

PAUL, A MODEL OF THE CERTAINTY OF FAITH
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PRINCIPALS AND VISITORS

School Visitors' Workshop

Mequon, Wisconsin

August 10, 1976

Prof. Armin Panning,
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Perhaps it would be well if it were understood from the outset that your essayist makes no claim for originality in this presentation. Its basis is an article written by the sainted Professor August Pieper. When a translation of that article recently appeared in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly under the title, PAUL, A MODEL OF THE CERTAINTY OF FAITH, ESPECIALLY FOR ALL SERVANTS OF THE WORD, it was judged to be so timely that it might well serve as a source of instruction and inspiration for the group assembled here today. Hence the assignment, as your essayist understood it, was to condense that article somewhat and to narrow its application specifically to teachers who are serving in the capacities of principals and visitors. (Those interested in the original article can find it in the October 1931 issue of the Theologische Quartalschrift as PAULUS ALS EIN VORBILD IN DER GLAUBENSGEWISZHEIT, BESONDERS FUER ALLE DIENER AM WORT. The translation, prepared by Professor John Jeske, appeared in the Quarterly, Vol. 72, #3, July 1975.)

+ + + + + + + + + + + +

We live in an age in which there is a great deal of complaint about the sad condition of the Christian church. That the outsider should find cause for complaint is perhaps not to be wondered at, but it is more disconcerting when even servants of the Word join in those complaints, for to them it ought to be perfectly clear that the only thing which the church of our day, and especially we as servants of the Word, lack is faith; living, robust, confident faith - the certainty of faith. Where certainty of faith governs, there the church, and its school system also, will prosper. The certainty of faith is both the source of all spiritual life, as well as the power for it.

From her very beginning down to the present day, the church has always had great heroes of faith - Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist, our Lord's disciples - and they accomplished great things. But one of the

greatest was the Apostle Paul, who through faith established the Christian church among the Gentiles.

Of the Scripture passages which describe Paul's certainty of faith, ✓ 2 Timothy 1:12 is surely one of the most beautiful. "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day" (NIV). Both of the epistles to Timothy, for all of their brevity, abound in expressions of Paul's confident faith. The second epistle is Paul's valedictory, his last will and testament to the New Testament church. Paul wrote this epistle aware of his impending death, hence its tone is one of uncommon earnestness. He was confident of having fought a good fight, of having finished his course, of having kept the faith. "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.... The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Humanly speaking, there was only one of Paul's pupils and associates who could assume the leadership of the Gentile congregations Paul had founded. That was the truest and dearest of Paul's spiritual children, Timothy, a young man of genuine faith, who had been loyal to the Lord and his apostle down to the present hour. But one thing seemed to be lacking in this future leader. He was still comparatively young and occasionally he seems to have yielded to his inborn timidity. He seems to have lacked the ability to take hold of himself with the virility given by the Spirit. Yet those were the very gifts that would be needed to lead the church securely in the face of subtle heresies of false teachers and in the face of increasing persecution from the Roman authorities and heathen mobs.

The entire second epistle to Timothy can pretty well be summarized in the single admonition: "My son, take strength from the grace of God which is ours in Christ" (2:1,NEB). Although the apostle does not say it in so many

words, it is clear throughout this second epistle that he wants to strengthen Timothy for the task ahead of him. In this strengthening process Paul's own example played a prominent role. He could point out to his young understudy that the Lord had always stood beside him, had delivered him from all persecution, had strengthened him so that through him the gospel might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And now, he is confident, the Lord will deliver him from the last great evil and will bring him safely to His heavenly kingdom, for, as he says, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day" (1:12).

The more closely one looks at these words, the more brightly they shine, like a sparkling diamond. These words apply to all Christians, but especially to all messengers of the gospel and to all leaders in the church. Confident faith is not the special prerogative of public servants of the Word. Every believer is to be confident in his faith, for according to Hebrews 11 faith is nothing else than being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Essentially faith is firm trust, created by God Himself, in the unbreakable promises He has given us. A Christian's faith, however, may vary from time to time. At one time it may rejoice in triumph; at other times it may be shaken and may waver, depending on how we view God's promises or conditions in our life. The Lord often rebuked His disciples for littleness of faith. More than others, they should have been strong in faith and confident of God's promises, regardless of unfavorable conditions in their life at the moment. But even their faith varied.

There is no form of the ministry in which the possessor does not need a strong faith if he is to carry out his ministry properly. Whether they be called apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers, principals or visitors, God can use only those who possess a knowledge of the gospel and a strength of faith in surpassing measure.

This is not to say that public servants of the Word do not have to undergo trials of faith common to other mortals. A teacher's doubts about the inspiration of the Bible, about the truth of the gospel, about its ability to transform the hearts and lives of lambs entrusted to him in the classroom, will not cease when he graduates from his course of training. On the contrary, he will continue to be plagued by littleness of faith, by depression, stubbornness, discouragements and doubts of various kinds. Indeed, we need to be plagued if our faith is to grow and mature. The very reason why God lets these trials enter our lives is that by His grace and Spirit we may overcome them, be preserved in the hour of trial, and be more firmly established in faith. And all the while He remains faithful to His promise, not to test us beyond what we can bear (I Cor. 10:31). Paul's admonition to Timothy, "My son, be strong" will always apply in a very special way to called servants of the Word. Just as Paul admonishes Timothy and us to fan into flame God's gift for our ministry, the spirit of power and love and of self-control, so he also adds the special promise that this gift of strength will be given to us in abundance.

In our ministry it simply will not do, and we will accomplish nothing worthwhile, if we are not divinely certain that what we teach is God's everlasting truth and the only way to eternal blessedness. The gospel of Christ is not an earthborn creation, but it comes rather from God's heaven; the Spirit of holiness reveals it to the occupants of this planet who otherwise would not know it, in order to rescue them from their own wisdom and their own righteousness and their own vices, and to make them wise and justified and upright for all eternity. This is the reason why the unbelieving world cannot tolerate the gospel. Wise men call it folly, the self-righteous an offense, the slaves of sin tyranny. Together they hate it and persecute it. It should not surprise us therefore that such hatred for the gospel focuses itself primarily on those who teach the gospel, and especially on those who train and instruct the youth.

Christian teachers must be ready, for the gospel's sake, to take what the unbelieving world is going to hand out. Rather than being ashamed of the testimony of Christ, they will, when opposed by men of science and philosophy and unchristian educational views, continue to confess the gospel as the truth which judges and condemns this world's wisdom. They must have the necessary courage and energy to separate themselves from the world.

The unbelieving teacher and the doubter will never manage to accomplish this; they see the wolf coming and run. The weak teacher will not accomplish this either, because he lacks the strength to risk enmity and to bear the abuse and recriminations that will be forthcoming from the educational community. Such a teacher is ashamed to testify to his Lord. The moment his own well-being, his honor and position are endangered, he no longer stands solidly on the Word. Bereft of that foundation, he simply is not able to endure hardship like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He cannot bring himself to put aside his concern for daily bread and to fight as a soldier should.

The work of the teaching ministry invariably demands the whole man. Although the demands may vary in individual cases, yet God asks teachers to exert themselves to the utmost when preparing their lesson-plans and class presentations, when instructing and nurturing the youth and when counseling with their parents. And in addition there is always the matter of Scripture study, of thinking through the gospel again - in general and in its particulars. This is a work which no teacher in a Christian classroom ever finishes. And if, in addition, he has accepted a special responsibility, if as principal he has been charged with the administration of a school, or if he has agreed to serve as a visitor, let him remember that he has not only a position of honor, but a noble task. He has accepted a precious but difficult assignment, one that demands physical and mental and spiritual exertion. Remember Paul's statement: "I labored more than they all." The church cannot tolerate frivolous, easy-going,

pleasure-loving people in any of her ministries without being harmed. What a man accomplishes does not depend so much on the particular task he has to do as on the inner energy with which he approaches his work. We who have been given a special call to work in our Lord's vineyard may be growing older in years, but we dare never grow old and tired-out mentally. We must be renewed daily with the strength that God has promised.

The Christian's strength, of course, rests on his personal assurance of faith. "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced." Christian strength is built on what it believes, namely on the objective truth of the gospel. This is the means the Holy Ghost uses to build the confidence of faith, the essence of which is one's personal assurance of his own salvation. The believer knows he has been delivered from sin, from death, and from Satan's power. He knows he has become the personal possession of Jesus Christ and of God the Father for time and eternity. Whoever does not have this assurance of his personal state of grace lacks the power to teach the gospel properly, to contend for it, to suffer for it, to expend himself for it. He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the winds (James 1:6).

How different it is with the person who knows that he has been snatched out of this present evil world into God's gracious arms! He will not find it unduly painful to renounce the friendship of the unbelieving world and the pleasures of this life, and gladly to shoulder the trouble and shame, the misery and suffering which will be the lot of the man who remains loyal to the gospel. As a principal he will not find the routine administrative matters stultifying or unbearably wearisome. And as a visitor he will not grudge the hours consumed in correspondence and counseling. Nor will it be irksome for him constantly to employ the Christian tact needed to keep open avenues of communication between the teacher visited, the principal, the congregation, as well as its pastor.

an ideal picture

Such strength must come from above. We see this in the apostles in general (Acts 5:41f.) and in the Apostle Paul in particular. How much this man accomplished single-handedly, how much he suffered, how much he gladly endured! And the strength for it all flowed from a single source: the certainty of his faith. It was this certainty that sustained Paul through his entire apostolic ministry. It was this that filled his entire consciousness, even when he faced death.

How did Paul ever gain such assurance? It will be worth our while to examine the confession of his life more closely, especially as this is illustrated by his unique conversion.

Without weakening his declaration in the least, the apostle might have said: "I know what I believe." Those words would have compelled us to understand that Paul was absolutely sure of his faith, of the gospel which had been revealed to him. But instead Paul gave the object of his faith a distinctly personal emphasis: "I know whom I have believed." God had not revealed the gospel of Christ to Paul as an abstract truth, objective and general; rather Paul had entered into an intensely personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Himself. The Lord had appeared to him personally and had let him, Saul of Tarsus, recognize the Lord in all His glory as both divine Judge and Savior.

By letting him see a reflection of His own divine majesty God blinded Saul and threw him to the ground. In a voice which penetrated to the very marrow of Saul's bones God called him by name. He laid his sin on his conscience. He threatened him with the awful consequences of his personal rebellion against the Holy Ghost.

Saul asked: "Who are you, Lord?" He still did not know who it was who was revealing himself. With the address "Lord" Saul was not referring to Jesus. Every pious Jew referred to Israel's God as "Lord." As Saul understood it, this "Lord Jehovah," the true God, had appeared to him here on the Damascus road. But when the Lord responded: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,"

then it dawned on Saul who was confronting him. Then his conscience accused him of sin. It crushed him, and he lay trembling in terror at the Lord's feet.

When Paul now responded: "Lord, what shall I do?" he was with that title acknowledging Jesus' divine majesty and the divine truth of His teaching, the very teaching for which he had formerly persecuted the followers of "this way" (Acts 9:2; 22:4). Furthermore, by asking: "What shall I do, Lord?" he was completely submitting his will to the will of this Jesus, whom he had up to now opposed in every way possible.

It is worth noting that in none of the accounts of Paul's conversion (Acts 9; 22; 26) are we told that the Lord personally spoke the absolution to Paul. Rather, the Lord referred him to one Ananias in Damascus. The inner relationship of trust which Jesus brought about in Paul and which Paul showed toward his Lord en route to Damascus reached full fruition only after Ananias had spoken to Paul (Acts 9:17ff; 22:12ff). Then for the first time Paul could say in full confidence: "I know whom I have believed and am convinced."

It is difficult to say what happened in the heart of Paul during his three-day blindness in Damascus. We are told only that he prayed. The picture of Jesus as He had appeared in glory on the road must have stood vividly before his mind's eye. Imagine: Jesus of Nazareth, the one crucified, is God's Christ, the Savior promised throughout the Scriptures! Surely Paul must have had considerable knowledge of the facts surrounding the rise of this Christian "sect" that he was persecuting - the crucifixion; the testimony of Peter and John to Christ's resurrection; Peter's Pentecost sermon. And Paul must also have thought about his own part in the recent history of this case - how intensely he had hated this Jesus; how viciously and violently he had persecuted the Christians; how gleefully he had arrested them, turned them over to the Council, and helped stone them to death!

All his former zeal for the Law of Moses, all his blameless conduct, had been in vain! It had been wrong. It had actually made him a persecutor of the Savior sent by God and a murderer of the congregation of God. Since the veil of Moses had covered his heart, his diligent study of the Scripture had trained him to be an enemy of God and a destroyer of the church.

With such thoughts tormenting his heart, he shuddered as he now recalled the details of the previous day's experiences, and he prayed. His prayer must have been disorganized bits and pieces of sighing and crying for grace and spiritual illumination, for peace and assurance. Paul's prayer was answered through the word of Ananias. He comforted Paul, absolved him, baptized him, and called him to be the apostle of Him whom he had seen. Paul now had peace of heart and assurance of grace. He had been enlightened by the truth about Christ and assured of his call as a gospel witness.

After only a few days Paul began in Damascus to proclaim Jesus as God's Son. We are told (9:22) that he became more and more resolute in preaching Jesus and baffled the Jews by showing them out of the Scripture that this is the very Christ, the promised Messiah. With the same resoluteness and zeal he had previously showed in persecuting Christ he now stood up for Christ and His gospel, without worrying about what the consequences might be for him. Unless he recanted, his conversion to Jesus meant expulsion from the synagog and fanatic, unrelenting persecution to the death. For Paul to stand up as he did meant a complete break with everything in his past.

Yet Paul made this break, as we can see from his words, "I know whom I have believed...." The perfect tense which he uses looks back into the past, beginning at the very moment of his conversion, through his apostolic activity, right on down to the present hour of his writing to Timothy, in which he is still conscious of that very same faith. At his conversion he was first led to

see clearly and confidently what kind of Man it was who had revealed Himself to him: a Man to whom divine glory and all power in heaven and earth had been given, whom God had appointed to be the Judge of the living and the dead, and the Savior of the whole world through faith in Him. This is the Man who had called Paul to be a servant of the gospel, to work toward the conversion especially of the Gentile world. All of this was divinely, infallibly sure to Paul, and as a result he entrusted himself completely to the Lord Jesus as his sovereign Lord. He had put matters of life and death into that master's hand. He had placed all of his abilities into the Savior's service, without reservation or condition. And the Lord gave him the strength to keep his vow and to complete his assignment victoriously.

How had that strength been supplied? To begin with, God sent Paul to school. Perhaps because of his doctrinal struggles with the Damascus rabbis, perhaps through a direct indication from the Lord, Paul interrupted his preaching activity in Damascus and went to Arabia for more than two years (Gal. 1:17ff). We are not told what he did there, but it is unthinkable that he did nothing, or that he sat alone with his thoughts. Undoubtedly this student of Gamaliel, who had learned the Old Testament so incorrectly, studied the Scripture all over again, this time under the illumination of the Spirit. Full of new insights, Paul returned to Damascus to resume his preaching. When the Jews resolved to kill him, he escaped to Jerusalem, where he again preached Christ. Here the same fate threatened this apostate Jew, especially at the hands of Greek-speaking Jews with whom he had come into almost immediate conflict. After Paul had spent fifteen days with Peter and James, the apostles sent him by way of Caesarea, Syria, and Cilicia to his hometown of Tarsus, where he had a special opportunity not only to study the Scripture, but to become better acquainted with Greek wisdom and literature. Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and

Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. In Tarsas Paul received a call from Barnabas, who had introduced him to the elders at Jerusalem, to serve a congregation which had recently been organized among Gentiles in Antioch. For a whole year Paul worked in Antioch with Barnabas and other prophets and teachers, instructing the congregation. It was from Antioch that the Holy Spirit commissioned Paul and Barnabas as apostles to the Gentiles.

Now Paul's loyalty had to be tested; his faith had to prove itself. He was confident of his Lord's grace and of his call as apostle. Although the thought of his sinfulness and unworthiness never left him (1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:13), yet for Paul that was always incentive to deeper humility, more intense joy, more earnest gratitude for the rich grace he had experienced, and more dedicated performance of the ministry entrusted to him, a ministry of which God had considered him worthy. Paul was aware of the fact that he possessed no special skills as an orator, but he knew that God had equipped him with full apostolic knowledge of the way of salvation (2 Cor. 11:5; 1 Cor. 2:10; 11:23ff). God had laid a severe physical burden on Paul, a "thorn in the flesh," and despite Paul's repeated prayers, God had seen fit not to remove it. He had, however, reminded Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." For 30 years the word came true which the Lord had spoken to Ananias: "I will show him how much he must suffer for My name." But to strengthen him for that suffering God gave Paul a glimpse into Paradise and let him hear inexpressible things that man is not permitted to tell (2 Cor. 12:4). The Lord permitted toil and anguish, trouble and sorrow in abundance to come upon Paul, but through it all He stood by him so that Paul could write to Timothy: "The Lord rescued me from all of them" (2 Tim. 3:11). In the strength of his Lord's faithfulness he had now finished his course, he had kept the faith. In the face of impending death he was confident that the same Lord who is seated at the right hand of the Father as Lord of all, the God who had shown great

mercy to him and who had remained faithful to him, would also be able to keep safe - even beyond the grave - what Paul had entrusted to Him, and would place on his head the crown He had promised him (2 Tim. 4:8,18).

The source for the power Paul displayed in all of his apostolic activity, in his prodigious output, in his untiring patience under suffering, his indestructible courage in danger, in his self-denying surrender to his Lord, in his quiet confidence in Him even when facing death - all this lay not in the keen intellect and strong will which the Holy Ghost had given Paul and had placed into the service of Christ, but rather in his certainty of the grace, the power, and the faithfulness of his Lord and Master which he had experienced so rightly. Because he could say, "I know whom I have believed" he could also write to the Philippians, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (4:13).

What is there that we can learn from this discussion? We are to strive to become confident in our faith, firm and strong in the certainty of faith, so that we can overcome all our doubts about Christ and His gospel. God wants us to dismiss all doubts about whether or not He has called us to our present post, our doubts about God's promises, His faithfulness, and His power even over death - and to stand firm in faith amid storms that threaten the world and the church.

We need not concern ourselves here with the hireling, the unbelieving teacher, whose only interest is his daily bread, his reputation, his comfort. He has his reward. And he can read of his future verdict also in James 1:6-8. Of greater concern to us at the moment is littleness of faith. With its fearfulness and anxiety it can do great damage in the church of God (Mt. 6:30; 8:26). It will cripple all real joy in one's ministry; it will shy away from every battle, every difficulty; it will make a man unwilling to suffer; and it will tremble in the face of death. Vigorous, sturdy faith is needed to do the work our calling requires, to endure patiently the sufferings of our ministry: the

unreceptivity of some pupils; the thanklessness one meets in the congregation, even from some parents; the differences of opinion that one as a principal must moderate among fellow faculty members; the defensiveness that a visitor occasionally encounters in dealing with a co-worker; not to mention the downright wearisomeness that perforce attends some aspects of every administrative routine. Brethren, let us make no mistake about it, it takes strong faith to give ourselves over completely to obedience and service of Christ. We must have a faith which "is sure of what it hopes for and is certain of what it does not see" (Heb. 11).

In this matter it will not do to discourage ourselves with the thought that our faith will never attain to the stature of Paul's faith. Of course it will not! Our assignment is not as large as his was. But Paul must nevertheless remain the ideal toward which we will strive. We should indeed learn to say with him: "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day."

And we will have to learn to say it in essentially the same way Paul learned to say it - essentially, but not exactly, in the same way. We dare not, e.g., count on seeing a miraculous vision of the Lord as he did. God has not promised that to everyone. Nor is it necessary. What converted Paul was not just the miracle of that heavenly vision. No miracle has in itself the power to convert. If it had, many Jews should have come to faith. They demanded signs, saw them, and remained in unbelief. The old Adam can explain away every miracle. No sign from heaven compels one to believe. Paul recognized a higher power at work; the vision itself would not have converted him. What effected the change in Paul was nothing less than the Lord's application of both law and gospel.

It was the stern law-word the Lord Jesus hurled at Saul that broke him down. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the

goads." Under the crushing weight of this word the strong man collapsed. This was not the first time Jesus had confronted this proud Pharisee. Saul was well acquainted with "this way" and had persecuted it with all his might. The Word preached by the apostles had testified to Saul that it was the truth of God and the power of God. But up to now Saul had managed to suppress the divine witness - albeit with a bad conscience. There was a goad in his conscience, put there by God, and he had struggled against it to this very moment. The Lord therefore announced to him: "Saul, that's going to be hard for you;" in other words: "It's going to be impossible for you; it will destroy you." This word, which drove the familiar curse of the law into his already wounded conscience, broke down the self-righteous Pharisee.

And it was the gospel that brought him to faith. Saul was made to realize that, despite the reality and the justice of the law, God had not immediately consigned him to the flames of hell. His life had been spared - that was grace! The Lord told Saul to get up out of the dust into which the heavenly vision had cast him - again that was grace! The Lord promised to explain fully what His plans for Saul were - still more grace! A ray of hope, trust in God's grace began to steal into his heart, although all around him it was still black as night. God's revelation that a man named Ananias would restore his sight strengthened his faith. But it was only when Ananias proclaimed the Word to him and baptized him that Paul came to a clear and precise understanding of his call and to the glad certainty of the forgiveness of his sin. Paul was converted through the preaching of law and gospel. The vision from heaven accentuated the working of the Word, especially the message of the law, but it was not responsible for it. Paul perceived the heavenly vision with his physical senses, as did some of his companions, but they were not converted by it. It was only through the Holy Ghost that Paul understood the words of Jesus; his companions heard only

sounds that didn't make sense. The Holy Ghost used the Word to bring Paul to faith.

And that is essentially the way God has chosen to bring every sinner on this earth to conversion. The Word is the only light which in this dark world can bring the light of day into hearts that heed its call. God has not left Himself without witness. To rescue this lost, sinful world from the curse and the death it has called down upon itself God has revealed Himself in Jesus of Nazareth, the true Word made flesh. He bore our sins in His body on the cross. Through Him and only through Him God has spoken to us ever since the world began. And down to the end of the world God will speak to us only through Him. Of Him God has said, "This is my Son whom I love; with Him I am well-pleased. Listen to Him!" (Mt. 17) "And whoever will not listen to my words which He shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him" (Dt. 18). Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and obey it; but he who despises the Word destroys himself.

The Word has such power because God has put His own converting power into the Word, whether it is preached by Him personally or whether it is taught and proclaimed by human beings. Jesus declares: "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you; he who listens to you listens to Me, and he who listens to Me listens to Him who sent Me." It is in this light that we should view the high calling which we have in our classrooms. We are God's mouthpieces. We have a message of tremendous power, for we teach a Word that can change young hearts and lives and make them fit for an eternity with God. The Word we teach has that power because it is God's law and His gospel, because it announces the glory of His justice and His grace.

But for us to share that Word effectively, it must first of all come to us. Like a judge, that Word must confront us with the evidence - the thoughts and attitudes of our heart (Heb. 4:12). It convicts us of our sinfulness and

forces us to hear its verdict of eternal damnation. No one can come to faith in God's mercy who has not, to quote Luther, "tasted terror and trembling" and learned to despair of making himself right before God. It is only the broken heart that God can and will comfort, heal, assure of His grace. But wherever God finds such a heart, He promises to comfort as a mother comforts her child (Is. 66:13). In this way we become sure of God's mercy.

And the more certain we are of having experienced God's mercy, the more zealous will be our ministry, as evidenced by greater diligence in preparing our daily lessons, more fervent love and concern for our pupils, greater patience with our colleagues and co-workers, greater willingness on our part to accept suggestions and corrections. The more joyful we are in our faith, the more steadfast we will be in danger and the more courageous in the face of death. The more we experience the amazing riches of our good and faithful God, the more faithful we will be as Christians and as servants of the Word.

After his conversion Paul went into seclusion, to Arabia and then to Tarsus, to study the Scripture. What miracles of divine prophecy there met his eyes. He saw Jesus, Jesus only, that Jesus who had revealed Himself to him personally. From God's Word Paul gathered treasures of understanding - a rich measure of comfort, of grace, of certainty, of courage and power and surrender to that Person who had not rejected the chief of sinners, this arch-enemy, this blasphemer. Unfeigned gratitude compelled Paul to exclaim: "I thank our Lord that He considered me faithful, appointing me to His service" (I Tim. 1:12) to make known to Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. It was in this way that Paul became strong in faith. In his work of ministry he drew closer to Him who had called him as servant, and each new day brought a new experience of the faithfulness and might of the Caller. As Paul's earthly course drew to its close, his word to Timothy, "I know whom I have believed," was only putting into words what he had experienced a thousand times over.

This is how we too can receive a sturdy and confident faith which will make us competent servants of Christ. It is not enough for us to consider the Bible God's Word and the gospel a true teaching, which we as honest men can with a good conscience present in our classroom. If our study of the Word has not brought us to a personal fellowship with Jesus Christ, then our ministry will remain without purpose and power. We will have to learn to say with Paul: "I know whom I have believed." Jesus must reveal Himself to us personally. We must learn to know Him intimately. Jesus must become the personal Friend who accompanies us every day, who illumines our mind, who speaks comfort to our heart, and who stiffens our resolve. That is how He fulfills His promise: "Lo I am with you alway." That promise is as true for us as it was for Paul. But let us not wait for a special miraculous vision of Jesus. He has not promised us that. Rather, He has put Himself into His Word. Here and here alone we can find Him. Here He has recorded His name. Here He comes to take up His dwelling in us. Here He wants to be found. Here He fills us with grace and comfort, with spirit and power.

A preacher or teacher or professor may be able to speak and teach fluently and skillfully, but if he studies the Word only infrequently or not at all, he is a sorry specimen. On the other hand, what an able servant of the Word that man is who lives constantly in the Word, cultivating his friendship with Christ Jesus! He is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which yields fruit in season; its leaf never withers, and whatever he does prospers.

+ + + + + + + + + + + +