

As we have already read, the Bible has historical narrative and doctrine as well as other forms of writing. In this upcoming quarter, we will see historical narratives like Gentiles coming to faith, Peter being set free from prison by an angel, and Paul's work in Ephesus. We will also have some instruction in doctrine such as justification by faith, the body of Christ and the gift of righteousness. May the Lord use these devotions to grow your faith.

## **WEEK 66 THE GENTILES ARE CONVERTED-----** -----Dennis Watson

The final step in the spread of the gospel begins in this week's passages. Jesus tells the disciples they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and all the world. The gospel catapulted from Jerusalem to the whole world. This week, the excitement mounts as the church moves beyond its original people, the Jews, and goes to the nations, the Gentiles.

### **Day 1**

#### **Read Acts 10:1-23**

The Lord was working to have the gospel spread to the whole world and it started among the Jews in Jerusalem. Several thousand Jews had already become followers of Jesus Christ as the gospel was preached and the message was about to make its way among the Gentiles. What started in Jerusalem was now moving into Judea and Samaria, according to God's plan. This account describes the Holy Spirit at work in two locations at about the same time preparing for the conversion of Cornelius and his relatives into the Jewish faith.

Cornelius was a Roman officer in charge of 100 soldiers in the Roman Army. He was a God-fearing Gentile who prayed to God faithfully and gave money to those in need. In Jeremiah 29:13, we read that a person will find the Lord if they seek Him with all their heart. God was ready to draw Cornelius to Himself. About three o'clock one afternoon, Cornelius had a vision in which the angel of the Lord spoke to him and told him to send messengers to Joppa and bring a man named Peter to him.

The next day, about noon, while Cornelius' men were traveling to Peter, the Lord gave Peter a vision in which He revealed to him what had been called unclean was now no longer unclean. Peter may have remembered Jesus told the disciples that it is not what you eat which defiles a man, but it is what comes from your heart that defiles you. (Mark 7:14-22) It took three visions for Peter to understand and be willing to eat what had once been called unclean.

Peter was trying to figure it all out when the men sent by Cornelius showed up at his door. Peter invited the men to spend the night and he lodged with them.

Is there something you have always believed to be right and now you believe it may be wrong? Are you unwilling to release that wrong belief? A few years ago, a man told me he did not like that I preached about the literal six-day Creation account found in Genesis. He told me he had always believed it took millions of years and he was unwilling to hear otherwise. Allow the truth of Scripture to break the bonds of things that you have always believed that just may not be true. It may be a breakthrough just like the one Peter experienced in this account.

Rejoice in how the gospel has spread and continues to spread, even today. We may not see its rapid expansion here, but all over the world millions are coming to Christ.

## Day 2

### Read Acts 10:24-35

The Pharisees were looked down upon because of their legalistic interpretation of the Law. However, early on, they had a very significant role as they were protectors and preservers of the Law. They were guilty of adding on to the Law with their overly strict interpretations. For instance, in regard to keeping the Sabbath, they added that you could not even touch a tool or carry anything on the Sabbath. They would not permit a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile because the Gentiles would eat unclean foods. For this reason, the Pharisees determined the Gentiles, themselves, were unclean. Peter also considered certain foods unclean, along with the Gentiles, themselves.

Cornelius was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the man the Lord told him to invite to his home. Cornelius had invited all of his close relatives and friends to hear the message from Peter. When Peter arrived with his entourage, Cornelius fell before him and worshipped him. Peter immediately told him he, too, was just a man.

Peter asked Cornelius why he had sent for him and Cornelius explained how an angel had appeared to him and told him to send for Peter and that he would come and speak to him. Peter began his explanation about Jesus, first telling Cornelius he now understood that God does not show partiality and that all who come to Him will be accepted.

What I love about this biblical historical account is the Holy Spirit working on both ends of this exchange. Please keep in mind God is always at work! He is at work in you, preparing you, and He is at work in others, preparing them, that we might all fulfill His work here on earth. Pray and be sensitive. Look around you and see what the Lord is doing and then jump in and join Him. Watch and listen and make yourself available to join the Lord in what He is up to.

## Day 3

### Read Acts 10:36-44

Peter came into Cornelius' home and after the exchange regarding why Cornelius had sent for him, Peter proclaimed the gospel to all that were present. A great spiritual awakening occurred that day. Peter preached about Jesus. He was certain in his message to connect Jesus to God. "He was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power." **Verse 38** He told how Jesus went about doing good and healing people because "...God was with Him." **Verse 39** He called Jesus "Lord of all." His message was that Jesus was crucified and Peter, along with others, was witness of all these things. He was sharing a message of his own personal experience regarding the historical event. Peter told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead on the third day and it was God who raised Him up. Peter told them he had seen Jesus alive after the resurrection with many others and had even eaten with Him after He was raised from the dead. He explained that Jesus was anointed by God and had told Peter and others to preach and testify that "He was ordained by God to judge the living and the dead." **Verse 42** The final part of his message was a very clear invitation that "Through His name, whoever believes in Him will have remission of sins..." **Verse 43**

Peter's message was very clear and concise. It was short, but truthful. The outcome was "The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word." **Verse 44** In fact, Peter was still speaking and the Holy Spirit interrupted!

I have to say it again, the Holy Spirit made all this happen! He spoke to Cornelius and prepared him and He spoke to Peter and prepared him. Cornelius invited Peter as the Spirit instructed him and he gathered friends and family. Peter followed the Spirit's instruction and went with the men sent by Cornelius. Then Peter preached the truth of Jesus and the Spirit brought conviction. What an incredible event!

Give praise and thanksgiving for God's wonderful Holy Spirit at work in the world!

## Day 4

### Read Acts 10:45-11:18

The gospel had been catapulted beyond the Jews to the Gentiles. It was no longer salvation only for the Jews, but had moved, as Jesus said it would, to the nations. After Peter gave the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit came much the way it did on the Day of Pentecost. Those present at Cornelius' house were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. For Peter and the Jewish believers present with him, this was confirmation that what had just happened was like that which they had experienced when the Spirit came upon them.

I like the way Warren Wiersbe put it: "After all, these men had not seen the vision with Peter and come to understand that the Gentiles were now on an equal footing with the Jews. This does not suggest that every new believer gives evidence of salvation by speaking in tongues, though every true believer will certainly use his or her tongue to glorify God."

God confirmed the entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom on that day. This was a biblical historical event with worldwide and eternal ramifications.

After the confirmation by the Holy Spirit, the whole group was baptized. News travels fast, especially when it may be considered bad news. For some, this event was initially received as bad news because they believed the salvation of Jesus was only for the Jews. The circumcised believers were Jewish believers. They called in Peter and his companions and questioned them about eating with Gentiles. Peter told them about the vision he had seen three times with the unclean animals which God pronounced clean and he told them that the voice in the vision said, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." **Acts 10:15** He then told about the men who had been sent to take him to Caesarea because a Gentile had also had a vision. He told them about the experience at Cornelius' house, how the whole household was saved, and the confirmation of the Holy Spirit convinced them it was legitimate. The Jewish believers then rejoiced that the Gentiles had also received salvation.

Breaking barriers! The gospel has always broken through barriers. This was a huge turning point in the whole Bible. The promise given to Abraham, that through him all the people of the world would be blessed, was becoming a reality! Give thanks to God for the barrier-breaking power of the gospel!

## Day 5

### Read Zechariah 9:10-11

In Verse 9, Zechariah prophesied that the King would one day come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Of course, this was prophecy concerning Jesus. The verses we are looking at today tell us that Jesus would bring peace to the nations.

How many times in my life have I heard people speak of world peace? Not only in my lifetime, but throughout history, people have been anticipating peace on earth. Today, as I write this, wars are going on all over the world, but what about the words of the prophet in Verse 10? He says that when the King, Jesus, comes, He will speak peace to the nations. When Jesus came the first time, He did bring peace. It is the peace which rules and reigns in the hearts of believers. However, when He comes again and establishes His eternal kingdom, true peace will reign everywhere. Warren Wiersbe stated: "His Word will go forth with power and there will be a general disarmament around the world. Chariots and war horses will be demobilized, every weapon will be destroyed, and "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4; see Micah 4:3).<sup>1</sup>

That is true peace! Let us connect another dot. Zechariah wrote in **Verse 11** "Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit." The exile will be over. All of those who have been captured, bound, enslaved, and kept in bondage will be set free.

Jesus came to bring deliverance to all. We will all ultimately be liberated from the shackles of sin and from the affairs and concerns of the world which keep us from experiencing true life. Life is found in the Lord God. He is life and apart from Him there is no life. Give thanks for the liberation and peace He has brought and will bring to you.

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<sup>1</sup>Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament The Bible Commentary - The Prophets





## WEEK 67 PETER FREED FROM PRISON----- -----Dennis Watson

As the church emerged onto the scene, so did persecution. As God blessed the expansion of the gospel message, so did attempts to stop its spread. The book of Acts is filled with the hostilities directed toward the first century believers and behind these hostilities was Satan himself. He used the governmental authorities to stop the message and the messengers. However, God's plan cannot be stopped. At the close of the book of Job, we read these words from him after all of his struggles: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted." **Job 42:2 (NIV)**

Just be reminded and encouraged!

### Day 1

#### Read Acts 12:1-4

As we follow the biblical historical records, it is interesting to see events unfold and reflect back to other connecting events earlier in the biblical record. Today, we see that Herod persecuted the church and arrested believers. He even went so far as to put James, the brother of John, to death. These two brothers were known as the "Sons of Thunder." On one occasion, their mother, Salome, came to Jesus to ask that He give them places of prominence when He came into His kingdom. Her request was specific, "... Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." **Matthew 20:21** Jesus told her she really did not know what she was asking. He said they would have to be baptized with His baptism, but He was speaking of His suffering and death. James and John responded that they would do that. Now, it has come to pass, at least for James that he really was baptized with Jesus' baptism of suffering and death. Herod had him put to death by decapitation. His brother, John, was not put to death, but was exiled to the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:9).

After killing James, Herod saw where it pleased the Jews and he quickly went after Peter. Herod had Peter arrested and put into prison under the watch of four squads of guards. There were

sixteen guards watching over Peter. Four rotating groups keeping watch so Peter could not escape nor be rescued by others. The plan was to execute Peter after the Passover.

Believers have always been persecuted by corrupt governments which have been and continue to be the main source of persecution. A corrupt government takes it upon itself to silence the One True God and His people. Be encouraged and be prepared for even greater persecution, even in our great country.

"It is good to know that, no matter how difficult the trials or how disappointing the news, God is still on the throne and has everything under control. We may not always understand His ways, but we know His sovereign will is best. "<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 1, p. 452). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## Day 2

### Read Acts 12:5-6

Peter was imprisoned and he was placed by Herod, under the guard of sixteen Roman soldiers. Four guarded him at a time on six hour rotations. Two were chained to him, one on the right and the other on the left and two were stationed at the door. Herod was serious about eliminating the possibility of the plotting of believers to come and rescue Peter from prison and his impending death. After all, there was still so much embarrassment because Jesus had disappeared from the grave while it had been guarded.

It is obvious Peter was one of those people who could sleep anywhere at any time. He had fallen asleep while Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter, James and John were with Him, but they fell asleep three times only to be awakened by Jesus each time. How could anyone sleep at such a time? On this particular day, Peter was chained to two Roman soldiers and was apparently sleeping soundly because the angel had to nudge him to wake him. Perhaps, at the time, he slept soundly because he was secure and confident in God's promises. He knew the people of the church were praying for him. Acts 12:5 Jesus had told him how he would die. I'm not sure how comforting these words were at the time, but he most likely was familiar with the words of the prophet Isaiah and the Psalmist: "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." <sup>19</sup>This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." **John 21:18-19**

"I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. " **Psalms 4:8**

Peter was comfortable because he knew he had been called and set aside to be a messenger of the gospel. He was secure, confident and at peace.

John Paton, a missionary to the South Pacific serving among cannibals once wrote in his journal, “I realized that my life was immortal till my Master’s work with me was done.”

## Day 3

### Read Acts 12:7-11

Angels play a big role in the book of Acts. We are told in **Psalm 34:7**, “The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.” In Acts 5:19, we read where an angel set the apostles free from jail and in Acts 8:26, an angel instructed Philip to go to a certain road, to meet the Ethiopian Eunuch and he led him to Christ. In Acts 10, we read where an angel gave instructions to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. He gave special instructions regarding a man named Peter, whom Cornelius was to send for. As a result, Cornelius and his household were saved.

While Peter was in prison, the believers were praying constantly for his deliverance. Then God sent an angel to the prison where Peter was being held; chained between two guards and two guards guarding the door. The angel nudged Peter waking him. The chains fell off and the angel instructed Peter to get dressed and to put on his shoes and follow him. The angel led Peter out of the jail through two guard posts and an iron gate. He led him into the city and then the angel departed.

Peter was now on his own. Notice the activity of the angel. The angel was about the miraculous work which only God could do. He woke Peter, removed the chains, led him out without the notice of the guards and caused doors and gates to miraculously open. Notice, also, the ordinary work of Peter. He put on his clothes and tied on his sandals and obediently followed the angel. Even though he was not sure if this was a dream or real, he still did his ordinary part.

Warren Wiersbe summarizes this beautifully: “God alone can do the extraordinary, but His people must do the ordinary. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but the men had to roll the stone from the tomb. The same angel that removed the chains from Peter’s hands could have put the shoes on Peter’s feet, but he told Peter to do it. God never wastes miracles. Peter had to stoop before he could walk. It was a good lesson in humility and obedience. In fact, from that night on, every time Peter put

on his shoes, it must have reminded him of the prison miracle and encouraged him to trust the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

God is with you with His power and strength, but you have to do your part in obedient trust.

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 1, p. 453). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## Day 4

### Read Acts 12:12-16

The work of the angel was finished. Peter had obeyed and trusted the angel. The angel left and Peter realized the prayers of the believers had made his deliverance possible. He decided to go to the place where they had been praying which was at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. When he arrived, Peter knocked on the door of the gate. In the homes of that day, particularly the more wealthy, there would have been an area beyond the door with a gate. Peter knocked on the door and a servant by the name of Rhoda opened the door and she could see and hear Peter. Rhoda left him standing beyond the door at the gate and she ran back in and told the others. They must have thought she was either crazy or Peter had been executed and it was his angel that had come.

Keep in mind, they had been praying for Peter's release for perhaps a week or more. Now that he was there among them, they were surprised and could not believe it. This is what many of us do. We pray specific prayers and when God answers, we are shocked and say, "I can't believe it."

Peter tells them to keep their excitement of seeing him down because the city was already in an uproar and the authorities may have already been looking for him. He told how the Lord had delivered him from prison and he gave instructions to tell James and the others about him and then he was on his way.

A great lesson to learn. When you pray, expect! Pray and start anticipating God to answer. Keep your eyes open, believing He will answer and then, wait on Him. I am sure those prayer warriors learned that lesson. They had to be encouraged and excited!

"My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him." **Psalm 62:5**



## Day 5

### Read Psalm 56

David had many enemies. On this occasion, he was fleeing from one of his enemies, King Saul, who had been trying to kill him. Saul was overcome by a distressing spirit from the Lord. He could not be relieved without some kind of comforting music which, through a search for a musician, David was brought to play his harp. Soon Saul became jealous of David and tried over and over to kill him. When David was fleeing from Saul, the Philistines, another enemy, captured him.

Like Paul, David had to deal with his enemies. First, we see David ask for mercy as he experienced oppression from his enemies. He had to struggle with those who hounded him all day. We know Saul was pursuing David, seeking to kill him. Secondly, we see David turn to the Lord. When he was hit with fear, he said he would trust the Lord. Where else can we turn, but to trust and depend on the Lord? He said he would trust God and praise His Word. Where do you turn when you are fearful? David concluded there was nothing the flesh could do to harm him. When you are fearful, trust and rejoice in God's Word.

Lastly, look at the last two verses of Psalm 56, we read David had found himself in a great place—absolute dependence upon God. Look at how those two verses are paraphrased in *The Message*: "God, you did everything you promised, and I'm thanking you with all my heart.<sup>13</sup> You pulled me from the brink of death, my feet from the cliff-edge of doom. Now I stroll at leisure with God in the sunlit fields of life." **Psalm 56:12-13 (MSG)**

God made very special promises to David. He had received a covenant from God that a King from David's descendants would forever be on the throne, and that King was Jesus.

This put David in a great place; a place of very significant responsibility. Since God had made this important promise to him, what

could man do to him that could thwart God's plan? David was in a sweet spot and the spot was one of being compelled by God to stay in the battle and trust in Him.

God has given you gifts and a calling. He wants you to use those gifts and fulfill your calling and nothing can thwart what He has determined. Stay in the battle and know, like David, that "God will keep your feet from falling so that you can walk before God."

**Psalm 56:13**



## **WEEK 68 JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH--Chris Watson**

Have you heard it said that the Gospel is Jesus plus nothing? Anything added to what Jesus has done is not the Gospel. A false gospel had entered the Galatian Church and it had to do with keeping the law. The church now believed if the Gentiles didn't follow the Law of Moses, they were not true believers. Truth is, NO ONE is saved by following the law, no one. We are saved by trusting in what Jesus did for us, by faith alone.

### **Day 1**

#### **Read Galatian 3:1-9**

Paul is pretty stern and straightforward in Galatians 3 and he believed Satan was using the false gospel to get true believers off the path of truth. Paul asked them several pointed questions. In Verses 2 and 3 he asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” and “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfectly by the flesh?” Think on these questions for a moment. In essence, Paul is asking them if they were saved by faith by the Spirit or, were they going to be made perfect by what they did or didn't do. It's obvious his questions were to help them remember and come back to the conclusion that it is by grace/faith that we are saved, but it can't be by just keeping the laws.

Paul gives a clear example of Abraham, who was clearly before Jesus, and even he wasn't saved by his works, but he believed God and it was credited to “... Him for righteousness.” **Verse 6** If Abraham wasn't saved by keeping the law before Jesus, then those of us who come after would not either. Salvation is not in what we have done, but what Christ has done. There is no salvation in us, we can't save ourselves. Salvation is not Jesus plus anything, it's just Jesus, trusting in Him alone. What is your salvation based on? Are you trusting in something you have done or in what Jesus has already done? We are saved by Jesus alone when we recognize our sin and know there is nothing we can do to make us right before God. We place our faith in what He has done for us and then we will desire to know and walk with Him.

## Day 2

### Read Galatian 3:10-14

"If we could have and continue to keep the law, God's death on the cross would have been pointless. That is if I could be perfect and never do anything wrong and sin against a holy God then I wouldn't need Jesus. However, we know from our own lives and just looking around us that our world is sick, it's sin sick and it needs Jesus. Paul tells us in verse 11 that no one is justified by the law.

An exposition of Romans 10:4, which says: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes," will help in understanding what it means that Christians are not under the law. The apostle Paul clarifies the effects of original sin in Romans 2:12, stating, "All who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." All men stand condemned before God, whether they are Jews or not, or to put it another way, whether they have the Law of God or not. Paul also states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

If we are without Christ, we are justly condemned in God's sight by the Law that was given to His servant Moses. However, we might argue that those who are not Jewish and therefore do not benefit from the knowledge of the Mosaic Law (including the moral and ceremonial laws), should not be condemned in the same way. This is dealt with by the Apostle in Romans 2:14-15, where he states that the Gentiles have the essence of God's legal requirements already ingrained and so are just as much without excuse.

The Law is the issue that has to be dealt with in order to bring us into a right relationship with God. "Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (Galatians 2:16). This passage reveals that the Law cannot justify or make righteous any man in God's sight, which is why God sent His Son to completely fulfill

the requirements of the Law for all those who would ever believe in Him.

Christ Jesus redeemed us from the curse that has been brought through the law by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). He substituted Himself in our place and upon the cross took the punishment that is justly ours so that we are no longer under the curse of the Law. In doing so, He fulfilled and upheld the requirements of the Law. This does not mean that Christians are to be lawless, as some advocate today—a teaching called antinomianism. Rather, it means that we are free from the Mosaic Law and instead under the law of Christ, which is to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Christ became the end of the Law by virtue of what He did on earth through His sinless life and His sacrifice on the cross. So, the Law no longer has any bearing over us because its demands have been fully met in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ who satisfied the righteous demands of the Law restores us into a pleasing relationship with God and keeps us there. No longer under the penalty of the Law, we now live under the law of grace in the love of God.<sup>4</sup>

Whose law are you under? God has saved us by His grace. When we receive that grace, we walk in that grace. Then we spend our time loving Jesus with all we have and loving others as ourselves.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/not-under-the-law.html>

## Day 3

### Read Galatian 3:26-29

"Christ did the work, we simply believed in His finished work; that's it. Paul says in verse 27 that not only were they (and us) baptized into Christ but being that they had, they have also put on Christ, so therefore the identity that only mattered was who they were in Christ. All are on a level; all are saved in the same way; all are entitled to the same privileges. There is no favoritism on account of birth, beauty, or blood. All confess that they are sinners; all are saved by the merits of the same Savior; all are admitted to the same privileges as children of God. The word "Greek" here is used to denote the Gentiles generally; since the whole world was divided by the Jews into "Jews and Greeks"—the Greeks being the foreign nation best known to them. The Syriac renders it here "Aramean,"—using the word to denote the Gentiles generally. The meaning is, that whatever was the birth, or rank, or nation, or colour, or complexion, all under the gospel were on a level. They were admitted to the same privileges, and endowed with the same hopes of eternal life. This does not mean that all the civil distinctions among men are to be disregarded. It does not mean that no respect is to be shown to those in office, or to men in elevated rank. It does not mean that all are on a level in regard to talents, comforts, or wealth; but it means only that all men are on a level in regard to religion. This is the sole point under discussion; and the interpretation should be limited to this. It is not a fact that men are on a level in all things, nor is it a fact that the gospel designs to break down all the distinctions of society. Paul means to teach that no man has any preference or advantage in the kingdom of God because he is a rich man, or because he is of elevated rank; no one is under any disadvantage because he is poor, or because he is ignorant, or a slave. All at the foot of the cross are sinners; all at the communion table are saved by the same grace; all who enter into heaven, will enter clothed in the same robes of salvation, and arranged, not as princes and nobles, and rich men and poor men, in separate orders and ranks, but mingling together as redeemed by the same blood, and arranged in ranks according to their eminence in holiness<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Barnes, A. (1884–1885). Notes on the New Testament: II Corinthians & Galatians. (R. Frew, Ed.) (pp. 352–353). London: Blackie & Son.

No matter if you are rich or poor, large or small, black or white, male or female or young or old, our identity is found in who He is and what He has done. Everyone comes to Jesus the same way!



## Day 4

### Read Galatians 3:15-25

"The meaning is, that the law was given to show the true nature of transgressions, or to show what was sin. It was not to reveal a way of justification, but it was to disclose the true nature of sin; to deter men from committing it; to declare its penalty; to convince men of it, and thus to be "ancillary" to, and preparatory to the work of redemption through the Redeemer. This is the true account of the law of God as given to apostate man, and this use of the law still exists. This effect of the law is accomplished, (1.) By showing us what God requires, and what is duty. It is the straight rule of what is right; and to depart from that is the measure of wrong. (2.) It shows us the nature and extent of transgression by showing us how far we have departed from it. (3.) It shows what is the just penalty of transgression, and is thus fitted to reveal its true nature. (4.) It is fitted to produce conviction for sin, and thus shows how evil and bitter a thing transgression is; see Notes on Rom. 4:15; 7:7–11. (5.) It thus shows its own inability to justify and save men, and is a preparatory arrangement to lead men to the cross of the Redeemer; see Note on ver. 24. At the same time, (6.) The law was given with reference to transgressions in order to keep men from transgression. It was designed to restrain and control them by its denunciations, and by the fear of its threatened penalties. When Paul says that the law was given on account of transgressions, we are not to suppose that this was the sole use of the law; but that this was a main or leading purpose. It may accomplish many other important purposes (Calvin), but this is one leading design. And this design it still accomplishes. It shows men their duty. It reminds them of their guilt. It teaches them how far they have wandered from God. It reveals to them the penalty of disobedience. It shows them that justification by the law is impossible, and that there must be some other way by which men must be saved. And since these advantages are derived from it, it is of importance that that law should be still proclaimed, and that its high demands and its penalties should be constantly held up to the view of men. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Barnes, A. (1884–1885). Notes on the New Testament: II Corinthians & Galatians. (R. Frew, Ed.) (pp. 344–346). London: Blackie & Son.

Verse 24 tells us that the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ. The law was our teacher to show us that we couldn't keep it. The harder we try, the worse we break the law, which is why we need Jesus. When we die to ourselves and live to Jesus we begin to have victory. No longer is the law our tutor, but it is the Holy Spirit. Praise the Lord.

## Day 5

### Read Genesis 15:1-6

**Verse 6** of today's Old Testament passage tells us Abraham "Believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Abraham put His trust in the Lord and God credited to him as righteousness. When I think of the word believe, I think of Moses as he lifted up the snake in the dessert. All those who believed Moses, looked at the snake and lived. We know the Gospel tells us, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the dessert, so that Son of Man must be lifted up." **John 3:14** The Israelites looked to the snake and lived and all who look to Jesus will live.

The word believe in this passage is not like my belief in Santa, the tooth fairy or if I believe the weather man will get it right. It is "I believe whole heartedly with all I have." If my belief requires an action I will look to Jesus. We know there were some in the New Testament who believed in Jesus, because they saw the miracles He did (John 2:23) but Jesus did not commit Himself to them (John 2:24). They believed with their eyes He was a good man who could perform miracles, but they didn't trust Him for salvation. May we look to Him for salvation alone (justification) and may we continue to look to Him each day to save us from ourselves (sanctification).

May we not only trust Him for salvation, but with our lives by sharing our faith so others might believe.



## WEEK 69 THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT-----

-----Chris Watson

We know an apple tree produces apples and an orange tree yields only oranges. It should be with Christ's followers that they produce godly fruit. If we are walking with Jesus, He will grow His fruit in us. At times, we may veer off and notice that we are bearing ungodly fruit. When this happens, we must repent and spend more time with Jesus. As you read through this week's devotions, ask, "What kind of fruit am I bearing?" This week, we are making a big jump to the book of Galatians. In many of Paul's letters, he addressed the Church and gave them direction and guidance, which is true of the passages we'll study in this week's devotions.

### Day 1

#### Read Galatians 5:1-15

Paul often dealt with the issue of law and grace. Remember, the Jews were having a hard time understanding grace. Jews were really focused on the Law, particularly on circumcision, going all the way back to Abraham in Genesis 12. As part of this Abrahamic covenant, all males were to be circumcised. At this point, however, Jesus had come and ascended into heaven, providing salvation from sin. Debate continued in the Church about whether or not circumcision should continue, about whether or not it was needed for Christ followers. The matter here was that some were still seeking to be justified by the Law, rather than simply receiving and being justified by God's grace.

Warren Wiersby gives this example "Imagine a motorist driving down a city street and deliberately driving through a red light. He is pulled over by a policeman who asked to see his driver's license. Immediately the driver begins to defend himself. 'Officer, I know I ran that red light but I have never robbed anybody. I've never killed anybody. I've never cheated on my income tax.' The policeman smiles as he writes out the ticket, because he knows that no amount of obedience can make up for one act of disobedience. It is one law, and the same law that protects the obedient man punishes the offender. To boast about keeping part of the law while at the

same time breaking another part is to confess that I am worthy of punishment.”

No amount of keeping the law can save us, which is why we need grace. This is Paul’s point. We are to keep laws, per se, but the focus is on the fact that we are saved by God’s grace alone and that we should live our lives in such a way that our actions testify to our love for God. Our love, not keeping the Law, is what should compel us.

When you live by grace, you depend on the power of the Spirit, but under the Law you depend on yourself and your own efforts. Praise God we are not seeking to keep some 613 laws like the Jews in the Old Testament. What we are to do is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves. If we are loving God and loving others as we ought to, then we are following God. We are not under the Law, but under God, and under God we will want to follow Him. Are you seeking to live by the law or grace? Grace is free and Christ’s love compels us. Love God and love others and see what God can do in and through you.

## Day 2

### Read Galatians 5:16-23

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” **Verse 18** Paul wrote we are under God’s grace and love and are not under the law any longer; rather, we are to be under the leading of the Holy Spirit. When we are under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, we want to love God, love others, and walk with Him; at the same time, we see God work on our hearts and minds as we grow in Him. This is called Holy Spirit living.

Are you living by the Holy Spirit, the Law, or your own selfish desires? If we live by our own desires, we live in sin and become hateful, idolatrous, lewd, envious, and worse. As believers, if we live by the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is proof that the Holy Spirit resides in us. Do you find yourself being loving to others? Do you have the joy that only God can give through salvation in Him? Do you have peace even in difficult times? Over time, do you find yourself being more patient? Do you show kindness and compassion to all people? Do you seek to do good to others and be faithful in your relationships with God and others? Is God’s gentleness flowing through you? The overall question is this: Are you under the control of yourself or under God’s control? Selfcontrolled in the context of this Scripture means under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Over the last month or so I have prayed for myself, my family, and our Church to be led by the Spirit. That is truly my desire. I want to follow the Spirit in my family, work, Church, and day-to-day life. Do you? Are you controlled by the Holy Spirit or by your own fleshly spirit? Today, ask God to help you follow where His Spirit is leading you. When you feel your desires seeking to take the place of His, stop and ask Him to overcome your desires. Think through it this way:

How can I be controlled by the Spirit in my family life today (spouse, kids, etc)?

How can I be controlled by the Spirit at school?

How can I be controlled by the Spirit at work?

How can I be controlled by the Spirit on the ball fields, at band practice, with the guys or girls, or with friends or enemies?

How might God's Spirit lead and guide you today?



## Day 3

### Read Galatians 5:24

Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” **Galatians 2:20** If you compare this with our verse today, they go hand in hand. When we trusted Jesus as our Savior, we said not only that we were putting our faith in Jesus, but also that we were dying to ourselves and allowing Him to reign in our hearts and lives.

Romans 12:1-2 tells us to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, giving ourselves to God, so that He might transform us. Have you heard it said that the problem with a living sacrifice is that it has a tendency to walk off the altar? We still have to struggle with sin and our old ways, because we are in a sinful world, but God can overcome our weakness. God wants all of us, 100%, and we are to present our bodies and ourselves to Him daily and sometimes it might be many times throughout each day.

Do you see ungodly areas in your life which seem to creep back up? Don't focus on getting them under control, instead, focus on getting rid of them. The only One who can do this is God. Give Him all of yourself and seek Him and His heart. When we seek Him with all we have, we will begin to see ungodliness disappear. Our focus will no longer be our desires and flesh, but God's!

## Day 4

### Read Galatians 5:25-6:1

We have all heard the quote, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” This simply means I am no better than anyone else; in fact, there is no good in me except what God has given. Paul wrote, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” **Romans 12:3**

Our verses today remind us not to become conceited, provoking, or envious of others, possibly thinking we could never be the worst sinner. We are all sinners and we need to be reminded we are all on the same level at the foot of the cross. Paul told us that when we seek to restore a brother in sin, we are to do so with gentleness of God’s Spirit and consider ourselves also, that the only thing keeping us from where they are is God and God’s work in our lives.

Warren Wiersbe says that the spiritual man will seek to restore the brother while the legalist would seek to exploit the brother. Which are you? If another believer is in sin, do you exploit the situation? We may not think of it like that, but do we think, “Well, suits them right” or “They got what they had coming,” or are we praying for them, loving them, and seeking to restore them so they can walk again in love and truth?

As believers, we should desire that other believers always walk in truth. We should celebrate when they celebrate and mourn when they mourn and, if caught in sin, do as Paul said, gently and privately seek to restore them. Remember Jesus’ words, “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” **Luke 15:4-**

Do you need to make things right with God today? Are you praying for brothers and sisters to make things right? In all, remember, “There but for the grace of God, go I.”

## Day 5

### Read Jeremiah 9:23-26

Today's passage reminds us we are to boast and glory only in the Lord. As the Scripture says, we are not to glory in our wisdom, our might, our riches, what we have, who we know, or what we do. Instead, we are to glory only in the fact we know God and God knows us.

Jeremiah went on to remind the Israelites, and us, that we are not made right by our actions, but rather by what is in our hearts. The Israelites were stuck on circumcision, as we have already seen, and the Pharisees and other religious leaders were all about keeping the Law.

We must be reminded that we are not made right with God and assured eternity with Him based on what we have done; rather, it's based on what He has done. From our salvation, we proceed to love, grow, change, and follow Jesus every day. We don't follow Jesus so we can be saved; we follow Jesus because we are saved. There is a huge difference between the two. Praise the Lord, for you and I could never do enough to enter into a relationship with God.

How will you rest in the finished work of Jesus today? Are you striving for Him to love you or to be pleased by you? Stop striving! Rest in His love and grace and in so doing, Jesus will produce actions and changes in us which are a result of what only God can do.



## **WEEK 70 PAUL PREACHES TO THE PHILOSOPHERS IN ATHENS-----Chris Watson**

Paul's missionary journeys took him to some very interesting places and to some very interesting people. This week, we look at Paul's persistence in daily presenting the gospel, no matter the people and no matter the circumstances. We can learn much from his approach and persistence. As you do this weeks devotions, ask the Lord to enable you to be persistent and to never stop and never give up.

### **Day 1**

#### **Read Acts 17:1-9**

This chapter opens with the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey in the city of Thessalonica. When Paul entered a city and if that city had a Jewish Synagogue, he would go there and talk to the people about the Old Testament scriptures. He would then lead the discussion to the topic of Jesus and His death and resurrection. He would present Jesus as the Christ, the Greek term for Messiah. "And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas." **Verse 4**

The Jews were not convinced and they were jealous of what was taking place. They believed Paul and his companions were presenting a message competing with their Jewish faith. They did not understand that the message of the gospel was a fulfillment of the Jewish faith and was not at all a competing message. This is often the case when people do not hear or are not open to truth. To the Jews, this sounded foreign although Paul began preaching the Old Testament prophecies and showed how Jesus fulfilled them.

As a result of Paul's preaching, there was a mob organized to rally against those who were teaching and those who were sympathetic to the gospel message. The people opposing the message caused a stir, so Paul and his companions were sent on to their next place to preach the gospel.

Often, it is wise to move on to a place or a people who are more receptive to your message. You can return at a later date to try again if they are not receptive. Some people are quickly receptive and some are open, but not immediately receptive. Be patient and continue to reach out and talk with them about the gospel. Pray that the Lord will open their heart if they reject the gospel. Continue to pray and keep doors open. There may come a time for you or someone else to reap the harvest.

## Day 2

### Read Acts 17:10-15

The people of Berea were totally different from those he left in Thessalonica. In Berea, the people joined in with Paul as learners. They were eager and, “Were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” **Verse 11** They were the kind of people pastors and teachers welcome! They wanted to learn and know the truth and to know why they believed it.

Bereans wanted to learn and be strengthened in belief. They had legitimate questions and they needed answers. We need to be ready to teach and disciple, and to be ready to come alongside people to help them grow and become disciplers themselves.

As we present the truth to people, remember we will encounter many types of resistance, indifference and hostility, just to name a few. Do not grow weary. Do not see rejection as permanent. People often need to see your patience and care. As the saying goes, “People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Do you have people with whom you have been reaching out to with the gospel? Have you quit or given up? Pray for them, and continue to reach out. Leave the results to the Lord.



## Day 3

### Read Acts 17:16-21

Paul and his entourage continued their journey, arriving in Athens. This was a place like no other he had experienced. He went to the synagogue and then on to the market place where he encountered the locals who were of non-Jewish persuasion. He also encountered Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. They were curious about what Paul was preaching, so they took him to a amphitheater called the Areopagus.

J. Vernon McGee writes this about these two groups: The philosophy of the Epicureans was more or less hedonistic (self-indulgent; pleasure-seeking). The Stoics, a group who believed in restraint, were what we today call stoical. The Epicureans believed that you go the limit, and in that way you could overcome the flesh. They thought that you should give the flesh all that it wants. If it wants liquor, drink all you can hold. Concerning sex, believe me, the Epicureans could really join in the "new morality," which was nothing new for them. By contrast, the Stoics believed that the body should be held under control. (Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee).

Paul was troubled by the philosophy and idolatry in Athens. Most believers are intimidated by the philosophy that surrounds them in their world, but the truth of the gospel is what everyone needs in spite of their current philosophy. The Stoic and Epicureans wanted to hear to make sure they had not missed something. They wanted to hear, and Paul was ready to oblige their curiosity. They were somewhat open. We need to be prepared to tell people what we believe and why we believe it. Everyone has a philosophy about life even if it was not intentionally chosen. Bold and courageous people, like Paul, need to speak up speak often and speak out. Many may hear and realize they had the wrong view of life or they had no view at all.

Keep telling the truth. Do not back down and do not be rude or arrogant. "... Be as wise as serpents and gentle as doves. **Matthew 10:16** Remember, "... the goodness of God leads to repentance" **Romans 2:4.**

## Day 4

### Read Acts 17:22-34

Paul provides us with a great example of reaching out to non-Jews and those who may have some connection to religion. I have often heard that religion is man's attempt to reach God and Christianity is God's attempt to reach man.

I really like what Tony Evans says about this:

When evangelizing Jews, Paul sought to show them from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah. When evangelizing Gentiles who didn't know the Bible, Paul started with their general interest in religion, moved to the living and true God who created the world, explained human sin and accountability before God, and then made his way to Christ. His approach serves as a good model for our own evangelism efforts. We must tailor our methods to meet our listeners where they are and take them to what they need—the gospel, the free gift of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone. (Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda).

The message was concise.

Verse 23—He met them where they were. “Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.”

Verses 24-26—He told them that God is the Creator God.

Verses 27-29—Because of who God is, they should seek Him, find Him and know Him in the person of Jesus. God is judging the world.

Verses 30-31—God is seeking them to repent and turn to Him in surrender and obedience.

The response is what we should expect. Some will mock and reject, others will want more information and instruction, while yet others will believe and follow Jesus. Our role, like Paul, is to deliver the truth with as much clarity as possible and leave the results to God.

Almost on a daily basis, I get something at my house from Amazon, UPS or the USPS. Some of it, I asked for, ordered, expected, and some I did not, but I was receptive. Still some, I just tossed because I did not need nor want. Our task is to present the truth and ask the Lord to use us to make the need for the truth known. Paul did that and we need to become daily more proficient to do the same.

## Day 5

### Read Isaiah 55

Isaiah 55:10-13 is about the power and reliability of the Word of God. Paul had confidence that when he taught, preached and presented the Word of God, it was powerful and reliable to accomplish God's purpose. The illustration in Verse 10 is how the rain and snow come down and provide water for the earth. The earth brings forth plants and seed and provides food and more seed for planting and harvesting.

The Word of God is preached, taught, presented and shared by many in various ways. It will bring forth results. We can count on it. We may not see it now and we may not hear the testimonies, but we know of the power and reliability of God's Word. God will bring results but we may not see or hear about them until eternity.

When I think of the reliability and power of God's Word this quote encourages me.

**“Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed.”** Robert H. Schuller

When you see one person come to the Lord, the Lord sees all of the others who will be saved as a result for generations to come. God knows how far the message goes and we know it goes way beyond what we could ever measure!



# WEEK 71 THE COMFORT OF CHRIST'S COMING AND THE DAY OF THE LORD-----

-----Chris Watson

It's amazing to have God's Word. Not only does it remind us of the Truth, but it also foretells what's to come. It gives us hope of what's ahead and what we can expect. The Church at Thessalonica was concerned about death and particularly their loved ones who had already died. God used Paul to comfort them, which in turn, comforts us today.

## Day 1

### Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

"The pagan world during Paul's time had no hope of life after death, in fact a typical inscription on a grave would say, "I was not, I became, I am not, I care not." The believers in Thessalonica were concerned about their loved ones who had died. What if the Lord should return? Would their deceased loved ones be handicapped in any way? Will those who are alive at His coming have an advantage over the believers who have died?

We don't have to wander about life after death and in particular those who have already passed (sleeping). Here in this passage and in 1 Corinthians 15:53 we read how the dead in Christ will be raised. The heavenly kingdom is not made for the kind of bodies we now have, bodies of flesh and blood. So when Jesus returns, the bodies of living believers will instantly be transformed to be like His body (1 John 3:1-3), and the dead believers shall be raised with new glorified bodies. Our new bodies will not be subject to decay or death.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychiatry, wrote: "And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be." Christians have victory in death and over death! Why? Because of the victory of Jesus Christ in His own resurrection. Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall also" (John 14:19).

Paul did not say that the soul went to sleep at death. He made it

clear that the soul of the believer went to be with the Lord: “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him” (1 Thes. 4:14). He cannot bring them when He returns unless they are with Him. It is not the soul that sleeps; it is the body.

The Bible definition of death is given in James 2:26—“For as the body without the spirit is dead.” At death, the spirit leaves the body, and the body goes to sleep and no longer functions. The soul-spirit goes to be with the Lord, if the person has trusted Jesus Christ. “Absent from the body, and ... present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

The fact of our Lord’s return is comfort to us in bereavement, because we know that He will bring with Him His people who have “died in the Lord.” I recall stating to a friend, “I hear you lost your wife. I’m very sorry.” He replied, “No, I didn’t lose her. You can’t lose something when you know where it is—and I know where she is!” On the authority of the Word of God, we also know what will happen: Jesus Christ will one day return and bring His people with Him.”<sup>7</sup>

We can be confident not only in life after death but in knowing those who have gone before us, Christ will take to Heaven with Him when He returns.

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<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 619–620). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## Day 2

### Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

"When will this event occur? Nobody knows, and it is wrong to set dates. The fact that Paul used the pronoun we in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17 suggests that he expected to be alive when the Lord returned. Theologians call this the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. Imminent means that it can happen at any moment. As Christians, we do not look for signs, nor must any special events transpire before the Lord can return. These great events will take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52). When Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection to the Athenian philosophers, most of them mocked him (Acts 17:32). To the Greeks, being rid of the body was their great hope. Why would any man want to have his body resurrected? Furthermore, how could his body be resurrected, when the elements of the body would decay and become a part of the earth? To them, the doctrine of resurrection was foolish and impossible.

When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will issue the "shout of command" and the "dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thes. 4:16). This does not mean that He will put the elements of the body together again, for resurrection is not "reconstruction." Paul argued for the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:35ff. He pointed out that the resurrection of the human body is like the growing of a plant from a seed. The flower is not the identical seed that was planted, yet there is continuity from seed to plant. Christians shall receive glorified bodies, like the glorified body of Christ (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:47-58). The dead body is the "seed" that is planted in the ground; the resurrection body is the "flower" that comes from that seed.

Passages like John 5:28-29 and Revelation 20:1-6 indicate that there are two resurrections in the future. When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will call to Himself only those who are saved through faith in Him. This is called "the first resurrection" or "the resurrection of life." At the end of time, just before God ushers in the new heaven and earth, there will be another resurrection. This is called "the second resurrection" or "the resurrection of judgment." Between these two events, I believe that the Tribulation on earth and the 1,000-year-kingdom will occur.



Three unique sounds will be involved in this event: The Lord's shout, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of the archangel. Jesus Christ will give "a shout of command," just as He did outside the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:43). Those "in the graves shall hear His voice" (John 5:28).

The Christian doctrine of resurrection assures us that death is not the end. The grave is not the end. The body goes to sleep, but the soul goes to be with the Lord (Phil. 1:20–24). When the Lord returns, He will bring the soul with Him, will raise the body in glory, and will unite body and soul into one being to share His glory forever. This leads us to the fourth fact that gives us comfort and assurance in the face of death.

Now the word rapture is not used in this section, but that is the literal meaning of "caught up." The Latin word *rapto* means "to seize, to carry off"; and from it we get our English word "rapture."

Warren Wiersbe says, "I once heard the Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest, preach on this passage and explain the various meanings of the Greek word that is translated "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Each of these meanings adds a special truth to the doctrine of our Lord's return.

"To catch away speedily." This is the translation in Acts 8:39, where the Spirit "caught away Philip" after he had led the Ethiopian to Christ. When the Lord returns in the air, we who are alive will be caught away quickly, in the twinkling of an eye. This means we should live each moment in the expectation of our Lord's return, lest He come and find us out of His will (1 John 3:1–3).

"To seize by force." See John 6:15. Does this suggest that Satan and his armies will try to keep us from leaving the earth? I trust it does not suggest that some of the saints will be so attached to the world that they must literally be dragged away. Like Lot being delivered from Sodom, they will be scarcely saved (Gen. 19:16).

"To claim for one's own self." This views the Rapture from our Lord's point of view as He comes to claim His bride.

"To move to a new place." Paul used this word when he described his visit to heaven (2 Cor. 12:1–4). Jesus Christ has gone to prepare a home for us (John 14:1–6), and when He comes, He will take us

to that glorious place. We are pilgrims and strangers in this world. Our true citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20–21).

“To rescue from danger.” See Acts 23:10. This suggests that the church will be taken home before the time of Tribulation that will come to the world from God. First Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 seem to state this clearly.

You and I shall meet the Lord in the air, in person, when He comes for us. The Greek word translated “meet” carries the idea of meeting a royal person or an important person. We have walked with Christ by faith here on earth, but in the air we shall “see Him as He is” and become like Him (1 John 3:1–2). What a meeting that will be! <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

## Day 3

### Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

"Believers do not have to fear future judgment because it is not part of God's appointed plan for us. Will Christians go through the Day of the Lord, that awful period of judgment that God will send on the earth? I think not, and verses like 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 seem to support this. Christians have always gone through tribulation, since this is a part of dedicated Christian living (John 15:18–27; 16:33). But they will not go through the Tribulation that is appointed for the godless world.

I realize that good and godly students of the Word disagree on this matter, and I will not make it a test of fellowship or spirituality. But I do believe that the church will be raptured to heaven prior to the Tribulation period. Let me share the reasons that have convinced me.

The nature of the church. The church is the body of Christ, and He is the Head (Col. 2:17–19). When He died for us on the cross, He bore for us all the divine judgment necessary for our salvation. He has promised that we shall never taste any of God's wrath (John 5:24). The Day of the Lord is a day of God's wrath, and it seems unjust and unnecessary that the church should experience it.

The nature of the Tribulation. This is the time when God will judge the Gentile nations and also purge Israel and prepare her for the coming of her Messiah. The "earth-dwellers" will taste of God's wrath (Rev. 3:10) and not those whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). God will judge the earth-dwellers for their iniquity (Isa. 26:20–21). But He has already judged believers' sins on the cross.

The promise of Christ's imminent return. The word imminent means "ready to happen." Nothing has to occur for Christ to return, except the calling out of the last person who will be saved and complete the body of Christ. If our Lord did not return for us until the end of the Tribulation period, then we would know when He was coming; for the sequence, signs, and times are all spelled out in Revelation 6–19. It is worth noting that the word *church*

is not used in Revelation from 4:1 to 22:13. Also notice that Paul lived in the expectation of seeing Christ, for he used the pronouns we and us in discussing this doctrine (1 Thes. 4:13–5:11). The Apostle John had this same attitude. He closed his book with the prayer, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

The course of the seven churches in Revelation 2–3. Many Bible students believe the Lord selected these seven churches to illustrate the spiritual course of church history. Ephesus would be the church of the Apostles; Smyrna would be the persecuted church of the early centuries. The last church, Laodicea, represents the apostate church of the last days.

This suggests that the Philadelphia church (Rev. 3:7–13) pictures the weak but faithful church of the period just before Christ returns. It is an evangelistic church with great opportunities and open doors. It is the church that proclaims the soon-coming of Christ (“Thou has kept the word of My patience,” Rev. 3:10), and to it He has promised deliverance from the day of judgment: “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10). This promise parallels the promise of 1 Thessalonians 5:9.”<sup>9</sup>

Thank the Lord for He has taken the wrath which was deserved by us and put it on Himself, I am so thankful.

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<sup>9</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 178–185). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## Day 4

### Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8 and 11

Three phrases in these verses need careful consideration.

“Times and seasons.” This phrase is found only three times in the Bible, and refers primarily to God’s plans for Israel. This is the way Daniel stated it when God gave him understanding of the king’s dream (Dan. 2:21). Our Lord’s use of the phrase in Acts 1:7 indicates that times and seasons relate primarily to Israel.

God has a definite plan for the nations of the world (Acts 17:26), and Israel is the key nation. Dr. A.T. Pierson used to say, “History is His story.” (Quite a contrast to Napoleon’s definition: “History is a set of lies agreed upon.”) God has ordained times and seasons for the nations on earth, particularly Israel; and all of this will culminate in a terrible time called “the Day of the Lord.”

“The Day of the Lord.” In the Bible, the word day can refer to a twenty-four-hour period, or to a longer time during which God accomplishes some special purpose. In Genesis 2:3 the word means twenty-four hours, but in Genesis 2:4 it describes the entire week of Creation.

The Day of the Lord is that time when God will judge the world and punish the nations. At the same time, God will prepare Israel for the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His kingdom. Read Amos 5:18ff; Joel 2:1ff; Zephaniah 1:14–18; and Isaiah 2:12–21 for a description of this great period.

Another term for this period is “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). Many prophetic students also call it the Tribulation and point to Revelation 6–19 as the Scripture that most vividly describes this event.

“Thief in the night.” Our Lord used this image in His own teaching (Matt. 24:42–43; Luke 12:35–40). It describes the suddenness and the surprise involved in the coming of the Day of the Lord. In Revelation 3:3; 16:15, He used this image to warn believers not to be caught napping. Since we do not know when the Lord will return for His people, we must live in a constant attitude of watching and waiting, while we are busy working and witnessing.

Now we can put these three concepts together and discover what Paul wanted to teach his troubled friends in Thessalonica. He had already told them about the coming of Christ for the church, the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. He had told them that there would be a period of intense suffering and Tribulation on the earth following this Rapture of the church. These “times and seasons” that relate to Israel and the nations do not apply to the church or affect the truth of the Lord’s coming for the church. He may come at any time, and this will usher in the Day of the Lord.

The world is caught by surprise because men will not hear God’s Word or heed God’s warning. God warned that the Flood was coming, yet only eight people believed and were saved (1 Peter 3:20). Lot warned his family that the city would be destroyed, but they would not listen (Gen. 19:12–14). Jesus warned His generation that Jerusalem would be destroyed (Luke 21:19ff), and this warning enabled believers to escape; but many others perished in the siege.

What truth do Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul teach us? The truth that of the Day of the Lord will come the birth of the kingdom. When God’s judgments are finished, God’s Son will return “with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). Paul described this event in his second Letter to the Thessalonian Christians.

There is a difference between being ready to go to heaven and being ready to meet the Lord. Anyone who has sincerely trusted Christ for salvation is ready to go to heaven. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross has taken care of that. But to be ready to meet the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ is quite another matter. Scripture indicates that some believers will not be happy to see Jesus Christ! “And now, little children, abide in Him; that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28).

This is why the Lord not only wants us to trust us with our justification (salvation) but with our sanctification, He wants to work in our life and produce fruit. He is our hope, the hope of our salvation. Hope of salvation means “the hope that salvation gives to us.” There are actually three tenses to salvation: (1) past—I have been saved from the guilt and penalty of sin; (2) present—I am being saved from the power and pollution of sin; (3) future—I shall be

saved from the very presence of sin when Christ returns. The blessed hope of our Lord's return is the "hope of salvation." Unsaved people are without hope (Eph. 2:12). This helps explain why they live as they do: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"<sup>10</sup>

We have great hope and we should want to pass that hope onto others.

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<sup>10</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 185). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## Day 5

### Read Deuteronomy 10:12-14

The Old Testament often spoke of Heaven and Hell in various terms. Verse 14 reminds us that everything belongs to the Lord, be it heaven or earth, it is all His. David reminds us in Psalm 139 that there is nowhere we can go or flee from God's presence.

You and I are simply stewards of this life, it is not our own. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:20 that we were bought with a price. Heaven and the earth are the Lord's. Since we are simply stewards of this life and all in it, Verses 12-13 tell us what God wants us to do:

- Fear the Lord – We know this means not necessarily to be afraid of the Lord but rather to honor and revere who He is, the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.
- Walk in His ways – We know His ways by His Word, so as we read His Word we walk in His ways.
- Love Him – Above all else, let Him not just be first but to be our all, to focus on Him and His love.
- Serve Him with all – This is to “love” with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Holding nothing back, serve Him.
- Keep His commandments and statutes – To walk in His ways. One day we will pass from the earth or Jesus will come back first and we will spend eternity with Him. We will worship, honor and walk with Him, are you ready?





## **WEEK 72 THE BODY OF CHRIST-----Dennis Watson**

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth to address divisions that had come to the church body there. In the passages we see this week, he was emphasizing that the Holy Spirit had given gifts to the members of the church to be used in the church for the profit of all. In his devotional book for children, Marty Marchowski uses the illustration of a beehive. This is a great illustration to show how God has given different bees different tasks in the beehive for it to function correctly. The queen bee lays eggs, the drones care for the queen, and the nurse bees feed the baby bees. There are worker bees which go and get food and there are bees that guard the bee hive and others that cool it. Each bee has a job to do. The same is true in the church. Each member of the body has a gift or gifts given to them so the body can function and accomplish its purpose.

### **Day 1**

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

In Ephesians 4:12 Paul says that different gifts were given for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body. In today's passage, Paul makes a very significant point for the Corinthians and for us—it is the Spirit of God who gives the gifts to the members of the body. This is significant because in the church at Corinth, there were divisions which were largely brought about by jealousy! He wanted them to know that the Holy Spirit gave those gifts according to His determination. The word Holy Spirit is used ten times in these eleven verses. Paul stressed that it is the Holy Spirit who determines the gifts and there is no room for jealousy or gift envy. Each person was to develop and use the gift the Holy Spirit had given to them.

From the negative standpoint, he was dealing with jealousy, but on the positive side he was dealing with the unity the Holy Spirit brings to the body. The gifts He gives are complementary and go together so the Body of Christ functions to accomplish the task of evangelizing and making disciples all over the world. This is all miraculously accomplished by the work of the Spirit. Paul opened this chapter by stating that no one comes to Jesus apart from the working of the Holy Spirit. All of what a believer, a church, or any group of believers accomplish is done by the work of the Holy

Spirit. No one should take credit for his or her gift or gifts and no one should take credit for the accomplishments of the Word of God. The church is made one by the work and power of the Holy Spirit of God. Our rejoicing, celebrating, and any boasting is in what He does for us. The church is a beautiful thing! It is a mighty testimony to the power of God and the indwelling work of His Holy Spirit.

Give thanks for your gifts and the gifts of others with whom you are blessed to collaborate to be the Body of Christ.

## Day 2

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Here we have a great picture of the necessity of all the members of the body. The picture Paul gives of the body and all the different body parts comes across very practical. Can you imagine your body parts having a discussion and your ear saying it is envious because it is not an eye? Or can you imagine your foot having resentment because it is not a hand? Sounds silly but he is making a point! Apparently, this was happening in the church at Corinth. People were jealous and envious of the gifts others had. Paul was telling them that it took all the parts of the body, each doing its part, for the body to work correctly. He wanted each of them to find their gift and get to work with the other parts.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible related to the church is **1 Corinthians 12:18**, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” Look at that verse again. I always think of a jigsaw puzzle and the person assembling it, placing each piece in its place just as the picture demands. Some of my favorite puzzles are pictures taken by wildlife photographer, Ken Jenkins. He took the pictures and puzzle makers turned them into 1000+ piece jigsaw puzzles. Each piece has a place. God has a vision and plan for His church and He has made each one of us and He places each one in the body according to His plan. Each part is necessary to complete the picture! I love the thought of this great biblical truth! Each person God brings to His church, for us, Harp’s Crossing Baptist Church, He has brought there by His plan, design and will. I know we all like to think that He does this with pastors, but it is not limited to pastors. He brought you to His church and placed you there with your gift just as He wanted! Each of us is not only important, but like a puzzle, we fit together!

I personally believe if each born again believer would get about the work they have been given in and through the Lord’s church, many of our struggles as individuals, families and churches would disappear.

Get connected to His church. Find out where you fit. Use your spirit-given gift in connection with others and enjoy the beauty of the Body of Christ.

## Day 3

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:27

In the middle devotions of some weeks, we look at how the passage connects to the gospel. This week, we look at just one verse, a very short, but amazing verse. It reminds us that each of us individually is part of the Body of Christ with each one collectively being the Body of Christ. This is actually only spiritually comprehensible. The Body of Christ is the church all over the world as one. It is the church located in communities all over the world and it is each individual believer. We are joined together by the Spirit of God and made to be one unit.

When Jesus came to our world born as an infant, He lived and carried out His Father's will here on earth for thirty-three years. We call this the incarnation. Jesus was fully God and fully man. God became flesh and dwelt among us. He was the living presence of God in the world for those thirty-three years. The church, which Paul calls the Body of Christ, continues that work, but as a body of people redeemed by the work of Jesus Christ.

I have often used the terminology that the church is "The continuation of the incarnation." That is semantically incorrect. It is important to always be learning and part of learning includes recognition of wrong and replacing it with truth. Semantically, it is wrong, but in theory, the concept is correct. We continue the redemptive work started by Christ, but the church can save no one. The church has been commissioned by Jesus Christ to go into the world and make disciples. However, Jesus was fully God and fully man. The church is not. The church is empowered by the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit. The church is made up of people who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and then sent to shine the light of Jesus in the world.

I am not God and neither are you. We have been saved by God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. We continue His work, but only He can save. We are miraculously connected to the life of God through Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Give thanks to Him that you have been included in the greatest endeavor the universe will ever know. We are the body of Christ carrying out His will by making His gospel known to all people.

## Day 4

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

It is definitely important to understand it is the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, who gives the gifts to the members and assigns the offices. He has a perfect plan for His church as a whole and for each local congregation. God works in and through individuals, local churches and through the universal church. No single church has all of the gifts, but each local body has exactly what they need. The church at Corinth was blessed, considering that the occasion for Paul writing the book was to address the problem of carnality. They were saved, but due to the failure to live Spirit led lives, they were carnal. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 the problem facing the believers at Corinth and still plaguing churches and believers today is carnality. The word carnal in the Bible is only used by Paul and he explained there are two kinds of people in the world—natural (unsaved) and spiritual (saved). He also explained that there are two kinds of saved people—mature and immature. The immature people are living carnal lives which means fleshly. The mature believer is either living according to flesh—natural desires, or the Spirit—spiritual desires. The problem in the church at Corinth was the people were still immature and living fleshly lives. This showed up in the disputes and one of those disputes had to do with spiritual gifts.

Paul told the people at Corinth that God gives the gifts according to His determination. He also tells them some gifts are more significant than others. In the church, there are gifts and offices of which some are obviously more significant than others. The gifts that lead, proclaim, and teach are of greatest importance, but that is not to say that other gifts are not significant and necessary. Regarding your own physical body, you can get by without a hand, arm, foot, finger or toe, but you cannot survive without your heart or brain. Each part is significant. Everyone does not have the same gift but Paul goes on to encourage them to desire the greater gifts.

"The believers should desire the most helpful gifts. In other words, in the desire to be helpful in the body of Christ, they should seek the power of the Spirit. Too often this verse is only applied individually when the emphasis should be on the church as a body. The church ought to desire the most helpful gifts so that it can function

well. It would be incorrect to interpret Paul as saying “desire the most helpful gifts” to mean “seek the gifts from the top of the list” (12:27-28). Paul had been stressing diversity of gifts and the necessity for the gifts to be interactive within the body. He could not have thereby excluded healing or tongues as lesser gifts. In addition, he could not have meant for the people to desire to be apostles—that was impossible, because only a few chosen men could claim that title.”<sup>11</sup>

"Unity and diversity must be balanced by maturity, and that maturity comes with love. It is not enough to have the gift of the Spirit and gifts from the Spirit. We must also have the graces of the Spirit as we use our gifts to serve one another."<sup>12</sup>

Rejoice in the gifts you have and use them to build up the body of Christ!

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<sup>11</sup>Life Application New Testament Commentary.

<sup>12</sup>Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

## Day 5

### Read Hosea 2:14-20

Day 5 each week is the time we look at a passage from the Psalms or one of the prophets to see how they connect to Jesus or to our salvation. In the Old Testament, God would often speak of His relationship to His people Israel as that of a marriage. He was the husband and Israel was His bride. Hosea wrote and gave this picture of Israel as God's betrothed. This is a picture of an engagement in which God promises to one day be His people's husband. We see in these passages, the promises God makes to His people. There are several "I will" statements which God says He will do for His people. This is a very intense section of God's promises which point to Jesus. He will turn them away from their other gods (Baals) and turn them to Himself. He says that their sins will be taken away and they will have a new relationship. They will no longer call Him my master but my husband.

We read in the Old Testament that many of the promises are expressed to the nation of Israel. God is eternal; He has neither beginning nor ending. Therefore, He is totally self-sufficient and needs nothing more than Himself in order to exist or to act. "God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made," wrote A.W. Tozer, "but He has no necessary relation to anything outside of Himself." God needs nothing, neither the material universe nor the human race, and yet He created both."<sup>13</sup> But by God's grace and His plan, His blessings extend to all people just as He promised to Abraham that all the people of the earth would be blessed. The beauty of this passage is expressed in **Verses 19-20**: "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy;<sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD." Now let's connect a few dots. In **Revelation 21:2**, John wrote "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Our spiritual roots run deep. See how the dots connect? Through God's people

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<sup>13</sup>Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary ch.



He has betrothed us to Himself. We are the Bride of Christ!

Thank God for this eternal relationship that had deep roots, including the promise given to Israel and extended even to us.



## WEEK 73 LOVE-----Chris Watson

Scripture reminds us that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us and this is how we know what love is. We can only truly love others if we have received the love of God. This is love in its purest form. Do you have a hard time loving others? Have you received God's love and are you putting that love into practice?

### Day 1

#### Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The Corinthians were using their gifts, especially prophecy and speaking in tongues, primarily for their own purposes, rather than for God's purposes. Christian love must be understood as flowing from God's love. Everything we do without doing so in love is essentially worthless. We are reminded what love is in **1 John 3:16**: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Jesus laid down His life for us. He did this because He loved us and He showed it. Paul told the Corinthian church that any good works, including helping the poor, done without love was not profitable in any way.

This scripture begs the question, "What is my motivation?" When I was a child we had a video that included a song with the lyrics, "Why do I do the things that I do and who do I do them for?" I learned this song about 25 years ago and I still remember it to this day. Apparently, the Corinthians were serving the poor, speaking in tongues, and prophesying, but doing so for themselves, rather than out of love for God and their neighbors. Their motives were completely wrong. We can think of others in scripture who had this problem, including the Pharisees. They desired that people hear their long prayers and watch them give their large sums of money, yet, there was no love in it.

What about you? Why do you do the things you do? I think we could all say our motives are at least sometimes wrong. First, you need to ask whether or not you have received God's love; that is, have you put your faith in Jesus to take your sins away? If not, do so now. If you have, then you need to ask whether you are living out of God's love and for God's glory or for yourself?

As you go throughout your day ask yourself, “Why do I do the things that I do and who do I do them for?” If you discover God and God’s love is not your motivation, ask God to redirect you and change your heart.

## Day 2

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Paul tells us that love is not: envious, boastful, proud, rude, self-seeking, easily angered, and delighting in evil. If this is the case, then love is the opposite of those things. In essence, love is not selfish and it endures all things. I believe it is best said that love is a CHOICE.

Today, many people say they love pizza, love sports, or love the warm weather. Obviously, saying these things compared to saying, I love my spouse or I love my mom or dad are two separate things. One is truly loved, while the other is really liked or enjoyed. Can you think of people you love in spite of some choices or things they have done? For instance, do you love people who have made you mad or have been really ugly to you? The answer is probably yes. This is because love is a choice. Oftentimes, people say they fell in love. I won't argue semantics here, but if one falls in love, that implies one can also fall out of love. Some people have said they are no longer in love because, for them, love wasn't a choice, but a feeling or a whim.

Praise God that He has chosen to love us. How do we know this? He showed us on the cross. It wasn't a feeling or a whim which held Jesus on the cross. It was God's plan, His love, which held Him there for my sins and yours. If it had been a feeling or a whim, Jesus might have backed out when things got tough. We know that His struggle was real. The gospels tell us that Jesus asked if this cup could pass from Him, but relinquished His will in favor of God's. The Lord's love was shown and made evident, as Jesus died for our sins.

Who do you love? Not who do you have feelings about or for, but who do you genuinely love? Because of Jesus' love, we are to love each other. This means that though we may let each other down, frustrate each other, or go through tough times, we can still love each other because it is not based on a whim or a feeling, but in response to Jesus' love. Have you received Jesus' love? If so, are you showing that love to others? If not, ask Him to help you do so.

## Day 3

### Read 1 John 4:10-20

In today's passage, two key words are repeated over and over again. Do you see them? They are *love* and *abide* and their connection is strong. We know that we love because He first loved us according to Verse 19. For us to love Jesus back and for us to love others, we must have first received and trusted in God's love. It's safe to say, that one cannot truly love in the real sense of the word if they have not received and experienced God's love. God Himself is love which is how we can love others as the passage says.

Can we truly love someone simply by having received God's love? Do I trust and believe in God and that's it? Now I can love others perfectly the way God wants me to? The answer is no. The second word that sticks out in this passage is ABIDE. Imagine putting a letter into an envelope and closing the envelope. The letter is abiding in the envelope and it is covered up by the envelope. I want to abide in Jesus; I want to be covered up by Him on all sides and at all times. The only way that I can truly love those closest to me and those who may seem like enemies is if I abide in Christ, that is, if I am walking with and in tune with the Holy Spirit.

Are you abiding in Christ? Are you trying to love others on your own or with His love? Today's passage tells us if we hate our brother, we are a liar because we can't love God and hate our brother. Ask God today to help you abide in Him and love others. We cannot do this on our own. Only after knowing God and abiding in Him can we truly love others. Are you abiding in Christ today? Only He can love in and through us.

## Day 4

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Paul told the Corinthians that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge would one day cease to be, they will no longer be needed. When the end comes, only that which is needed will remain: faith, hope, and love, the greatest of these being love. God's love for us and our love in response to His are what matters. Love is the gift that never ends. When we get to heaven, we will continue to love God and God will continue to love us.

Think of everything that matters to you. How much does it really matter? Are things we deem necessary or important, really important, or is it that it just seems that way? Scripture often reminds us that as God loves us, we are to love Him and others and that's what is really important.

Many have said to always put God first. I would argue, don't. Instead, allow God to be everything to you no matter where you are. In this way, God is not part of a list of things that need to be checked off. He's not to be simply the first thing in our lives; He's to be our lives. He is with us morning, noon and night. He is all we truly need, though He has given us His blessings to enjoy and experience in this life. Are you walking with and following God? Is He your all? Why not make Him your all today and seek Him anew daily.

## Day 5

### Read Psalm 31:1-8

Look at the true and heartfelt words of David in this psalm. We see just how David felt about the Lord and the truth he knew:

"For you are my rock and my fortress" **Verse 3** - David knew the Lord was all that he needed. Whether life was going well or if he was running from his enemies in a time of adversity, he knew God was that constant rock, dependable as no other thing or person could be. In our crazy world Jesus is our rock and our fortress, which we can lean on to steady us and to set a firm foundation underneath our feet.

"You are my strength" **Verse 4** - David knew he had no strength on his own and we don't either. It's easy to get down and feel defeated when we keep our eyes solely on the world and the things of the world. However, if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we experience Him as our true strength and joy.

"You have redeemed me" **Verse 5** - Jesus is our ultimate redeemer and though David wrote these words many years before Jesus came to earth, David knew that trusting in God (putting his hope in Him) was what saved him. When Jesus died on the cross for our sins He also died for those of David and others. Praise God that you and I have been redeemed, we have been purchased by the blood of Jesus.

"I trust in the Lord" **Verse 6** - Scripture tells us that some trust in chariots, things or people, but we are to trust in the name of the Lord our God. Choosing to trust in Jesus is a choice, and as we make this choice God is faithful to reward our trusting in Him as He offers peace and hope that only He can give.

"I will be glad and rejoice in your mercy" **Verse 7** - David realized that God is merciful. We often don't think of what we really deserve which is hell and eternity apart from God. In contrast to what we deserve, Jesus gave us what we don't deserve (salvation, eternity with Him, and abundant life). We can rejoice in His mercy and be glad.



Think of all of these words of truth that David penned. Choose today to follow and trust God no matter what you are facing. We can either choose to follow, walk with, and trust in Him or choose to try to do life on our own. I have tried the latter and it doesn't work, but trusting and hoping in God does. Will you trust and follow Him?



## **WEEK 74 PAUL'S WORK IN EPHEBUS-Dennis Watson**

What we read this week in Acts took place during the time of Paul's third missionary journey. The spread of the gospel continued and even took a huge leap as Paul left the synagogue in Ephesus and went to teach at the School of Tyrannus. From there, the gospel spread among the region, even more to the gentiles. This week, we will also look at Paul's farewell message to the elders of the churches of Ephesus. The gospel is powerful and resilient in the hands of people who are filled with the Holy Spirit and surrendered to God's plan to take it to the whole world.

### **Day 1**

#### **Read Acts 18:24-19:7**

It is very difficult to teach people who have not received the whole gospel. This was the case with a man named Apollos, but also with a group of disciples Paul came across in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Apollos was teaching, but teaching only the part of Jesus that came up to and through the ministry of John the Baptist. Chuck Missler says that the Old Testament actually ended in Luke 16:16. He says that John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet. John told about the coming of Jesus. In his preaching and teaching, salvation was expected, but had not yet come. Apollos knew about coming events promised by John the Baptist regarding Jesus, but he did not know the fulfillment. Two believers, a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, took him aside privately and taught him the full message of the gospel.

When Paul set out on his third missionary journey and arrived in Ephesus, he found a group of disciples like Apollos who only had John's message and baptism. Paul asked them about their baptism. He wanted to know if they had received the Holy Spirit. The pattern for today is that sinners hear the Word, they believe on Jesus Christ, they receive the Holy Spirit immediately upon their belief. and then they are baptized (see Acts 10:43-48). Therefore, it can be said these believers were on the right side of Easter, but on the wrong side of Pentecost. They were on the right side of pardon, but on the wrong side of power. They were justified, but not sanctified. Paul shared the whole gospel with them, baptized them, and after he laid hands on them they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

They now had the power of the gospel which is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Regarding the laying on of hands to receive the Holy spirit, Warren Wiersbe writes:

Why was it necessary for Paul to lay hands on these men before they could receive the Spirit? Didn't this contradict the experience of Peter recorded in Acts 10:44-48? Not if you keep in mind that this was a special group of men who would help form the nucleus of a great church in Ephesus. By using Paul to convey the gift of the Spirit, God affirmed Paul's apostolic authority and united the Ephesian church to the other churches as well as to the "mother church" in Jerusalem. When Peter and John laid hands on the believing Samaritans, it united them to the Jerusalem church and healed a breach between Jews and Samaritans that had existed for centuries. What God did through Paul for these twelve men was not normative for the church today. How do we know? Because it was not repeated. The people who were converted in Ephesus under Paul's ministry all received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they trusted the Savior. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 1:13-14, and this is the pattern for us today.<sup>14</sup>

It is not enough to just be forgiven. The whole gospel includes the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit who empowers believers to live and make disciples. Thank the Lord for the whole gospel, including the indwelling Holy spirit!

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<sup>14</sup>Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

## Day 2

### Read Acts 19:8-12

Paul was determined to preach and teach the message of the gospel. For three months, he had been teaching in the synagogue, seeking to persuade Jews regarding the gospel message. However, they were not only unresponsive, but also began to malign the followers of the Way. It was this which caused Paul to leave his teaching in the synagogue and turn to a place called the School of Tyrannus. This was a school in Ephesus which was a public building or lecture hall. During the early afternoon, Paul would teach and present the message of the gospel, at a time when people would normally be eating and napping. It was during this time the gospel spread to all the people of the province of Asia. From this base of operation, churches all over the region were started, perhaps even the seven churches of Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3. These churches came into existence either through Paul's own labors or through the labor of those who heard his teaching, became believers, and went out from there to teach and preach, too.

The rejection by the Jews caused the gospel message to be preached to the gentiles outside the synagogue. As a result, the message spread throughout the region. Paul turned away from the synagogue and described the experience that opened up in Ephesus. Here are Paul's words describing what had taken place, "But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." **1 Corinthians 16:8-9**

When the message is rejected in one place it will surely be accepted in another. Don't be discouraged when people do not receive your witness. Henry Blackaby puts it this way, "Look to see where God is at work and join Him."

Keep presenting the truth of the gospel. Some will reject it, but others will hear and gladly receive. Be encouraged and keep going!

## Day 3

### Read Acts 20:17-27

In Paul's travels on his third mission trip visiting and strengthening the churches, he turned his attention to Jerusalem. In this passage, we see that he decided to return to Jerusalem. On his way he sent word to the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him in Miletus. In the New Testament the term elders is used to describe the shepherds of the congregations. Elder, bishop, and pastor are synonymous in this context. Over the next two days we will look at the three parts of Paul's farewell message to these leaders.

The first part of his farewell message was a review of the past. In verses 18-21 he shared with the elders his motive for ministry, his manner of ministry, and the message of his ministry. His motive was in serving the Lord. This was what kept him going. This was his passion—to serve the Lord. He was not in it to make money, to enjoy an easy life, or make a name for himself. His manner was to live a life that anyone could inspect. He lived above reproach. His was a ministry characterized by humility. Paul was not a religious celebrity wanting others to serve him. He faced the work of the gospel with confidence and did what needed to be done to get the message of the gospel to people.

In Verse 22 he made the switch from his review of the past to the present. He bared his heart to the assembled elders regarding what would most likely happen to him as he went to Jerusalem. He knew from the Holy Spirit that chains and tribulations awaited him, but he said that none of these things moved him. He just wanted to finish his task well and testify to the gospel of the grace of God. He told the elders that this was most likely the last time he would see them. Because of his persistence to preach the gospel he was innocent of the blood of all men. He was also confident that as he came to the end of his life and ministry that he had preached the whole counsel of God. He knew that in the past he had been faithful and would continue in the present until he had finished the course set out for him.

Paul was determined to finish well! Let us all make the same determination to finish sharing boldly the good news of Jesus Christ.

## Day 4

### Read Acts 20:28-38

Yesterday, we looked at the first two parts of Paul's farewell address to the elders of the Ephesus churches. The first was his review of the past. The second was his testimony of the present. Today, we will look at the verses which deal with a warning about the future. His warning for the elders in **Verse 28** was to "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood."

Warren Wiersbe speaks regarding the importance of the church to God: "The church is important to God the Father because His name is on it—"the church of God." It is important to the Son because He shed His blood for it; and it is important to the Holy Spirit because He is calling and equipping people to minister to the church. It is a serious thing to be a spiritual leader in the church of the living God."<sup>15</sup>

Paul warned them about the dangers around them. There were wolves who would ravage the church. These are those who come and teach lies and counterfeit the truth. The goal is to attack the sheep and lead them astray, even destroying them. Pastors need to instruct the people properly so they can be safe and secure when these wolves come.

There were and are dangers which come from within the church. These are people who are overly ambitious for position and power. These people want to gain attention and recognition for themselves and they literally suck the life out of the church.

He warned about the danger within us, "...take heed unto yourselves." In **Verse 28**, Paul told them there are five sins that are especially destructive to the church body. In Verse 31, he spoke of *carelessness* and warned them to remember how he had told everyone night and day for three years, concerning the need to be spiritually responsible and not careless.

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<sup>15</sup>Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

He warned of *shallowness* in Verse 32 and told them to build themselves up with the Word of God. We cannot effectively build His church if we are not regularly being built up by His Spirit and His Word.

In Verse 33 he warned of *covetousness*. Paul told them he did not covet anyone's silver, gold, or clothing. He warned against coveting what the people in the church had.

He warned them against being *idle or lazy* in Verse 34. He reminded them he had worked with his own hands to provide for his needs and the needs of those with him. It is not wrong for an elder, pastor or Christian worker to receive an income for his work, but he should definitely work!

Lastly, he warned them against *selfishness*. They were to work to provide for their own needs and to give to others who had a need.

To be a pastor, elder, or any other Christian leader is a great privilege, but it is also a great responsibility. Those called to serve need to be careful to live as examples to those around them, always above reproach. Are you serving Him in His church? If so, do it faithfully.



## Day 5

### Read Isaiah 45:21-22

Day five each week is when we look at a passage from the Psalms or one of the prophets to see how they connect to Jesus or our salvation.

Do people worship idols today? According to the Bible, an idol is something or someone worshipped other than God. Idolatry is not only an ancient thing, but it is modern, too. Recently, it occurred to me that in the US we have transferred our worship gathering from the church house to the stadium or coliseum. There, as many as 100,000 people gather to sing, cheer, and shout about their team. Maybe yours is not a sports team, but a singer, or TV or movie personality. We mourn the death of famous people as though they had done something great like save us from a dreaded disease or deadly attack.

Isaiah is telling the idol worshippers to abandon their idols and look at the true savior. The verses that lead up to today's passages are about God raising up and using a Persian King by the name of Cyrus. God prophesied about Cyrus and called him his anointed a century before he was born. Idols are not only powerless, but the gods they represent do not even exist. Idols are non-existent, yet people still worship them, considering them to be gods when they are not.

Idols are imaginary and impotent, but the one true God is powerful, just, and mighty to save. There is no other God but the God who has revealed Himself in history. And then again in history through Jesus Christ, God's Son and God's anointed. Since there are no other gods and no idols, Verse 22 is an appeal to look to God for salvation which is to look to Jesus Christ. He is God in the flesh. We now know that the Savior is Jesus. Have you looked to Him? If not, now is the time.



## **WEEK 75 A NEW CREATION-----Chris Watson**

We are a new creation. Through God, we have been made new and nothing can take that away. If we are made new, then we know we were once old and needed the newness only Christ could bring. A well-known song says, “Now I’m not who I used to be.” A new creation is what this song speaks of. How has God changed you? How has He made you new?

### **Day 1**

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15**

The Greek word for compel in Verse 14 is *anagkázō* and it means to do so with urgency or with a pressing necessity. Verse 15 goes on to say we should no longer live for ourselves, but we should live for the One who died and rose again. Putting this together, Paul was saying that it is Christ and His love that compelled him, to do what he did. It was not for himself, so he could boast or so he could make himself or others look good. Rather, everything he did was because Christ’s love compelled him.

What compels you today? What compels you to love? What compels you to give? What compels you to serve? If it is anything other than Christ and His love, repent and ask Him to change your heart. We all know that if we serve based on something other than God’s love, we get burned out and often become angry and frustrated, but if God is our greater gift and our treasure, then our heart and motives are right. Take some time today to ask God to make your heart right and your actions and motives to be compelled by Him. If you are currently involved in something where your compelling comes from something or someone else, give it to Him.

## Day 2

### Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Scripture reminds us we have been saved, reconciled to God. Today's scripture also reminds us that in Christ, we are a new creation and old things have passed and all things have been made new. In Christ, we are no longer slaves to our old ways and a life of darkness and turmoil, but slaves to Christ. Our hearts have literally been changed, along with our attitudes, thoughts, and minds.

If you are like Paul, you will still struggle with the temptation to go back to the old self. Paul even told us the things he should be doing he was not and that which he shouldn't be doing he was. In other words, our sinful nature tries to creep back in, as we live in a fallen world and our default setting is sin, the ways of the world and the ways of the enemy. We need to be reminded often that in Christ we are a new creation, we don't have to live that old life with the thoughts and actions we used to have before Christ entered and changed us.

Our part is yielding to the new life we have in Christ. **1 Timothy 4:8** says, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." When we trust in Jesus, we get all of Jesus. However, we must yield to Him. Think of yielding. In driving, we are to yield to oncoming traffic, we let traffic go and we fall in afterwards. This is what it means to yield to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. We wait for His leading and direction, never going in front of Him or doing it on our own because we are a new creation and we no longer do things the old way.

How has God made you a new creation? How have you seen Him take your old way of thinking and actions and tune those to His way of thinking and His actions? Thank Him today that you are a new creation and walk in that new life which has been given to you by Him.

## Day 3

### Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

The word reconciled is used five times in these three verses. Reconciliation means to bring together or bring back together two people who were once against each other. In addition, **Romans 5:10** says, “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Also **Colossians 1:21** says, “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.” Before we placed our faith in Jesus, we were literally enemies of God.

Therefore, there are two types of people in this world when it comes to a relationship with God and those are friends of God or enemies of God. John 15 reminds us that as believers we are friends of God. How can we be reconciled or friends of God? Verse 18 tells us this is accomplished through Christ Jesus, by placing our faith in what He has done for us, allowing Him to change our whole lives. However, we are not to just trust in Jesus, walk with Him, and then keep it to ourselves. Reread Verse 20 of today’s passage, we read the word ambassador again. An ambassador is one who acts as a representative. We are on God’s team, and we should be sharing our faith and telling others about their need for Christ, since we are representing Him. Verse 20 gives us the picture we are to be telling everyone we see or know about Jesus and our relationship with Him and asking them whether or not they have that relationship. If they do not, we are to tell them how they can and ask them if they would like to have what we have, a hope for the future and a relationship with God now.

Who are we sharing with? Think about last week for a moment; did you find yourself sharing your faith? Convicting question, right? There are many reasons we may not share with others, including fear or just being me focused, or distracted by all that is going on in our own lives. Ask God to show you someone who needs to hear the story of your faith. Ask Him to help you see such opportunities. Years ago, I changed my prayer from, “God, give me opportunities to share my faith” to “God, help me see the opportunities.” I became convicted they were all around me, but I was

missing them because of my focus on everything which kept me so busy. Who do you need to share with today as Christ's ambassador? Pray and ask God to open your eyes and help you to slow down to seek God and these opportunities. Pray and ask God if He might have you be on mission in Canada, Baltimore, or China. The question is not should we go, but rather when and how. If you are physically unable to go on a mission trip, ask Him how you can be a part of helping someone else go.

## Day 4

### Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

Read Verse 21 again. This is an incredible verse which reminds us what God has done. God has imputed His righteousness on our behalf. The word imputation simply means to charge to one's account. This helps us understand **Verse 21** when it says, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God." God has placed upon us His righteousness, something that we could not do on our own.

"To impute means to reckon to someone the blessing, curse, debt, etc., of another. Adam's sin is imputed to all people (Rom. 5:12-21). Therefore, we are effectively all guilty before God. Our sins were put upon, imputed, to Jesus on the cross where He became sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21) and died with them (Isaiah 53:4-6). Therefore, our sins are forgiven. Understanding imputation is very important. Imputation is the means of our salvation. Our sins were put upon, imputed, to Jesus on the cross. Our sins were "given" to Jesus. When He died on the cross, our sins, in a sense, died with Him. The righteousness that was His through His perfect obedience to the Father in His complete obedience to the Law is imputed--given to us. In short, our sins were given to Jesus. His righteousness was given to us. Technically speaking, our sins were imputed to Jesus. His righteousness was imputed to us. Sin is breaking the law of God (1 John 3:4)--hence the legal aspect. Sin is a legal debt. **Matt. 6:12**, *'And forgive us our debts (opheilema), as we also have forgiven our debtors.'* The parallel in Luke 11:4 says, *"And forgive us our sins (hamartia) . . ."* Jesus equates sin with debt. So, legal debts can be transferred which is why Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). And, because of the instrument of faith, we are justified (a legal standing before the Law) and have a righteousness that's not our own (Phil. 3:9). His righteousness is reckoned to our account (justification)."<sup>16</sup>

God took our sin and gave His grace instead. He took our filth and made us clean, He took our hate and anger and gave us love. We could go on and on concerning the exchanges God has given us. Praise be to God for what He has done and continues to do for us.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://carm.org/dictionary-impute>

## Day 5

### Read Psalm 31:9-16

Like David, Jesus was often persecuted by His enemies. However, David often found himself in troubles of his own making. Verse 10 tells us that his strength was failing because of his iniquities (sin). David was feeling the weight of both his own sins and the sins of others as many sought to take his life. In the end, David knew that his hope was in the Lord.

Verse 14 tells us although he was grieving and his enemies were ever after him, his trust was ultimately in the Lord. We all face times of struggle, difficulties, and heartache. We have the choice to be bitter and angry or to give it all to the Lord and trust in Him. That's not to say we won't hurt or have to work through the situation and the hurt. But in all of it we can trust that God is in control. The only hope we have is that which David had and that is our hope in God and in God alone. We are to be obedient, follow God, listen to Him, and trust in His plans.

What about you? In whom or what is your trust today? Have you put it in other things, including yourself? Do you feel overwhelmed, as though your enemies are taking you over or your sin is overbearing? Place it at Jesus' feet. He is our hope, the One in whom we trust.





## WEEK 76 GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER-----

-----Dennis Watson

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" **Acts 20:35**. I believe this to be true, so I, like Paul, teach about giving. This week, we will see that Paul taught and encouraged the Corinthian believers to be givers. He taught them that giving was a blessing and they could experience great joy and hilarity in giving. He also taught that giving blessed everyone and giving would extend that blessing throughout eternity.

### Day 1

#### Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-9

The story is told that when Alexander the Great had conquered the world and returned to Greece, he looked up his old teacher, Aristotle, to tell him all that had happened. When he found Aristotle, he was taking a bath. Alexander stood in the doorway and told Aristotle what had happened. Then he said, "Now I am prepared to give you anything in the world that you want. What do you want?" Aristotle looked up and replied, "I want you to get out of my light!" May I say to you, that's all any of us do -- we cast a shadow. But there is no shadow in God at all.<sup>17</sup>

James 1:17 tells us that every good gift of giving and every perfect gift comes from God who is light and has no darkness or shadows.

The law of sowing and reaping is definitely built into nature. The farmer who goes out with his seeds and sows them thoroughly, will in turn, and in time, reap a harvest. If he refuses to sow his seeds out of greed, there will be no harvest. If you put this together with the introduction paragraph, you come up with the concept being taught in this passage of scripture. God gives us the stuff we have, but to really experience the blessings and benefits of it all, we must give with great expectation.

The believers in Jerusalem were struggling due to persecution. They were poor and going without even the daily necessities. The gospel had spread to the surrounding gentile region where churches had sprung up and the people were being blessed.

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<sup>17</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Paul encouraged the church at Corinth to supply the offering they had previously promised. He sought to motivate them to come through with what they had promised.

Consider the motivation he was giving. He told them to give bountifully and, in doing so, they would reap bountifully. He also told them to give with a heart that was motivated to bless others as they had been blessed.

He exhorted them to give cheerfully or hilariously. Then, he helped them to see the blessings. This is spelled out in a very encouraging way in **Verse 8**, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”

Look at those phrases—“*all grace abound*,” “*always having*,” “*all sufficiency*,” “*all things*,” and “*an abundance*.” He is encouraging them from both sides—the lead up and the outcome. The lead up is a heart which is full and aware of God’s blessings to give joyfully. The outcome is to see God’s blessings overflow in so many ways.

There is an old saying, “You cannot out give God.” I will add something to this quote. Just enjoy trying! Ask the Lord for the grace to be a bountiful, cheerful, and expectant giver.

## Day 2

### Read 2 Corinthians 9:10-12

Paul continued his encouragement of the Corinthian believers to be givers. In his words about “seed for the sower and bread for food,” our thinking turns to Isaiah, “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”  
**Isaiah 55:10-11**

For the believer there is no distinction between sacred and secular. In Isaiah, seed and bread refer to both the Word of God and the harvest in the field. Whatever we use, give, or dispense, whether it be money, possessions, or the Word of God, they all go out and return bringing about a harvest. He was telling them all we do in serving the Lord will have a fruit-producing impact. In particular, their provision in this offering would not only provide for those with physical needs, but would also result in more and more people giving thanks to God and worshipping Him. This becomes a cycle. When you give, you are blessed and you want to give more. When you give more, more people are blessed. When more people are blessed, they give thanks and worship. The outcome is the fruits of righteousness. This depicts people who are blessed and rejoicing in the blessings and they share with others and see God bless even more. This is a glorious celebration of cheerful givers experiencing the abounding grace of God!

I hope you see what Paul did with these Corinthian believers. He invited them to experience the blessing of being an instrument of God’s blessings. You see, everything He gives us is not intended to end up with us. We are to share the blessings and enjoy the fruit of those blessings as we see others enjoy the fruit also.

One more time, you cannot outgive God! But give it a try!

## Day 3

### Read Romans 6:23

In the middle devotion each week we look to see how the week's devotions connect to Jesus and the gospel message. Many times it is just one verse. This verse is loaded. This week we have been looking at the impact of true giving. Many people are impacted in a positive way when a person gives with the true spirit of biblical giving. Consider just a few connections.

First look at **John 12:24** where Jesus spoke of His coming death, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." Jesus used the sowing idea to show that one grain of wheat produces a huge amount of grain when it gives up its life.

Look at Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 15:20**, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." The term firstfruits tells us that He is the first of many more to come. In giving Himself to die, Jesus multiplied His offspring exponentially.

Now, look at **Romans 5:17**, "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." The wages or result of Adam's sin passed to all men until Jesus, God's Son, came to live among us. He was the God-man; fully God and fully man. However, He was not born in the line of the man, but of the seed of the woman. He was the only one qualified to bring a new lineage or family line. Through Jesus Christ, the new comes. Therefore, in Christ a person becomes new by His grace.

Lastly, look at **Romans 6:23**, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" Wages is what we earn or deserve. In the case of our sin, the wages are death. However, because Jesus gave Himself to die for our sin and in our place, we receive the gift of eternal life.

I am thankful for God and His grace giving! Look at the impact that grace giving has had and will continue to have. Look at the thanksgiving that just flows and will continue until Jesus returns because He gave! And one more verse; I love this one. **Hebrews 12:2** speaks of Jesus and says of Him, “Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” What was the joy? It was the joy of doing His Father’s will in giving His life. Jesus was a cheerful giver with fruit that continues today!

Give thanks to the Lord for the blessing Jesus’ gift continues to bring!

## Day 4

### Read 2 Corinthian 9:13-15

“The gift that keeps on giving.” That is an ad slogan that was first used or at least first trademarked to be used for commercial purposes in 1925. It was used for the first ever talking machine, also known as the phonograph. It needs to be said that later they were known as record players and today, most recordings are done digitally. The point we want to look at is the slogan, “The gift that keeps on giving.” That first trademark has been canceled and the slogan has been used by many commercial entities. However, Jesus and His gospel is truly the gift that keeps on giving. In today’s passage, Paul told the Corinthians that their giving would cause the gospel to spread and keep on giving the greatest gift of all, salvation. Salvation really does keep on giving for eternity. Giving results in the spread of the gospel. I want to share a wonderful story of giving that resulted in the printing of scripture and its long term impact. This comes from Chuck Missler’s notes on Acts.

In 1835, The Bible Society published 100 copies of the Gospel of Luke in Maori. In 1836, missionaries gave one to a young Maori girl, Tarore, at a mission school near Matamata. She read it to her father, the chief of the Waikato tribe. She kept her treasured copy under her pillow when she slept.

Under threat of a neighboring warring Rotorua tribe, the mission school was in the process of relocating to Tauranga. On October 19, 1836, at the Wairere Falls, a raiding party killed the 12-year old girl, and took the treasured object from under her pillow.

Later, unable to read, the Rotorua chief discarded it until a slave boy who had learned to read, revealed its contents to the fascinated listeners. The chief was convicted by its content and resolved to become a Christian. The Rotorua chief resolved to seek out the father of the murdered girl and beg for his forgiveness.

When finally confronting the father, the chief of the Waikato tribe—and risking the customary tribal response of revenge—the father of the murdered girl forgave him, and thus began a peaceful relationship between the two previously warring tribes!

(This true story is distributed to school children as part of their Maori heritage.)

A young girl murdered... a devastated father refusing to seek revenge... a murderer transformed through the Gospel he stole from his victim... then forgiveness given and peace achieved!

The story of this young Maori girl and her copy of the Gospel of Luke became the key to the conversion of many Maori tribes. When missionaries visited both the North and South Islands, they discovered that many of the Maori tribes had already been converted to Christ due to the story of Tarore and her copy of the Gospel of Luke making its rounds. On February 6, 1840, the nation of New Zealand was born by the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi with the Maori tribes.

While primarily dealing with land rights and other issues, this foundational document obligates the Crown of the United Kingdom to safeguard and protect the Maori's rights of worship.

Since a significant portion of the Maori tribes had previously been converted to Christianity, the government is legally committed to protect Christianity in New Zealand. There are Bibles in schools, home schooling is encouraged, and many Christian schools receive significant government support.

Thank the Lord that the gospel really is the gift that keeps on giving. You also give so the gospel will continue to bless and bring rejoicing and thanksgiving.



## DAY 5

### Read Isaiah 53:9

Day five each week is the time we look at a passage from the Psalms or one of the prophets to see how they connect to Jesus or our salvation.

Isaiah 53:9 tells us that Jesus was designated for burial with the wicked. But, in God's plan, He had another location for His short-term burial. It could have been the first and only case of rent-a-tomb. Do you think Joseph of Arimathea had any idea he was fulfilling prophecy when he asked for the body of Jesus and then laid it in his own tomb? I think he was just doing what he believed was the right thing to do. Do you think he believed Jesus was going to vacate the tomb in just a few days? I believe that Jesus had arranged this with Joseph before His crucifixion. I believe God had Joseph in the right place at the right time. Joseph of Arimathea was a secret believer inside the 71-member Sanhedrin. God had placed him there as He had Esther, "...For such a time as this." **Esther 4:14**

Hundreds of years before His birth, God had Isaiah write that Jesus would be killed with criminals and was destined to be buried with them, but instead He would be buried among the rich. Here we see the dots connect. A rich man provided his own tomb for Jesus to be buried in. Joseph of Arimathea was blessed to be in on God's plan. He was willing and ready and when the time came he had this time, this place, and these people, and God worked mightily through him.

God is still at work. He has placed you in this time, this place, and among this group of people. Join God in what He is up to. Don't miss out on the experience of being gloriously used of God.



## WEEK 77 PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH-----

-----Dennis Watson

This is one of my favorite accounts in the New Testament. God shows us we are often in danger of a sinful attitude we are not aware of and He uses certain situations to remind us we need to seek Him. When we do seek Him, He is faithful to reveal to us an attitude that needs to always be present: we are always desperately in need of God's all-sufficient grace.

### Day 1

#### Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33

The Corinthians had to put up with the boasting of the false prophets. So Paul, too, boasted but his boasting was in his weakness and his sufferings. It seemed like Paul was a bit embarrassed by the need to boast. He kept his boasting to his weakness and suffering. In **Verse 23** he even says, "I speak as a fool."

Like the false prophets, Paul boasted in his pedigree. He was a Hebrew, an Israelite, and he was of the family of Abraham. He was also a minister of Christ. However, his boasting is how much he had suffered for being a minister. He suffered labors, imprisonments, beatings and near death experiences as well as the struggle of ministering in the churches. All of this brought him great pain and hurt.

Tony Evans says of Paul's suffering: Paul's point is this: suffering was not an indicator of his failure as an apostle; it was a sign of his superiority. His superior suffering on behalf of his Savior (who suffered!) demonstrated his superior service and commitment. (Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda).

Paul boasted in his struggles and his infirmity. He also boasted in how he had been able to escape being let down in a basket through an opening in a wall. He also boasted in the Lord.

"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." **Galatians 6:14**

I love Paul's humility. He wanted to make sure that his boasting was not about him. A lesson we all need to learn. We are in all things about the glory of the Lord.

## Day 2

### Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-6

Paul boasted in what appeared to be a man he knew about who had a very special experience—he was caught up into the third heaven. We know he was speaking of himself, but he wrote in third person so as to not boast in his special experience. This man, Paul, was allowed to be in the third heaven by an experience either in the body or out of the body. He was not sure if it happened or if it was a vision. This was an event which happened fourteen years earlier and it would have been about the time Paul was stoned and left for dead. J. Vernon McGee believes he was dead and God raised him from the dead. I am not sure, but it may have been in that experience he had this vision or he was literally-taken up into the third heaven.

What did Paul mean about the third heaven? People believed there were three heavens or three levels. The first heaven would be the earth's atmosphere. The second heaven would be where the sun, moon stars, planets and galaxies are located. The third heaven would be the dwelling place of God; the location of God's throne room. Paul was forbidden to speak any further on what he witnessed:

"God honored Paul by granting him visions and revelations, and by taking him to heaven; but He honored him further by permitting him to hear "unspeakable words" while he was in heaven. He overheard the divine secrets that are shared only in heaven. These things could be spoken by God and by beings in heaven, but they could not be spoken by men." (Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - New Testament, Volume 1).

Paul speaks as though it were someone else—in the third person because he is being careful that his boasting is in his weakness and not his blessings. He was careful to show it is through weakness we really experience God's blessings and display His glory. I am sure this experience gave him strength and encouragement which probably inspired these words, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." **Romans 8:18**

## Day 3

### Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-8

I am not sure if these verses trouble you, but I know it has troubled many a believer. How can a man who served God, like Paul, be impacted by a messenger from Satan? Keep in mind this context. Paul has been boasting regarding his sufferings, infirmity and near death deliverances. He speaks about a man, himself, who was transported into the throne room of God. This certainly could have been a place for most men to become puffed up and full of pride. Paul understood events such as this would require a loving heavenly Father to discipline him to preserve his godly character. God permitted Satan to physically beat or strike at Paul in order to torment Him. It was a proving test, not to see if Paul could do it, but to enable Paul to depend on the Lord!

Our faith must include a place for God to use evil to keep us seeking after Him. Satan was also mentioned in the book of Job. It was a proving time for Job to come out with a tested and proven faith and dependence upon God.

Paul turned to God in prayer and in his prayer, was begging the Lord to remove the thorn. This was not a little rosebush thorn; it was a spike. The word used is for a stake which would be used to torture or impale someone. The intention was not aggravation or mere irritation, but a real nagging pain from which Paul cried out to the Lord to remove.

Think about areas in your life that are difficult for you to deal with. It may be a physical affliction, it may be an emotional struggle, or it may even be a recurring temptation or sin. It is not for you to try to fix it. It is for you to cry out to the Lord in desperation. God wants us to want Him and He tells us to seek after Him. It is in the times of desperation we really seek after Him.

## Day 4

### Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

There are two messages in our passage today. One message from Satan and the other is from God. Satan wanted to torment Paul and to make him bitter and mean-spirited. The goal was to get Paul to give up on what God had for him to do. When Paul prayed, asking God to remove the thorn, God's message came through. Often, when we experience a thorn like Paul's, we look for someone to blame. However, God gave Paul what he needed, not blame, but grace. God said My grace is enough. Grace is God's provision for every need when we need it. There is an acrostic for the word grace—**G**od's **R**iches **A**vailable at **C**hrist's **E**xpense. God answered Paul's prayer with the gift of Himself. He was saying, "I am all you need." God was letting Paul know his weakness was where his strength would come through.

I love how everything changed for Paul when God gave His answer. Paul went from moaning about his condition to rejoicing in it. It was like Paul did an about face and said, "Well alright then, since that is the case, I will boast in my weaknesses because I now know I always have God's provision of strength." He knew his weakness tuned him into the strength of Jesus. He all of a sudden saw all of his human frailties as reasons to rejoice because his weakness turned him to God's grace and strength.

We truly encounter the greatness and majesty of God in our weakness and inability to fix our struggles.

## Day 5

### Read Psalm 51

Psalm 51 is a prayer of brokenness and a cry of repentance from David after Nathan had come to him and gave an illustration about his sin with Bathsheba. David cried out to the Lord for restoration because he had sinned by committing adultery with another man's wife and murdered her husband by putting him in a place where he would be killed in battle. It was premeditated. David's struggle was due to his own sin.

Paul did not suffer because of something he did. He suffered because of the correction and discipline of God. He loves us too much to leave us where we are. Paul was in a position which could lead to pride. The Lord allowed Satan to deliver the message of the thorn. What the enemy meant for harm, God was going to use for good. Paul understood when he faced a struggle, he needed to turn to the Lord. Consider God as a loving Father.

God is a disciplining and correcting Father. He wants the best for us. Here is how it is expressed in Hebrews: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, <sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." <sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! <sup>10</sup> Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

**Hebrews 12:5-11 (NIV)**

Whatever you may be going through that is hurtful, painful and hard, do not discount it. Cry out to the Lord knowing of His goodness. He may be working in you to enable you to depend more on His all-sufficient grace.





## WEEK 78 A GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS-Chris Watson

We have no righteousness or goodness of our own, which is why we need Jesus. If we could produce our own goodness we would not need God. Jesus became our righteousness and placed it on us. It was a gift and, like all gifts, must be rejected or received.

### Day 1

#### Read Romans 3:9-20

You and I are evil. There, I said it! However, I am only agreeing with what the Bible confirms. Verse 10 says there is no one who is righteous; therefore, we must be unrighteous, which means we are evil, we are all under sin.

“The expression ‘all are under sin’ must be taken in a spiritual sense; that is to say, not as men appear in their own eyes or in those of others, but as they stand before God. They all are under sin, those who are manifest transgressors in the eyes of men, as well as those who appear righteous in their own sight and before others. Those who perform outwardly good works do them from fear of punishment or love of gain and glory, or otherwise from pleasure in certain objects, but not from a willing and ready mind. In this way man exercises himself continually in good works outwardly, but inwardly he is totally immersed in sinful desires and evil lusts, which are opposed to good works. Such outward good works are doubly evil; first, because they do not flow from a good will and so are sinful (in themselves), and again, because with incredible arrogance they are upheld and defended as good. If the will of men is not sanctified by the grace of God, which He has promised and imparts to those who believe in Christ, so that freely and joyously and solely to please God in doing His will they do the works demanded by the Law, with full freedom from fear of punishment and selfish love for the act, they always are under sin.”<sup>18</sup>

This quote reminds us of our motivation; if there is any good in us it is because of God. We have no goodness or righteousness of our own. Verse 20 reminds us that nothing we do in and of ourselves

<sup>18</sup> Commentary on Romans, Martin Luther. Translated by J. Theodore Mueller

will be justified in God's sight, but rather the law helps us see and understand sin.

We must be reminded that apart from Christ we are bad, evil, disobedient, unloving, and hateful people. Both you and I. But with Christ in us, this all changes, not because of us, but because of Him. Are you reminded today that you are not good enough to approach God's throne?

I am reminded. Rather than thinking on our sin, think on what God has done for us. As we place our faith in Him, we are considered righteous, not because of our works, but because of His!

## Day 2

### Read Romans 3:21-24

“St. Augustine writes in the ninth chapter of his book Concerning the Spirit and the Letter; ‘He does not speak of the righteousness of God, by which God is righteous, but of that with which He clothes a person when He justifies the ungodly.’ Again in the eleventh chapter he comments, ‘But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested that is, God imparts it to the believer by the Spirit of grace without the work of the Law, or without the help of the Law. Through the Law God opens man’s eyes so that he sees his helplessness and by faith takes refuge to His mercy and so is healed.’ The Apostle therefore does not describe the righteousness of God, by which He is essentially righteous, by the righteousness (by which a sinner is justified), which they can obtain only by faith in Christ.”<sup>19</sup> In essence, the righteousness of Jesus is the only thing which can make us right before a holy God, when we put our faith in Him and what He has done for us.

St Augustine goes on to say in the thirteenth chapter of his book Concerning the Spirit and the Letter; “What the law of works commands with threatening, that the Law of faith accomplished through faith”. In the nineteenth chapter he remarks; “The Law was given, in order that we might seek after grace. Grace was given, in order that we might fulfill the Law. It was not the fault of the Law that it was not fulfilled, but the fault man’s carnal mind. This guilt the Law must make manifest, in order that we may be healed by divine grace.”<sup>20</sup>

The law was meant to show us our sin and our need for Christ. We are justified freely and, while it doesn’t cost us anything, it cost Christ everything. In return God wants our hearts, minds, everything we are.

Praise God that He has given us His grace. And though all are sinners and fall short of God’s glory, God’s love and grace is open to all who will receive and put their trust in Him. Have you put your trust in Him? Are you following Him? Spend some time today thanking Him for His grace and love and that He has saved you!

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<sup>19</sup> Commentary on Romans, Martin Luther.

<sup>20</sup> Commentary on Romans, Martin Luther.

## Day 3

### Read Romans 3:25-26

“On the great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) the high priest presented before Jehovah two goats: one was slain, and its blood brought by the high priest into the tabernacle, through this holy place, and past the second veil into the holy of holies. There the high priest sprinkled the blood upon “the mercy-seat” (the covering of the ark of the covenant, where the Shekinah glory of God’s presence was above the cherubim), and also before the mercy-seat, seven times. This was the blood of the goat upon which the lot fell “for Jehovah”; therefore we have here first the holy and righteous claims of the throne of God as to sin completely met. The golden covering of the ark was called the “mercy seat.” In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this golden covering of the ark is always called by the Greek word, hilasterion, which we find translated “propitiation” here in verse 25 and ‘mercy seat’ in the only other New Testament occurrence of the word, Hebrews 9:5.”<sup>21</sup>

Propitiation is the removal of wrath, guilt, and death based on the gift of Jesus’ blood. When Jesus died, He died for all the sins of the world. In **Verse 25** it says God, “... passed over the sins previously committed.” Does this mean all those who committed sins prior to Jesus’ death on the cross get a free pass? Of course not. Even in the Old Testament, we know the sins of many cost others their lives. Sin cost them their relationships with God. Only the blood of Jesus could cover that sin. How was one made right before Jesus’ blood? By trusting and believing in God. **Romans 4:3** says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Believed God meant Abraham trusted God and his trust was made evident by his following and obeying. We see others like Moses and Abraham listed in Hebrews 11 as the writer spoke of their faith. It wasn’t their faith that saved them God did, their faith was the avenue in which they were made right with God. The same is true for us. It is not our faith that saves us, God does, and He took care of it at the cross.

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<sup>20</sup> Romans, Verse by Verse, William R. Newell

We receive that salvation personally and are assured eternal life when we put our faith in Him.

Thank God you were made right before Him when you trusted in Jesus' blood to forgive you of your sins. Spend some time considering the elaborate and incredible plan that God put into place to save us.

## Day 4

### Read Romans 3:27-31

Many of the religious leaders boasted in keeping the law. You might remember how the Pharisees would pray loud prayers to make themselves look good or others would make sure that everyone else knew how they were obeying the law. Many equated obeying the law with knowing God, when in reality they missed the mark.

We don't follow God's Word in hopes we will know God, rather, we follow God's Word and heart because we do know God and we have put our faith in Him. Because we have put our faith in Jesus, we will then follow Him. In fact, we are to follow God with all we have.

When I follow God and His Word, I can't boast in what I have done. Rather I boast in what God has done, both on the cross and in me. It is not me doing it, as my nature is evil and I do not naturally desire to follow God. When we are a new creation and God is in us, He works on our hearts, changes our desires, and we obey Him and His Word because we follow Him.

For the Jews of that time and for many today, philosophy says, "I keep God's Word and commandments, therefore I am saved." However, scripture confirms I am saved when I put my faith in Jesus and what He did for me on the cross. I then keep His Word and commandments not because I want to be saved, but because I am saved. These are two different things. One says I hope to be saved by following God's Word and commandments and the other says I am saved, therefore, I desire to follow God and His commandments.

Where are you? Are you living out of the law or out of faith? One is very constraining and the other is very freeing. Ask the Lord today which way you are living.

## Day 5

### Read Isaiah 52:14-15

Today is our Old Testament passage that prophesies about Jesus. We are told in Isaiah, written some 700 years before Jesus, that He would be marred and disfigured beyond that of any man. If you saw the movie Passion of the Christ, or any movie depicting the death of Jesus, then you know how cruel and gory it was. In fact, the American Medical Association says, “Due to the pain endured by the weight of the body hanging from the nails, which damage the medial nerves and tear at the tarsals, the respiratory torture, the cramping, the pleural effusions, concluded that ‘death by crucifixion was in every sense of the word excruciating.’”<sup>12</sup> The torture and beating that Jesus took was immense, so we can understand a little better as to why Isaiah says His appearance was disfigured so much more than that of any man.

Verse 15 reminds us that Jesus’ blood will cover many nations. “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” **Revelation 7:9-10.** Jesus’ blood is not just for you and me. It is certainly not just for Americans, but for the whole world, for anyone who would trust and put their faith in Him. This is just one reason we need to tell the truth to others, to convey God’s love across the street and around the world.

Verse 15 reminds us of God’s divinity. Jesus is the King of Kings. At the end of time, every knee will bow down and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. God raises up kings and tears them down, and at the end of time He will be the only King standing. Thank God for His Kingdom and His incredible plan. If you have put your faith and trusted Him as Savior, you are a part of His plan.

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<sup>12</sup>On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” Journal of the American Medical Association, March 21, 1986



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