

Reality & Paul 1

by George Verwer

The sermon explores the reality of the Apostle Paul's life and the call to live a committed and obedient Christian life amidst suffering and challenges.

Duration: 56:33

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:9

Topics: "Reality"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the criticisms and challenges faced in their ministry. They emphasize the importance of not letting small mistakes or wasted words hinder the message of God's Word. The speaker reads from 1 Corinthians 4:9, highlighting the apostles' role as fools for Christ's sake, yet wise in Him. They share how criticism can be a blessing in disguise and how learning from critics can lead to growth. The sermon also touches on the significance of simplicity in reaching a diverse and lost world, and the power of prayer from a simple, faithful woman.

Transcript

July 1975, at a Bible school and holiday camp in Padua, and the subject is reality in the life of the Apostle Paul. Father, we do commit ourselves to you now as we look into your holy word. We don't really know one another that well, in some ways I'm a stranger, but Lord we are known of you, and we are gathered here in your name, and our prayer together is that the speaker may be hid behind the cross, and that your Son, the Lord Jesus, may be lifted up.

We thank you for the privilege of just having a spiritual feast and looking into your word, but we know it may not be all blessing, for we know that oftentimes the blessing must be preceded by the breaking. We know that your word is like a two-edged sword, piercing even into the subconscious, into the depth, into the marrow, into the very inner man, cutting, exposing, that reality may come. We thank you now for this time together, and we praise you, and worship you, and commit our hearts to you.

Thank you Lord for giving me the strength of voice, and thank you Lord for above all else, your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died that we may be free, that we may live, that we may be forgiven, that we may know your reality. In Jesus' name, amen. We're going to be studying together in the word of God the subject of reality, and especially reality in the life of the Apostle Paul, or is demonstrated in the life of the Apostle Paul.

There's a lot of material. We could spend two or three mornings just giving you background and never even get into the meat. So I'm not going to give you too much background, but go right into the heart of the subject and look at some of the scriptures that speak about Paul and give us an inside view of his life.

There are very few men in the whole of scripture that we know as much about as the Apostle Paul. There are very few men in scripture that have shared from their own heart something about their own lives, their own background, their own history. We don't have very much about the Lord Jesus in his early years, to say the least.

And of course, a good part of the New Testament, God chose to bring it through the Apostle Paul, the human instrument. I don't think we need to be convinced in this kind of gathering about the significance of the life of Paul, of the importance of the epistles of Paul, but sometimes we need to just remind ourselves and say some things in the way of remembrance. It's not easy to speak to a group like this in that we have a very wide range of age levels, from teenagers right on to some of you who have gone on to the senior citizen stage.

That's what they call them in the States. I don't know what you call the people over here when they get a little older, but they call them senior citizens. They are now a great new protest movement.

They're marching, demonstrating, demanding rights, tremendous parades through the streets of the cities with hundreds and thousands of older people demanding their rights and wanting to take over the country and whatnot, joining the black power movement and the women's lib and, of course, everybody's got to get in on the thing these days. So we have senior citizens and we have some who are not even of voting age, and then you have people of many different ages. Not only that, there are people here from many backgrounds, and Christians have prejudices.

Christians have prejudices. I have hardly ever met a Christian who did not have prejudices and biases, and we sit here in a meeting and someone raises his hand and says, oh, the Pentecostals are here. And someone puts their hat on during the morning break and says, oh, the Brethren are here.

And we get our little mentalities of who's who and what's what. It's getting more confusing than ever these days, so you better stop trying to guess who's who because really you can't tell anymore. But we have our prejudices.

And I know, as someone who's been now speaking for 20 years, that I can say just one thing that may not be quite right and people can switch me off. Now, I don't mind actually being switched off. I don't blame you in some ways for switching me off, but don't switch God off.

And don't let some little thing I say, I've never spoken hardly once without saying something stupid. That's part of my whole lifestyle. But don't let some little thing I say that may not be biblical or maybe just wasted words, straw, keep you from the wheat and from what God wants to give us from his word.

The scripture I want to read for our first session this morning is a very powerful scripture in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. 1 Corinthians chapter 4. We'll start at verse 9. For I think that God hath set forth us, the apostles, last, as it were, appointed to death. For we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are horrible, but we are despised. Even under this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted, have no certain dwelling place.

And later, working with our own hands, being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure it. Being defamed, we entreat we are made as a filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you, though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. And here's the key text.

Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some are puffed up as though I would not come to you, but I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know not the speech of them who are puffed up, but the power.

The second key verse. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love and in the spirit of meekness? I have pondered this scripture dozens and dozens, perhaps hundreds of times.

It has perplexed me, it has challenged me, it has driven me to my knees again and again. The most perplexing part of this scripture is verse 16, where Paul says to the Corinthian believers, Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me. Do you realize the implication of this? I have a name that I try to give to the kind of Bible study that I engage in.

It's called dynamic Bible study. I use that simply to try to indicate that whenever I am teaching the word of God, I am teaching for action. I'm not here giving you something that I believe you can choose.

You may choose or not choose some little side issue that I mention. But I believe when we go into the word of God, it has tremendous authority. I believe we must not play with it, and I believe if we are to have God's blessing, and if we are to walk in God's path, we must respond.

I don't believe any of us are here by coincidence. I think most of you know that God had to intervene to bring me here. A doctor told me one month before I could speak, and that was only three weeks or less than three weeks ago.

And I believe God has intervened to give me the privilege of being here, and I believe God, above all else, is looking for obedience. There will never be a substitute for obedience. Any crisis experience, any special blessing, anything that God gives you, and He gives us much, is never a substitute for obedience.

Jesus Christ said, If you love me, keep my commandments. We are free will beings. We have a will.

If we had no will, we could never say that we were created in the image of God. Absolutely ludicrous. God has given us a will, and we have the privilege as believers of responding.

So many Christians have come to me and have written to me, and they've said, Each summer I go to a summer camp. Each summer I go to Keswick. Each summer I go to Filey, or I go here or there, and I recommit my life, and I have a tremendous blessing.

I have a mountaintop experience, and each winter I backslide. One young man told me he'd been doing that for ten years. A young man from Birmingham.

For ten years he recommitted his life in the summer camps. His parents always sent him to the summer camps, and each Christmas he would backslide. Usually he'd be backslidden by October.

This is not our purpose for this kind of Bible study. This, I'm sure, is not the burden of the organizers of this camp. I believe it is a privilege, the privilege of the Christian to live 365 days a year committed to Jesus Christ.

A lot of people in the church today give the idea that backsliding is sort of a normal part of a Christian life. You know, we're all going to backslide a bit. You know, we're all going to have dry months, and months in which we don't have our quiet time, and months in which, you know, we don't witness, and months in which we're behaving like miniature lions around the house.

It's a lie of the devil. I want to actually start my sessions by giving a little bit of my own testimony, because I think it will help you understand me. I know when I'm listening to a speaker, I sort of have a little interest to know a little bit about this person.

So why he is speaking so strongly? Why he is so dogmatic on certain points? I don't think you will find too many things that I say something that you will want to argue over. I've never had many people take an argument with me. My theology is very basic.

I avoid a lot of the controversial sort of theological issues that people are arguing over these days. And I go past that to basic things, but very significant things that most people know are all too true. And yet, somehow, it's not a functioning reality in their life.

If it wasn't for verse 16, I don't think I would be bringing this series. Because the tendency is to relegate the Apostle Paul to the flannel grass for the children's Sunday school hour. You know, Paul going over the wall in a basket, Paul praying at midnight.

Isn't this wonderful for the kiddies? So exciting, a life of the Apostle Paul. Let's have a film strip on the life of the Apostle Paul. And Paul today, I believe, practically speaking, is relegated to mythology.

Practically speaking. Theoretically and theologically, Paul, of course, is a great churchman, he's a great missionary, he's a great theologian. We all believe in Paul.

But how much does it mean on a practical level? I think we have put Paul almost into the area of myth. Or we think Paul was an unusual person, very specially chosen of God, and we just don't expect this kind of person anymore. Now Paul here is writing to the Corinthian church.

He is not writing to a little super-dedicated group of people with a China inland mission in the middle of China. He is writing to the Corinthian church. And you all know the background of the Corinthian church.

They have little habits like going to bed and having sex relations with their mother-in-laws and other things that really weren't quite appropriate in church life. In other words, they were really a mixed up and messed up church, a carnal church. So if Paul could write some of these strong words to the Corinthians in their condition, giving them such a high standard, describing his own life as we have read right here, and then saying, being followers of me, then I believe we must be able to say that these writings of Paul are very appropriate for us as well.

This standard of Paul is not something for just a few special spiritual people out in the middle of India. This is down-to-earth basic teaching for all believers. For all believers.

The world is never going to be evangelized by Operation Mobilization. The world is never going to be evangelized by all the so-called full-time missionary movements put together. The world is only going to be evangelized as the man in the pew, Joe Ordinary, Susie Normal, the average man in the pew and in the home, begins to see that he is chosen of God.

A lot of people write to me and they have difficulty. In fact, I was answering a letter last night about the calling. We are all called.

We are all called. Isn't that wonderful? We are called into his likeness. We are called to be kings, priests, pilgrims.

When you make a list of all that we are as Christians, it's just overwhelming. And you're looking at a missionary so-called that's never had a missionary call. I have to apologize for that.

I've been on the mission field for 17 years, but I haven't had a missionary call. Not the way a lot of people are looking for. The electric bolt, dream in the night type of thing.

I can give a call to these young people, go down into this dormitory about 2 or 3 at night when they finally get to sleep, and get on my color slides, a little music, a little Turkish music in the background, color slides, and they're sort of half awake, and suddenly they wake up and there's a picture of a mosque and they hear this music coming through. The next day I talk on Turkey 3 or 4. Call to Turkey. Now we laugh, but some of the young people who have come to me to share the way they got their quote missionary call, it was that.

Similar type of emotional thing. The only problem is, is that when finally they get out there at the foot of the mosque and begin to witness to Muslims, they discover they don't have what it takes. And I believe more important than just some kind of a call, well I'm not against that, I never despise any experience any man has, is training.

Training. And also using the God-given brains and minds that we have, and the human mind is a phenomenal thing, to seek the word of God and to discover the will of God and to see what our gifts are. But in the sense of witness, in the sense of witness, we are all called.

We are all called. In the sense of the major issues of the Christian faith, prayer, witness, love, fellowship, the real, heavy, basic issues, we are all called. We are all called.

And the Apostle Paul teaches, we see especially in Philippians 1.29, and I'm happy to see some of you taking notes because the human mind has a great ability to forget, but in Philippians 1.29 it says we have not only been called to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake. You cannot say the word or name Paul without saying the name or word suffering. It has been given unto you not only to believe, but to suffer.

And Paul is describing here some of his suffering. He even says that he's a fool for Christ's sake. He's hungry and he's thirsty and he's naked and he's buffeted.

He has no certain dwelling place. He labors working with his own hands. He's defamed.

These are powerful words. These are heavy words. And we would just shrink back.

We would say, well, this is not my cup of tea. This is not my thing. And then Paul comes zooming in on us and says, be ye followers of me.

I tried to run away from that. The life of discipleship, the life of suffering, the life of choosing the hard road, the life of taking up the cross and following Christ, I want to tell you right now, it's not my thing. And if you knew my background, you'd know.

It's still not my thing. People get the idea that leaders of movements like Operation Mobilization, we've got an aesthetic twitch. We've got an itch to work 17 hours a day.

We're all a bit neurotic. We hate any kind of fun. But you know, often this is not the case at all.

It's just that we have come to discover that we are bought with a price. We have come to discover it no longer matters what we want to do. It no longer matters whether I like hot climates or not.

Actually, I can't stand hot climates. I've lived in India half of my life almost for the last ten years. It doesn't matter whether I like hot food that causes smoke to come out of my ears when I eat it, like the food I have in India.

It doesn't matter whether I get seasick or not. Actually, I get seasick in my life even more. God told us to spend the last some years half the year on a ship, day after day with your stomach going around.

And in your heart, in yourself, you say, I'm never going on a ship again. I'm going to sail sailboats around my bathtub, but I'm not going to go on any ship. But as you go back to the Word of God, you realize it doesn't matter what I sort of feel.

Not that God doesn't care. Of course He does. And so Paul is probably the greatest in Scripture to cut across our natural ways, to cut across our natural love of ease, our natural drift, and say, follow me.

You've been called to suffer. Now with those words of introduction, I'd like to give you just a little background on my own testimony. I was not reared in a Christian home.

I have a rather interesting family tree. My grandfather was from the Netherlands. He was an atheist.

And he, with my father, went over to the United States. My other grandfather was from Glasgow. He was an alcoholic.

And I'm not sure when he ever got over to the States or how he got there. He divorced my grandmother, and that was one big mess. And I was reared in a sort of normal, middle-class home.

My father wasn't an atheist, theologically, but practically speaking, he might as well have been. We didn't know Christ in our home. Christ was not exalted.

And yet at the same time, my parents provided me a relatively, relatively stable home. And I'm thankful for the way God used them even before they knew Jesus Christ in a personal way. But in one way, the key thing in my whole life is one dear elderly lady who prayed for me.

She prayed for me for three years. She'd been praying for the high school that I attended when I was about 14, started attending when I was about 14. She'd been praying for that high school for about 15

years.

If there's any human founder of Operation Mobilization, I believe it's this woman. Not only was she praying that people would be converted to Christ in that school, but she was praying that from that school, this is an ungodly high school, this isn't a Bible school, that people would go all over the world declaring the gospel. She was a missionary, if you can use it in a good sense, fanatic.

Missions, missions, world evangelism. Yet she was involved locally. She had child evangelism classes in her house.

She was involved in this, involved in that. And more than all that, she knew God. Ultimately, that's discipleship.

Discipleship is knowing God. Discipleship is not a matter of doing this or doing that or going here or going there. That may be involved in it, but first of all, discipleship is knowing God and therefore, first of all, the marks of a disciple or can I even say the mark of a disciple is hunger for God.

You may not feel you're a great disciple. You may not think you're a great first century witness in the 20th century. You may not feel you're a great man of prayer, but I want to ask you, are you hungry for God? Is there some hunger in your heart? I believe so.

I believe that's why you've come to a holiday like this rather than something in which you just spend the entire day ministering to your own particular physical or emotional needs because you're concerned about your spiritual life. There's a hunger. There's a hunger.

You may not feel you're as hungry for God as you should be. You may be perplexed. You may feel guilty about the lack of hunger you have for the Lord.

Don't. Feed the little hunger you do have and God may increase your appetite. You know, we're all different.

We're all different. We're not all A.W. Tozer's. We're not all Andrew Murray's.

We're not all St. Francis Zisi. I believe man is made in such a way that different men have a different capacity for God. I don't know if you've ever worked among real sort of straightforward working class people.

I don't believe in classes, but just for the sake of communication. The man who, if he doesn't know Christ, goes from his job to the pub to the telly to the football to the job to the pub to the telly to the football. And if you talk to him, he can't even talk sensibly about too many issues.

His world is very, very much locked into a small frame of mind. Now I don't believe someone, when he gets converted in that environment, is within a few weeks going to become a Tozer or a Martyn Lloyd-Jones or an Andrew Murray. He may never understand Watchman's Encyclopedia on Spiritual Life.

But I want to tell you, some of the most beautiful believers I know are very basically simple people who can't get through the third chapter of some of these books, but they're hungry for God. They're hungry for God. Don't judge people outwardly.

Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. Don't judge a man outwardly. And with that, don't judge a man by his vocabulary.

Some of the most beautiful Christians I know in Asia don't have any spiritual vocabulary. They're illiterate. But sure, they know something of the Bible as they've had it taught by their local pastor, but they've never converted in older years, been able to read the Word of God, and yet they walk in a simple, beautiful way before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn't that thrilling? People converted back in the jungles of New Guinea, walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, never read a book on the Holy Spirit. How can it be? Never read the Bible. Can it be? They've heard the Word of God preached, of course, so the Word of God has been active.

And it's thrilling. You know, one of Hudson Taylor's key principles, I'm not sure if it's brought out in this book, but I know in his earlier books, was simplicity. Simplicity.

And I think it's very important as we attempt to reach a lost world of very, very different people compared to the last generation that we sometimes say, keep it simple. And it's beautiful how God can work through simplicity. Anyway, this lady who prayed for me was a very simple woman.

There was nothing complex about her. She knew God. She knew how to pray and she believed God answered prayer.

She wasn't famous. She never will be famous. And she prayed for 15 years for that school.

She prayed for me for three years. And during that time, she sent me a Gospel of John through the post, the mail. And I began to read this and it began to speak to my own heart.

I was getting more and more entangled with the world and I'm not interested in going into the details, but basically I lived for money, I lived for girls, I lived for pleasure, I lived for myself. The greatest sin of man is selfishness and that's why it's so hideous when it keeps popping its neck up after we're converted. And I'm sorry to say that the greatest battle I had before I was converted was selfishness and the greatest battle I have today is selfishness.

But I have a power within me now, the Lord Jesus Christ, that can slap this selfishness in the face and that can cut it down and put it where it belongs under the blood of Jesus. His gate is already there. And my calling is to live daily in the light of what already has taken place through Calvary.

When I read this Gospel of John it spoke to my heart, but it was so contrary to my lifestyle that for three years nothing happened. I was very stubborn. We Dutch are known to be extremely stubborn.

My grandfather came from an area of Holland called Friesland where the Germans and the Dutch say the most stubborn people in the entire world come from. The Frieslanders. And so I just kept living my own way, getting involved in various things.

I went into business when I was about 12. I had three businesses by 16. And I could get money out of your wallet whether you wanted it or not.

I learned to gamble. I remember going to Boy Scout camp and I don't know what I would have ever done if I came to a camp like this back in those days and how we all need to have patience with our younger people. But I remember going to Boy Scout camp and the main thing I did was gamble.

I felt a little guilty about it. I had a little bit of ethical teaching because my parents had sent me off to church once in a while. It was a church that didn't preach the Gospel.

The greatest menace to the spread of the Gospel in the world today are so many thousands of churches today where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is never preached. There's no message of regeneration, no message of the new birth. They allow sin to take them into a penal spin.

They allow sin to depress them and they get caught into the quagmire of self-pity. You see, we move on to a certain position spiritually and then we fail and we can't face that failure. And so it drives us into self-pity.

Why did I do that? What went wrong? And down we go into the mire of self-pity, into the mire of depression, into the mire of discouragement instead of realizing that reality includes knowing what to do when you sin. Knowing what to do when you sin. There's two aspects of the victorious life, the V of the victorious life.

Now, there's many, many ways to describe the victorious life. I have no one way. I have no one way.

I agree with Billy Graham who says, I don't care how you get it, just get it. And I would add, let's see it. Let's see it.

But in one sense, there are two aspects to the victorious life in that one, I think we all agree on this, is our goal is perfection. We are perfect in Christ. And our goal now is to see that a practical reality.

Holiness, whatever you want to call it. The other aspect of the V of reality and of victory is knowing what to do when we do sin. Knowing what to do when we do fall flat on our face.

And if as a young believer God hadn't showed me from His Word that even when I sinned, He still loved me. Even when I sinned, He was still there. Even when I sinned, His arms were around me.

I would have never, never made it past the third year. And it's so important to understand the grace of God toward us as sinners. It's not cheap grace.

It's not an excuse for just going on and on in your sin. If you can do that, then something is seriously wrong. But it is, as one man said, G-R-A-C-E, God's riches at Christ's expense.

Grace. And you can't talk about the life of Paul as we're going to do without thinking on the word grace. They almost come together.

Paul is accused of being the founder of the theology of grace. Jesus taught the law and grace, and Paul only taught grace, the critics say. Not true.

But oh, what a wonderful thing it is to know Jesus Christ personally. And you know one of the dangers as we grow older in the Lord? I'm probably young in the Lord compared to some of you, only twenty. But as we grow older in the Lord, there's a danger of taking lightly our salvation.

A.W. Closer says sometimes we belittle our salvation in order to hard sell a second blessing package. Now, I'm not going to get into arguments about the second blessing or the third blessing or any other blessing. But whatever else you believe comes after conversion, don't belittle conversion.

I tell you, that is a great danger. I think personally some people who later on in their life think they come into a second blessing, they didn't see anything in their Christian life before that, and then they come into some kind of second blessing. Personally, my own conviction is sometimes they've only just been saved.

Because what kind of salvation do we have when people say I was saved but nothing happened? I don't read about that in my Bible. Well, I was saved twenty years ago but nothing happened until last year. Wait a minute.

Now, I know that is possible, but it is certainly not the general rule. Salvation is a revolutionary experience. When a man is saved, when a man is born again, things happen.

They don't all happen at once. And to me, the miracle of salvation must be followed by the miracle of spiritual growth. And this also we're going to see very, very clearly emphasized as we study the life of Paul.

Spiritual growth. The importance of spiritual growth. Because it was the Apostle Paul who said, I buffet my body and bring it into subjection, lest after preaching to others I should become a reprobate.

So many times as we study Paul we just see all kinds of paradoxes. One minute he's talking about being crucified with Christ, and it all seems to be just totally hinged on Christ, and there's nothing we can do but just acknowledge that we are Christ, and the next moment he's saying, I buffet my body and bring it into subjection, lest after preaching to others I become a reprobate. Of course, spiritual balance is one of the most important things we're going to see in the life of Paul.

Well, by God's grace, I was converted March 5, 1955. I began to witness and live for Christ March 5, 1955. And by God's grace, and I don't say this in any way as a boast, I say it as a testimony of the grace of God, that the devil may be nailed as a liar when he tries to tell us we all have to backslide.

And by God's grace, every single day, 365 days, these 20 years, I have walked with Jesus Christ. Oh, there have been the moments of depression, there's been the moments of soul agony, but there's always been the blood, there's always been the cross, there's always been the Lord Jesus reaching down to such a worm as I. And I say that for you young people, because I believe with all my heart every day you give to the devil in one sense, you're going to be unhappy for. You only have one life.

Sometimes people see me now, I'm an old man at 37. That's what you think in O.M., you know. I used to say, boy, when a guy's 30, shoot, he's finished.

When I was 17. We keep moving the age limit each year, keep me in the movement. Actually, Captain Paget is 73 and we praise God for him.

The captain of our ship. We discovered God's not interested in age. But I just believe with all my heart that when you're a teenager, it's the time to begin to live for Christ.

I think one of the greatest mission fields I had was in my own high school. I went back right after my conversion, I only had one more year. One more year in high school.

And what God did before the Lord was done in that high school at the end of the year or a year and a half, almost 200 had come to Jesus Christ. I was one of them. The principal couldn't stop me.

I was in the high school. And God moved. And you have a tremendous mission field in your, what you'd call a grammar school.

And then I went to college. I didn't stay there long as I felt led to go to Moody Bible Institute and get out to the mission field as soon as possible. But you'll never have the same mission field the way you have it right now in high school or in college.

Buy up every day. Buy up every minute. Be a spiritual revolutionary.

Set your sails to follow the Apostle Paul in this kind of lifestyle that we're going to be talking about during these days together. And you'll never regret it. I praise God for all the precious souls He gave me that came to Himself in those first few years.

I've never, I don't think, led as many teenagers to Christ as in those first few years. And you have a mission field right where you are as a young person. Perhaps later on in another one of the times together I can share a little bit of what happened.

It's after two years being a Christian I went into Mexico and the work was born in Mexico and two years later I was in Spain and the work was born there. And the next year I came to England and God caused this thing to explode in the British Isles so that within three months He mobilized 90 young people to cross the English Channel in 1962. Sixty-three, nine hundred British young people joined with us.

By then it had spread almost all the way to India. People said it would just die out. They said, it's fly by night, it's flash in a pan.

Some of you know the tremendous criticism that was leveled at this work in the early days. Every kind of wild story you could ever think of. But God gave us the grace to see that this criticism was one of the greatest blessings in disguise.

You don't learn anything from people patting you on your back telling you, oh what a great fellow you are. All you get is a fat head. But you can learn from your critics.

And we saw that some of this criticism was valid. You know the communists teach. I was reading some time ago a book on communist insurrection in South America.

The communists teach that every failure is a springboard to success. Some of us with our failures should be doing quite well by now. But somehow we as Christians have lost that mentality.

And we become cynical and we become sort of semi-sterile and we become sort of lethargic. Reminds me of this story of this young American who came over from one of the Southern Baptist churches to England. And of course he didn't know where to go to church and he thought he'd go to the Church of England.

And he went in and they were of course going through the liturgy. And he was quite amused by this. He'd never seen anything like this in a Southern Baptist church back at home.

And as he walked out he said to the vicar at the door he said, Boy I sure do like your lethargy here in this church. Well sometimes the liturgy does lead to lethargy but there is a great difference. But how lethargy, the spirit of softness and laziness, how it creeps in.

How quickly God's people seem to grow cold and worse than growing cold grow lukewarm. No longer are their hearts stirred for souls. No longer is there the burden to pray.

No longer is there the passion that once roared in their hearts. My great concern even in these days together as I've already expressed is not that just we can fill our heads with great truth from God's word and from what God is doing but that in these days our hearts would be stirred. That the flame of God would roar and Holy Ghost revival upon us.

And I'd be the last one to want to self-start some kind of a show because I believe that the Holy Spirit works deeply in our hearts and these days the effect will be seen six months from now and by God's grace six years from now. The Apostle Paul's life is of course the example of that as he ran his life to the very, very end. Notice this verse 20 just to spend a little more time in this passage.

I'm going to try to limit each one of my lectures to one hour so it will depend to some degree on when you get in here and get started. But I want us to look at verse 20 for this is very, very important. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

Now this is very important and again we need the spiritual balance. We get some people the moment you say the word power they think of healings, they think of signs, wonders and miracles and of course I believe God can heal, I believe God can do great things. I've seen it with my own eyes.

But that's not what it's talking about here primarily because this scripture must be taken in its context and Paul has not just finished talking about his great successes. Paul has just described his suffering and if only Christians could see it they would be saved from a lot of confusion. The primary power that God speaks about in his word is the power that produces morality, ethic, reality, perseverance, character.

You study it in its context. Paul has just talked about being laboring, he's talked about being persecuted, being defamed, he's talked about being the off-scouring, he's talked about having to work that doesn't sound very spiritual. Most of us can figure and see how God can be with us here in this place.

I love the woods. I had my quiet time this morning in the tree hut. I love the woods.

I'm a bird watcher, I saw ten species this morning and I feel so close to God in the woods. But you know if I had to work probably in some of the places some of you have to work in I may not find it so easy. But I believe one of God's greatest plans for us is to take us more and more into the inner sanctuary of spiritual reality so that we not only sense God in the woods, we can sense God in the factory floor.

We can sense God in the midst of some job where half the people need to have their mouths washed out with soap. And all the blasphemy and cursing you have to listen through all day long. That is harder.

And I come here not as some great missionary looking down on you poor layman that you're going to get with it. I come here, believe me, realizing that if I had some of the jobs that some of you have I'd probably be away from the Lord. And I know that it's tougher in many ways to live for Jesus Christ in the middle of Swansea or Birmingham or Manchester than it is to live for Jesus Christ carrying a hundred or a thousand tracks on my back over the back hills of Nepal.

The fact of the matter is wherever the devil is there's going to be a battle whether it's Nepal or Birmingham. We're all in this together. But it is harder sometimes to sense the Lord in the middle of the kitchen when the children have just broken the cookie jar or the biscuit jar and when the tea has been

spilled and when your husband has not appreciated your meal and has bowled you out because the egg was one degree too hard and the phone is ringing and you can't get your favorite news program on the radio because the battery has just died or some other major crisis.

And my burden is not that we'll just know the power of God here fellowshiping and singing together but we'll know the power of God in the routine in the mundane of what we have to do back where we are. The kingdom of God is in power not in word. And let's not think of that power firstly as something spectacular.

Let's not think of that power firstly as something that happens when Billy Graham comes to town or when we have a readout meeting and we all get excited through singing the choruses. But that power first of all is going to give you the character the moral drive the ethical reality that makes you a consistent follower of Jesus Christ. We have so many inconsistent Christians who are up and down So many Christians today go the exact opposite of what Paul teaches and live by feelings.

Sometimes they feel so saved and they're praising the Lord. Next time they're down in the valley. I believe it is more significant to praise the Lord when you're feeling down and you're feeling miserable and everything's gone wrong and nobody understands you and no one loves you even your husband can't figure you out.

It's more significant to praise God than it is to praise the Lord when you're walking through the woods and the birds are singing and you can forget about all your troubles at least for a few minutes. It's much more meaningful I believe to the living God. A.W. Tozer said something about feelings that I'd like to read to you.

I write quotations down in my little book here and then I usually go and proceed to lose the book but I lost this in Swansea it got sent back to me. Feeling is the play of emotion over the will. A kind of musical accompaniment to the business of living.

And while it is indeed most enjoyable to have the band play as we march to Zion it is by no means indispensable. We can work and walk without music and if we have true faith we can walk with God without feeling. There are times, beloved, when we have to take a stand turning our back on feeling or on no feeling and believe God.

This is the kind of faith Paul demonstrated. He didn't feel like being buffeted, whipped. He didn't feel like going without food any more than you or I do.

He didn't feel like going through these things he went through but he took his stand on his knowledge of God and he marched both with the music and without the music. At conferences like this is often lots of music not just in the literal sense with the piano and all the rest but in other ways something about being in an environment like this that is refreshing to most people. The living God is still going to be with us long after we leave here.

We can march without the band though we're more than happy if the band is there as we march forward for our Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is not in word but in power. A.W. Tozer said we become professional at the game of words.

This so concerns me. I'd like to speak at greater length about this but I believe that we have pronounced so many of the great Christian words so much without living them that many of these words are meaningless. Many of the great Christian words today dedication, commitment consecration discipleship

sacrifice so many words what do they mean? I can tell you in the United States and I think you need to understand that I'm an immigrant to this country I'm not an American here on a tour.

I've lived here now for 13 years I've traveled more in Great Britain than the most British people I've ever met and though I can't speak the language I'm working on that and this is really where I consider home. This is my home. I've never been back to the States except in three or four weeks preaching tour but in the States I think even more than here though you're catching up quick we play the game of words dedication here's a man he's making 25,000 pounds a year in Christian work he's living in a ten room house he's got two cars he's got to get rid of one because he's almost a year old and he's got a yacht and he gets up and preaches on commitment forsaking all following Christ taking up the cross.

Something has got wrong the definitions have somehow slipped this is why we have to go back to men like Paul in another place Tozer says we have measured ourselves by ourselves you know, one another for so long there are no longer any higher plateaus in the things of the Spirit and isn't this a danger you know, we look at the fellow down here we always think the other man is materialistic never else even if our car is only one month older than his our house is one room less or, you know some little thing we always think boy, you know poor brother we're going to have to pray for brother so-and-so he seems to be getting caught up in the things of the world it's always the other man it's never Lord my own heart because we know that the poor man living in his garage can be just as

materialistic in instinct as a millionaire up on a hill materialism is no respecter of persons it's a very subtle and a very tricky thing the kingdom of God is not in word what do these words mean to us? sacrifice the crucified life the Spirit-filled life dedicated and I believe God's concern is that these things go out of the realm of words into the realm of power and of course that must firstly be the power to live this way and you know when God has a man who's living this way who's demonstrating this kind of consistency then the second stage of power can be added in the realm of supernatural happenings and souls being saved and breakthroughs and answer to prayer and so many other things that can take place in Christian work it sort of reminds me of these rockets they keep sending off

to outer space and if any of you watch the rocket take off I don't have a television but the lady upstairs asked me to come up my wife to come up and see the Americans go into space so I thought maybe I'd better do this maybe some spiritual lesson so I went up and watched this launch off from Florida and as I think of that there are a lot of interesting comparisons that in our own life this first stage of power is in a sense to get us away from the world and into real living into orbit spiritually speaking and then the second stages of power are to do all the wonderful things these men up in the middle of space shaking hands with one another and doing every crazy thing you can think of the kingdom of God is not in word but in power take this passage of Scripture in your free moments and

re-read it as we go into our next three sessions we're going to look at far more Scriptures than we looked at this morning as I try to just give you a little background and try to get a little bit on your wavelength and share a little bit of my own heart's experience but we're going to go into a lot of related passages we're going to see the Thessalonian church here's a brand new young church where Paul could only stay for a short time then he had to leave and yet they became a New Testament church an example church in a matter of months and we're going to see the secret the secret of the Thessalonian church interesting, our brother was led to read that Scripture this morning one of the main Scriptures I want to deal with and we're going to see the Apostle Paul as a missionary one of the

things we're going to see is how balanced this man is most people tend to think of Paul as the outgoing, aggressive hard-hitting type the men who study temperaments call him a choleric temperament many of you have read Spirit Controlled Temperament by Tim LaHaye an amazing book or you've read Mr.

Hallowsby's book on temperaments you know that some Christians have divided people into four different temperaments just as a way of understanding people why are some so fast and others slow some so outgoing and some seemingly so reserved and there are different kinds of people and many of us in our work have found it a great help to understand people and we don't judge them so quickly but he and his writings and most people who understand temperaments would agree that Paul was basically a choleric temperament perfect for killing Christians ideal temperament for killing Christians and yet we see when the Holy Spirit fills Paul just what a spirit-filled choleric can do and the balance that here's the man going over the wall in the basket here's the man praising God at midnight in jail

here's the man who said for the space of three years he ceased not to warn people to stop warning people night and day with tears here's this man just go, go, go, go right across the known world of his day we find him as a nursing mother among the Christians in Thessalonica that's what it says a nursing mother and we see the gentleness of Paul and the meekness of Paul and it's beautiful and all of us need spiritual balance some of us tend to be outgoing and aggressive charging down the road others seem to be so reserved and quiet and apparently gentle but when God's spirit moves in and the power that we've been talking about it brings that perfect spiritual balance and that's my goal and I tell you I'm a long way from it and I come here believe me as a learner hungry and thirsty for God

and hungry and thirsty for spiritual balance and spiritual maturity which I know I'm lacking in many, many areas and even here in these days if you see something in my life that is not like Jesus Christ oh how grateful I'd be if you'd come up in a loving way not too rough because you may discover that I'm not as broken as you thought but if you come in a loving way and say, Brother really, don't you think that in this area you could be a little more Christ-like I won't be able to be among you as much as I would like I have about three or four hundred letters that need to get answered that's why I agreed only to come here if I could bring my secretary in my office I have another secretary in Bromley that I'm keeping busy this whole week though I am going to be giving some time especially

to my children and I hope to have some time for individual fellowship with some of you but I won't be able to be among you perhaps as much as I would like I have one thousand seven hundred young people who I am in some way small way perhaps responsible for before the Lord and feel I must spend much time in prayer for them and corresponding with their leaders and handling a lot of other people problems our business in O.M. is people and in the summer we have two or three times as many people as we have normally but let us believe that God in these days to come will take us deeper into his word that we may go from here knowing that the kingdom of God is not inward but in power let us pray our God and Father we thank you for this first time we have had together this morning just to somehow

get started we thank you for this tremendous passage of scripture we thank you for the reality and the life of the Apostle Paul and when he says that we are to be followers of him we know even as he is of Christ this is what we want deliver us from our defensiveness deliver us from our excuses deliver us from rationalization deliver us from operation escape that we may face truth head on and decide to obey whatever the cost wherever it leads us whatever areas we have to repent about whatever things we have to put right that we may in a deeper way appropriate your grace we thank you that the Christian life is grace we thank you that you love us as much when we have fallen flat on our faces as when we are

running along so many miles an hour and we just praise you we thank you that we don't

have to feel guilty about a little time of recreation or relaxation but we pray that these times may be true times of getting our spiritual batteries stored and our physical bodies stored restored and our minds restored that when we leave this place we may be disciples and we may be soldiers and we may be on the attack that we may be the kind of men and women you would want us to be for the glory of your name through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen

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