we can then develop a deep fellowship with God and work together with Him – what He wants to accomplish.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to live according to the purpose of the gospel and give ourselves to walk with God meaningfully, in deep fellowship with Him as we depend fully on Him to transmit the message of the gospel.

Let us ask the Lord to help us appreciate this more deeply for ourselves in practical terms. The outcome in our lives will depend on how we respond to what God says to us. If we recognize that this is the right path, are we going to take it seriously, hold it fast, bear fruit? Or would we just say, "It is nice to know that" and go our own way, do our own things?

Let us come before the Lord and ask Him to help us to consider what He has done for us, why is the message of the gospel possible: It is because of what the Lord Jesus has done on the cross for us. Let us express our gratitude to Him not just in words, but in the life that we live.