

Sunday – December 3rd, 2017

Preparation

As we mentioned in yesterday's Reflection, there are less than 30 days, one month, remaining in our journey through the Bible and Daily in the word. That being said, this upcoming week will allow us to complete the book of 1 Corinthians, as well as read through both 2 Corinthians and Galatians. Of course, the books we'll be reading are shorter in comparison to the four gospels and even the book of Acts, however, that doesn't mean we should underestimate the content contained within, on the contrary in fact. Within these letters of Paul is the doctrines by which we operate within the "the church, Which is his body" (Ephesians 1:22-23).

We discussed on Friday of the nature and state of the church at Corinth. To say it was operating and performing in an unbiblical manner would be an understatement to say the least. Through the first 6 chapters we read last week, the Holy Spirit has already taken the opportunity to address some of the sin and problems that the church at Corinth was caught up in. As we pick up in chapter 7, He quickly picks up right where He left off as 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 teaches us, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." Sadly, this type of teaching is not a popular theme throughout the church of Laodicea, yet it would do us well to apply this to our lives, for many a man has destroyed his life and the life of his family, by simply disobeying such a command.

As we come to the end of the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul brings it to a close by discussing the importance of the resurrection. Of course, there is not one aspect of the gospel (death, burial, and resurrection of Christ), that's more important than the other, for all of them are required to fulfill scripture. Yet, at this juncture in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul had to address the problems this church had with believing that the resurrection actually took place. What a miserable life we would lead had Christ not conquered death and the grave by resurrection on the third day, In fact, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." But praise the Lord the resurrection brings "hope" of eternal life. As Titus 1:2 "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" . This promise was made available the moment the Holy Spirit brought Christ back to life (Romans 8:11). This being the case, Paul closes his thoughts on the resurrection of Christ

and the transition from mortality to immortality by writing the following and at the same time both exhorting and provoking the church to action: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-58) Considering the levity of what we’ ll read throughout the week, let’ s keep in mind the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:34 as he writes, “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.”

Monday – December 4th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: I CORINTHIANS 7-11

OVERVIEW:

Marriage and divorce (chapter 7); Christian liberty (chapter 8); the purpose of our liberty (chapter 9); lessons from Israel (chapter 10); issues regarding communion (chapter 11).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

We now begin the section of I Corinthians in which Paul answers the questions the Corinthians had sent to him. The first issue he addresses is marriage. Apparently, the Corinthians were wondering if it was better for a man never to marry. In one sense it is. Verse 1 of chapter 7 says, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. In 7:8 Paul says he wishes all men were like him (single). 7:8 says it is good for the unmarried and widows to remain single. 7:27 advises men if they are loosed from a wife (single) not to seek a wife. The reason is found in 7:32-34. An unmarried person may give their service more wholly to the Lord. Everyone that is married understands the point, because there are restraints on our time, resources, and service because of our families. For example, it's more difficult for a husband/wife, father/mother to go on a six month or one year mission trip than it is for a single person. That is just common sense. What often happens, however, is singles sometimes mistakenly believe if they can just be spiritual enough, they can remain single for life. God makes clear in 7:7 that singleness is a gift, and that marriage is certainly good and honorable, and what is right for most.

Space does not allow for an exhaustive look at chapter 7, but there are some key principles God establishes in this chapter that need to be noted:

7:2-5 Intimacy is not an option in marriage. The husband and wife are to give themselves to each other. A marriage that lacks intimacy distorts the picture of Christ and the church revealed in Ephesians 5:25-33.

7:10-15 Do not seek divorce. If there is a split, God desires reconciliation. However, if an unbelieving spouse departs, the believer is free.

7:18-24 Learn to be content. If you can improve your circumstances, go for it, but learn to be content.

7:25-40 Realize your marriage requires time, effort, and care.

In chapter 8, the next question the Corinthians posed was about meat offered to idols. They were asking this question in a way to get the answer they wanted — almost an “It’s okay to eat, right?” You can see by the development of the chapter that they already had their well-thought-through reasons it was okay, and were simply looking for Paul to agree with them, or condone their wishes. The Corinthians said, “We have knowledge! We know an idol is nothing”. God responds, “Knowledge is vain. It puffs up! The key is, do you have charity?” Chapter 8 is a redirecting of the question from, “Because we have knowledge and we know an idol is nothing we can eat this meat offered to idols even though it offends our brothers, right?” to “Do you love your brother enough not to eat it?” Notice the shift from, “What are my rights?” to “How can I care for my brother?” Yes, an idol is nothing, and no, there is nothing wrong in and of itself in eating meat offered to an idol. However, the overarching concern must be verse 9 — “Am I using my liberty in a way that causes others to stumble?” If so, I’m using my liberty as an occasion to the flesh and not only sinning against my brother, I am sinning against Christ (8:12).

In chapter 9, Paul illustrates from his own life, the principle of chapter 8. Verses 1-14 establish the authority and right that Paul and Barnabas had to be compensated for their work in the Lord. However, they chose not to exercise this right for the sake of the gospel. Paul had the right to be compensated, but he chose not to do this so that nobody would or could ever accuse him of doing what he did for money, and thereby hurt the cause of Christ. Rather, 9:20-23 reveals he chose to live as others to try and reach them with the gospel. In fact, he brings himself under control that he might be an effective messenger of the gospel. The question we need to ask ourselves is, “Do I place the priority on being as an effective minister of the gospel as I can be?” or “Do I place the priority on my rights and liberty?”

In chapter 10, God illustrates why we all need to have the mindset Paul just described in chapter 9. The illustration comes from the Old Testament and has to do with the Nation of Israel. Verse 1-4 reveal that all Israel experienced the same supernatural deliverance from Egypt, in the same way every true believer has experienced supernatural deliverance from sin and the world. However, most of them were overthrown in the wilderness. They are an example to us. Five areas did them in: lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting God, and murmuring. Verse 12 gives us a solemn warning. Sometimes we think we’re immune to certain sins. God says we better constantly be taking heed to His Word lest we fall. 10:13 is a very popular verse, however, don’t forget the context. The temptations that are common to man are the very things he just listed that the Nation of Israel faced. We need to be on guard, taking heed to what God’s Word says about the five

areas that caused most of Israel to be overthrown.

Then, Paul comes all the way back to dealing with the issue he started discussing in Chapter 8 – meat offered to idols. Verses 14-22 deal with actually participating in the religious experiences of those sacrificing to idols. Some Corinthians probably thought that since an idol is nothing what's the big deal if I go to my neighbor's religious service and participate with him. It's no big deal, right? Wrong! False religious services are actually a worship of Satan. They certainly don't look that way, but that is the spiritual reality. However, the meat that is sold afterwards is permissible to eat, just don't defile your conscience or the conscience of your brother. The key principles to apply to our life are found in 10:23- 24. I'm free to do what I want, but just because I'm free to do it doesn't mean I should! There are other issues involved, not the least of which is regarding my brother and not just my own selfish wants. This is also the context for 10:31-33. The glory of God is what should be the motivation for all we do. However, we're Laodiceans, and usually we are motivated by what profits us, not what profits others.

Think of the boldness of Paul to write verse 1 of chapter 11. This verse is often misquoted as if it says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." He doesn't say that. Paul says the very bold, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am [a follower] of Christ*". Notice the difference – "I'm a follower of Christ, you be a follower of me." He was telling these immature believers to start following him. God understands we that sometimes need a model to follow. Young or immature believers need a mature Christian to follow. However, God's desire is not for that to continue indefinitely. As a believer matures, they need to learn to stand (Gal. 5:1), and walk (Gal. 5:16) on their own two spiritual feet.

The next part, 11:2-16, is quite an interesting portion of scripture. Remember how the Corinthians asked that question to try and get the response they wanted? We typically do the same thing when we approach the issue of women wearing a covering on their head. We tend to approach this issue with the question, "Women don't really have to wear something on their head when they pray, do they?" Isn't it interesting how that is our first question. There are a couple of key points that help make this passage easier to understand. First, God is a God of order. That is clearly revealed in verses 3, 8-9. Second, Paul is dealing with a cultural issue. How do we know that? Let me answer that by asking another question – is hair the covering? Well, verse 15 says it is the covering given to a woman. But, is that the teaching of scripture? No, nature teaches us that. Is it wrong for a man to have long hair? Some say that it is because of verse 14. But again, keep in mind that that is a reference to nature, not to scripture. Different

cultures have different customs. That brings us to the third point. Notice verse 16. Paul is not instituting any biblical requirement upon these people or upon us. So the answer is no, women don't have to wear something on their head when they pray, unless, of course, the culture dictates it. Remember; don't seek your own profit, but the profit of others.

As Paul continues on in chapter 11, he rebukes them for their abuse of the Lord's Supper. They were using this time as a time to party and do what they wanted instead of remembering our Lord's death. God uses this passage as a reminder of the purpose of communion, and shows us:

- This is a very important and meaningful time to God. (11:27)
- We should examine ourselves before participating. (11:28)
- There are extreme consequences to not judging ourselves. (11:30)

Tuesday – December 5th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: I CORINTHIANS 12-16

OVERVIEW:

The body of Christ (chapter 12); the priority of charity (chapter 13); the boundaries for spiritual gifts (chapter 14); the resurrection of the dead (chapter 15); structure for orderly giving (chapter 16).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapter 12, Paul begins to correct the ignorance of the Corinthians regarding spiritual gifts. Remember the context – they think they've got it all together (4:10). They certainly didn't think they were ignorant about spiritual gifts. I mean, they were using their gifts; they were having services where the "Spirit" was literally overwhelming people. The only problem was, it wasn't the Spirit of God! God actually uses sarcasm in the passages we will look at today to rebuke the Corinthians.

God establishes three keys to spiritual gifts in verses 4-6:

1. There are different gifts.
2. There are different ways to administer your gift.
3. There are different ways to operate your gift.

However, there is one overarching principle guiding spiritual gifts. Verse 7 states that the purpose of the gifts is to "*profit withal*". In other words, the purpose of your spiritual gift is not for your benefit; it is for the benefit of the whole body. God then illustrates this point by using the example of our human body. The purpose for our hand is not for the benefit of our hand, it is for the benefit of our whole body. Through this illustration, God also emphasizes the necessity of all believers within a local church. Every member is necessary. Sometime believers can get the idea, or live with the feeling, that they are not as important as other members of the body. But the point of the passage is that every member of Christ's body is just as vital as any member of our own human body is to us. Because of that fact, as a body we are to care about one another; we're to rejoice when others rejoice and weep with those in sorrow. Because we so often live with a preoccupation concerning ourselves (II Tim. 3:1-2), instead of caring about one another, we're often jealous and/or envious of one another (Gal. 5:26).

Pay close attention to 12:28-31. The obvious answer to the questions being

asked is “No! We do not all have the same gifts. We each have different gifts.” Also look back at 12: 7-11. Do we get to choose our gift? No, the Holy Spirit imparts our gifts to us as He chooses. Verse 31 is one of those sarcastic phrases Paul uses to rebuke the Corinthians. First, he states their ignorance, and then he reveals an example of their ignorance. These people were coveting certain gifts (the “showy” gifts) even though we have no say in our gift and it is imparted by the Holy Spirit at His will. God is using sarcasm to illustrate immaturity in coveting “the best gifts”. God then reveals where their focus should be: not on what gifts I want to have, but rather, on a more excellent way. More excellent than what? More excellent than ignorantly trying to obtain different gifts or showing off the gift you do have!

The placement of chapter 13 is key to understanding spiritual gifts. Never lose sight of the context when studying scripture. Verses 1-3 of chapter 13 are a direct confrontation in the face of the Corinthians. They have the appearance of “spirituality” in their lives and in their church, but it is only an appearance. They’re consumed with the show of spirituality. God reveals that it doesn’t matter how much you speak in tongues, it doesn’t matter how many gifts you have and how well you use them, it doesn’t matter how much you give, if you don’t have charity in your life, it is all WORTHLESS. Before we condemn the Corinthians, why don’t we try to paraphrase this into something that is a little more applicable to us:

Though I am heavily involved in discipleship and even participate in the 365 Days of Pursuit, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I carry the correct Bible, and can divide it into the correct dispensations, and though I’ve gone through all of the layers and levels of training offered in my local church, if I don’t have charity, I’m just full of information and knowledge. And though I discover my spiritual gift, and do all kinds of things so that everyone else in the church thinks I have it all together, if I don’t have charity, I am really nothing more than a fat-headed Laodicean.

We can and do pursue a lot of things. Paul says that the excellent thing to pursue is charity. If we live our whole Christian life without ever really completely being able to identify our spiritual gifts, but we live a life of charity, we will have lived the life God wants us to live. God then describes what biblical charity looks like. How does your life line up with verses 4-7? That is how we can really determine where we are spiritually.

God completes this chapter by again revealing that charity is superior to the gifts themselves. In fact, He says there’s going to be a time when the “showy” gifts the Corinthians were so zealous for, will cease and disappear. We do not have the

time in this tool to get into all the reasons the sign gifts have ceased. However, it is important for each of us to have a basic understanding of why this is true, and if you are sketchy on this issue, you would do well to study it for yourself and talk with your discipler, or your pastors about it. In a nutshell, there were miraculous gifts given as signs in the period of time before the N.T. had been completed, for the purpose of authenticating both the messenger and his message (See Heb. 2:3-4). After the N.T. was completed, they ceased to have a biblical purpose.

Chapter 14 is a chapter that is often lifted out of its context (chapters 12-13), along with individual verses that are lifted out to form a faulty doctrine. For example, we have all heard someone say that the gift of tongues is a heavenly language that draws a person closer to God. Where does this come from? Most will show you verse 2 (speaking to God) and then verse 4 (edifies himself). One question will help you understand this chapter in its proper context – What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Are they for the benefit of the individual, or for the benefit of the body? We have already clearly seen that God emphasizes that they are for the body, not for the individual. Paul again is using their arguments (i.e. “I just speak to God and edify myself.”) in a sarcastic way to reveal their ignorance. Also, notice in verse 1 how God separates the term spiritual gifts from prophecy. There certainly is a spiritual gift of prophecy, but that is not what God is not talking about in this chapter. God is talking about the ability of every believer to prophesy (i.e. to proclaim the truth of God and His Word). Remember, does everyone have the gift of prophecy? No, but every believer can prophesy (proclaim the truth of God)! This is similar to the fact that there is a spiritual gift of giving and a gift of faith. However, every believer is called to give, as well as to exercise faith.

God spends the first half of chapter 14 showing the priority of speaking His truth in a manner in which people can understand, rather than trying to show off some spectacular gift. The second part of the chapter deals with the proper use of gifts within the body. The basic principle in verse 40 is that things are to be done decently and in order. Any church doing things in a crazy manner (most charismatic churches) are directly disobeying God’s Word. Even at the time of the writing of I Corinthians when God was still using these sign gifts to authenticate the messenger and his message, there was a specific prescription they were to follow to maintain “decency” and “orderliness”:

1. In a service, only two, or at the most three were permitted to speak in tongues. Also, they were to speak in turn, not at the same time. (14:27)
2. Someone was permitted to speak in tongues only if there was someone

present with the gift of interpretation of tongues as well. Otherwise, tongues were forbidden. (14:27-28)

3. Prophesying was likewise to be one at a time, but there was no limit to the amount of people who could prophesy (proclaim the truth). (14:29-31)
4. Women are not permitted to speak in tongues or prophesy in the service.(14:34-35)

Because the N.T. is complete, the sign gifts are no longer necessary. But even if they were operative today, I know of no churches that follow the clear instructions given for their use in this chapter. Certainly there are churches that do, I'm just saying I know of none. It's one thing to believe all the gifts are still operating today. It's quite another not to follow God's clear instructions for their use.

But not only were the Corinthians messed up on spiritual gifts, in chapter 15, Paul shows that they were also messed up on the resurrection. This chapter clearly lays out the priority of Christ's resurrection. Everything we believe is predicated on the fact that Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead. If that did not happen, we are the most deceived, disillusioned, pitiful and miserable people on this planet.

The fact is, however, Christ did rise from the dead! And just as in Adam we were born sinners; in Christ we are born righteous. As in Adam all die; in Christ we are all made alive. As in Adam we were born in his image; in Christ we are born in Christ's image. As in Adam we were born with a body like his; in Christ we will receive a glorified body like Christ's.

The resurrection of Christ and its subsequent benefits and promises should be the motivation that keeps us continually abounding in the work of the Lord. Are you "abounding" in the work of the Lord, or have you grown complacent and weary? If so, perhaps you have misplaced the importance and implications of the resurrection.

In chapter 16, God instructs the Corinthians concerning the best way to receive the offerings they were collecting to relieve the saints in the church at Jerusalem. Verse 9 reveals a truth we must always keep in mind: open doors and adversaries go hand-in-hand! Fulfilling our mission on this planet is not a walk in the park. It is a battle. Expect resistance. Expect difficulties. Expect adversaries, but, by all means, press on! Be strong in the Lord.

Wednesday – December 6th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: II CORINTHIANS 1-7

OVERVIEW: The comfort of God (chapter 1); instruction concerning forgiveness (chapter 2); the new covenant (chapter 3); the minister of the new covenant (chapter 4); the new covenant ministry (chapter 5); the new covenant temple (chapter 6); a restored church (chapter 7).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapter 1 reveals that God is not just the God of comfort, but the God of ALL comfort (1:3). We may not always feel His comfort. We may even wish He would speed up His comfort. But He is our God, and He will comfort us in our walk with Him. The question is, what will we do with that comfort? Will we just thank God and go about our way? Or, will we respond biblically and look for others who need the very comfort we have received. We need to be aware of the people God has placed around us, and comfort them when they need comfort.

Verse 12 of chapter one is a powerful verse regarding the life of the Apostle Paul. His rejoicing is in the fact that in good conscience and by God's grace, he has lived his life in simplicity and godly sincerity. Is that the testimony of our lives? Can we say with a clear conscience that we have lived a life of simplicity and godly sincerity toward God and others? We get so busy doing all kinds of different things, when in reality, only a few things really have eternal significance. Paul knew that, and lived his life accordingly.

Chapter 2 and verse 4 reveals the motive behind Paul writing the first letter to Corinth. He wasn't writing because he was mad at them or because they were embarrassing him. He wrote with a heavy heart because he loved them and wanted to see them walk in the truth. Apparently, they responded correctly and even dealt with the man living in sin in chapter 5 of I Corinthians. However, even though the man had repented, they weren't sure whether they should allow him back into their fellowship. God's instruction was to take back the repentant man. The goal of dealing with sin is always restoration. Even when someone has to be removed from the church, the goal is always for them to repent so they can be reconnected with the body. It also important to note, that this is also one of Satan's devices to gain control over us. Verse 11 reveals that not being willing to forgive opens up an opportunity for Satan to get a stronghold in our lives. How many believers have unknowingly allowed Satan to gain an advantage over them because they were unwilling to forgive? Have you?

In chapter 3, Paul declares that believers are actually living epistles that are known and read of all men. If you wanted to see what was important to the Apostle Paul, all you had to do was read his life. People were important. He spent his life investing the Word of God into the lives of people, whether they were saved or lost. Are there people in which you have invested the Word of God that are now living epistles that can be read of all men? What is the direction and priority of our life? We have been made able ministers of the New Testament. Not because we're anything special in and of ourselves. It's because when God saved us, He put His Spirit in us and "made" us able ministers! You may not feel you have very many talents or gifts, but God says that if you are saved, you are an "able minister". Do you believe God? In fact, do you realize that you and I have a more glorious ministry than Moses had? Can you believe that? We don't realize that we are ministers of a more glorious covenant than what Moses had. We don't realize that, because we typically look at life from a human perspective, rather than a divine perspective. What God wants is found in verse 18. He wants us to behold Him through His Word, so that we can be changed into His image. Is that what you want?

In chapter 4, Paul teaches us that there is a price to be paid for being conformed into the image of Christ. Our lives will be troubled; we'll be perplexed; we'll be persecuted; we'll be cast down; death will work in us; our outward man will perish; we will have affliction. That's certainly a great recruiting tool, isn't it? The fact is, there is a price to living a life surrendered to Christ, and allowing Him to minister through us. It's not something we bring on ourselves, but it will happen because this world system is against Christ.

Note however, that when we see with spiritual eyes, we see the other side. Though we are troubled, we won't be distressed. Though we are perplexed, we won't be in despair. Though we are persecuted, we won't be forsaken. Though we are cast down, we won't be destroyed. Though our outward man is perishing, our inward man will be renewed day by day. Though our lives are dying, the life of Christ will be revealed through our bodies. One perspective brings a life of eternal meaning, significance, and reward, while the other, though it may look and feel nice, is vanity.

Chapter 5 reveals that we will give an account of our service to the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is not a judgment of sin, that took place at Calvary. This is a judgment of our ministry after becoming believers. This is the same judgment talked about in I Corinthians 3. How often does the Judgment Seat of Christ come into your thinking? Paul said that it was one of the motivating factors in his life and ministry (5:10-11). Think about the context of this chapter. Chapter

3 talks about how God has made us able ministers of the New Testament. Chapter 4 talks about the life of God's minister. At the end of chapter 4, God reveals that we are His ambassadors and have been given the ministry of reconciliation. We have been made a minister, acting on God's authority, of bringing people into a right standing with God (reconciliation). Now, based on the context, what do you think is going to be the key issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ? While most believers are making sure they don't smoke, cuss, chew, drink, etc. (all important things), the real issue at the Judgment Seat is much larger than all of those things. The questions we need to be asking ourselves in preparation for that judgment are:

How profitable am I in my ministry of reconciliation? How am I fulfilling my role as God's ambassador? Am I actually ministering as a New Testament minister?

How humbling a thought in chapter 6 and verse 1, that we can receive the grace of God in vain. Does that mean someone can lose their salvation? No. However, we can waste the grace that the Lord has bestowed upon us. How? The key is the context. Think about everything we have come through in chapters 3-5. When we neglect the ministry of reconciliation; when we don't walk as God's ambassadors and when we're not ministering as a New Testament minister, we are wasting the precious gift of God's grace. We should follow the example of the Apostle Paul in verses 4-13, and in all things, approve ourselves as the ministers of God.

Chapter 7 lets us know that the church at Corinth had repented when they received the first letter from Paul. In this context, God describes two kinds of sorrow. First, "godly sorrow" that brings about true repentance. Secondly, "worldly sorrow" that brings about death. Worldly sorrow is the type of sorrow that Judas had. He knew he had done wrong, but he never turned to Christ to deal with his sin, and ultimately, he killed himself. Godly sorrow is what the Corinthians had. It brought them to true repentance. They saw their sin the same way God saw it. That's the response God is looking for in us when we sin. Most people will feel bad when they do wrong. The question, however, is whether it is godly sorrow or worldly sorrow. Sadly, many times it is a sorrow that never causes us to turn from our sin and to seek God; we just don't commit that sin for awhile to appease our conscience. However, we've never really dealt with that sin biblically. How do we know when it is godly sorrow and true repentance? Look at verse 11. True repentance will bring about carefulness, a clearing, and indignation against that sin, along with a fear of God, a vehement desire to follow God, and a zeal to live differently.

TODAY'S READING: II CORINTHIANS 8-13

OVERVIEW:

The grace of giving (chapters 8-9); Paul defends his ministry (chapter 10); the false religious system (chapter 11); Paul's final appeal to the Corinthians (chapters 12-13).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Today's reading provides the clearest and most complete principles on giving in the entire New Testament (chapters 8-9). The Corinthians had committed to supplying funds to help the church in Jerusalem, but at this point, they had not yet followed through on their commitment. Paul writes to exhort them to fulfill their promise, and in the process, lays out the New Testament pattern for giving. Note some of the principles gleaned from these two chapters:

1. Giving should result from us already having given ourselves to the Lord.(8:5)
2. Jesus Christ is the ultimate picture of giving. We will never give more than our Lord has already given. (8:9)
3. We should be a generous giver.(9:6)
4. We should purpose in our hearts what we believe the Lord wants us to give.(9:7)
5. We should give cheerfully. In other words, not because we have to but because we want to. (9:7)
6. Giving is a proof of the sincerity of our love.(8:8)
7. It is the grace of God that allows us to give sacrificially.(8:1-3)
8. God's grace can meet any need we have.(9:8)

We also read the simplest explanation of God's grace in 8:9:

G God's
R Riches
A At
C Christ's
E Expense

The ultimate gift is the grace that God has bestowed upon us. Perhaps grace is best understood by comparing it to mercy. Grace is God GIVING us what we DID NOT deserve. Mercy is God NOT GIVING us what we DID deserve. Take a minute to meditate upon the truth of 8:9. Meditate upon the price that Christ paid

to purchase our redemption. Are our lives living out this truth to the lost world around us? May we see giving, not as a burden, but as an opportunity to spread the grace of Christ to the lost world.

Chapter 10 show us that even though the majority of the church repented of the things Paul addressed in the first epistle, there appears to be some who still questioned Paul's authority to say these things. As Paul defends himself and his authority, he was able to keep in perspective who the real enemy was. This is the context for 10:3-5. It's easy for us to get to thinking that people are the enemy. We must remember that our warfare is not against flesh and blood. Our tendency is to begin to compare ourselves to the people we're ticked off at, or that did something to wrong us. However, 10:12 lets us know this isn't wise. That's how the world thinks. We need to remember that our standard is not a human standard, but rather, the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. In the final analysis, it doesn't matter how many people commend you or don't commend you. What matters is whether the Lord commends you!

Chapter 11 is a key chapter to understanding how our enemy operates in this world. What Satan attempts to do is the same thing he did against Eve. Satan wants to corrupt us from the simplicity in Christ. If you think about Adam and Eve, their "Bible" was pretty simple. In fact, it really only had two verses: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," and "don't eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." I mean how simple is that? Yet, Satan comes along, and by questioning the Word of God, is able to corrupt Eve from the simplicity of God's command. This is the same thing Satan wants to do to us. How does Satan do this? He sends people who preach "another Jesus" (Mormons and Jehovah's False Witnesses), or try and get you to receive "another spirit" (charismatic movement— Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin), or preach "another gospel" (Catholicism and other off shoots of Catholicism). We usually think Satan spends his time in the bars, crack houses, or other places we deem as wicked. God reveals in this chapter, however, that Satan spends most of his time at church! Satan's key work is within the sphere of religion. In fact, he still transforms himself into an angel of light. Satan's ministers (11:15) portray themselves as ministers of righteousness. They look good, they sound good, they're well-respected, but they proclaim a message that will not save, and they corrupt the simplicity found in Christ. A modern day example of such a minister is no doubt Robert Schueller. Now I'm sure he is a nice man. He looks good on television. He sounds genuine and sincere. He talks about the love of Jesus and the emptiness of life without Jesus. There's just one problem – he doesn't believe what the Bible says. He believes those that haven't heard the gospel can be saved by being a faithful follower of whatever it is that they believe. He believes

sin is a bad self image. This is a man that looks like a minister of righteousness who is really a minister of Satan. We must judge every message and messenger, not by externals, but by the pure Word of God.

Chapter 12 faces us with a very sobering question: Do we really believe God's grace is sufficient for us? I mean, when really it comes right down to it and we're going through infirmities, reproaches, persecutions and distresses, do we really believe God's grace is sufficient, or do we really just want the bad stuff to stop? What if it is during the tough times that the life of Christ shines the brightest in you? Let's face it, we don't really want to have to say *"for when I am weak, then am I strong."* And yet, we can look around our own local church and see people that have had to go through infirmities, or reproaches, or persecutions, or distresses, and we have seen the life of Christ shine through them. Do we really want to say to God, "Lord, do whatever you want to do with my life so that Your glory may be revealed to those around me"? After all of these years, I still pray that prayer with fear and trembling. The things of this world still have an appeal to me even though I know they are vanity. Some may be able to say, "As long as my family has their health I don't care what else we have." However, what do you say when God says it's through your infirmity, or the infirmity of one of your loved ones, that I want to reveal Myself? And what do you say when it's through a loved ones death that God wants to shine through your life? Is His grace still sufficient? May we seek to know Him so well, love Him so much, and be so desirous for His glory that we can honestly say, "Lord, your grace is sufficient for me."

The parting words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians in chapter 13 should be something we try to remember to do each day: examine ourselves. How often do we really take stock of how we're living our lives? It's not enough to simply do it on Sundays. We need to be judging and examining ourselves on a daily basis. Am I ministering how God wants me to minister? What kind of ambassador of Christ was I today? Am I looking forward to His return? Do I love Him? Am I living proof that His grace is sufficient?

Friday – December 8th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: GALATIANS 1-6

OVERVIEW:

The priority of grace in Paul's message and life (chapter 1); the priority of grace in Paul's ministry (chapter 2); the preeminence of grace over law (chapters 3 and 4); the priority of standing in liberty and walking in the Spirit in grace living (chapters 5 and 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Understanding the key issues facing the churches in Galatia causes the six chapters of this Book to be some of the most practical in the entire New Testament. The fact is, the 1st century "Galatian" problem is alive/and well in Christianity in the 21st century!

Let's begin with a little background information. Whereas the other letters written by Paul to local churches were addressed to one specific local church in one specific city (i.e. Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica), this letter was written to a group of local churches in a particular region. That region, known to us as modern day Turkey, was known in the 1st century as Galatia. It was this area that was settled by the Gauls of France, and thus became known as Galatia, or "Gaulatia," if you will. The local churches in this region were established by Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey. The specific churches were the churches in the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (of Pisidia) – see Acts 13:14-14:23.

Obviously, these churches were comprised of Gentiles believers who had responded to Paul and Barnabus' proclamation of the gospel which is received by grace through faith in Christ alone. After receiving Christ, Acts 14:22-23 lets us know that time was spent by Paul and Barnabus "*confirming the souls of the disciples*" in each of these churches, and making sure that "*they had ordained them elders in every church.*"

It was just that fact that so blew Paul away! Not long after Paul and Barnabus had grounded these churches in the truth, false teachers began infiltrating these churches with what Paul called "*another gospel.*" Much to Paul's utter shock and dismay, the "*disciples*" (Acts 14:22) and "*elders*" (Acts 14:23) in these churches dropped Paul and his gospel like a hot potato, for a false, powerless, and even damnable "gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul, literally, could not believe it! He writes,

(with his own hand by the way (6:11) – in other words, Paul didn't dictate this letter for someone else to write as he usually did. He was so passionate about the content of this letter, he wanted to write it himself, in spite of his obvious eye problems – 4:15 c.f. 6:11), but he writes using some of the strongest language and rebuke found in any of his letters.

These false teachers are known historically as “Judaizers” or “legalizers.” They were Jews, who like Paul before his conversion, were incredibly zealous for Judaism, or Jewishness, and thus, the title, “Judaizers.” Their basic point of attack upon these Galatian believers, was that at Gentiles, if they really wanted to be saved, and/or really wanted to stay saved, and/or really wanted to be “spiritual,” they would have to “become like them.” In other words, they would have to first become a Jew, and live under the ramifications of the law (and thus, the title “legalizers” or “legalists” — “legal” having to do with the law). Their teaching is epitomized in the words of Acts 15:1 – *“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”*

Paul's reaction to this false teaching is what prompted the writing of this scathing letter to those churches. Paul is absolutely livid with these false teachers, and the Galatian believers as well! He says that those who preach this false gospel give evidence that they are worthy of hell (1:8-9), and those who are swayed by it give evidence that they have not only been misinformed or deceived, but actually, “BEWITCHED” (3:1)! They were acting as if they were under a Satanic spell.

The content of this letter is of utmost importance, because the Judaizers of the 1st century were not the last of those who propagate that there is SOMETHING MORE that you need to DO in order to BE saved (i.e. be baptized, take communion, etc.), STAY saved (i.e. “Be like us. Dress like this, not like that; wear your hair like this, not like that; listen to this kind of music, not that kind; you can go to these places, but not those; etc., etc., etc.”) Understanding Paul's message is vital in keeping us off of the endless treadmill of legalism.

What the Galatians didn't understand, as is the case with most believers today, is that they were already as SAVED as they would ever be, and already as SPIRITUAL as they would ever be, and it's not because of what WE DO or DO NOT DO, it is based totally on WHO CHRIST IS, and what He has DONE! We were *“made the righteousness of God in Him”* the moment we were saved (II Cor. 5:21). It's hard to get more righteous than that! We were made accepted with God the moment we were placed in Christ – as accepted as He accepts Christ, His beloved Son (Eph. 1:6). And it's hard to be more accepted than that! And again, this is all totally apart from what WE DO or DO NOT DO!!! That lesson is

foreign to most believers, and comes hard! The difference, however, is the difference between legalism and a life of flesh-walking, and true, genuine biblical Christianity and a life of walking in the Spirit!

The message of the Holy Spirit through Paul to the Galatian believers and to believers today is, Christ, through His death, set us free from the law! Paul asks in 3:2 and 3, *“This is only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”* The obvious answer, is that it was through faith and by His Spirit that we were saved, and were placed on the road to maturity. Based on that reality, Paul admonishes us to first, learn to STAND — *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hat made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”* (5:1), so that we can learn to WALK — *“Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (5:16).

Understanding the practical ramifications of the Book of Galatians for new believers cannot be overemphasized. It will literally save 20 years (conservative estimate) of frustration, as the flesh tenaciously seeks and strives to produce what can only be produced by the Spirit (5:22-23) through the faith of Christ (2:16, 20 – see also Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:20-22). Pray that God will open your eyes to the wondrous truth (Psa. 119:18) in this incredible little Book of Galatians.

Saturday – December 9th, 2017

Reflection

As we reflect over this last week of Daily in the word, it's actually quite amazing how much ground we were able to cover in just five days. Yes, we were able to complete 1 Corinthians and read through both 2 Corinthians and Galatians, but more importantly we covered topics ranging from our love for God, to the grace of God, to our walk in Christ, leading us to the "simplicity that is in Christ". Before proceeding any further, what we can take away from just this thought is that our time of Daily in the word is of utmost importance. There is not a day that should be taken for granted or overlooked. In fact, even if for unforeseen reason we miss our daily reading, we have to do our best to pick it up on another day. Consider the topics above. There is not a single person reading that wouldn't benefit from a better, deeper understanding of anything listed. Beyond that, we only addressed a few of the topics that Paul expounded upon throughout the chapters and books we read. Missing one day should be a monumental deal to each and every one of us.

Paul, in writing to the church at Colosse in Colossians 1:9-12 writes, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light". Of course, for the purpose of application we highlighted the phrase "increasing in the knowledge of God", which we can all agree is impossible apart from a daily relationship and walk in the word of God. However, without a daily walk in the word, it will also be impossible to "be filled with the knowledge of his will", to be "fruitful in every good work", and to be "Strengthened with all might". Again, it should be a necessity to each of us that we read and meditate upon the word of God on a daily basis. It should be a necessity, but not of necessity that we do it. We should choose to do it because it's right, and because "ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:20)

As we mentioned in yesterday's devotional, it's truly incredible to see how God, through Paul, seemingly repeats Himself throughout the different books we read. Of course, we should know by now that when God repeats Himself it is His way

of turning up the volume on a subject, and drawing our minds to pay special attention to what's being said. Consider the times God speaks of His grace. Again, we can agree that, without doubt, His grace is something that should be emphasized. The word “grace” is actually mentioned 170 times in 159 verses throughout our Bible. It was used 25 times throughout our reading this week. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” Then in 2 Corinthians 9:8 he writes, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” . As we are reminded below, our Devotional Scripture was 1 Corinthians 15:10, which tells us, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” As we closed yesterday’s devotional, this should be reason for thanksgiving and praise. Even if things aren't going as we might have planned, or things seem bleak at the moment, we still have reason for praise based on Galatians 2:16 alone, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” In closing, as we bring this year of Daily in the word to an end over the next few weeks, may we stay faithful to His word, and may His word be cause for praise, and at the same time provoke us to action to change what needs to be changed and obey what needs to be obeyed. Amen and amen.

As we prepare for this 50th week of reading, and really for the final 3 weeks of this year’s pursuit, we will learn, even as we have already learned, much about our incredible Lord and Saviour and what is expected of us as believers in, and therefore followers of, Jesus Christ. But there is still so much to learn and apply of which it will take a lifetime to appropriate. This is one of the many exciting things of this adventuresome journey with Christ and the word of God. Life cannot be boring with Him!

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

1 Corinthians 8:3 “But if any man love God, the same is known of him.”

1 Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

2 Corinthians 1:12 “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.”

2 Corinthians 11:3 “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Galatians 2:16 “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”