



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X
Issue 238

Paul's Ministry

by – Vladimir M. Gelesnoff (1877-1921)

The aim we have in view is **recovery** of truth. Much of it was lost immediately after Paul's departure from this earthly scene. Some has been recovered, but a great deal still remains buried beneath the rubbish of decayed theology. Current teaching, especially on the subject of Paul's ministries, needs readjustment.

Paul's ministry differs radically from that of the other apostles as to sphere and character.

- The Twelve preached to the **Circumcision**.
- Paul preached to the **Nations** (Galatians 2:10).
- The Twelve proclaimed **pardon** to the Circumcision.
- Paul preached **grace** to the aliens.

The repentance of Israel as a nation was the aim of their [The Twelve's] ministry. Their preaching of Messiah as Son of David calls to mind the times of the Shepherd-King.

Paul's ministry, which should never be mixed up with that of the Twelve, passed through three different phases, each based on a special and distinct revelation. These are:

- The Gospel of God (Romans 1:1-2).
- The Mystery of the Gospel (the Reconciliation – Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 6:19).
- The Secret Economy (Ephesians 3:3, 9).

These can be properly understood *only* in the light of Israel's apostasy. Each failure on Israel's part is followed by further concessions to the nations.

It is well to note at the outset that each new departure in Paul's ministry – each revelation – points backward to a remoter type than the preceding.

Justification, which is the focus of the Gospel of God, is prefigured in the dealings of God with Abraham in uncircumcision (Romans 1-4).

Reconciliation goes back to Adam, finding its type in the grim period intervening between the failure of Adam and the call of Moses (Romans 5-8).

The Secret Economy overrides all previous revelations, carrying us back anterior to the overthrow of the mundane system by sin (Ephesians 1:4).

Such clear discrimination between the types requires equally clear discrimination between the antitypes.

The Gospel of God was no secret. This is clear from the opening verses of the Roman letter (Romans 1:1-3). It relates to the blessing of the nations on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant.

The reconciliation was a **partial** secret. It is first seen in silhouette, then it is dissipated, then it emerges into clear light and is heralded among all nations (Romans 16:25-27).

The Secret Economy was an **absolute** secret. God was positively hiding it from the ken of former ages. There is no mention of it even in Paul's letters until Ephesians was sent on its mission (Ephesians 3:9).

These three ministries possess two common features: all concern the nations, and all are committed to Paul

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

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UNION (continued from page 2245)

– but beyond these similarities they vary considerably in other respects.

The Gospel of God was ministered by word of mouth (Romans 15:15-21).

The Reconciliation was divulged by means of “prophetic writings,” viz., the epistles which set it forth, as Romans, Corinthians, etc. (Romans 15:25-27).

The Secret Economy was made known to Paul, and its ministry carried on by the servants of the local assemblies (Ephesians 6:21).

Other notable differences press themselves upon our notice.

Abraham was blessed by a priest (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:6). So the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant will be dispensed to the Gentiles by the priest-nation. In line with this, when Israel failed and Paul took her place toward the nations, he ministered the Gospel of God as a **priest** [minister] (*leitourgos*) (Romans 15:16).

The Reconciliation was ministered by him as Messiah’s **ambassador** (II Corinthians 5:18-21).

The Secret Economy was made known by him as Messiah’s **prisoner** (Ephesians 3:1).

These ministries differ also in another particular: the *time* of their revelation.

Justification and freedom from law (though not complete, as current versions seem to imply), were preached during his itinerancy among the nations and the dispersion (Acts 13:39).

Justification is first broached in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch. Afterwards it is fully developed in the first four chapters of the Roman letter.

Reconciliation is unfolded in his letters, after the hostile attitude of the Jews outside the land became manifest, but before his imprisonment.

The Secret Economy was committed to his stewardship *after* his imprisonment.

The contents of the Roman letter revolve around two themes: Justification (chapters 1-4), and Reconciliation

(chapters 5-7).

Abrupt severance of chapters 9-11 from the preceding portion of the epistle has tended to obscure the teaching of reconciliation.

Chapters 5-8 view it in the effulgence of God’s love and glory, while chapters 9-11 point out that its root lies in Israel’s apostasy.

For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? (Romans 11:15).

The opening and closing salutations of the great epistle are in perfect accord with the two themes discussed. The opening verses summarize the salient [significant] features of the Gospel of God (Romans 1:1-7); the concluding verses summarize the salient features of the Secret of the Reconciliation and distinguish it from the Gospel of God.

Unto Him Who is able to stablish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, in harmony with the revelation of the secret silenced in the course of ages, but now manifested, and by prophetic Scriptures, according to the decree of the God of Ages, is made known unto all nations for faith obedience (Romans 16:25-27).

With Romans as a starting point, subsequent epistles add more luster to its glorious beams. Romans presents reconciliation from the divine standpoint. The Corinthian letter views it from our standpoint, following it with an impassioned appeal to receive what grace has given. Ephesians enriches the subject by adding the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:16), and Colossians winds it up with the reconciliation of the universe (Colossians 1:20).

The above is but a scanty outline of the subjects which are foremost in our mind. We wish to share these exceedingly rich and precious truths with our fellow-believers. Our effort will be to unfold them by the Spirit’s gracious help, so that others may be able to see them. God’s choicest gift to us is His Word. Let us bring to the task of Bible study our very best.

Unsearchable Riches
Volume 1, Number 1 (1909)

The Blessing of Weakness

by – J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

My strength is made perfect in weakness.

We are not accustomed to think of *weakness* as a condition of blessing. The *law of the cross* lies deep in spiritual life.

All the best things in human life are really hints and gleams of the divine life. Paul could well afford to keep his “*thorn*” with its burdening weakness, because it made him far more the object of divine strength. Weakness always makes strong appeal to divine strength. We think of suffering or feebleness as a misfortune. It is not so, however, if it brings us nearer to the heart of the Father. Blessed is weakness, for it draws to us the strength of God!

God's noblest servants have carried “*thorns*” in their flesh all their days, but meanwhile they have had spiritual blessing and enrichment which they never would have had if their cries for relief had been granted. We do not know what we owe to the sufferings of those who have gone before us. *Prosperity* has not enriched the world as *adversity* has done. The best thoughts, the richest life lessons, the sweetest songs that have come down to us from the past have not come from lives that have known no privation, no adversity, but are the fruits of pain, of weakness, of trial. Men have cried out for emancipation from the bondage of hardship, of sickness, of infirmity, of self-denying necessity; not knowing that the thing which seemed to be hindering them in their career was the very making of whatever was noble, beautiful, and blessed in their life.

There are few people who have not some “*thorn*” rankling in their flesh. In one it is an infirmity of speech, in another an infirmity of sight, in another an infirmity of hearing. Or it may be lameness, or a disease, slow but incurable, or constitutional timidity, or excessive nervousness, or a disfiguring bodily deformity, or an infirmity of temper. Or it may be in one's home, which is cold, unloving, and uncongenial; or it may be in the life of a loved one – sorrow or moral failure; or it may be a bitter personal disappointment through untrue friendship or love unrequited. Who has not his “*thorn*”?

We should never forget that in one sense our “*thorn*”

is a “*messenger of Satan*,” who desires by it to hurt our life, to mar our peace, to spoil the divine beauty in us, to break our communion with Christ. On the other hand, however, God Himself has a loving design in our “*thorn*.” He wants it to be a blessing to us. He would have it keep us humble – and save us from becoming vain; He means it to soften our hearts and make us more gentle. He would have the uncongenial things in our environment discipline us into heavenly-mindedness, help us to keep our hearts loving and sweet amid harshness and unlovingness. He would have our pain teach us endurance and patience, and our sorrow and loss teach us faith.

Do not allow our “*thorn*” to fret us; to resist, and complain; to lose faith and lose heart – to spoil our life. Accept it in the faith that, in its ugly burden, it has a blessing for us. If we endure it patiently, submissively, un-murmuringly; if we seek grace to keep our heart gentle and true amid all the trial, temptation and suffering it causes, it will work good, and out of its bitterness will come sweet fruit.

He said unto me, “My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (II Corinthians 12:9-10).

The blessing of weakness is that it nourishes dependence on God. When *we* are strong, or deem *ourselves* strong, then we are really weak, since then we trust in ourselves. When we are consciously weak, though, knowing ourselves unequal to our duties and struggles, then we are strong, because then we look to God for His strength.

Too many people think their weakness is a barrier to their usefulness, or make it an excuse for doing little with their life. Instead of this, however, He will transform our weaknesses into strength. He says His strength is made perfect in weakness; that is, what is

lacking in human strength He fills and makes up with divine strength. Paul had learned this when he said he gloried now in his weaknesses, because on account of them the strength of Christ rested upon him, so that, when he was weak, then he was strong – strong with divine strength.

The people who have done the greatest good in the world, who have left the deepest, most abiding impression upon the lives of others, have not been those whom the world called the strong. Much of the world's best work has been done by the weak, by those with broken lives. Successful men have piled up vast fortunes, established large enterprises, or won applause in some material way; but the real influence that has made the world better – enriched lives, taught men the lessons of love, and sweetened the springs of life – has come largely, not from the strong, but from the weak.

I walked over a meadow and the air was full of delicious fragrance, yet I could see no flowers. There was tall grass waving on all sides, but the fragrance did not come from the grass. Then I parted the grass and looked beneath it, and there, close to the earth, hidden out of sight by the showy growths in the meadow, were multitudes of lowly little flowers. I had found the secret of the sweetness – it poured out from these humble hiding flowers. This is a picture of what is true everywhere in life. Not from the great, the conspicuous, the famed in any community, comes the fragrance which most sweetens the air – but from lowly lives, hidden, obscure, unpraised, which give out the aroma of unselfishness, of kindness, of gentleness. In many a home it is from the room of an invalid, a sufferer, that the sweetness comes, which fills all the house. So it is always: out of weakness and suffering, and from crushed, broken lives comes the blessing which renews and heals.

We need only to make sure of one thing – that we do indeed bring our weakness to Christ and lean on Him in simple faith. This is the vital link in getting the blessing. Weakness itself is a burden; it is chains upon our limbs. If we try to carry it alone we shall only fail; but if we lay it on the strong Son of God – and let Him carry us and our burden, going on quietly and firmly in the way of duty – He will make our very weakness a secret source of strength. He will not take the weakness from us – that is not His promise – but He will so fill it with His Own power that we shall be strong, more than conquerors, able to do all things through Christ Who strengthens us!

We ought not to allow ourselves to be beaten in living. It is the privilege and duty of every believer in Christ to live victoriously. No man can ever occupy this place without sore cost in pain and sacrifice. All that is beautiful and worthy in life – must be won in struggle. We can make life easy, in a way – if we will – by shirking its battles; but in this way we never can enjoy anything really *beautiful* and *worthy* of our life. We may keep along shore with our craft, never pushing out into deep waters; but then we shall never discover new worlds, nor learn the secret of the sea. “No cross – no crown” is the law of spiritual attainment.

He who has never a conflict
Has never a victor's palm,
And only the toilers –
Know the sweetness of rest and calm.

Therefore God really honors us when He sets us in places where we must struggle. He is then giving us an opportunity to win the best honors and the richest blessing. Yet He never makes life so hard for us, in any circumstances, that we cannot live victoriously through Him.

In all of these things we may be “*more than conquerors through Him Who loved us.*” The grace of Christ can take the most unlovely life and change it into beauty. *Limitations*, if we rightly use them, only help to make our life more earnest, more beautiful. A writer calls attention to the fact that every musical string is musical, because it is tied at both ends and must vibrate in limited measure of distance. Cut the string, and let it fly loose, and it no more gives out musical notes. Its musicality depends upon its limitations. So it is with many human lives: they become capable of giving out sweet notes only when they are compelled to move in restraint. The very hardness in their condition is that which brings out the best qualities in them, and produces the finest results in character and achievement.

This lesson applies also to experiences of misfortune, adversity or sorrow. Paul speaks of himself in one place as “*sorrowful – yet always rejoicing.*” His *life* could not be crushed, his *joy* could not be quenched, his *songs* could not be hushed. We must all meet trial in some form – but one needs never to be overwhelmed by it. We cannot help weeping; Jesus wept, and tears are sacred when love for our friends and love for Christ mingles in them; but our tears must not be rebellious. “*May Your will be done*” must breathe through all of

(see **BLESSING**, last page)

Strictly Personal

Daily Email Goodies

The amount of readers for both the *Daily Email Goodies* (DEGs) and the *Bible Student's Notebook* (BSN) has continually fluctuated over the years as people join the readership and then for one reason or another lose interest or become unsatisfied with the direction of the teaching. More often than not the tally of the readership has been a downward spiral over the years; as a few readers join us each month, and a few more than that are removed.

However, over the past few months the readership of the *Daily Email Goodies* continues to grow. Currently there seems to be an interest in our daily teaching by e-mail. It is God's truth that we attempt to share – as we see it – in as simple words as possible. We learned years ago to commit our written ministry to Father. Our written ministry is for Him and for those to whom He has given the “ears to hear.” We simply make the ministry available and it is Father who awakens or closes hearts and ears according to His Own will. His work to reconcile all back to Himself is all in His Own wise timing.

We do rejoice that Father has provided open avenues to the hearts of a few. We receive daily response from those rejoicing in the “riches of His grace.” We are thankful for this for, indeed, His grace is abundantly rich, and it thrills our hearts that He reveals this to the hearts and minds of others. He deserves it, and that future day in His plan when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14) cannot be too soon for me; but that will remain for another age.

For now, we are content to have a “not many” ministry (I Corinthians 1:26); but this does not mean that we are not active in our pursuit of those who have the ears to hear, and that it does not rejoice our hearts that they can hear.

At present there are just over 1,400 who receive the daily studies. For us this amount is encouragingly “a lot”; yet for the current 6.7 billion of the earth, it is but a “not many” ministry for sure. If Father chooses to reduce our readership down again – as has been the

pattern in our past – we will rejoice and praise Him for His wisdom, for “the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

World Population

With the world population nearing 7 billion, what “a great door and effectual is opened before us” (I Corinthians 16:9). This is staggering. One statistic says,

Of all the people in human history who ever reached the age of 65, half are alive now. – Fred Pearce, *New Scientist*, April 2010.

With this fact comes astounding opportunity and responsibility to “do the work of an evangelist; fully discharge your service” (II Timothy 4:5, CLNT). May we each pray for the wisdom and courage to seize the day with all that we have!

Hope Beyond Hell

For those who receive the printed version of the BSN, with the last issue you received a free copy of a condensed version of Gerry Beauchemin's *Hope Beyond Hell*. Through the gracious sacrifice of a brother in Christ, these are available for free giveaways. Could you make use of some? Please feel free to call, e-mail or send us a letter and request multiple copies. All that we ask here, is that you assist with the postage in getting them to you.

Visit

A couple of weeks ago we had the honor of having as our overnight guests Martin Zender and Charlie Cronk. It was our great joy to have them and we had such a sweet time of fellowship together. The only downside was that it was too short a time; but even so God managed to stir our mutual passions for the work to which He has called us, for which I am thankful.

Unsearchable Riches

For those of you who know me very much at all, you know that at heart I am a gleaner. All of my life I have sought out valuable written treasures to “devour” and glean – not only for my own benefit, but also for the benefit of those whom I love. This is the motivating

factor behind the BSN. It has always been my avenue of sharing my own personal gleaning from Scripture (my articles) as well as the gleanings from others.

A few years back my gleaning led me to *Unsearchable Riches*, a wonderful Bible study bimonthly magazine that began publication in 1909. Still in print today, one hundred and one years later, remarkably its subscription price has remained the same as its inception: a dollar a year. You can subscribe by sending your dollar to: Unsearchable Riches, 15570 Knochaven Road, Santa Clarita, CA; 91387.

I have received this rich periodical for a few years now. I bring this to your consideration now, because a dear friend, Charlie Cronk, supplied me with a wealth of early issues – 88 years worth to be exact! – in electronic format. What a treasure these are to me already; and I have just been reading the first few issues!

It was originally co-edited by V.M. Gelesnoff and A.E. Knoch. After Gelesnoff's death in 1921 Knoch took over the entire responsibility. Many of our readers are familiar with Knoch, in that we carry his books at www.StudyShelf.com, and have carried a few articles by him in the BSN. He was a wonderful student of the Scriptures, and if you have not yet read his work, *The Problem of Evil*, I highly recommend it.

While reading the first issue of *UR*, I immediately fell in love with the original editor Vladimir M. Gelesnoff as well. The lead article in this issue was taken from the editorial of the very first issue. I found an immediate bond as I had with other precious teachers of the past. I trust that you will as well.

What follows here is the beginning of this first editorial from Gelesnoff, from that first issue in 1909. I hope that you will be as touched by his spirit of love and acceptance of others while standing for the truth as I have been. Enjoy!

Unsearchable Riches

Volume 1, Number 1 (1909)

Vladimir M. Gelesnoff (1877-1921)

It is with a sense of deep gratitude to God that we send forth the first number of this magazine in the interest of a rightly apportioned Word.

The truth which we endeavor to make known through these pages is one which thus far has been sadly ignored, but which is a stimulus to deeper Bible study, opens up the treasures of God's Grace and the resources of His multifarious Wisdom, and discloses endless vistas into time and eternity, both past and future.

This enterprise is not undertaken on the spur of the moment. It is the result of several years' protracted thought and consideration. Realizing our own insufficiency and weakness, we balked at shouldering so arduous a task, in spite of repeated urgings and solicitations of many friends, which would have remained unheeded but for the sympathy and cooperation of our beloved and esteemed friend, Mr. A.E. Knoch, of California.

The character of *Unsearchable Riches* is irenic [aimed at peace], not polemic [argumentative]. It seeks to state the truth as God gives it to us, without wounding the feelings of those who may hold differing views. God has taught us to count no person common or unclean.

Experience demonstrates that the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit is often present where His illumination is not vouchsafed [given], and that the mind may be muddled while the heart remains true.

The truths essential to Christian fellowship are three, all concerning the Person of Christ: The Virgin Birth, the Vicarious Death, the Resurrection. Possession of these vital truths should distinguish every believer from those about him.

With all those holding these essentials we seek to cultivate fellowship, irrespective of denominational affiliations. The Person of Christ is the touchstone of Christian fellowship and the channel along which it flows. Repudiation of the above cardinal points excludes from the pale of Christian fellowship. On the other hand, to erect other barriers than these is tantamount to a denial of the injunction to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Intolerance or undisciplined religious zeal for traditional party tenets is doing more to demoralize the forces of God than the assaults of blatant infidels and the craft of perverts.



Reader's Question Box #9

"Better that He Was Never Born"

Q: Please comment on Matthew 26:24 and Mark 14:21. If Judas was part of God's plan from the foundation of the world, why would it have been good for him if he had not been born?

A: First, it is necessary to view the whole verse in a literal rendering. Quoting from *Rotherham's New Testament*:

The Son of Man, indeed, withdraws as it is written concerning Him; But alas! For that man through whom the Son of Man is delivered up: well would it have been for him, if that man had never been born (Matthew 26:24.)

The *Concordant Literal NT* helps us even further by adding capitalization. It says in this:

The Son of Mankind is indeed going away, according as it is written concerning Him, yet woe to that man through whom the Son of Mankind is being given up! Ideal were it for Him if that man were not born!

Notice that this version renders it "Him" – with a capital H. This helps

us to better understand the meaning of Jesus' statement. In these literal renderings when Jesus says, "... well would it have been for Him, if that man had never been born," "Him" is referring to Himself, the Son of Man; and "that man" refers to Judas, "that man" who delivered Him to His captors and eventual executioners.

In this chapter Jesus told of His being betrayed to be crucified. Here is emphasized Jesus' humanity, in the view of His coming sufferings on the cross. It is Jesus Who, humanly, would have been better off if Judas had not been born. The thought that "Him" refers to Judas and the punishment for his act, is based on the theology that brings God as the tyrant who uses human "justice" to get even with those who are against Him. This has nothing to do with Judas' punishment.

The Bible teaches a different God than that of religious tradition: One Who graces all and justifies His enemies. God places people where He wants them to fulfill His purpose of the ages. If Judas had not been born, God would have just placed someone else in that position to do the job; otherwise Christ would never have been crucified. If God is just, and places someone to do that kind of job, would

it be just to send that person to an everlasting hell? Of course not: God is just and righteous.

A.E. Knoch (1904-1974) wrote about Matthew 26:24 in his *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*:

The case of Judas has an important bearing on the ultimate destiny of the human race and all creation. If it were well for Judas if he had not been born, then there can be no justification of all mankind (Romans 5:18) or reconciliation of all creation (Colossians 1:20). If he is ultimately justified and reconciled, it is well that he has been born. The solution of this difficulty will help us to see the bias which pervades our translations. They deliberately recast the sentence and give it a meaning quite foreign to the text. The Lord speaks of Himself as "Him," and of Judas as "that man." It were ideal for the Lord if Judas were not born. The Lord's impending suffering is in view, not the punishment of Judas, whose ultimate destiny is not under consideration.

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BLESSING (continued from page 2249)

our sobbings and cries, like the melody of a sweet song in a dark night of storm.

Sorrow hurts some lives. It embitters them. It leaves them broken, disheartened and not caring for life anymore. Yet, we should accept sorrow, however it may come to us, as bringing with it a fragment of God's sweet will for us, as bringing also some new revealing of divine love. We should meet it quietly, reverently; careful not to miss the blessing it brings to us.

experience of sorrow teaches us many lessons. We are wiser afterward, more thoughtful, better fitted to be a guide and helper to others, and prepared especially to be comforters of those whom we find passing through affliction.

Even the things which seem to be failures and defeats in our lives – through the love and grace of Christ – will prove in the end to be successes and victories. Many a good man fails in a worldly sense, and yet in the spiritual realm is more than conqueror.