

# The savour of life and death

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[ 0 : 00 ] The second Corinthians chapter 2 verses 15 and 16. For we are unto God a sweet favor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish.

To the one we are the favor of death unto death and to the other the favor of life unto life. Especially in verse 16.

To the one we are the favor of death unto death and to the other the favor of life unto life. Now the Christian faith is a great mystery which nobody can understand until he personally becomes converted.

It is as easy to explain to somebody who is not a Christian what the Christian life is like as it is to explain to a blind man what the colors of the rainbow look like.

There is in the Christian life the mystery of paradox. That is to say there are things in a believer's life which are a sort of apparent contradiction.

[ 1 : 39 ] Now you get a lot of this here in chapters 4 and 6 of the epistle to the Corinthians.

The second epistle. Let me just show you some of the things that Paul says in connection with this mystery of the Christian faith.

I am reading here a few verses in chapter 4 of this letter just over the page beginning at verse 7.

But we have this treasure in earth and vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

We are troubled on every side. Yet not distressed. We are perplexed but not in despair. Persecuted but not forsaken.

Cast down but not destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

[ 2 : 52 ] Now he is describing his own experience as a preacher but also as a Christian. And you see there he is saying things which almost amounts to a contradiction.

They are certainly a paradox. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in us.

Count down but not forsaken. And so on. Then you get a similar set of statements in chapter 6 where I point you now to verse 8.

2 Corinthians 6 beginning to read a few verses at verse 8. Again he is talking about his experience as a preacher but also as a Christian.

How do we commend the gospel he is talking about? Now verse 8. By honor and dishonor. By evil report and good report.

[ 4 : 01 ] As deceivers and yet true. As unknown and yet well known. As dying and behold we live. As chastened and not killed.

As horrible yet always rejoicing. As poor yet making many risks. As having nothing and yet possessing all things.

Now isn't it strange that the apostle would describe his experience like that. As dying and behold we live.

As having nothing and yet possessing all things. As having nothing and yet. As having nothing and yet. As having nothing and yet. So you see the point that I make.

Illustrated in chapters 4 and 6.

Particularly so. It seems to be one of the features of 2 Corinthians. That there are these paradoxes. These seeming contradictory statements.

[ 5 : 06 ] Laid side by side. And he does this in order to show. The mystery. Of the Christian's experience. Nobody can enter into this.

Unless. He has the grace of God. Well then briefly. He is meaning this. Our experience.

As the people of God. Is full of difficulties. We experience disappointments. And tears. We have our hopes dashed.

And everything seems to be going hard with us. As the people of God. And yet. God is always secretly. Doing something.

True. And in spite of our suffering. To bring blessing to us. And to bring blessing to others. That really. I think is a fair summary of it.

[ 6 : 10 ] Our old lives. Are consciously affected by weakness. And by. Even by sickness. And trouble. Trial.

Disappointment. All of these things. And yet. God is working in spite of that. And even because of that. And through that. To do us good. And to do others good.

Samuel Rutherford. In his very famous letters. Says something. Which struck me recently. As I was having another look at those great. And famous letters.

Listen to this. He said. I have come to see. That the way to have Christ. With me. Daily in the Christian life. Is always.

To desire to have his cross. Upon me. I am afraid. He said. Of losing. The difficulty. Of the Christian life. Because I discover.

[ 7 : 09 ] That when I do that. I lose the blessing. Of the Christian life. It's only as we are. In the conscious difficulties. That we experience. The conscious presence.

Of Christ. Who are the wise ones. Among you. That experience this. Who are the thought. Of God amongst you. My friends.

Who could say your amen. To Samuel Rutherford. It's not every Christian. Not every born again person. Who has come to that point. Of maturity. But it is certainly true.

The more we. Experience. Of sorrow. And loss. For Christ's sake. The more he will draw near to us. As our compensation.

We have another of these famous paradoxes. Somewhere else. In I think chapter four. But I won't draw attention to it. Except to mention it. And that is this. Do you remember where he says. The outward man.

[ 8 : 13 ] Is daily perishing. But the inward man. Is being. Daily renewed. Now there's another of these paradoxes.

These apparent contradictions. Which is true in the experience. Of the Lord's people. Now why do I mention. This. It is to bring.

To you. The message. Which we find in our text. Because. Here also. Surely. In our text. There is another.

Of these paradoxes. Let's look at it again. I'll read the text again. At verse 15. We are unto God. A sweet favor of Christ.

In them that are saved. And in them that perish. To the one. We are the favor of death. Unto death. And to the other.

[ 9 : 12 ] The favor of life. Unto life. I want to open out. This text. In these two verses. And I wish to do so.

Under these three headings. For your convenience. That you might. Have a handle. The better. To remember what we are saying. The first thing to notice here is. Let us see.

What God thinks. About. True. Gospel. Preaching. Let us see. What God thinks. About. True. Gospel. Preaching. That's the first thing.

Secondly. Let us see. What. The effect. Of true. Gospel. Preaching. Is. Upon those. Who reject it. And third.

Let us see. What. The effect. Of true. Gospel. Preaching. Is. On those. Who believe it. And receive it. So we'll look at it. In that order.

[ 10 : 09 ] And first of all. Then. That brings me. To talk about this. What is God's. View. Of true. And sound. Gospel. Preaching. And gospel. Witnessing.

Now we mustn't confine this. Exclusively. To the prophet. Of course it is abundantly true of that. But it has its application. To all. Faithful.

Testimony. To the gospel. Faithful witness bearing. To the gospel. Now. We have. The statement. Given in verse 15. Which answers to this heading.

We are unto God. A sweet. Favor of Christ. We are unto God. A sweet. Favor. Of Christ.

Now what is meant by a sweet favor. That's something we shall need. To make clear. To ourselves. In the Old Testament.

[11:06] As everybody knows. They used. To offer. Sacrifices. And offerings. To God. Within the tabernacle. And temple.

These sacrifices. Were of various kinds. Sometimes. Sometimes they took. An animal. A domesticated animal. It might be a sheep.

Or a goat. Or something like that. And then they would cut its throat. And. And. Pour out the blood. And sink it in certain ways. As we've talked about. On a number of occasions.

And then they would chop it up. Into its various pieces. And place it on top of wood. On top of the fire. On this. Grass. Altar. And the fire was then applied to it.

And the whole was consumed. Now. Where this was done. In accordance. With the Old Testament law. We are told. That God. Smelled.

[12:02] A sweet flavor. In that sacrifice. And of course. We have to understand that. As being. God. Using. Human language. So that we can appreciate.

His attitude. God of course. Does not smell. As we do. Or hear. As we do. He doesn't have these bodily. Organs of sense. And smell. He doesn't need to.

Because he knows all things. But what it is. It tells us. What God thinks. About that sacrifice. When the sacrifices. Of the Old Testament. Were offered to God.

With true love. And true devotion. To the Lord. Then God's attitude. Towards them. Was one of pleasure. And delight. In other words.

God delights. In the worship. And especially. In the public worship. Of his people. God delights. In the act.

[12:59] Of public worship. When his people. Call upon his name. In the assembled. Gathering. Well we know this is true. From a thousand things. In scripture.

We know it's true. Because he has told us. Never to forsake. The gathering of ourselves. Together. In worship. We know it is true. Because Jesus. Never left an occasion. Unused.

In which he went. To the synagogue. On the Sabbath day. As scripture tells us. God delights. In the corporate. Gathered worship. Of his people.

And of course. The lesson is. Never to be absent. If we can avoid it. If we can help it. But the point. What I'm bringing you to see. Is this. God smelled a sweet flavor.

In that worship. Now the same is true. When you think of the incense. On the day of atonement. As you remember. The high priest went.

[13:55] Into the holiest holies. The innermost. Sanctuary. Of the tabernacle. Or temple. And he had to take the blood.

Of a slain beast with him. But also he took an incense holder. Something like a brass. Or gold cup. And inside it. There was this burning incense.

Which gave a fragrant smell. And the smoke attended. And went up. And God as it were. Smelled. A fragrance. In that act of.

Ceremonial worship. Now this is the illustration. My friends. That God. Here in scripture. Uses. About sound preaching. We.

Says the apostle Paul. We. Who truly preach Christ. We. Are the favor. Of Christ. The sweet favor to God.

[14:50] Of Christ. In those. Who hear us. That's the first thing then. That we should see. And you know. My brethren. We need.

To be told this. You need. To know this. And we. Paul preachers. Need to know this. Because. Need I say it. Because.

This is not the world's view. Of faithful preaching. This is not the view. Of the local papers. And those who are writing. This is not the view. Of the BBC.

Or the IBA. Or these great companies. And corporations. This is not their view. Of preaching. The preachers. Who get all the praise. From men.

In this world. Of course. Are those. Who are excellent. At their little. After dinner speeches. At burn tappers. And at the sort of minister. Who can.

[15:45] Crack jokes. As they call it. And amuse the people. And sometimes. Talk about. Undesirable. And even questionable. Stories. To gain a cheap laugh.

And Jesus' words. Are true to this day. Woe unto you. When all men. Speak well of you. For so did their fathers.

Unto the false prophets. Blessed are ye. When all men. Speak. Evil of you. Falsely for my sake. Rejoice.

And be exceeding glad. For so did their fathers. Unto the prophets. That were before you. My friend. It's a comfort to know this. That whatever people. In this world.

May think about. The preaching of the gospel. And the proclaiming of Christ. And the setting forth. Of gospel truth. In congregation. God sets a high value upon it.

[16:43] We are unto God. A sweet favor of Christ. And God thinks that. Because you see. There is a sense.

In which God himself. Is always in. The congregation. God is the witness. To what is being said. He is the witness. To your workers.

God knows. The attitude of your heart. When you come to his house. And he knows. Whether the preaching is sound. Or unsound. True or false. Whether men are being faithful.

To his word. Or not. Whether men are squeezing. His word. Like blasphemy. In order to accommodate. The desires. Of the audience. That they are hearing. What they want to hear.

And they are being given. Into what. They want to know. And nothing else. The hard things are all. Screamed away. And people are being given. Things that are. Palatable. And smooth.

[17:37] Instead of. Faithful. And true. And good for the soul. So let us then. Be comforted in that way.

And you see. There's a connection. At the end of verse 14. God makes us always. The triumphing Christ. And makes us manifest. The favor of his knowledge.

By us. In every place. So my friends. As we go about. This world. As you. Speak a word. For Christ. In the sight of God. That is the. Sweet favor of Christ. It's like. Drinking perfume. About. Wherever you go. To bring comfort.

And fresh. Refresh. To those nearby. So it seems. To God. Speaking. In this way. In a human way. It is the God. Of sweet favor of Christ.

[18:36] Now then. Secondly. Let us see. What the effect. Of our preaching. And witness. Has. Upon those. Who reject it. And here we are brought.

Into verse 15. In them that perish. And in them that are saved. We are unto God. A sweet favor of Christ. In them that are saved. Verse 15.

And in them that perish. So in other words. We are now considering. Two types of persons. Who listen to this preaching. Who come to church.

Let us say. Or who are influenced. By the testimony. Of God's people. One of these classes of persons. Are called. Those who are. Being saved.

And the other class. Is called those. Who perish. And in verse 16. He says. To the one class. We are the favor of death. Unto death. Those of course.

[19:32] Are the ones perishing. And to the other. The favor of life. Unto life. Christ. So my second heading is this. The effect of our preaching.

Upon those who. Reject it. We are to these persons. Says Paul. The favor of death. Unto death. Another way of putting it is this.

Then the people. Come to God's house. And here. Christ. Made available to them. Through faith. And when they decide.

In their own hearts. That they will not believe. They reject. Christ. They are not prepared. To choose. Christ. Then something is.

Happening. Within them. They may not be aware of it. But they are. Growing worse. They weren't saved. Before.

[20:31] But when they hear this gospel. And reject it. They are perishing. All the more. So the effect of hearing the gospel. Upon this class of hearers is.

That they are. Finding the gospel. The favor of death. Unto death. Let me explain it again. There are persons. Spoken up here in this text.

As those who are perishing. In other words. They have one foot in hell. Already. They are not yet lost. Because they are still in this life.

There is still hope for them. That yet. Even yet. They may repent. And choose Christ. But they haven't yet done so. These people.

Now they are not those. Who are un-evangelized. These are the people. Who hear the word of God. Christ. And they come to God's house. And they are aware of the gospel. They know why Christ died.

[ 21 : 31 ] But they are perishing. Because they refuse. To bow their knee to this Christ. They are in a perishing condition. They have as I say.

One foot in hell. Already. And they are in danger. Of having both feet there. Very soon. When death comes along. Now when these people. Says Paul.

Hear the gospel preached. It is a deadly favor to them. A favor of death. That is to say. There is something within them.

That hates it. They dislike the challenge. Of the gospel. To them it is a smell. Which is deadly. It is an offensive thing. The offense of the cross.

They don't like the call of God. To repent. They can't part of the world. They don't want to give up. Their earthly pleasure.

[ 22 : 26 ] For the fate of Christ. They are not willing. To turn their back upon. The old life. And so when they hear the challenge of Christ. To repent and turn to God.

For them. It is nauseating. For them. It is a bad smell. In their nose. So to speak. Not only that. But it is not simply a favor of death. But it is a favor of death. Unto death. And that means to say. The effect of this preaching is. That they only grow worse under it.

And they grow worse under it. Because. The more they hear it. And the more they reject it. The more guilty. They become. The more.

The more people. The more people. The more people. The more people. The more people. The more people. The more people. The more people. The more people. The more people. I do not want. To submit to that doctrine. The more. Their hearts. Become. Harder.

[ 23 : 23 ] Every time. They hear a sermon. And say to God. I shall not believe this message. Then there is. A hardening effect. Takes place upon them.

It is another blow of the hammer, another knocking of the nail into the coffin of their doom. It is a favor, in other words, of death unto death.

Now, mark you. This is not the preacher's fault. The Apostle Paul is saying this. And Jesus Christ said similar things. And it doesn't matter how eloquent the preacher may be or how well studied. He may know his Hebrew, his Greek, his Kyriak, his Aramaic. He may be fluent in these and other languages. He may be perfect in diction. His argumentation may be irrefutably clear and profound. But this is something which derives from the fact that men have chosen to refuse that message. And the effect of the blessed gospel upon them, says Paul, is that the preaching which is so glorious, the preaching which would give them heaven if only they would believe it, is in the experience of these people a favor of death unto death.

[ 24 : 44 ] They're getting worse. They're getting harder. Every gospel sermon they hear, they become less inclined to believe it. Every time they hear the challenge of Christ, they put it off the more.

And so it becomes rapid harder. Now, it is because there is such an experience of this in men's lives, that the gospel hardens people, or some people, it is because of that that we have some of the most remarkable passages anywhere in the Bible itself.

If we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins than a certain fearful looking for a judgment and fiery indignation.

Now, that's one passage which refers to people who hear so much of the beautiful gospel of Christ and who close the door. You see, the gospel is becoming a favor of death unto death to such people.

Or again, you get this, it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gifts and remain partakers of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God of Thess and put into an open shed.

[ 26 : 24 ] Now, there is something for us all to learn from that. My dear friend, if you are here today and you have hardened your heart against Christ and his gospel, I tenderly ask you to think again.

The sun that melts the butter hardens the clay. The same gospel that saves believers causes those that refuse to believe it to become but the worst.

Peter says this at the end of one chapter in his second letter, it would have been better for them not to have known the Holy Commandment than to have known it and to have turned away from it. There are too many people like that in this world. And they're not all an extinct race, I must say. Now, thirdly, let us see what the effect of sound preaching is on those who believe it.

I read again our text at verse 15. We are unto God a sweet favor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish.

[ 27 : 40 ] To the one we are the favor of death unto death and to the other the favor of life unto life. And of course, you see now that I'm coming to describe the effect of the gospel on those who believe it.

The gospel, says Paul, is the favor of life unto life to those who believe it. Now, the people described here are those who are being saved.

It is the present it is the present tense the present tense in the original language. Those who are being saved. So, Romanoid.

Those who are in the process of being saved. The present participle. Those who are under the influence of salvation. They have been born again. But they're not yet in heaven.

Let's remember that, my dear friends. You may have made a profession of faith in Christ, but you're not yet in heaven. So, treat yourself as very fragile. until you get to heaven, you must guard your soul very jealously.

[ 28 : 46 ] Don't be careless about the things of God. Who knows whether you may not get to heaven at all? Your profession of faith may be worth nothing until you make it pure and certain.

You say you've been born again. How do you know? If you're careless about the things of God, you may not have been born again. It may have been some temporary experience that wasn't salvation. And that's why, you see, the Bible talks about salvation under three different tenses. I have been saved.

I am being saved. I shall be saved. Past, present, and future. Now the people talked about this, talked about in this text of being saved, the present tense.

They have not yet got the glory. so they too got to watch and pray and be vigilant and careful in case their profession of faith turns out to be empty and of no account.

[ 29 : 49 ] So they then be slack. Let us take heed, lest there be in any one of them an evil heart of unbelief. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

You've only got to neglect it. That's all you have to do. Neglect it and you won't escape. Read the gospel carelessly and you won't escape, says the writer.

Now what's happening to these persons? Well, says Paul, the preaching of the gospel to these that have faith is it's a favor of life. Now what does that mean?

it means that they love it. It means that the gospel preaching to those that have faith is glorious. They love the sound of the truth.

They love the preaching of the truth. They hunger for it. Their lives radiate this love of the truth. They come to hear it week in and week out, year in and year out.

[ 30 : 51 ] They never tired of hearing about Christ and his death on the cross. These people, we could say, have one foot in heaven already. They're not there yet, but they have one foot there and soon those people will be there.

They are being saved. And the gospel to them is a favor of life. More than that, it's not simply says Paul, a favor of life.

It is a favor of life unto life. It is a favor of life unto life. That is to say, what is the effect of this preaching upon them?

The effect of hearing the preaching upon those that have life is that they have more life. They increase in this life. They grow in this life.

In other words, they become sanctified by the truth. They become fortified and strengthened in mind and heart by the truth.

[ 31 : 51 ] The truth leads them on from strength to strength. The truth leads them on from glory to glory. How does the preaching do this?

By ever increasing their knowledge of God. They are growing in faith and every great. God's love.

My friends, we must ask ourselves what the effect of our hearing of the gospel is having upon us.

You must ask it and I must ask it. Do we regard it as something which is a deadly, dull, boring drug?

Do we drag ourselves to God's house? Because to us it fears purgatory to come to hear the preaching of the gospel?

Do we find all our pleasure in the dance hall or the bingo hall? Or is all our ambitions to watch more television and more football and more music and all these other things is so then the gospel alas is the favor of death to us.

[ 33 : 00 ] On the other hand if we love it and can become it is the truth of Christ then we have every reason to hope that what God has begun in us he will perform unto the day of Jesus Christ.

May each one of us find strength to search and try his ways today. The favor of the gospel is to God a sweet smelling thing.

My friends let it be so to all of us.