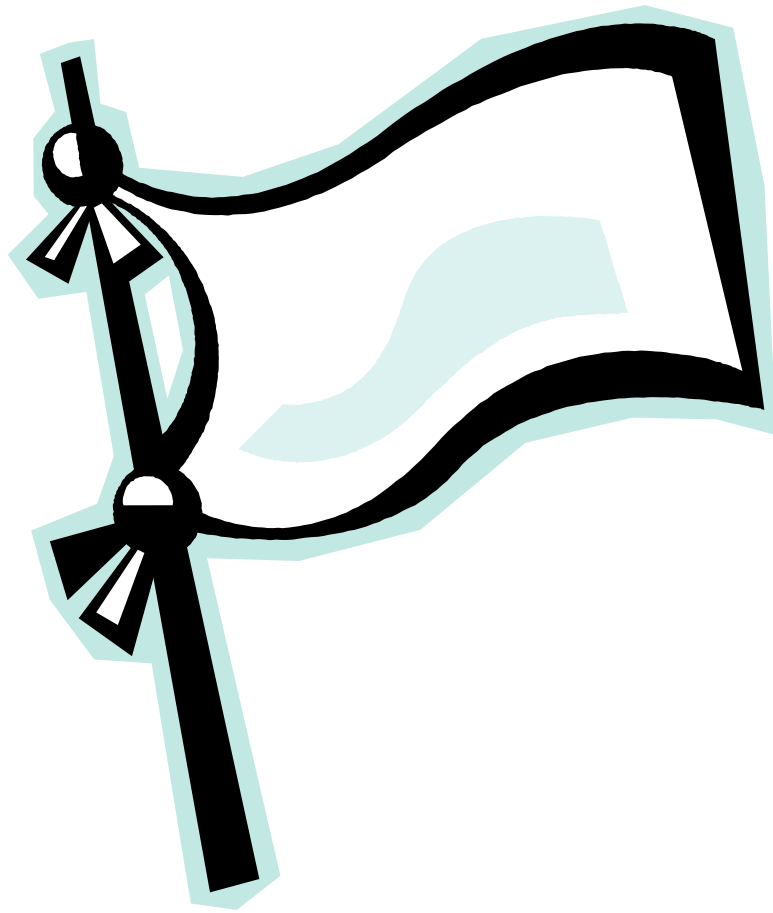

His Banner Over Us Is Love



A Series of Five Sermons on the Love of God

Gene Taylor

Preface

The theme for this series of sermons is **“His Banner Over Us Is Love.”** Is there any greater theme than love? If we learn to appreciate the boundless love that God has shown toward us, we will have no problem at all in returning that love through obedience to His divine word. Christ said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

In the Bible God has given us the many qualities of love and numerous examples of that love. The lessons in this series will help all ages to better understand the love God has for mankind and the love we need to manifest toward Him and our fellow man.

These sermons may be presented as a series or independently for each lesson is complete in and of itself and does not build on previous lessons.

Gene Taylor

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The Love That Never Fails

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:13

Introduction

1. In the controversy in the church at Corinth over spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul injected teaching on love in order to show the proper reasons for desiring and using spiritual gifts.
 - a. Love is a "*more excellent way.*" (1 Cor. 12:31)
 - b. Of faith, hope and love, "the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)
2. This lesson will show:
 - a. Why love is greater than both faith and hope.
 - b. What results from having such a love.

I. An Analysis of the Text: A Definition of Terms

A. "Love."

1. "AGAPAO and the corresponding noun agape present 'the characteristic word of Christianity, and since the Spirit of revelation has used it to express ideas previously unknown, enquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint, throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the N.T. ... '

"Agape and agapao are used in the N.T. (a) to describe the attitude of God toward His Son ... ; the human race, generally ... ; and to such as believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ... ; (b) to convey His will to His children concerning their attitude one toward another ... , and toward all men ... ; (c) to express the essential nature of God ... '

"Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. God's love is seen in the gift of His Son ... But obviously this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellency of its objects ... It was an exercise of the Divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself ...

"Love had its perfect expression among men in the Lord Jesus Christ, ... Christian love is the fruit of His Spirit in the Christian, Gal. 5:22.

"Christian love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments, John 14:15,21,23; I John 2:5; 2 John 6. Self-will, that is, self-pleasing, is the negation of the love of God.

"Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom. 15:2, and works no ill

- to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to all men ... " (W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, p. 703)
2. 1 Corinthians 13 defines the term by the qualities it manifests.
- B. "Greatest."
1. "Of great moment, of great weight, important ... A thing to be highly esteemed for its excellence." (Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 395)
 2. "Excellent:...lit., a throwing beyond, hence, a surpassing..." (Vine, 395)

II. Why Love Is Greatest

- A. Love will exist in heaven whereas faith and hope will cease to exist at the second coming.
1. Faith will end with sight. (Heb. 11:1)
 2. Hope will stop with realization.
 3. Love will only be perfected in the state of glory when we shall see Christ as He is and be like Him (1 John 3:2) and it will be eternal.
- B. Love is the one thing from which faith and hope spring. (1 Cor. 13:7)
1. "Faith is not an end; it is faith in a Divine Deliverer and in his promise of salvation; it is the means toward eternal life. Hope is not an end; it is hope of final and eternal fellowship with God; it is the means to steadfastness and to heaven. But love is an end in itself. It is the bond of perfectness; beyond this even Christianity cannot carry us. As faith and hope realize their purpose when they produce love, it is obvious that the virtue which is their final purpose is greater than they." (David Lipscomb, *Gospel Advocate Commentary on I Corinthians*, pp. 203-204)
 2. Faith comes from hearing the word (Rom. 10:17) which is based on love.
- C. Love is the great underlying principle of the universe.
1. God, the greatest being, is love (1 John 4:8) and the laws of the universe are the manifestations and outgrowths of His love.
 - a. The "golden rule." (Matt. 7:12)
 - b. Love your enemy. (Matt. 5:43-48)
 - c. We are most like God, the greatest being, when we love.
 2. God's word is undergirded by love. (Matt. 22:35-40)
 - a. We love because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)
 - b. To love is to conform to the laws of God. (John 14:15)
- D. Love moves us to action with an almost irresistible power.
1. "Love is as strong as death" (Song of Solomon 8:6) and "many waters cannot quench love." (Song of Solomon 8:7)
 2. "Love never fails" (1 Cor. 3:8) in the Goodspeed translation reads, "Love will never die out."
 3. "Greater love has no one than this." (John 15:13)

4. This principle demonstrated by the women who came to the tomb of Jesus.
 - a. They had watched Jesus die on the cross and had seen His body laid to rest in the tomb.
 - b. They were moved toward the tomb early Sunday morning with the intention of anointing His dead body. (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1) Why?
 - 1) Faith? If they had believed what He had said repeatedly, they would have been going out to meet the risen Christ instead of going to anoint His dead body. (Matt. 16:21)
 - 2) Hope? Theirs was probably as dead as that of the two men with whom Jesus talked on the road to Emmaus—it was nearly dead. (Luke 24:21)
 - 3) It must have been love.
 - c. These women loved Jesus.
 - 1) They did not know how the great stone they thought was still on the door could be moved but they moved on in spite of this tremendous hindrance.
 - 2) They did not know how they could get the soldiers who they thought were still guarding the tomb to let them inside to anoint His body, but they moved on.
5. Love never fails, if it is strong enough. When faith is weak and hope is almost dead, love will move us on.

III. Results of Such Love

- A. You will obey whether it makes sense or not.
- B. You will follow Jesus and cleave to Him in times of doubt and trial.
- C. You will do what the Lord wants you to do in spite of hindrances and obstacles which may seem insurmountable. You will not be turned aside.
- D. You will make the Lord, His will and His body the most important things in your life.
- E. You will have the proper attitude toward God, Christ, their word, your brother/sister in Christ, your family, your neighbor, the lost, your enemy, etc.
- F. You will make being with the Lord your primary goal.
- G. You will realize what the religion of Christ is all about.

Conclusion

1. Love's superiority is easily seen. Therefore, follow the advice of Paul to "pursue (follow after) love." (1 Cor. 14:1)
2. The more we love, the more we are like God, the more we will be pleasing to Him.

The Lord Is My Shepherd

Text: Psalm 23

Introduction

1. The text, without doubt, is one of the most familiar Bible passages.
 - a. It is often read and quoted at funerals but it is a psalm of life rather than death.
 - b. Very few are aware of its impact upon the lives of Christians.
2. The Lord is a shepherd, provider and protector to those who follow Him. (John 10:11-18)
 - a. "Want:" The thing that is lacking; deficiency, necessity. A lack of necessities of life, poverty, destitution.
 - b. His provision is comprehensive of both the material and spiritual aspects of one's life.
3. This lesson will:
 - a. Provide a textual consideration of Psalm 23.
 - b. Define the Good Shepherd and His sheep.
 - c. Make application of Psalm 23 to Jesus' care for His sheep.
 - d. Conclude by viewing the separation of the sheep from the goats.

I. A Textual Consideration of Psalm 23

- A. Verse 1: The shepherd provides all the needs for the sheep.
- B. Verse 2.
 1. "Green pastures."
 - a. The shepherd provides lush pastures which give the sheep an ample supply of food.
 - b. Sheep only lie down when their stomachs are full.
 2. "Still waters."
 - a. Because they are nervous animals, sheep will not drink from noisy streams.
 - b. "Still waters" speak of calm, peace and serenity.
- C. Verse 3.
 1. Sheep aimlessly wander off and often need to be rescued by the shepherd.
 2. This principle is emphasized in Matthew 18:11-14 and Luke 15:4-7.
- D. Verse 4.
 1. "The valley of the shadow of death."
 - a. This term was used to describe a narrow, treacherous path through the mountains which led from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea.
 - b. It was the only path to some of the most fertile pasture in all of Palestine.

2. "Rod and staff."
 - a. One end of the rod a shepherd carried was a blunt instrument which could be used like a weapon to fight off enemies.
 - b. The other end was crooked so that the shepherd could lift sheep safely from crevices, ledges and thickets.

E. Verse 5.

1. The shepherd would conscientiously go through a field and remove all of the hazards in it before allowing his sheep to graze there.
2. If a sheep were bruised or cut, the shepherd would pour oil on the injury to soothe, protect and promote healing.

F. Verse 6.

1. The shepherd was always there for his sheep.
2. He was ever vigilant to meet their needs and supply their wants.

II. The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

A. The Good Shepherd. (John 10:11-18, 25-29)

1. In the Old Testament, the figure of a shepherd was used:
 - a. In reference to God in the text of this lesson. (Psa. 23)
 - b. To describe the prophesied Messiah. (Isa. 40:10-11)
2. Jesus, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, proclaimed Himself to be the "Good Shepherd." (John 10) As the "Good Shepherd" He:
 - a. Lays down his life. (11, 17-18)
 - b. In contrast to the hireling, protects the sheep from predators. (12)
 - c. Also in contrast to the hireling, cares for the sheep, including love and provision. (13)
 - d. Maintains the flock: He knows His sheep and is known by them. (14)

B. The Sheep. (John 10:27-28.)

1. Sensitive: They hear Christ's voice. (27)
 - a. They are "swift to hear" the Shepherd's voice. (James 1:19)
 - b. They desire to "hear all things." (Acts 10:33)
2. Fellowship: Christ knows them. (27)
 - a. They have fellowship with both the Father and the Son. (1 John 1:1-4)
 - b. Christ acts as mediator in their behalf. (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5-6)
3. Obey: They follow Christ. (27)
 - a. Obedience is a sign of their love. (John 14:15)
 - b. Jesus is their Savior. (Heb. 5:8-9)
4. Hope: They have eternal life. (28)
 - a. The free gift of God has been given to them. (Rom. 6:23; John 10:10b)
 - b. Christ has gone to prepare a place for them. (John 14:1-3)
5. Assurance: They never perish. (28)
 - a. The Lord is not slack concerning His promises. (2 Pet. 3:9)
 - b. The Lord has given assurance to all. (Acts 17:29-31)

6. Security: They are not snatched from the Lord's hand. (28)
 - a. Christ desires to provide protection. (Matt. 23:27)
 - b. There is a crown laid up for his sheep. (2 Tim. 4:6-8)
7. They are righteous. (Matt. 25:31-40, esp. v. 37)

III. An Application of Psalm 23 to Jesus' Care for His Sheep

A. The material aspects of Psalm 23: The Lord's sheep shall not want for the necessities of physical life. (Psa. 37:25)

1. God's provision for the righteous from the beginning of time.
 - a. Noah. Provided the plans and specified the materials for the ark which saved the lives of Noah and his family. (Gen. 6-8)
 - b. Abraham. Increased the herds and land of Abraham after Lot had chosen the better pasture. (Gen. 13)
 - c. The manna to Israel. Fed them in the wilderness for 40 years when Israel had no bread. (Ex. 15:35)
 - d. Elijah. Sent ravens with flesh and bread to feed him when upon his exile from Gilead he had to hide by the brook Cherith. (1 Kings 17)
2. The method of God's provision. (Psa. 104:25-28)
 - a. God provides for His creatures but it is entirely up to them to gather that which is provided.
 - b. God's provisions today include opportunities to work, physical families, the church, etc.
 - c. The Christian is to work. (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thes. 3:12; 1 Tim. 5:8) in order to gather God's blessings.

B. The spiritual aspects of Psalm 23.

1. First make sure it is really the Lord who is your shepherd.
 - a. Israel fell prey to false shepherds who were more interested in feeding themselves than the flocks. (Ezek. 34:2-3)
 - b. God feeds His sheep. (Ezek. 34:14)
2. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, in accordance with Psalm 23:
 - a. Supplies the spiritual needs of His sheep in such a manner that they want for nothing. (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)
 - b. Feeds them by providing the proper spiritual nourishment: the word of God. (Acts 20:32; Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 5:6)
 - c. Provides them the water of life. (John 4:10, 14)
 - d. Restores the soul by:
 - 1) Cleansing all their sins. (1 John 1:9)
 - 2) Making them alive when they had been dead. (Eph. 2:1)
 - 3) Renewing them day by day. (2 Cor. 4:16)
 - e. Causes them to fear no evil. (Psa. 2:7-9; 1 Pet. 5:7; 1 Thes. 4:13)
 - f. Grants them peace even in the presence of enemies. (Rom. 8:31-39)

- g. Is with them every step of the way through life. (Matt. 28:18-20; Heb. 13:5-6)
- h. Grants them eternal life. (John 10:10; 1 John 5:13)

Conclusion: The Separation of the Sheep from the Goats (Matt. 25:31-46)

1. Those who reject Jesus as their Shepherd while on earth (See John 10:24-26) have only condemnation awaiting them at the final day.
2. The sheep, the righteous, will be divided from the goats, the unrighteous. The sheep will go into the eternal abode the Good Shepherd has prepared for them. The goats will go into everlasting punishment.
3. Make sure you are being led by the Good Shepherd. You will never want in this life and He will lead you to eternal bliss in the life to come.

The Golden Rule

Text: Matthew 7:12

Introduction

1. The text is one of the best known verses in the Bible.
 - a. All agree that if everyone lived by its teaching the world would be a better place.
 - b. Yet, few people apply this principle in dealing with others.
2. The principle set forth in this passage is not unique to Jesus. He carves out no new ethical ground.
 - a. It is simply a restatement of Leviticus 19:18.
 - b. The people were not astonished at what Jesus taught but at the manner in which He taught. (Matthew 7:28-29)
 - c. He does, though, bring greater intensity to this principle by living it before the people of His day. (John 13:34-35)
3. This lesson will:
 - a. Examine the text in its context.
 - b. Consider a classic illustration of this principle by looking at the parable of the good Samaritan.
 - c. Make practical application, both positive and negative, of this principle.

I. The Text (Matthew 7:12) in Context

- A. Matthew 7 is not several disjointed teachings but rather an application of the principle set forth in Matthew 6:33 to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”
 1. Seeking first the kingdom of God in relation to:
 - a. Things. (6:25-34)
 - b. Others. (7:1-12)
 - c. Way of life. (7:13-14)
 - d. False doctrine. (7:15-20)
 - e. Jesus and His word. (7:21-27)
 2. The righteousness of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven is determined by his attitudes and actions in relation to all of these areas.
- B. In the section which deals with the Christian’s relationships to others (1-12), several principles govern ones actions.
 1. One’s understanding of the kingdom and its righteousness should not produce in him a spirit of harsh judgment toward others. (1-5)
 - a. While people need to see the nature of true righteousness, an uncaring, self-righteous hypocrite is not the one who can do it.

- b. The self-righteous is disqualified because he is oblivious to his own sins.
 - c. It is the one who has humbly submitted his life to the will of God who can properly influence others. (Matt. 5:14-16)
- 2. Time should not be wasted sharing the gospel of the kingdom and its righteousness on those who have no interest in it. (6)
 - a. The kingdom of God is not spread by an unheeding zealotry anymore than by a harsh judgmentalism.
 - b. The kingdom and its righteousness is foolish to the swine and dogs of the world. (1 Cor. 1:18, 23)
- 3. Since the kingdom and its righteousness are a gift of God's love, the Christian ought to love others in the same manner. (7-12)
 - a. The love of God was such that He provided salvation through His Son. (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8)
 - b. The Old Testament law was given to prepare mankind for that gift (Gal. 3:24), therefore, it was undergirded by God's love.

II. The Parable of the Good Samaritan: A Classic Illustration of This Principle (Luke 10:25-37)

- A. The parable was spoken in response to the questioning of a lawyer who was testing Jesus.
 - 1. This lawyer acknowledged that in order to have eternal life he must:
 - a. Love God with all his heart, soul, strength and mind.
 - b. Love his neighbor as himself.
 - 2. After Jesus told him to apply this teaching, the lawyer, seeking to justify himself, asked, "And who is my neighbor?"
 - 3. Jesus then related the parable showing that the "neighbor" of the one who fell among thieves was "He who showed mercy on him."
- B. The parable illustrates three basic attitudes toward others.
 - 1. Iron rule: "What's yours is mine and, if I can, I will take it."
 - a. This rule is represented by the thieves.
 - b. They had not the least concern for their fellow man.
 - 2. Silver rule: "What's mine belongs to me and I'm going to keep it."
 - a. This rule is illustrated by the priest and Levite, two religious people.
 - b. This is the attitude most people seem to have—non-involvement.
 - c. The passive are condemned. (Matt. 25:41-46)
 - 3. Golden rule: "What I have belongs to God and I will use it according to His will."
 - a. The Samaritan depicts this principle.
 - b. Jesus epitomizes this rule.

III. Practical Application of This Principle

- A. Negatively: Why don't more people practice this principle?
 - 1. Most people are selfish and self-centered.

2. Only when the old self-serving way is broken will people be free to treat others the way they themselves wish to be treated.
 3. How can people be released from selfishness?
 - a. By looking to God.
 - 1) "Our fascination with self can only end when we have become fascinated with God." (Paul Earnhart, *Christianity Magazine*, Aug. 1987)
 - 2) See Matthew 22:36-39.
 - b. When an absolute love of God has driven out an absolute love of self, one is free to love others as he loves himself.
 - c. Only God can deliver us from ourselves and enable us to love others selflessly. (1 John 4:19)
 4. In Matthew 7, the basis for our treatment of others is God's gracious treatment of His children. (9-11)
 - a. God's mercy and generosity is not what man deserved but what he needed.
 - b. Those who have received of God's grace, on the basis of that grace, should be gracious to others even if it is not what they deserve. (Matt. 18:23-25)
- B. Positively: How can we put this principle into practice in our everyday life in a practical way?
1. Not by:
 - a. Constantly griping and complaining about others to others. (Phil. 2:14)
 - b. Being overly and unjustly critical.
 - c. Blaming others—never self.
 - d. Delighting in making life miserable for others.
 2. By:
 - a. Thinking about how others feel. (Phil. 2:3-4)
 - b. Complimenting others.
 - c. Noticing people. Being kind to all. (Phil. 3:12-13)
 - d. Being a true friend.
 - e. Being sympathetic and compassionate. (Rom. 12:15)
 - f. Loving others. (Col. 3:14)
 - g. Teaching others the gospel.

Conclusion

1. The Christian should diligently try to make practical application of the "golden rule" each day.
2. True righteousness demands a selfless love for men which rests solidly upon God's gracious love for us.

The Good Tidings of Great Joy

Text: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:5 - 2:51

Introduction

1. The birth of Jesus is an expression of love. (John 3:16)
 - a. As part of the natural order, God intends the birth of every child to be an expression of love.
 - b. The world has thwarted God's purpose in this as it has in many other areas of life.
2. We seem to shy away from an in-depth study and discussion of the birth of Jesus because of the way His birth has been treated by the world in general and religion in particular.
3. This lesson will:
 - a. Examine the texts where the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding it are recorded.
 - b. Establish the validity of the virgin birth.
 - c. Consider some conclusions, both true and false, about the birth of Jesus.

I. A Synoptic View of the Birth of Jesus

- A. An angel appears to Zacharias to inform him that John the Baptist would be born to him and his wife. (Luke 1:5-25)
- B. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary to tell her that she will give birth to Jesus. (Luke 1:26-38)
- C. Mary visits Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias, to tell her of the angel's message. (Luke 1:39-56)
- D. The birth of John the Baptist. (Luke 1:57-80)
- E. An angel visits Joseph, the man betrothed to Mary, to tell him of the nature of Mary's being with child. (Matt. 1:18-25)
- F. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. (Luke 2:1-7)
- G. An angel appears to shepherds in the vicinity of Bethlehem to tell them of the birth of Jesus which causes them to go to Jesus and then to widely announce His birth. (Luke 2:8-20)
- H. The circumcision of Jesus and His presentation in the temple. (Luke 2:21-38)
 - I. The visit of the wisemen from the east. (Matt. 2:1-12)
 - J. The flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus into Egypt to flee the persecution of Herod. (Matt. 2:13-23; Luke 2:39-40)
- K. At age 12 Jesus goes to the Passover in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:41-52)
- L. The genealogies of Jesus. (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:28-38)

II. The Validity of the Virgin Birth

A. The birth of Jesus was a matter of Old Testament prophecy.

1. The time of His coming.
 - a. In the last days. (Isa. 2:2; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17)
 - b. During the fourth world empire. (Dan. 2:44; Luke 2:1)
 - c. Before Judah lost its distinctness as a tribe. (Gen. 49:10)
 - 1) Note that the ten tribes of the northern kingdom were no longer really distinct at the time of Jesus' coming.
 - 2) Also note that Judah lost its distinction within just 40 years of the death of Jesus.
2. The place of His birth: Bethlehem of Judea. (Micah 5:2)
 - a. Another Bethlehem existed. (Josh. 19:15)
 - b. Micah was specific—"Bethlehem Ephrathah."
3. His lineage.
 - a. A descendant of Abraham. (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:16)
 - b. Of the tribe of Judah. (Gen. 49:10; Micah 5:2; Heb. 7:14; Rev. 5:5)
 - c. Of the house of David. (Isa. 11:1-2,10; Psa. 132:11)
4. He would be born of a virgin. (Isa. 7:14)

B. Some observations about the virgin birth.

1. It was not just a supernatural birth.
 - a. Supernatural birth is a generic term which includes virgin birth.
 - b. The births of Isaac, Samuel and John the Baptist all qualify as supernatural births but not virgin births.
2. As Jesus, after His death, was raised by the power of God (Rom. 1:4), He was born by the power of God. (Luke 1:35)
 - a. If there were no resurrection there would be no fitting end to His existence as a man.
 - b. Without the virgin birth there would be no suitable beginning to it.
3. The only way God could use a birth of the flesh but still assure us of His deity was through a virgin.
 - a. Natural birth assures us that Jesus partook of the fullness of the flesh.
 - b. The virginity of His mother assures us of the paternity of God and thus the stamp of divinity upon the off-spring, God in flesh. (Matt. 1:23)

C. Answering those who question the validity of the virgin birth.

1. The reactions of both Mary and Joseph give credence to the Biblical account.
 - a. Mary goes into the presence of the high priest who ordinarily would have led the investigation into her immorality and pronounced the death penalty. (Num. 5:11-28; Deut. 22:13-29)
 - b. Mary's reaction at Calvary is not that of a guilty party. She could have spared her son by merely naming His father.

- c. Joseph's actions show he was not involved immorally with Mary.
 - 1) His refusal at first to marry her indicates he was one who honored the law.
 - 2) His consideration of her to put her away privily indicates his devotion to her.
 - 3) His haste to take her as wife at the angel's statement indicates he believed she was pure.
- 2. Jesus, if illegitimate, violated the law by being in the temple. (Deut. 23:2)
- 3. "Virgin," as used in Isaiah 7:14 is the Hebrew word "*almah*" which could mean "young girl."
 - a. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text which was translated some two centuries before the birth of Jesus, translates "*almah*" with "*parthenos*" which **always** means "virgin."
 - 1) The Greek has three other words which could have been used had Mary not been a virgin.
 - 2) Modernists, including the translators of the RSV and NRSV, all deny the virgin birth and translate the word as "young maiden."
 - b. Mary emphatically stated that she had not known a man. (Luke 1:34)
 - 1) "Know" is used in sacred and profane literature as a euphemism for sexual relations.
 - 2) Matthew 1:18 says that Mary was with child before she and Joseph had had sexual relations with one another.

III. Some Conclusions About the Birth of Jesus

- A. A false conclusion: The birth of Jesus took place December 25th.
 - 1. This practice began in 221 A.D. when Julius Sextus Africanus, a historian from Alexandria, Egypt, composed a chronicle of world events which listed the birth of Jesus as December 25.
 - a. It coincided with Saturnalia, the Roman feast of the sun.
 - b. It was made an official Roman holiday by the Council of Nicea in 325.
 - c. It is widely recognized by most churches today as the birth of Jesus.
 - 2. Reasons why December 25th should not be recognized as the day of Christ's birth.
 - a. Scripture does not reveal and there is no way to accurately determine the exact day Jesus was born.
 - b. The birth of Jesus did not take place in winter but in early spring or summer.
 - 1) Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, would have been serving as priest in the temple 8 weeks after the spring sacred season since he belonged to the course of Abijah, the 8th priestly course to serve in the temple during the Jewish year. (1 Chron. 24:10; Luke 1:8-9)
 - 2) The conception of John the Baptist took place two months after the Feast of Unleavened Bread which took place in the spring. (Luke 1:10-11, 23-24)

- c. The shepherds were tending their flocks out in the fields at the time of the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2:8)
 - 1) Sheep were not kept out in the open at night any later than September.
 - 2) During the winter months the sheep were kept in sheepfolds.
 - 3) Jesus had to have been born during the warmer months.
- d. There was no celebration of Jesus' birth for about 220 years.
 - 1) The church, under the guidance of the apostles, did not celebrate His birth at all.
 - 2) December 25th was chosen by men not appointed by the Lord.
- B. A false conclusion: The three wise men visited Jesus in the stable shortly after His birth.
 - 1. No one knows the number of wise men except that there were more than one.
 - a. The number three is conjectured from the fact that they brought three gifts.
 - b. Any number of individuals could have been represented by the gifts.
 - 2. Their journey was made long after Jesus was born.
 - a. Months had most likely passed before they followed the star to Bethlehem.
 - b. Mary and Joseph had probably moved to more comfortable quarters than the stable.
- C. A true conclusion: Without the virgin birth the purpose of God would have been thwarted. (Phil. 2:5-11)
 - 1. Jesus was pre-existent in the form of God but He chose to empty Himself and come to earth in the flesh to accomplish the will of the Father.
 - 2. He became God in flesh.
 - a. Born of woman He experienced all aspects of humanity.
 - b. Born of the Spirit He retained His deity.
 - 3. Neither the humanity nor deity of Jesus should be called into question by anyone.

Conclusion

- 1. The birth of Jesus certainly qualifies as "good tidings of great joy" for it brought to earth the only begotten Son of God in the form of man so that He could live a perfect life and qualify to be the Messiah, the one who would save mankind from sin.
- 2. He became one of us to save us. (Luke 19:10)

The Good News

Text: Romans 1:16-17

Introduction

1. The term “gospel” generally means “glad tidings” or “good news.”
2. In the New Testament the term takes on a new, fuller meaning.
 - a. “Originally denoted a reward for good tidings; later, the idea of reward dropped, and the word stood for the good news itself. ... In the N.T. it denotes the good tidings of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith, on the basis of His expiatory death, His burial, resurrection and ascension.” (W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, p. 507)
 - b. Jesus commanded that it be preached everywhere to everyone. (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16)
3. This lesson will:
 - a. Look at several Scriptural designations for the gospel.
 - b. Examine and analyze the text to determine its teachings about the gospel.
 - c. Summarize the gospel, its origins and message.

I. Scriptural Designations of the Gospel

A. The gospel of God.

1. References in Scripture.
 - a. Romans 1:1. “...separated to the gospel of God.”
 - b. 1 Thessalonians 2:2. “...speak to you the gospel of God.”
 - c. 1 Thessalonians 2:9. “...preached to you the gospel of God.”
 - d. 1 Timothy 1:11. “...the glorious gospel of the blessed God.”
2. A proper designation because God is the ultimate source of the gospel. The gospel was:
 - a. Prepared by God. (1 Cor. 2:9)
 - b. Promised by God through prophets. (Rom. 1:2)
 - c. Once a mystery but now revealed (Eph. 6:19) so that all can:
 - 1) Understand. (Eph. 3:1-5)
 - 2) Obey. (Acts 5:29)

B. The gospel of Christ.

1. References in Scripture.
 - a. Romans 1:9. “...the gospel of His Son.”
 - b. Romans 15:19. “...I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”
 - c. 1 Corinthians 9:12. “...but we endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.”

- d. Galatians 1:7. "...some...want to pervert the gospel of Christ."
- e. 2 Thessalonians 1:8. "...taking vengeance...on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- 2. A proper designation because Christ is the subject, object and very life of the gospel. (1 Cor. 15:1-4)
 - a. "Jesus" means "savior" so the good news concerns salvation. (Matt. 1:21; Luke 19:10)
 - b. All of Jesus' thoughts and actions were to bring about salvation.
- C. The gospel of the grace of God.
 - 1. Acts 20:24. "...to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."
 - 2. A proper designation because the gospel is the medium of God's grace to man.
 - a. Grace makes salvation possible. (Eph. 2:8-9)
 - b. Grace is revealed in and by the word. (Titus 2:11-12)
- D. The gospel of peace.
 - 1. Ephesians 6:15. "and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace."
 - 2. A proper designation because it is through the gospel man makes peace with:
 - a. God. (Rom. 5:1)
 - b. Other men. (Eph. 2:15-18; Gal. 3:28)
 - c. Self. (John 14:27; Col. 3:15)
- E. The gospel of your salvation.
 - 1. Ephesians 1:13. "...after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."
 - 2. A proper salvation for the gospel brings salvation to mankind. It:
 - a. Contains the "power of God to salvation." (Rom. 1:16)
 - b. Generates the faith essential to salvation. (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Heb. 11:6)
 - c. Contains the commands to be obeyed to the salvation of the soul. (Luke 6:46; 2 Thes. 1:8-9; Matt. 7:24-27; Jas. 1:22)

II. An Analysis of Romans 1:16-17 and Its Teachings in Context

- A. This text is the very core of the Roman epistle.
 - 1. It states the proposition for the entire book.
 - 2. In it are stated precepts and principles one must grasp in order to understand the gospel and the salvation of the soul.
- B. A summary of the book of Romans.
 - 1. The proposition stated. (1:16-17)
 - 2. The proposition argued.
 - a. The guilt of the Gentile world. (ch. 1)
 - b. The guilt of the Jewish nation. (ch. 2)
 - c. The guilt of all mankind and God's provision to save them. (ch. 3)
 - d. The Old Testament proves the proposition. (ch. 4)

- e. A comparison and contrast of Adam and Christ. (ch. 5)
 - f. Life as a Christian: dead to sin, alive to God. (ch. 6)
 - g. Freedom in Christ versus the bondage of the Old Law. (ch. 7)
 - h. Walking by the flesh versus walking by the Spirit. (ch. 8)
 - i. Has God rejected His people Israel? (ch. 9)
 - j. Rejection due to unbelief, acceptance is upon the basis of faith. (ch. 10)
 - k. God's plan subject to universal application. (ch. 11)
 - l. Practical application of God's plan into one's life. (chs. 12-16)
- C. The following facts can be learned about the gospel from an analysis of the text.
1. The nature of the gospel.
 - a. This is seen in the fact that it is the "power of God."
 - 1) Power is the very essence of its quality and character.
 - 2) The power is that of **God**. (Psa. 29; Heb. 1:1-2)
 - 3) Consider Hebrews 4:12.
 - b. For centuries the gospel has cut to the very heart of human beings.
 - 1) Those present on Pentecost are an example. (Acts 2:36-37)
 - 2) To this day the "power" works throughout the world accomplishing the purpose of God and the salvation of man. (1 Pet. 1:24-25)
 2. The source of the gospel.
 - a. The gospel is from God.
 - 1) It is the words of the creator to His creation.
 - 2) The inspired writers wrote the will of God. (1 Cor. 2:9-13; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Gal. 1:11-12; 1 Cor. 14:37)
 - b. Having heaven as its source sets the gospel apart from all other writings. (Matt. 21:23-27)
 3. The purpose of the gospel.
 - a. The phrase "to salvation" expresses the purpose of the gospel—to save the lost.
 - 1) Since it is from God it can accomplish its purpose. (Isa. 55:10-11)
 - 2) Consider the apostle Peter's preaching to Cornelius. (Acts 11:13-14)
 - b. Only Jesus has the words to eternal life. (John 6:68; Heb. 1:1-2)
 4. The scope of the gospel.
 - a. "Everyone ... for the Jew first and also for the Greek."
 - b. The gospel is for all.
 - 1) God desires that all be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4)
 - 2) God is no respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34-35)
 - 3) The disciples are to carry it all over the world to every person. (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16)

5. The requirements of the gospel.
 - a. Belief, faith, is the central requirement of the gospel. (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 5:1)
 - b. A saving faith is an obedient faith. (Rom. 1:5; 16:26)
 - 1) Faith is more than a simple trust or mental acceptance.
 - 2) Commitment to Christ is displayed by obedience. (Jas. 2:24)
6. The accomplishment of the gospel.
 - a. The gospel reveals "the righteousness of God."
 - 1) It reveals God's way to justify the sinner.
 - 2) It shows God's plan for making men and women as they ought to be.
 - b. Those who accept the gospel are made righteous. (1 John 3:7; Rom. 6:16-18)
7. The result of the gospel.
 - a. "The just shall live by faith."
 - b. All must obey the plan of God, living by it.
 - c. The vengeance of the Lord will be upon those who do not obey the gospel. (2 Thes. 1:7-9)

III. A Summary of the Gospel, Its Origins and Content

A. The gospel originated with God.

1. It was His desire that all be saved. (2 Pet. 3:9)
2. He revealed His will to man to bring about man's salvation.
 - a. The Holy Spirit searched out the mind of God and revealed His will to men who in turn wrote it down. (1 Cor. 2:10-13; 1 Pet. 1:12)
 - b. The source of the gospel preached by Paul and the other apostles was Divine. (Gal. 1:11-12)
3. What God revealed was what a person needed in order to be saved from sin. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3)
 - a. The gospel is God's power to save. (Rom. 1:16)
 - b. The message of the cross is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18)
 - c. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God. (Rom. 1:17)
 - 1) One is to seek God's righteousness first. (Matt. 6:33)
 - 2) Life and immortality have been brought to light in the gospel. (2 Tim. 1:10)
 - d. No other gospel has been given or will be given for the one which has been given is sufficient to take away the sins of man and to save him.
 - 1) As there is one God, there is one gospel. (Eph. 4:4-6)
 - 2) When one preaches another gospel he is accursed. (Gal. 1:6-8)
 - 3) Both Jew and Gentile, all mankind, will be saved in the same manner. (Acts 15:7, 11)

B. The gospel consists of facts, commands and promises.

1. Facts to be believed about Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:1-4)
2. Commands to be obeyed. (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:9; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 15:58)
3. Promises to be enjoyed. (Mark 16:16; Eph. 1:3; Rev. 2:10)

Conclusion

1. The gospel, the good news, when preached and obeyed brings glory to God and Christ and salvation to man.
2. If you desire to be at peace with God and be a recipient of His grace, you must obey the gospel.
3. There is no hope for one who rejects the gospel. (2 Thes. 1:7-9)



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