

Between Books 6 and 7, there is a shift from a historical narrative to a more theological pursuit. We will open up with a look at Abraham, who is the father of all by faith and from there, we will look at theology regarding Israel and her rejection of Christ which includes Paul's statement that Israel will be saved. We will also look at the theological truth of the supremacy of Christ and then wrap up with the issue of spiritual warfare and the full armor of God. I hope you will dig into these topics and many other theological truths we will read about in the upcoming weeks.

WEEK 79 ABRAHAM: FATHER TO ALL BY FAITH-

-----Dennis Watson

This week, we will be reading several passages which will connect saving faith going all the way back to Abraham. Paul calls him the father of us all who have faith. **Romans 4:16** We will see this week that faith in the Bible connects the person of faith to God and His promises. Abraham was the first. We will see that although he lived long before Jesus and did not even know His name, Abraham's faith was in the saving work of God to deliver.

Day 1

Read Romans 4:1-5

It is tempting to think that keeping the law is the way to be right with God and thus earn your way into heaven. However, the law does not make a person right with God (righteous) and will not get you into heaven. Instead, the law makes us aware of our sinfulness and our inability to keep the law. In **Romans 3:23** Paul wrote, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In Chapter 4, he sought to help us understand what it is that makes a person right with God.

Abraham lived 400 years before the law and the Ten Commandments were given. It is first written in **Genesis 15:6** about Abraham, "And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Believe means to say *Amen*. Abraham said amen to God because he trusted and obeyed Him. Abraham leaned on the promises of God and lived accordingly.

Like all of us, Abraham's greatest need was righteousness. How is a person made righteous? To be righteous is to be in right standing with God. Our problem is that we are sinners, and we need to be made righteous. To believe in Him is to be made righteous. *Counted* in Genesis 15:6 and *accounted* in Romans 4:3 both signify the idea of applying to someone's account something which was not earned. The word impute meaning to put something on an account, is another word that is often used. When God told Abraham to leave his homeland, he obeyed. He trusted in God's promise and lived accordingly and in following God's promises and Word,

Abraham was placing his faith in Jesus way in advance of His coming. Jesus died for our sins. To believe in Him is to be made righteous. When we believe God's promises and trust Him, He puts righteousness on our account!

J. Vernon McGee says of Paul's writing in chapter 3 of Romans, "There is concord and agreement between the law and the gospel. Although they represent two diametrically opposed systems, neither contradicts nor conflicts with the other. And they are not mutually exclusive. Even under the Law and before the Law, faith was God's sole requirement. Abraham, before the Law, was justified by faith."¹

Give thanks that righteousness, as with salvation, is a free gift. It is a gift which is not earned, but is given to those who believe God and trust in His work and promises.

¹ Thru The Bible With J. Vernon McGee.

Day 2

Read Romans 4:6-12

Paul used Abraham as an example of faith, but we see in these passages that Abraham was more than a mere example. Paul illustrated his point with David, as well. Abraham lived four hundred years before the law was given and he was declared righteous before circumcision was required of all males. David lived under the law, but even he spoke of sin forgiven and sin not imputed or applied to a person of faith's account. In legal terminology, the idea of expungement comes to mind. This is the removal of a crime from a person's record. Sin is not imputed to the person of faith because his sin has been removed forever. We live much later than the law, circumcision, and the historical event of the crucifixion. Something really important to remember: Which of your sins were in the future when Jesus died for them on the cross? All of them! Which ones did He expunge from your record? All of them! Amazing Grace for sure! The person who trusts in the Lord is blessed to know his sin will never ever again be placed on his account!

Paul returned again in these passages to Abraham. We know that Abraham was the father of the Jewish people. However, Paul wrote here that he was also the father of all who believe. Before there was the law, before there was circumcision, and before Abraham took to himself the sign of circumcision, he was justified by faith. He was the father of the Jewish people by birth, but even more significantly, he became the father of all who come to God by faith apart from law and any other signs. Abraham simply believed God. That's all.

The old kid's song says, "Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord."

Everyone who has faith in God's plan through Jesus has been made a descendent of Abraham! Give thanks for God's incredible plan.

Day 3

Read Roman 4:13-17

In the midweek devotion most weeks, we look to see how the week's devotions connect to Jesus and the gospel message. How does this passage connect to the gospel?

The biblical historical account of God's saving plan is the overall theme of the Bible. He delivers. The law was not given to save us or make us right with God because no one can keep the law. Abraham was made right with God by believing God's promise. Remember, the law was given some four hundred years later. Faith is the link to God which makes one right with Him. Abraham had faith in God's plan and promise and we have the advantage of hindsight. We now know all God's promises were summed up in Jesus and He fulfilled all of those promises. In essence, when Abraham believed God, when he trusted in His promise, he was also trusting in Jesus. Abraham did not know about Jesus, he didn't even know His name, but he believed in the Father of Jesus and it was Jesus' Father who made the promise to Abraham. The only way to be right with God is to trust in God's saving plan.

This faith made Abraham the first of God's people. He became the family of God through faith and from Abraham, came a much larger family—the Hebrew people. From the Hebrew people came an even larger family of faith—all believers in Jesus Christ. Abraham became the father of a huge family—the family of faith. This same faith not only makes us right with God and makes us part of His family, but it is the faith by which we walk with God daily. As we believe and obey Him, He saves us many times a day from sinful choices and activities.

Although Jesus came to live and walk on the earth at a specified time, Jesus has always existed. When Abraham trusted God's promises, he was trusting Jesus. Give thanks to the salvation and deliverance that comes through God's promises, all summed up in Jesus.

Day 4

Read Romans 4:18-25

Paul, again, tells us that Abraham's faith was counted or put on his account which made him righteous. It was not any work he had done. We know Abraham's faith did not come easy. In fact, it is written in these passages that Abraham, "...contrary to hope, in hope believed." **Verse 18** His belief and trust in God was contrary to human logic and he had no human reason to believe. But Abraham believed anyway. This was counted to him as right standing with God. It made no sense, it was humanly illogical. It could only be a divine plan. He and Sarah were well past the age of having children. Humanly speaking, it was impossible. Warren Wiersbe says,

"One reason why God delayed in sending Abraham and Sarah a son was to permit all their natural strength to decline and then disappear. It was unthinkable that a man ninety-nine years old could beget a child in the womb of his wife who was eighty-nine years old! From a reproductive point of view, both of them were dead."²

Here is our link of belief which is credited to us: Just as Abraham and Sarah believed and it was credited to them as righteous the same is true of us. It is spelled out in Verses 24-25. We learn what we are to believe about Jesus. First, we are to believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead. Then, we need to believe Jesus died for our sins. Lastly, we must believe Jesus was raised from the dead to make us justified. All of this is contrary to human logic. Where did such a plan come from? Would a human come up with such a plan? All of man's supposed plans to get right with God have to do with man doing things which will earn God's favor. God's plan is contrary because it has nothing to do with our activity, but is totally dependent upon God's activity: His Son dying for sin; His Son raised from the dead. What do we do? Believe.

What a simple plan. Do you believe?

² Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:10

This verse is found in a section known as songs of the suffering servant. From before the world began, God had already planned to send His only Son, Jesus, into the world to become the sacrificial lamb. This verse sets forth Jesus as God's substitute for our sinfulness. He is God's atoning sacrifice for sin. Our Heavenly Father took the initiative long before the disciples, Abraham, and even Adam and Eve, lived. He spoke about Jesus through the prophets of old and told us of His plan. In Acts 2:22-23, Peter made it clear that Jesus' suffering and death was not of human planning, but was purposed by God.

Isaiah explained the cross from God's point of view. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him" in the beatings and in having Him nailed to the cross. God put Him to grief. It was God who caused Jesus to go through the suffering. It was God who made Jesus an offering for sin. Jesus was God's sacrificial offering for our sin. This is overwhelming to read and think about because it was His own Father who put Him through the ordeal of suffering and the cross. His suffering and death were not a tragedy but a triumph of God over sin for our sake. There are two statements in this passage which make it clear that His suffering would not end in death. First, "He shall see His seed." Jesus had no children by marriage, but He has a multitude of offspring by His death and resurrection. Second, "He shall prolong His days" tells of His resurrection. God will bring the victory of resurrection. God gives the victory.

The very last statement of Verse 10 takes my mind to a favorite passage of scripture which says, "Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross." **Hebrews 12:2** Jesus saw the cross as the joy before Him because He was doing His Father's will. It was His pleasure to accomplish His Father's purpose of salvation from sin.

What a blessing to know that the Father loves us so much and wants us free from sin and with Him forever, so He took all the steps and He made the sacrifice. What an amazing love!

WEEK 80 DEAD TO SIN, ALIVE TO GOD----- -----Chris Watson

Two key books in the New Testament, Acts and Romans, make the transition from law to grace. One can never be made right before God by keeping the law, but rather by faith as we see in Hebrews 11. It wasn't until the Gospels and, in particular, Acts and Romans where we have Jesus and the New Testament Church. While Christ was foretold in the Old Testament, the Jews and Gentiles were learning what it meant to die to self and live to Christ.

Day 1

Read Romans 6:1-4

In order to understand the context of this chapter, we must look back to Chapter 5. “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” **Romans 5:20-21** Paul, to this point has made it clear that God's love and grace is more than enough. God's love and grace is so much greater than our sin. As Paul is preaching, he is asking the questions that those hearing his words might have and answers them. He is asking should we sin more so we can receive more grace? Of course not, we died to sin. In other words, if one has truly come to Christ, they will not want to live in sin and if they do sin, they will be convicted and that conviction leads to repentance.

In order to truly grasp the Gospel, we must first understand that without Jesus, we are hell bound and we have no hope of our own. The very definition of eternal life, from scripture, is to know God and the one whom He has sent, Jesus. The Good News is only good once we have grasped the bad news first. Then, it's not just good news, but great news. Therefore, if we were lost in our sin, but now alive in Christ, we would not want to live in that which brought us death. From the rest of the context of scripture, we still know that temptation and sin(s) will come and it grieves God and

it should grieve us. In Verse 4 of our passage, Paul says we should walk in newness of life. Christ has given us a new life and we no longer have to walk in sin.

Do you find yourself defeated today? Be reminded and let any defeat drive you to Jesus. The Lord doesn't want us to live in defeat, but in victory through Christ Jesus.

Day 2

Read Romans 6:5-14

Until Jesus comes back, we will all die. In our passage today, Paul brings up death and resurrection. He says in Verse 6 that our *old man* has been crucified and our sin done away with, therefore, we will no longer be slaves to sin. In order to live to Christ, I must die to myself. I can't live to Chris Watson and Jesus Christ at the same time because our hearts and desires are totally different. If we have truly trusted Christ, we, in essence, died to ourselves and Paul makes it clear that we died to sin. The rest of our life is us learning to die to self and live to Christ, literally. Every moment in our lives we seek to die to who we are (our selfishness, hate, anger, bitterness, etc.) and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, living to Christ. We can't do this on our own which is why we need Jesus to save us daily from ourselves.

Think about what you just read for a moment. Our biggest problem is not with others, but ourselves. When we seek to gratify our sinful nature, living to sin, we get into a lot of trouble and go opposite of Christ. This is why Paul said we don't sin all the more for we died to sin and its ugliness. Why would we want to live in sin any longer? This doesn't mean we are perfect because we will still struggle with sin, but we won't be happy or satisfied to live in it if we know God. Sin will bother us until we deal with it before Christ. In **Verse 13** when Paul says, "... present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God," he is clearly saying, submit to God and die to self.

What is it that you need to die to today? Perhaps anger, unforgiveness, hate, bitterness, or lust needs to die. Take time right now to ask the Lord to give you victory. In fact, He already has, you simply need to lay it at His feet and submit to Him.

Day 3

Read Romans 6:15-19

Today is our connect to Jesus day. The only way we can know God is if we have been connected to Him through Jesus and His blood. We know God by putting our trust in Jesus and while there is nothing that can keep us from God's love, sin can hinder our relationship with God. For example, if you are married you were married on a certain day and you have a marriage license and certificate to prove it. Your wife may do something which gets on your nerves, she may be short and ugly with you, or visa versa. This may hinder your relationship or fellowship, but it doesn't mean you are not married, just that the relationship is hindered until that situation is dealt with. It's not that you are no longer married or the marriage ended as soon as you argued, but rather the relationship suffered because of the argument or whatever was done. The same is true for us, when we sin, we don't lose our salvation, but it hinders our relationship with Christ which is why moment by moment repentance is so important.

In our passages today, Paul conveys that every person is a slave to something and before we were saved, we were slaves to sin. In becoming followers of Jesus, we are and should be slaves to Jesus. In others words, before we were saved our master was ourself, we did whatever we wanted or whatever made us happy; we were slaves to sin. Since knowing God, He is our Master. Who are you slave to today or maybe better asked, who are you serving today, yourself or Christ? May it be Christ.

Day 4

Read Romans 6:20-23

We have all done things we have been ashamed of, be it something we said, something we did, somewhere we went, or just an all-around foolish and stupid decision. Although some of those decisions were made before we knew God, we must all admit we continue to make poor decisions even after we know God. Paul says in **Verse 21** "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? In other words, there was nothing good about those things and even now, one may be paying for those choices, but praise God, God's grace covers those.

In Verse 21, bad fruit is a product of ungodly choices and sin. In Verse 22 Paul speaks of fruit to holiness and everlasting life. Everlasting life is not simply escaping hell and going to heaven. Scripture tells us that eternal life is to know God and the one whom He sent, Jesus. As we know Jesus, He produces fruit in us. In Galatians 5:22 we read of the Fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is totally opposite of what sin produces, the fruits of death and regret.

Paul ends Chapter 6 by telling his readers that the wages of sin is death and eternal separation from God, but God's gift found in Jesus, is eternal life. Eternal life is so much more than going to heaven and escaping hell. As we walk daily with Jesus, the more we know Him and the more we know Him, the more we love Him and want to be obedient to Him.

Do you know Him? If so, ask the Lord to produce in you faith that is in keeping with repentance.

Day 5

Read Leviticus 17:8-12

The Lord told Moses in Leviticus 17:11 that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Those in the Old Testament were made right before God by faith. Hebrews 11 tells us of this concerning many Old Testament heroes. While once a year a sacrifice was made for the sins of the people, it could not take away those sins. Ultimately it pointed to Jesus who would take away sins. In the New Testament age, as in the Old, the shedding of blood was necessary, both pointing to Jesus.

Many people wear crosses around their necks, on rings, earrings or t-shirts. It's a sign of so much pain, hurt and agony for Jesus, and yet, the cross brought true life for us, the opportunity for a relationship with Jesus. We see in our passage today, it also brings us grace and freedom from sin. We no longer have to be married to sin, but instead we can be sons and daughters of the King, adopted into His family because of what He has done.

Take some time today and reflect on the cross. Reflect what it meant for Jesus and what it means for us.

WEEK 81 NO CONDEMNATION-----Chris Watson

As a believer, conviction comes from the Holy Spirit, but condemnation comes from the enemy and sometimes we confuse the two. Have you ever sinned and felt awful, condemned and just plain lousy? This most likely wasn't from the Lord. The Lord convicts us, calls us to repentance and loves on us while doing it. This is totally different than the guilt and condemnation used by the enemy. This week, Paul reminds us there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Day 1

Read Romans 8:1-11

The word, *therefore* is used in the beginning of Chapter 8 and we need to ask what it's there for. Paul ends Chapter 7 saying, "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." **Romans 7:21-25**

We now know the word *therefore* is used because Paul, like us, was having a back and forth between his flesh and living to the Spirit. Sometimes he would submit to the Spirit and, at other times, he would submit to himself. In Verse 1, Paul wrote "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." Meaning, when we fall and mess up, we don't have to be condemned because the Lord has forgiven us and died for those sins. He calls us to repent, to change our minds, and continue walking with Him.

Paul goes on to say in Chapters 6 and 7, that if the Spirit lives in us, we don't live to ourselves or our desires, but to Christ. As a believer, where do you find yourself today? Living to yourself or the Spirit? If you are living to self, repent and while doing so, remember there is no condemnation. Live rejoicing in Christ.

Day 2

Read Romans 8:12-17

Paul reminds his readers we are not debtors to the flesh, but the Spirit. He reminds us in **Verse 14**, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are Sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption..." When Christ died for our sins and we trusted Him, we became His sons and daughters; He adopted us into His family. We read in **2 Corinthians 5:21** "He became sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God." Because of this adoption we can cry out, "Abba, Father."

I love how the website Got Questions explains and answers what it means that God is our Abba Father. "In Scripture there are many different names used to describe God. While all the names of God are important in many ways, the name "Abba Father" is one of the most significant names of God in understanding how He relates to people. The word Abba is an Aramaic word that means "Father." It was a common term that expressed affection and confidence and trust. Abba signifies the close, intimate relationship of a father and his child, as well as the childlike trust that a young child puts in his "daddy."

Abba is always followed by the word Father in Scripture, and the phrase is found in three passages. In Mark 14:36, Jesus addresses His Father as "Abba, Father" in His prayer in Gethsemane. In Romans 8:15, "Abba, Father" is mentioned in relation to the Spirit's work of adoption that makes us God's children and heirs with Christ. In Galatians 4:6, again in the context of adoption, the Spirit in our hearts cries out, "Abba, Father." Together, the terms Abba and Father doubly emphasize the fatherhood of God. In two different languages, we are assured of God's care for His children.

Many claim that all people are "children of God," but the Bible reveals quite a different truth. We are all His creations and under His authority and lordship, and all will be judged by Him, but the right to be a child of God and call Him "Abba Father" is something that only born-again Christians have (John 1:12-13). When

we are born again (John 3:1–8), we are adopted into the family of God, redeemed from the curse of sin, and made heirs of God (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7). Part of that new relationship is that God now deals with us differently, as family.

It is life-changing to understand what it means to be able to call the one true God our “Father” and what it means to be joint-heirs with Christ. Because of our relationship with our Abba, Father, He no longer deals with us as enemies; instead, we can approach Him with “boldness” (Hebrews 10:19) and in “full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22). The Holy Spirit “testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17).

Becoming a child of God is the highest and most humbling of honors. Because of it we have a new relationship with God and a new standing before Him. Instead of running from God and trying to hide our sin like Adam and Eve did, we run to Him, calling, “Abba, Father!” and finding forgiveness in Christ. Being an adopted child of God is the source of our hope, the security of our future, and the motivation to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). Being children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords calls us to a higher standard, a different way of life, and, in the future, “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Peter 1:4).³

Paul ends the scripture passage reminding us that if we are His sons and daughters, and He is our Father, we are also heirs and if we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him. What a great promise for this life and for the next.

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Abba-Father.html>

Day 3

Read Romans 8:18-30

The rest of scripture along with our text today, reminds us we will face trouble and sufferings in this world. Part of that suffering is the trials and tribulations of this life and looking forward to the glorious eternal one. Look around, we all recognize things are not the way they are supposed to be and we know it is because of sin, and because of this, we eagerly await the day of the redemption of our bodies and meeting Jesus face to face.

Paul reminds us we will have weaknesses and struggles and, at times, we won't know what to pray but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us. **Hebrews 7:25** says, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Christ right now is interceding for us. Robert M'Cheyne wrote "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference; He is praying for me." What a great promise and reminder. As He prays for us, He causes "... all things to work together for good to those who love Him and called according to His purpose." **Verse 28** Because of this God foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified His followers.

Thanks be to God for His grace and love.

Day 4

Read Romans 8:31-39

Upon the resurrection of Christ and the beginning of the New Testament Church, it was the disciples as well as other believers against the world. Paul gives us this great reminder in **Verse 31**, "... If God is for us, who can be against us?"? This passage is so reassuring. God with us means more than anything and because of this Paul also pens in **Verse 35**, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? What can separate us from God? Nothing, absolutely nothing, not one single thing. Why? We know who God is and with God, we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus.

I think we would all admit the world we live in today is crazy and chaotic and this is putting it nicely. With everything going on, we need a constant. Jesus is that constant. Scripture reminds us He is the same yesterday, today and forever. In this crazy world, when Christians are in the minority, it seems like everything and everyone is going against the Lord and His Word. Again, remember when God is with us, no matter what is against us, we win.

Church be encouraged today. Ecclesiastes tells us there is nothing new under the sun. The same things we see going on in our world today were going on in scripture time. We have TV, social media, radio, and alerts that keep us connected 24/7. Don't lose sight that no matter what is going on, God is with us. It doesn't matter who or what is against us.

Day 5

Read Micah 7:7

Our hope is in the Lord. Micah knew this as did God's chosen people, but like us, they often forgot. This one verse reminds us how to walk with the Lord. It was written as a confession for the sins of Israel in often going before Him and not listening when He spoke. Let's unpack it line by line.

Therefore, I will look to the Lord:

We may look to the news, our finances, our jobs, our families or even ourselves for hope, peace or satisfaction, but we will always come up empty. While none of those things are bad in and of themselves, God may use them in our lives. He may teach us much with them, but we must always look and keep our eyes on the Lord.

I will wait for the God of my salvation:

Have you ever gone before the Lord in prayer about a situation and or made a choice to react because you thought He was too slow in His response or you didn't get the answer that you wanted? I have and it cost me, more than I wanted to pay. All throughout scripture the Bible speaks on waiting on the Lord. Even when waiting is hard and we become impatient, it's best to wait for His leading so we do not take matters into our own hands. Are you waiting on the Lord?

My God will hear me:

When the veil was torn, we gained direct access to the Father by what Jesus did for us on the cross. We don't have to go to someone else to speak to God on our behalf. While we want others to pray for us, we can also speak directly to the Lord because of the blood of Jesus. It is so reassuring that we can speak to God and He responds to us through the Holy Spirit.

May you and I look to the Lord and wait on Him, for He hears us!

WEEK 82 ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF CHRIST-----

-----Dennis Watson

Paul wrote something in Romans which creates a stir for many people. He says in **Romans 11:26-27**: "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ²⁷ For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." **Romans 11:26-27**

Paul expresses deep concern for his people in Chapters 9-11 of Romans. He has a heavy heart for his people, the Israelites, because they have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. He longs for them to come to the truth even to the point of saying he would gladly give up his own salvation. He goes on to say the rejection of all Israelites will not be final, but a remnant will be saved.

Day 1

Read Romans 9:1-13

Paul was struggling and grieving that his own people had rejected the Messiah of God. Although they had received the blessings of God, they did not accept the Messiah. They were the privileged people of God. He had chosen them to be His own people. He had placed His glory on them. He had made a covenant with them. He had given the law to them. They had the tabernacle and the temple and the care and service of them. They were the people from whom Christ came into the world physically. They were so advantaged by God, but still rejected Him.

However, not all of those who were of Israel were actually Israel. Just like all of those in the church are not really saved. It was never intended that the people of Israel would just be a physical people and nation. God established them so they would become a people of faith. The covenants were to be based on faith and belief. God willed that they would love Him, trust Him and obey Him, but most of them made it about keeping the law. The real people of Israel were those who received and believed the promise which had been given to Abraham. The real Israel was not those who merely became law-keepers.

Election is a very important word in the Bible. Election is all about the call of God, it is not from natural descent, nor is it from human merit. God calls and He elects. When it comes to Israel and the Jews, they are a special people. Even when they walked away, the Lord is faithful. I really like this passage: “For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” **Malachi 3:6**

God is not finished with the Jews. It was through this nation God opened up His arms to all people. It is all about His choice. Not about what we deserve! Give thanks for Him choosing you!

Remember, God is not finished yet.

Day 2

Read Romans 9:14-29

Who is God to make such a random choice. Random? Consider the following passage: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. ⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. **Isaiah 55:8-9**

Nothing God does is random. It is all deliberate and in keeping with His purposes. God is sovereign and there is no one like Him. He is in control of all of history and eternity

Why would God choose Isaac over Ishmael? Why would He choose Jacob over Esau? It was not about natural descent nor human merit. It was sovereign choice. He has plans and purposes which are beyond our capacity to grasp or understand. If God did it, it is good and it is righteous; we just have to let His plan unfold. Let Him finish.

This thought process usually follows this thinking: "Why would God choose him or her? They are undeserving." The truth is we all deserve condemnation, not mercy. He shows grace for His purposes. This is what He did when He chose Abraham to be the father of the nation of Israel, His chosen people. On the other side, He hardened Pharaoh for the same reason—for His purposes. Are you ready to trust His sovereign choice? I do not understand, but when it comes to myself, I trust His choice. I was walking around in the worship center this morning where there were several workers remodeling the stage area. It suddenly hit me what all God had done! He had built this beautiful facility and this wonderful church made up of such wonderful people. Why me? Why am I so blessed to be a part of what He has done and is doing? I don't get it! But I am so thankful and rejoicing. His choosing is His choice. It is based on His plan, His wisdom, and His knowledge. He does not work on the limitations of time, space, and matter.

Israel's rejection of Jesus opened the door of the gospel to the gentiles. The coming of the gentiles into the kingdom opens the door for Israel to be saved. God's plans are incredible!

Day 3

Read Romans 9:30-10:21

Why did the Jews reject Jesus Christ? It was never the plan of God to make any person His own child apart from trust. We read in **Romans 4:3** “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Trust and belief became the source of His relationship with God. It is not in doing, it is in trusting. It is the two of these, belief and trust which links us to God.

"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." **Genesis 15:6**

God has made Himself known to us through creation, His Word, and His Son, Jesus Christ. He gives us an invitation to come to Him in trust. It is all about Him! Then, He invites us to join Him in what He is doing—what He is up to. It is in this joining Him that we get to experience Him. He does all the work. We trust and obey joining Him in His plan. This is where we enjoy seeing Him at work. It is not about what we do for Him. It is all about what He does when we join Him in trust and obedience.

The Jews rejected God and Christ because they wanted their right standing with Him to be based on their works. It is sinful human nature to believe whatever good comes our way, we had something to do with it. We, as sinful humans, have a hard time with free gifts. Paul writes it is by faith the gentiles were made right with God (righteous) and not by keeping the law, works or their behavior. Israel rejected Christ because they wanted right standing with God to be by keeping the law. The law was given to lead us to Christ. It is through the law we find out just how bad we are.

Paul says they did not seek righteousness by faith, but by works of the law, because of this, they rejected the stone God provided. Tony Evans writes “As long as anyone pursues salvation by works, as Israel did, the grace of Jesus will act like a stumbling stone. Jesus is either the stone we trip over in our self-righteous-

ness, or he's the rock we build our lives upon." (Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda.)

Israel was zealous for the things of God pertaining to the law. However, Paul writes in **Romans 10:2**, "... It was not according to knowledge." They were serious about being religious. They worked hard to live good lives but they missed God's provision of the Savior. They were like many today who are going to church and being good people yet, missing the gift of salvation through faith.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. It is from that faith or belief we, in obedience, join God in what He is doing. The Jews wanted their relationship with God to be based on their goodness in keeping the law. No one will ever be good enough, but all who call on the name of the Lord (Jesus) will be saved.

Day 4

Read Romans 11:1-10

Paul begins to show how God has a plan to save Israel. God has not cast away His chosen people, the Jews. He has promised to bless them and through them, all of the families of the earth will be blessed. Although the people of Israel had been set aside for a time, God is not finished with them.

God has not and will not cast His people away. Paul first presents himself as evidence of God's faithfulness to the Jews. Paul was a Jew, a descendent of Abraham through the tribe of Benjamin. Paul was a Pharisee and teacher of the law. God was not finished with the Jews.

He shows another illustration from the Old Testament prophet Elijah. Elijah was convinced he was the only one left who was faithful to God. He laments that the Jews had killed the prophets and torn down the altars and he was the only faithful one left. God told Elijah he was mistaken and there were seven thousand men who had not bowed down to Baal. God always keeps for Himself a faithful remnant. Even when it seems like there are no faithful people, God has preserved for Himself a remnant. The remnant is "...according to the election of grace." **Romans 11:5**

God is faithful. People can be unforgiving. God is faithful to forgive and to continue in His blessings. Humans are quick to be vindictive, but God is forgiving. I was thinking recently that if I were God, I would kill me. I know this sounds extreme, but this is human nature. We want to eliminate people for their persistent sinning. God is not that way. He wants to forgive infinitely and He made that possible this way, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." **Romans 5:8**

I am still a sinner, yet Christ died for me. My salvation is secure only because of Jesus!

Day 5

Read Romans 11:11-36

Paul had great concern for Israel and prayed for their salvation; however, as we read further in these passages, we discover that ultimately Israel would be saved. We must keep in mind, God does not provide another way of salvation for Israel. He just provides another and final opportunity.

God had a plan and it began with a particular people—the Jews. The Jews turned away time and time again, but God remained faithful to His covenant even when Israel rebelled and turned to idols and false gods. It was through their rebellion and disobedience that God, as was His plan, made a people who were not a people, His people—the gentiles. Non-Jews are gentiles. God, as promised, brought His invitation to the nations. God chose the Jews so the nations might be saved. God finished opening the door to the gentiles which we read about in Romans 11:25. Paul wrote that the Israelites were blinded “until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.” When that time is finished, the church will be taken out of the world in the event known as the rapture. Soon after, the tribulation will begin and it will be a time when the Jews get an opportunity to receive Jesus. There will be 144,000 Jewish evangelists preaching the gospel. There will be 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Here is what gotquestions.org says about the 144,000: “These 144,000 Jews are “sealed,” which means they have the special protection of God. They are kept safe from the divine judgments and from the wrath of the Antichrist. They can freely perform their mission during the tribulation. It had been previously prophesied that Israel would repent and turn back to God (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:25–27), and the 144,000 Jews seem to be a sort of “first fruits” (Revelation 14:4) of that redeemed Israel. Their mission seems to be to evangelize the post-rapture world and proclaim the gospel during the tribulation period. As a result of their ministry, millions—“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9)—will come to faith in Christ.” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/144000.html>)

God will save many during the tribulation. Many of those will be Jews, but they will be saved the only way any person can be saved—through faith in Jesus' death bringing forgiveness of sin and the indwelling of the Spirit through His resurrection. God will open the eyes of the Jewish people. Not all will be saved, but many will.

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." **Zechariah 12:10**

Give thanks to the Lord for His mercy and grace and His irrevocable call!

WEEK 83 BELIEVE AND CONFESS-----Chris Watson

The gospel is so simple and, yet, it is so complex. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that the gospel is this; Jesus lived, died, was resurrected, and lives so we might know God through Him. The more we study the gospel, the more we learn and grow. In both the Gospels and the New Testament, there were really three main words which were used when it came to salvation. Two of those are repent and believe and the other was confess. This week, we will look at what it means to believe, repent, and confess.

Day 1

Read Romans 9:24-10:4

I have often described Romans as Paul trying his best, under God's direction, to help Israel understand they are not saved by the law (works), but by grace. We see this continued in our passage this week. The end of Chapter 9 shares that many won't get or receive God's grace and the beginning of Chapter 10 tells us why. Before Christ, the law (God's law) was to be kept without question. Today we are to keep God's law and follow Him. In Old Testament times, keeping God's laws showed you loved Him as does obeying and following Him and His Word today. However, the Israelites took it a step further. They believed that keeping the law and doing right, or making themselves look good, was what made them right with God. In his letter to the Romans, Paul tried to help them understand that keeping the whole law or even some of it could not save them. Rather, trusting in God's righteousness and His keeping of the law for us and placing our faith and hope in Him accomplishes our salvation.

We see in today's scripture that they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Martin Luther said, "This is a terrible thing, which properly and alone resist faith, opposes obedience to God's Word, and makes men stiff-necked and incorrigible, as we perceive this in heretic and schematics. For they insist upon their 'good intentions' with stiff-necked and obstinate opposition, just as though they could not be mistaken they believe that their salvation is altogether based upon the fact that they have good intentions and zeal for God. Such person the Bible describes most properly as

perverse in heart and corrupt in mind. Therefore we must note that to have a zeal of God according to knowledge means to regard nothing else as greater than always to be ready with fear and trembling and to be guided, led and instructed (by God) in all that is good, no matter how insignificant it may be.”⁴

No matter our best intentions, as good as we try to be at keeping the law, nothing can save us but God. For if we could save ourselves, we wouldn't need Jesus. The fact we are sinful and can't save ourselves reminds us we are truly in desperate need of a Savior. Do you find yourself beating your chest at how good you are, or how well you obey God's law? Do you think God should be happy to have you on His team? Repent! Trust in His goodness, His grace, and the fact that through Jesus, we are on His team. We are His children.

⁴Commentary on Romans, Martin Luther

Day 2

Read Romans 10:5-13

Today, we come to a section of scripture which is said to be one of the most quoted scriptures. Many of the Jews had a hard time believing the man crucified was the Messiah. However, if they knew this truth and trusted that He was indeed the Messiah, and if they put their faith in Him as the Lord whom was raised from the dead, they would be saved. The Jews would have clearly understood up to this point that one could not merely acknowledge these facts and then continue on the same path. Acknowledging this truth and following it would absolutely change their lives. For this man, Jesus, was the Son of God.

Verse 10 tells us the heart believes unto righteousness. This also clarified to the Jews and any others that salvation could not be earned, but had to be received by trusting and putting one's faith in Jesus to cover their sins. The second part of the salvation process is to confess such actions with their (our) mouth.

“Confession is the chief work of faith; for here man denies himself and confesses God. And he dies (to himself) in his confession of God by the denial of himself; for there can be no greater denial of oneself that this, that one does to confess God. By doing this, he surrenders himself, in order that God may be confirmed and (his) confession of Him (may be confirmed).”⁵

Again, the Jews would clearly have known to confess Jesus as the Savior and His having risen from the dead would be a game changer. This was not just a head nod confession, but one that would definitively change the course of one's life.

What about you? Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? How has it changed your life? Do you just give God lip service or your whole life? Take some time to think on these questions and thank God that He has changed your life!

⁵ Commentary on Romans, Martin Luther

Day 3

Read Romans 10:14-15

“Paul now takes these two ‘whosoever’ verses, and from them answers the Jew, who not only relied on his law-keeping instead of on simple faith to save him, but also denied that either Paul or any of the apostles has any right to proclaim salvation by a simple message,- a message that left out the law and Judaism. If salvation were to come unto them that ‘call on the name of the Lord’ argues Paul, calling is impossible to one who has not believed on the Lord; and believing is impossible to one who has not heard the message about the Lord; and hearing is impossible unless someone comes preaching the message; and preaching is impossible except the messenger be Divinely sent!”⁶

Paul made this argument or statement to the Jews, but it also applies to us. Through Paul’s writing, God reminds us we are to go and tell. We are saved when we trust in Jesus, Jesus also gave us the command to go and make disciples and to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world in Acts 1:8. In other words, once we trust Christ and as we grow in Him, we have a responsibility to share the gospel with others. We are to share Him both in word and deed with our family, those with whom we work or go to school, our community, and the entire world. In earlier devotions I have referenced how God has commanded us to go. We don’t have to pray whether or not we are to go and share the gospel. That’s a given; it’s a command. We might pray and ask where God would have us go, maybe about a specific mission trip, or that He would give us the words to say and the right timing to share with our friends. There is no question about whether or not we are to share. God commands it.

How are you taking the Gospel to your family, your community, and the world? Some are truly physically unable, yet, they can provide prayer support and, perhaps, even financial support for those who can go. For those of us physically able, what’s holding you back from going to China, Canada, Russia, or another part of

⁶ Romans, Verse by Verse A Classical Commentary, William R. Newell

the world to share the Gospel? If we know it's God's will, we just need to join Him in it. Will you be obedient to go? Maybe next time we will be praying over you? How will God use you?

Day 4

Read Romans 10:16-21

Verse 16 begins, “But not all the Israelites accepted the Good News.” Some Israelites believed and trusted in Jesus and there are several places in Romans and Acts which recorded that some (Jews) believed. This is great news! The bad news is if some believed, this means some did not.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Lord sought to reveal Himself to the Israelites. We know from Romans that the gospel would be for all people. While the Israelites concerned themselves with keeping the Law, making themselves look good in front of others, and seeking their own righteousness, God revealed Himself to gentiles (all those who were not Jewish). Paul noted in Verse 21 the Jews were disobedient and obstinate, as if they wanted to do things their own way.

Have you ever sought to do things your own way and be totally disobedient? How did it work out? Unfortunately I have, and it didn't work well. Some of the Israelites were doing this and others totally shunned the gospel. What about you? Do you know the gospel? I am not talking about just knowing the facts of the gospel, but have you turned from your self-righteousness? Have you trusted in Him as your Savior? If not, call on His name now to save you. If you have trusted in Him, thank Him for your salvation. Thank Him for revealing Himself to you. Take some time to pray for those you know who are still stiff-arming God and His gospel. Pray for those who may have trusted in Jesus, but have wandered far away from Him. Don't just pray for them today, but add them to your prayer list and pray often for them. In the meantime, pray for God to keep you in His will, following and obeying Him.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 65:1-2

Romans 11 speaks of how gentiles have been grafted in. We are reminded Israel is God's chosen people, but God has given the Gospel to everyone which makes us grafted in. Romans 11:11-24 is not part of our devotion today, but I encourage you to read it. It will help in understanding just what God has done for us. Remember, Isaiah was written hundreds of years before Christ came so this was another prophecy that the Gospel would spread and would be for all peoples. Take some time as a part of your devotion and thank God that He has revealed Himself to you. Thank Him for saving you and opening your eyes to the Truth. As part of that prayer, ask God to make clear to you the opportunities to share the Gospel with others.

Verse 2 of today's passage speaks about those (Israel) who do not walk in a good way, but are pursuing their own imaginations. In school, we learned an imagination is a good thing if used for the right purposes. However, if we let our imaginations run wild, we can get ourselves in a lot of trouble. No one wakes up in the morning and commits an unthinkable act without having first thought it through. When we follow the path of sin, it's just that, a path and as the path is followed, often in our imagination, it leads us to places we think we want to go, but really we should not. Have you ever found yourself imagining or daydreaming of things ungodly? If so, confess and when it happens again, flee. If our minds are set on the things of God, like scripture tells us they need to be, then our minds are on the right things. Our problem is when we focus on the ungodly things.

Romans 1:30 describes very evil people. People which let their imaginations run wild, so much so that it says *they invented* ways of doing evil. Are you following God or following the enemy? Is your mind on the things of God or the things of this world? Are you focusing on your ungodly imagination or the Truth of God? Set your mind on the things of God and as scripture says let your mind be transformed to that of God's!

WEEK 84 PAUL IN CHAINS-----Dennis Watson

The explosion and spread of the gospel into the world continued. Paul persevered to preach the gospel and his focus had turned to the gentiles, but his heart still ached for his people to receive the gospel. Paul had entered into a vow with some other believers. When they went into the temple area, the Jewish people assumed Paul had taken some of his gentile friends into the temple area where no foreigner was allowed to go. They seized Paul with the intent to kill him. However, Roman guards took Paul into custody. A near riot broke out due in part to the anger of the people toward Paul, but mostly due to their illogical hostility. Paul was taken into custody and faced several trials and hearings, all of which became opportunities for him to share Jesus and his faith. Finally, Paul made his appeal to Caesar. His case would be heard in Rome. Our biblical historical account now picks up with his journey to Rome.

Day 1

Read Acts 26:19-32

Paul found himself in Caesarea, no longer before the governor Festus, but before King Herod Agrippa. Agrippa was in town and wanted to hear from Paul. The king gave Paul an opportunity to speak for himself and Paul took full advantage of it! Paul told him about the vision and his experience on the road to Damascus. He told King Agrippa Jesus had spoken to him and told him he would be the Lord's servant and witness. Paul said he had to be faithful and obedient to his calling and he explained he had preached repentance, which was why the Jews had seized him. All he had done was be faithful to the message of Moses and the prophets in preaching about Jesus and His resurrection from the dead.

The governor, Festus, had heard Paul before Agrippa, so when Paul spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, Festus accused Paul of being out of his mind, driven insane by his learning. Paul turned it around and denied his insanity and told his listeners that Agrippa knew what was going on. He asked Agrippa in **Verse 27** point blank, "Do you believe the prophets? I know you do." Talk about boldness!

Paul was not being disrespectful; he knew what was true and just wanted Agrippa to acknowledge what he knew. King Agrippa gave a response which is best expressed in the NIV, “Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”” **Acts 26:28** Agrippa knew what was going on. Paul was seeking to lead Agrippa and everyone in the room to salvation through Jesus Christ.

Paul was clearly on mission—all the time! Wouldn't it be great if we would see our lives as a mission? When we are on mission trips, we know why we are there. Paul saw everything which happened in his life was to advance the gospel. He was not defending himself. He was presenting the gospel. Paul wanted everyone to become like himself, except for the chains.

As the meeting came to a close, neither Festus nor Agrippa believed Paul had done anything deserving death or prison. However, Paul had already made his appeal to Caesar and he was about to be on his way to Rome.

Ask the Lord for the grace to be reminded that you are always on mission.

Day 2

Read Acts 27:9-28:16

The long journey began for Paul and his servant-companion , Aristarchus. In Acts 27:2 we see Luke had returned as one of Paul's traveling companions. Ultimately, the trip would be in an Egyptian grain ship with 276 passengers. Paul had warned that the journey would be dangerous due to its timing during the stormy season, but he was ignored. As the journey continued, it became true of Paul, "Paul began as a prisoner and ended as the captain." Paul was assertive and aggressive and was not afraid to take charge and speak up.

"A crisis does not make a person; a crisis shows what a person is made of, and it tends to bring true leadership to the fore. Paul gently rebuked the centurion, pilot, and captain for ignoring his warning. Soon they would discover that God had spared all of them only because of Paul." ⁷

Paul encouraged the crew and he shared God's word with his captive audience. He gave warnings. He was an example before them. God's people should be doing all of these things. Paul took seriously his call to be light in a dark world and to give hope and encouragement.

The ship, crew, and passengers struggled in the violent sea for fourteen days and nights. They had gone several days without seeing the sun or the stars, so they could not determine where they were. Paul encouraged them to eat and stay with the ship so they would all be saved from the storm. They threw the cargo over the side of the ship to lighten the load. After two weeks, they ran the ship aground. All 276 passengers and prisoners made it to land safely.

The land was the isle of Malta. The people of the island welcomed them and showed them hospitality by building a fire to help the people from the ship keep warm. Paul, never taking on the role of a victim, but remaining always a servant, was gathering sticks for the fire when a snake latched onto his hand. The people of the island assumed this was a sign Paul was a criminal and would die of

⁷ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1

the bite. Not only did he not die, but he began to heal the sick people of the island. After three months on the island, they boarded another ship and traveled on to Rome where Paul served and was served.

What an amazing account of a man who was under arrest. He did not moan and pout. He did not live his life as a victim. He went right to work in every situation and circumstance taking every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

We are not victims, because of Jesus we are victors! Be lifted up and encouraged. Serve the Lord by serving others at all times!

Day 3

Read Acts 28:17-31

Day three each week is the time to connect the week's scripture to Jesus and the gospel. The last fifteen verses of Acts powerfully continue the account of Paul and his ministry of the gospel in Rome. Just a few days after arriving in Rome, he gathered the Jewish leaders together and shared his story with them, what he had been doing, and how he came to be in the position he was in. He did not complain or offer negative words. His focus was on presenting Jesus and the gospel. He understood the gospel was the number one need of all people and it took precedence over everything else.

The Jewish leaders at Rome knew about Christianity, but had not received any correspondence about Paul. They had heard of the sect and that it was "... spoken against everywhere." **Verse 22** They obviously did not understand, so Paul taught them.

A time was chosen and he preached the gospel to them, sharing that it was rooted in the writings of Moses and the prophets. From morning until evening, he reasoned with them urging them to come to Jesus. Some were persuaded. However, others were not and Paul applied the passage from Isaiah 6:9-10 to them. Paul rebuked those who did not believe, letting them know that because of their unbelief, the gospel had been sent to the gentiles who would believe.

Paul kept "open house" and received anybody who wanted to discuss the things of the kingdom of God. He was chained to a guard and the guards were relieved every six hours, so they were forced to listen as Paul preached and taught and prayed. No wonder some of them were saved! (Phil. 1:12-14; 4:22)⁸

For two years, Paul continued to preach and teach in Rome. The very last word of Acts tells us he did so without hindrance. Nothing got in the way of his proclamation of the truth!

What a challenge for us today! We need to be about the message of the gospel, not allowing anything to hinder its presentation.

⁸ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

Day 4

Read Philippians 1:12-16

Paul knew what he was about. He was about the gospel; like Jesus, he was about his Father's business. This was Paul's motive. Whatever came his way was simply another opportunity to give testimony, either by word or deed, to the message of the gospel. This is what Paul was saying when he said, "The things which happened to me" as described by Luke in Acts 21:17-28:31. This period of time covered more than four years of Paul's life.

Warren Wiersbe really expresses the sentiment of Paul's words:

"To many, all of this would have looked like failure, but not to this man with a "single mind," concerned with sharing Christ and the Gospel. Paul did not find his joy in ideal circumstances; he found his joy in winning others to Christ. And if his circumstances promoted the furtherance of the Gospel, that was all that mattered! The word furtherance means "pioneer advance." It is a Greek military term referring to the army engineers who go before the troops to open the way into new territory. Instead of finding himself confined as a prisoner, Paul discovered that his circumstances really opened up new areas of ministry."²⁰

Attitude is huge in approaching life. Some have even said attitude is everything. I prefer to think it is not as important what happens to you as it is how you respond to it. Paul seemed to have it all nailed down. Whatever came his way was received as an occasion to advance the gospel. For me, an occasion involves this time, this place, and these people. So what am I going to do? I can fuss. I can complain. I can mope like a child whose feelings have been hurt. Or, I can use this time and this place to advance the gospel to these people! Let's use all occasions to advance the gospel whether by word or deed.

⁹ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 2.

Day 5

Read Psalm 22:22-31

On day five, we look at a Psalm or passage from one of the prophets to see how they connect to Jesus. This section of Psalms, Chapters 22-24, are Messianic Psalms; they prophesy about Jesus the Messiah. In Chapter 22 we see the Good Shepherd who dies for the sheep. In Psalm 23, we see the Great Shepherd who lives for and cares for the sheep. Psalm 24 is about the Chief Shepherd returning in glory for their service.

The last part of Psalm 22 describes how Jesus' death provides salvation for us. In Hebrews 2:11-12, the writer of Hebrews attributes the words of Psalm 22:22 to Jesus, Himself. Jesus said one day He will call all believers His brethren. In **Hebrews 2:11** the writer noted that, "He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all one." By this he was saying that Jesus, the One who saves, and those who are being saved are one. Jesus made this possible; in doing so, He made us all part of the same family!

When Paul arrived in Rome, he gathered the believers together and called them brothers. Jesus has brought us together and made us His spiritual offspring. He is the "... firstborn among many brothers." **Romans 8:29** Kinship is made possible for us by the work of Jesus' salvation through the cross.

This is the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. All of the nations of the world would be blessed. What an incredible unfolding of God's plan. We see it in Genesis, Psalms, Acts, and Hebrews. It all connects!

Give thanks for God's incredibly amazing plan to bless all people!

WEEK 85 THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST----- -----Chris Watson

God is in charge, praise the Lord! I am not in charge. You are not in charge. We may oversee others at our jobs, in our homes, or in other situations, but ultimately, God is in charge and sees everything. He knows what's going on and is working things for our good and His glory.

Day 1

Read Colossians 1:1-12

A man by the name of Epaphras was visiting when Paul preached in Ephesus; both he and Philemon became believers. Epaphras started the church in Colossae by preaching the gospel there. “While Paul was under house arrest, he shared the story of how the Colossians first became Christians. After that, Paul and Epaphras prayed together for the Colossian church, along with Timothy, who came to visit Paul. One day while Timothy was with Paul, Paul decided to send the Colossian church a letter like he did for some of the churches he had begun. That way, even though he had to remain in prison, he could greet the church, encourage them, and teach them with his letter. Paul hoped that his instruction would help them fight against the bad teaching that some false teachers were spreading in the churches in Asia.”¹⁰

Paul's opening twelve verses were simply an encouragement to the Church at Colossae. He was commending them because he had heard how the gospel was spreading because of their faith. Paul was thankful for them and their love for Jesus and the gospel. Paul went on to give them godly instruction, but before doing so, he wanted to boast in Christ and what He had done through them.

Have you ever had someone share with you that something you said, did, or just the way you lived your life was an encouragement to them and their faith? Do you have someone in your life who is an encouragement to you in your walk with Christ? Can you think of others who are advancing the gospel for God's kingdom? What specific people come to mind regarding the last two questions?

¹⁰Old Story New, Marty Machowski

Maybe you should consider sending them a note, email, text, or calling them to let them know you are thankful for them and what God has or is doing through them. Take some time today to pray and thank God for those people who have been instrumental in your life and your spiritual walk.

Day 2

Read Colossians 1:13-18

Paul's words in our passage today have a deeper meaning. Gnosticism was being pushed by some Christian communities and it was not the full gospel. Matt Slick helps us to understand how some Christians embellished the gospel. He wrote, "The unknowable God was far too pure and perfect to have anything to do with the material universe which was considered evil. Therefore, God generated lesser divinities or emanations. One of these emanations, Wisdom, desired to know the unknowable God. Out of this erring desire the demiurge, an evil god, was formed, and it was this evil god that created the universe. He along with archons kept the mortals in bondage in material matter and tried to prevent the pure spirit souls from ascending back to god after the death of the physical bodies. Since, according to the Gnostics, matter is evil, deliverance from material form was attainable only through special knowledge revealed by special Gnostic teachers. Christ was the divine redeemer who descended from the spiritual realm to reveal the knowledge necessary for this redemption. In conclusion, Gnosticism is dualistic. That is, it teaches there is a good and evil, spirit and matter, light and dark, etc., dualism in the universe. The danger of Gnosticism is easily apparent. It denies the incarnation of God as the Son. In so doing, it denies the true efficacy of the atonement since, if Jesus is not God, He could not atone for all of mankind, and we would still be lost in our sins."¹¹ Read today's verses, again, with this additional background in mind. We see Paul was seeking to give truth in light of the lies which were being told. Gnosticism taught that salvation was achieved through a special knowledge, not by Christ's finished work.

In understanding the gospel, it's important we understand it all from the very beginning knowing God is the creator and sustainer of all things (See Verse 16). When we begin with the knowledge that God was the beginning, then we can move forward in the gospel. Paul wanted the people not to be manipulated and swayed by a false teaching, so he wrote them to share and remind them of the truth.

¹¹ <https://carm.org/gnosticism>, Matt Slick

There are many lies in our world today. Some say to believe whatever you think God is, others say there are multiple ways to God, and some say God does not exist at all. We have the truth. If you have trusted and experienced God in a real way, there is no question what God has done. Ask God to protect you from the lies or the half-truths and then follow only Him and His Word.

Day 3

Read Colossians 1:19-23

In Verse 19, the word fullness is translated from the Greek word pleroa. This is another way to say Jesus is truly God. This would have been an obvious slap at the Gnostics as they used the same word (pleroma) to denote the divines of lesser gods. A major focus of Colossians was to speak to the supremacy of God and against such beliefs as those held by the Gnostics.

Verse 21 describes how we were once alienated from God and were enemies in our minds by our wicked thoughts. Romans 5:10 also reminds us we were once enemies of God but have been restored by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We can understand that people are separated into two categories; all people are either friends or enemies of God. Which are you? I pray that you are a friend of God.

"It is said that years ago in a western city a husband and wife became estranged and chose to separate. They moved away and lived in different parts of the country. The husband happened to return to the city on a matter of business and went out to the cemetery to the grave of their only son. He was standing by the grave in fond reminiscence when he heard a step behind him. Turning, he saw his estranged wife. The initial impulse of both was to turn away. But they had a common hearted interest in the grave, and instead of turning way they clasped hands over the grave of their son and were reconciled. They were reconciled by death."¹²

Paul told the Colossians that they had been reconciled to God, meaning their (and our) relationships were made right and could only be reconciled through Christ and His death, burial and resurrection. Our personal reconciliation took the death of God's son, but His death went far beyond what any human death could. Jesus' death took us from death to life, from darkness to light, and from despair to hope. When we put our trust in God's work and what He has done for us, we become a child and a friend of God.

¹² Colossians and Philemon, The Supremacy of Christ. Kent Hughes

Thank God He has reconciled you to Himself through Jesus. Thank Him that He is supreme and in control. Ask God with whom you can share what He has done for you, so they too can hear about your reconciliation to God. Then, pray that they really hear and that their minds may be open to the truth.

Day 4

Read Colossians 1:24-29

On several occasions, in his writings, Paul uses the words sufferings and rejoice or joyful in the same sentences, as in Verse 24. Paul said he rejoiced in the sufferings, but how could he rejoice? We know his suffering brought good to the church. We know both from the Bible and through ancient and modern history that the gospel has flourished most often under difficult and hard situations, rather than under favorable and easy conditions. Not only has the church flourished during times of suffering and difficulty, but often so have the individuals who experienced the difficulties. Have you learned more about God and your relationship with Him when things were great in your life and you were rocking along enjoying life without a care in the world? Or, have you learned more when things seemed to be falling apart or at the very least not working as you had planned? Most would say, myself included, that it was the latter that brought the most growth and refinement. In our times of struggle, difficulties, and maybe even “suffering,” we have learned more about our walk with Christ than we might have without those challenges. I am sure there are many reasons for this, but probably the biggest reason is when we find ourselves in those situations, we seem to lean on and walk with God more than when things are going well. Can you rejoice in the difficult and hard times like Paul did? Remember, he knew it was advancing the Church and he knew God was working in him as well.

We are reminded the mystery has now been made known in Christ and because of this, we are to preach and share the gospel with as many as we can. In Verses 28-29, Paul said we are to proclaim the truth to everyone that they, too, may be made perfect in Christ. The word labor is used in Verse 29 and before we look at this we must realize in our laboring, we do not do anything in our power or might, but in God’s; in other words, it’s not us, but Christ in us. The Greek word translated “labor” was used for work that left one so weary that it was if they had taken a beating.¹³

¹³ Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, F.F. Bruce and E.K. Simpson

Paul preached the gospel all over with all his might. Many great preachers and theologians, such as Luther, Moody, and Wesley were to have said to preach and teach to the point that they gave everything they had. Now, before I go on, I want to make sure we get this. This is not to say this is on us. God saves, but as we remember from earlier passages, there has to be those that go, preach, and teach. In doing so, we labor and become tired. Paul's life exemplified this, but we find our strength in God as he did. Regardless of job or trade we must preach and share the gospel.

“What is true of the minister is true of every man who bears the name of Christ. We have not begun to touch the great business of salvation when we have sung ‘Rescue the perishing, care for the dying.’ We have not entered into the business of evangelizing the city or the work until we have put our own lives into the business, our one immediate physical endeavor, inspired by spiritual devotion.”¹⁴

Share, teach and preach Jesus today. Remember, He has changed our lives and we want to share that with others so He can change their lives too.

¹⁴The Westminster Pulpit, Volumes 3, 4. G Campbell Morgan

Day 5

Read Psalm 22:14-16

Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 are two of the most prophetic chapters in the Bible concerning the Messiah, Jesus. Written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, we see such prophecy played out in the gospels. What Jesus went through for you and me is astounding.

“The radical moisture of his body was dried up through his loss of blood and spirits, and through the violent fever upon him, brought on him by his being hurried from court to court; and which generally attends persons under a panic, in consternation and fear of danger and death, and at crucifixion; or this was occasioned by the inward sorrow and distress of his mind, which affected his body and dried his bones, as a broken spirit is said to do, Proverbs 17:22; and chiefly it was brought upon him through the sense he had the wrath of God, which like fire dried up his strength, just as a potsherd burnt in a furnace; which expresses his dolorous sufferings, which were typified by the Passover lamb being roasted with fire, and the manna being baked in pans.” Regarding verse 15 as his tongue clang to his jaw. “Thus Christ answered not a word to the charges of the false witnesses before the high priest, nor to the accusations of the chief priests and elders before Pilate; nor did he open his mouth, when he was led to be crucified, neither against the law and justice of God, nor against his people for whom he suffered, nor against his enemies who used him cruelly; when he was reviled he reviled not again; but rather this was occasioned by thirst, through the violent fever that was upon him; see Lamentations 4:4; Hence, when he hung upon the cross, he said, ‘I thirst,’ John 19:28.”¹⁵

Jesus is good; He is so good to us. Thank Him today, not only for what He did for you, but for His great plan and His desire to save you to Himself. As you are thanking Him, ask Him who He would have you share your story with today? Someone needs to hear it, they need to hear what He has done in your life.

¹⁵ <http://www.christianity.com/bible/commentar php?com=gill&b=19&c=22> Team,

WEEK 86 CHOSEN BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN--- -----Dennis Watson

While Paul was imprisoned, he wrote four letters known as the prison epistles: Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul was imprisoned in Rome for two years. During this particular imprisonment, he wrote Ephesians. Ephesians can be divided into two parts. Ephesians 1-3 is theological or doctrinal. Ephesians 4-6 is practical and spells out the believer's responsibility based on the theological/doctrinal passages. We will see God's plan to save and establish for Himself a special people was laid out before the world was ever created.

Day 1

Read Ephesians 1:1-6

In order to properly build a building, the very first step is to lay the foundation. The foundation of a building is the part below the ground which supplies stable support for the building. In addition to the foundation, and even before the foundation is laid, there must be a plan for the building. God has a plan that reaches back before time. In today's passage, Paul wrote about this plan and the foundation which is from God. Today, we will look at what God purposed from the very beginning and even before.

Paul used four words in these passages which describe the foundation God has provided. The first word is blessed. He wrote believers have been blessed by God; He "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The blessing is from God and is spiritual in nature, coming through the Holy Spirit. We are blessed to have God's Spirit living in us. He provides blessings of security, sealing, and everything we need for life and godliness. Besides being spiritual in nature, these blessings also have a sphere. As Christians, we live in two spheres: the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible. We also have blessings which are out of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven. Heaven is the believer's ultimate hope; our hope is not in this world. We have real blessings which are eternal and are far greater than any blessing we will have temporally.

The second word is chosen. This is that glorious doctrine known as election. God chose us in Christ, not in ourselves. Salvation is all of God's work. He did this before the foundation of the world. As believers, we are chosen by God. This is not to say we did not have to make a decision to respond to His grace, but it is still the work of God. Warren Wiersbe really gives a good explanation of this:

Does the sinner respond to God's grace against his own will? No, he responds because God's grace makes him willing to respond. The mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility will never be solved in this life. Both are taught in the Bible (John 6:37). Both are true, and both are essential.¹⁶

The third word in this section which is foundational for the believer is predestined. This can be a confusing concept. Paul writes in Verse 5 that we have been "... predestined to adoption." The word predestined has to do with saved people. It means God planned and purposed beforehand to save. This verse says nothing about anyone being predestined to be lost. God has beforehand determined to adopt or bring you into His family. Again, this is the work of God.

The last word is accepted. As believers, our acceptance is based in Christ, referred to here as the beloved. We cannot make ourselves acceptable to God. The literal translation is that we have been be-graced. All of this is the work of God. Our part is to receive and appreciate what He has done for us.

Give thanks for His activity on your behalf!

¹⁶ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 2.

Day 2

Read Ephesians 1:7-12

As we read yesterday, God's work was the work of election. Before the world began, He set out a plan to save and adopt believers. In today's passage, we see the work of the Son, Jesus. His work was that of mediation. This is God's plan put into action through the work of Jesus Christ.

We have redemption. Jesus redeemed us through His blood. He made it possible for us have our sins forgiven and all of this through the riches of His grace. To redeem means to purchase and set free by paying a price. Slaves were often bought and sold like pieces of furniture. Sometimes a person would purchase a slave and then set them free. This is what Jesus did for us. The price paid was the blood of Jesus. In doing this, He set us free from the law, free from slavery to sin, and free from the power of sin and the world. As slaves, we were poor; as children of God, we are rich.

Through Jesus Christ, the mystery of His will is made known to us. A mystery is something which was not previously revealed or understood. This mystery has now been disclosed to us. The church was not known in the Old Testament. The Old Testament saints had no concept of the church. A dispensation is God's way of dealing with man. The difference is clear how He dealt with the Jews in the Old Testament and how He deals with people after the resurrection of Jesus. This plan has been made known to us through Jesus. We now know God will, one day, unite everything in Christ.

The last aspect of the mediating work of Jesus is that He provided an inheritance. In Christ, we have an inheritance and we are an inheritance. He provided the price to purchase us. We are valuable to God. We are also joint-heirs with Christ.

God purposed to elect us as His children and Jesus is the instrument of His grace to accomplish our redemption, reconciling us to His will. Thus making us both His inheritance and joint-heirs with Him.

Give thanks for His work through Jesus on our behalf.

Day 3

Read Ephesians 1:13-14

It is day three of the week which is the day we connect the week's devotions to the gospel. The entire process of salvation is given in Verse 13. It tells how the sinner becomes a saint. A saint is a believer. This is not something earned; it is something God accomplishes through the process of salvation. The word saint is used nine times in the book of Ephesians. The process described in this verse goes like this: the gospel was heard and the hearers believed and trusted what they heard, having realized the gospel was for them. They were then sealed by the Holy Spirit. The process was hearing, believing, trusting, and then being sealed with the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be “sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise?” **Verse 13** It means a finished transaction. When significant legal documents are processed, they are stamped with an official seal indicating the deal is done and ratified. In addition to signifying a finished transaction, the sealing speaks of ownership. God has purchased us. He has bought us with a price; that price was the life blood of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has marked us with a seal of both completion and ownership. Also, the sealing of the Holy Spirit is a mark of authenticity. The presence of the Holy Spirit proves the believer is genuine. God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit because we are God's children (Romans 8:16). The Holy Spirit of God seals us, so we are confident.

The Holy Spirit is also the guarantee of our inheritance until the process of salvation is complete. Remember, we have been saved, we are being saved, and ultimately we will be saved. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is in us as a pledge that all will be completed. It is like earnest money which is put down on a purchase, guaranteeing the final payment will be made, and the transaction will be completed.

I am totally confident God has done what He promised. My confidence is not in what I have done, but in what God has done, is doing, and will do. Remember though, God accomplished this before the foundation of the world and in Christ it has been and will be played out in history. Rejoice in the finished work of God and, at the same time, anticipate the full experience of it!

Day 4

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul rejoiced in the faith of the Ephesians and for this, reason he wrote telling them he prayed for them and gave them the specifics of his prayer. Paul, as their servant-leader, was all wrapped up in praying for the believers at Ephesus. We can learn from Paul four aspects of praying for other believers.

First, he prayed that they would know God. He prayed that God would give them, "... The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." **Verse 17** Paul knew God personally and wanted them to also know Him this way. The atheist believes there is no god. The agnostic believes that if there is a god, he cannot be known. What a blessing it is to know God and grow in knowledge of Him. To know God personally is salvation. To know Him in growth is sanctification. To know Him in perfection is glorification. Paul wanted the saints at Ephesus to fully know God.

Secondly, Paul prayed that the believers at Ephesus would "... know the hope of God's calling." **Verse 18a** Paul knew he had been called by God's grace. The calling a believer has in Christ assures us of a delightful future. The word for church in the Greek means called out. We are called out of the world into a relationship with the God of the universe. He prayed believers would know the hope of His calling. This hope we have in Christ is the motivation of our lives. Warren Wiersbe describes this hope this way: "The hope that belongs to our calling should be a dynamic force in our lives, encouraging us to be pure (1 John 2:28-3:3), obedient (Heb. 13:17), and faithful (Luke 12:42-48). The fact that we shall one day see Christ and be like Him should motivate us to live like Christ today."¹⁷

The third aspect of the prayer Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus was they would know "... the riches of the glory of His inheritance." **Verse 18b** This phrase does not refer to the inheritance in Christ. Instead, he was praying that believers would grasp their value to God. We are His inheritance! We are His body and His bride. Think about the price God paid for you. You are valuable to Him!

¹⁷Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 2

The fourth part of his prayer was that the saints would know “the greatness of God’s power toward us.” **Verse 19** This is the out-working of God’s power expressed and experienced when God raised Jesus from the dead, seating Him in the heavenly realm. He is above all powers in all the earth and all things are placed at His feet.

What a glorious prayer to pray for other believers, that they may know God, know his calling, know His riches and know His power. Pray this prayer. We are blessed to have this outline to pray for other believers.

Day 5

Read Zechariah 9:10-11

A dot connecting picture from the Psalms or the prophets is our focus on day five each week. Zechariah 9 is a prophecy of the coming of Christ in His final victory. Our world has been and continues to be plagued by war. We have had two world wars and both of these were believed to be the war that would end all wars. However, all over the world, war is being waged. Presidents and other national and international leaders have spoken of bringing peace. Man will not bring peace. Another war will not bring peace.

Verse 10 of today's passage speaks of wars ending only when Jesus comes and brings with Him true peace. When Jesus comes in complete power, He will speak peace to the nations. When He comes, He will bring peace from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth. The words of Jesus carry authority and when He speaks things happen. When He speaks, His word will go out with power; there will be true disarmament. Look at **Isaiah 2:4**, "He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; 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 anymore."

As for verse 11, J. Vernon McGee says this, "As for you' refers to the godly remnant in Israel which was suffering. The best I can do is to make a spiritual interpretation of this verse. The only deliverance for mankind is through the blood of the covenant, and that blood of the covenant is the blood of the New Testament, the blood of Christ. Man talks about his freedom and his liberty. Man in this world today does not recognize that he is actually a prisoner. He is 'sold under sin' (Rom. 7:14). He is a slave to sin. In a day in which we hear so much about liberty, I receive hundreds of letters from former drug addicts who have been delivered. How? Only by the blood of Christ, my friend, only by turning to Him for deliverance. He alone can deliver prisoners from 'the pit wherein is no water.'" ¹⁸

Thank the Lord God that there is a time of true peace coming. It will not be accomplished by man, but only by the Prince of Peace.

¹⁸ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

WEEK 87 FROM DEATH TO LIFE----- Chris Watson

If you have ever seen a newborn baby or had the privilege of seeing a baby born, you know it's incredible. The opportunity to see new life enter the world is amazing. Even more so is that which is brought from death to life. As unbelievers, we were once lost (dead), but God quickened our hearts, spoke to us, and saved us through faith. Thank God for being brought from death to life.

Day 1

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

Scripture reminds us we are dead (spiritually, we do not know God) in our sins. If we have believed and trusted in Christ, we are alive, a new creation. The Holy Spirit works in us unto salvation. "Resurrection (spiritual) is a gift from God. God must touch the heart. God must unstop the ears. God must quicken the soul. It is as great a miracle as when God created life and created you. It is as great a miracle as when God resurrected us from the dead to our spiritual life in Christ."¹⁹

God is the only one that can bring forth life from death. Scripture reminds us no one comes to Jesus unless the Father, who sent Him, draws him. It is God who works in us. Though we are dead, He brings new life. There is a response needed on our part; we must trust in God, we must put our faith in Him to have eternal life and a relationship with Him. How has God drawn you to Himself? How did He save you when you walked in your sins?

Every person is either under the direction of the Holy Spirit or under the direction of "the prince of the power of the air" (enemy). There is no third option; it is just one or the other. Before we were believers, this passage tells us we used to walk in the ways of the world and we conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh. We were children of wrath, meaning we were enemies of God. Since God has saved us through His Son, we are now friends of God. Since we are friends of God, we should see ourselves yielding more and more to the Spirit of God and less and less to the ways of this world. Salvation is not just a one-time decision, but as I have heard it said, it is a one-time decision to become a lifelong disciple of

¹⁹ Ephesians, An Exposition by W.A Criswell

Jesus Christ. When we place our faith in Jesus, we follow Him the rest of our lives.

Who are you yielding to today? The one of this world or Jesus? Who are you in tune with and who is directing you? Has God saved you? Thank Him that He has wakened you from the dead, removed the scales from your eyes, and made you His own.

Day 2

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

Go back and read the first 2 words of Verse 4. “But God.” We see these same two words all over scripture. In today’s passage, Paul said, “... but God” has made us alive. Though we were once dead He has made us alive.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 are some of the most quoted verses in all of the Bible and for good reason. We have been saved by grace, God’s grace though Jesus at the cross. This grace, is received through faith. We believe, trust, and know that Jesus died for our sins. Through faith, we put our trust in what God did for us and we continue in trust. Romans 10:17 reminds us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. So we must hear the truth of God through God’s Word(s).

“Saving faith is accepting. I hear it, I accept it as true – the testimony of the Book and the testimony of other Christians. I came to believe that testimony. I have never been to Tibet, but I believe there is a Tibet. I have never been to Afghanistan. I have talked to people who were there. I believe this testimony and that it is the channel by which God’s grace comes to them. Your heart is made like your hands. Your hands are made on purpose to receive, to take. Your soul is made to take, to receive.”²⁰

We receive God’s love, praise the Lord, and it is nothing that we have done or can do. It is not by any works we or anyone else can do. If it were by works, then we wouldn’t need Jesus; we could just do it for ourselves. Instead, we are reminded that our good works are like filthy rags.

Take some time today to thank God for His free gift of salvation and His desire for us to know Him more daily and to be in tune with Him.

²⁰ Ephesians, An Exposition by W.A. Criswell

Day 3

Read Ephesians 2:11-18

“Yesterday we learned the good news of the gospel. Today we learn (are reminded) that the good news of the gospel is for all people. When God called Abraham, he promised to bless all the people of the earth through him. Yet it wasn’t until Jesus died for the sins of all people that a way was opened up for the Gentiles to come to God. By trusting in Jesus, the Gentiles, who were once separated from God, can also join God’s family. God kept his promise to Abraham through Jesus, who was born into Abraham’s family line. So, way back when God promised to give Abraham a son and bless the nation, he was thinking of Jesus dying on the cross so that everyone, both Jew and Gentile, could be rescued from their sins.”²¹

In Verse 14 we read where Jesus broke down the wall of separation between us and God. Paul tells us in Verse 16 that Jesus reconciled us to God and in Verse 18, we have access to God through Jesus. Salvation includes going to heaven in the future, but it’s not just about our final destination. It’s also about what Jesus has done, mainly He has given us the only way to know the one true God. Through Jesus, we not only go to heaven, but we can have a bit of heaven because we can intimately know God. The more we grow in that relationship, the more we know God. If you have a relationship with someone, say a spouse, a close friend, or someone who really means a lot to you, there was a time when you initially met them. While that time is important, what has really grown your relationship is the time you have spent with them. Whether face to face, talking with them via phone calls, letters, or emails. Over time, that relationship grew; you just didn’t meet them and then never talk to them or see them again. Rather, you invested in that relationship. The same is true for our relationship with God. There was a time, whether we remember all the details or not, when we met God through Jesus. While our initial conversion was important, what grew our relationship was the time we spent in the Word, time in prayer, and worshipping, and time serving with other believers.

How is your relationship with God? Are you growing? If not, ask how you can spend time with God more regularly and invest time and energy in your relationship with God.

²¹Old Story New, Marty Machowski

Day 4

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

“In ancient building practices, the cornerstone was the principal stone placed at the corner of the edifice. The cornerstone was usually one of the largest, the most solid, and the most carefully constructed of any in the edifice. Jesus describes Himself as the Cornerstone that His church would be built upon, a unified body of believers, both Jew and Gentile. In the New Testament the cornerstone metaphor is continued. This time, however, the apostle Paul is preaching to the Ephesian Christians for the purpose of helping them know Christ better. In chapter 2, verses 19-21, the comparison between Jesus and Cornerstone becomes very clear: ‘Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.’ Furthermore, in the 1 Peter 2:6, what Isaiah said centuries before is affirmed in exactly the same words.”²²

Jesus is the chief cornerstone. If our foundation is off or faulty, then everything else will be off as well, but if our foundation is that of Jesus Christ, His blood, and His Word then all will be properly aligned. In today’s time, we must remember there is one truth and only one solid foundation and that is Christ. As He works and moves in us, He is building on that foundation. We have nothing to offer God, but through our obedience, He uses us to grow His Church and to draw others to Himself. Verse 22 says we are being built together. God is the one doing the building and growing and He is doing that in us. As God’s Church, whether ours or the one on the other side of the world, if we follow God and His Word, then Christ’s love is shown in us and exemplified in the world.

Who or what is your foundation? Today, there are many half-truths” being preached and taught. We must always take what we hear taught, preached, and conveyed in other ways and measure the teachings against Jesus Christ and His Word, the chief cornerstone.

²² <http://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Christ-cornerstone.html>

In doing so, we make sure the building's foundation is secure and the structure is not compromised. For when we compromise or give in to compromise our foundation is shaky. Pray today that your foundation is in Christ alone. If it is not, ask God to change your view and your foundation.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:6

During our first year of marriage, Lisa and I lived in an apartment in Peachtree City across from what is now The Avenue. One Sunday afternoon, we decided to take a walk in the Planterra Ridge Subdivision, allowing plenty of time before we needed to get back to church. However, on the way back, we apparently took a wrong turn and ended up having to run back once we found our way. We needed to be back at church that night, particularly to the classes we taught. We unintentionally went astray and we were really turned around.

All through scripture and, unfortunately in our own lives, we know all it takes is just one little step off the path to get completely off course. If we are not careful and don't jump right back on the path, we may go totally astray. This can cause serious repercussions. All unbelievers have gone astray; that is, sinned and turned to their own way. We were born in Adam's line (lineage) of sin, but we also sin. Praise God for the second half of Verse 6. Our sin (going astray) was laid on Jesus and He died for us. When we place our faith in Jesus, our sin is forgiven and Jesus, by His love and grace, brings us back to life.

Do you find yourself going astray right now? Is there something(s) that you are doing that you know will lead you down a path of destruction, regret, and lack of fellowship with God, unless you turn back? If so, repent and jump back on God's path, the only right path. If you find yourself walking the path, but know you have a tendency to easily step off as we all do, then pray that when you are tempted to step off and give in to the enemy, you will hear God's voice and follow Him, instead.

WEEK 88 THE GIFT OF MEN-----Dennis Watson

This week, we look at God's provision for our needs, not only in Christ, but also in His church and in the leaders He has given to His church. We have briefly looked at the doctrinal part of Ephesians, found in Ephesians 1-3. Ephesians 4-6 is the more practical part of the book. Here, we see our responsibilities, what we should be doing in light of the theological truths laid down in Chapters 1-3. The theological sets us up to put truth into practice.

Day 1

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

Now that we are in the practical section of Ephesians, we can see how Paul connected the theological/doctrinal section of chapters 1-3 with the practical/duty section of Chapters 4-6. He initially connected the two with the word *therefore*. Since all of this theology and doctrine is true, therefore live this way. This section opens with Paul reminding the believers at Ephesus to live "...worthy of the calling with which they were called." **Verse 1** In essence he told them, "Live like what you are—children of God." He made this appeal, urging them to live in such a way which brings about unity in the church. This walk is to be characterized by seven graces—lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, love, endeavoring to keep the unity, and peace. These graces must be present in the members of the church for there to be real unity.

In addition to this, Paul wrote about the ground of unity with another seven—seven ones. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. The unity among believers was to be based on doctrine and truth. I have been with groups who wanted to have unity for unity's sake. This is uniformity, not unity. Unity comes from within and is a spiritual grace, while uniformity is the result of pressure from without. Our unity is based, then, on grace and truth.

Think about your church. How can you begin to practice the seven graces Paul mentioned in today's passage? We did not go through each one in detail, but take time to read back through them and ask the Lord to enable you to practice these graces in the body. Look at the seven 'ones' and see the pattern of unity that God gives us. Pray that our church might truly be a reflection of God's unity.

Day 2

Read Ephesians 4:7-13

There is a transition between this passage and yesterday's passage. Verses 1-6 are about unity and what believers have in common. Verses 7-13 are about the differences among believers and the unique gifts and offices God gives to each one in the church through the Holy Spirit

Paul told the Ephesians that Jesus ascended into heaven and He had led sinful captives into freedom into the new captivity of Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. He first descended to earth and lived and died and was resurrected. He then ascended, taking liberated captives with Him into heaven. Matthew 27:52-53 He also received gifts and then gave gifts to men who are individual members of the church. The gifts He gave are what we know to be spiritual gifts. In the New Testament, there are three lists of spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31; Romans 12:3-8; and Ephesians 4:11. These lists are not identical, so it could be that Paul did not name all the gifts which were available. Paul wrote some gifts are more important than others, but all believers are needed if the body is to function normally. (1 Cor. 14:5, 39) Paul named not so much *gifts* as the gifted men God has placed in the church, which there are four of them. They are apostles, which are ones who are sent on a mission, prophets, not the kind who predict the future, but those who speak forth the word of God, evangelists, who proclaim the good news or who evangelize, and there are pastors and teachers. This seems to indicate one office in the church which has the responsibility of shepherding and teaching.

God was very intentional in the giving of these gifts and He gave them for a purpose. They were given first to equip the saints. The gifts were given for teaching, feeding, and shepherding the people so they would be equipped. Secondly, the equipping was so the people could do the work of the ministry. The third purpose of the gifts was that the church would be edified or built up. All of these gifts provide encouragement to build up the body. Lastly, there would be unity in the body.

God has chosen, called, and equipped the body so we might be

to the praise of His glory. The church is not about us or any particular individual, but about God and His glory. He gifted us so the church can become all He intended. Thank God for what He has done and the wonderful blessing of His call and His gifts. We are blessed!

Day 3

Read Acts 20:17-32

This is the day we see how this week's passage connects to the gospel message. God gave to the church certain gifts and with these gifts, He also gave certain offices or servant-leader responsibilities. One of those is that of pastor/teacher. This appears to be the office of pastor with the responsibility of shepherding and teaching the Word. On this occasion of meeting with the Ephesian church leaders, Paul is on his journey to Jerusalem. In Paul's travels, he was on his third mission trip visiting and strengthening the churches. He was now heading for Jerusalem. On his way, he sent word to the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him in Miletus.

Paul's address to the Ephesian leaders was unique because it revealed Paul the pastor, rather than Paul the evangelist or Paul the defender of the faith. This message enables us to get a glimpse of how Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years.

Paul wanted to make sure the pastors did not lose sight of the task of preaching and teaching the gospel. Paul, in this farewell address to the Ephesian church leaders, was sharing his heart (and, for me as a pastor, the picture of a pastor's heart).

He shared his motive was "... Serving the Lord with all humility with many tears and trials." **Verse 19** Paul was doing what he was doing because he believed it was God's call and he was serving God. He would press on no matter what happened, even tears and trials, in order to accomplish what God had called him to do. He was encouraging these pastor/leaders to have the same motive.

He had genuine concern for the people he served. There was a desire to see them repent and come to full faith in God. Paul preached, taught, and disciplined out of his concern for the people under his care. He was a true shepherd.

He was not concerned about himself. Instead, he went through all kinds of struggles so he could finish his race with joy and complete the ministry he received from the Lord Jesus. A pastor must

put the people he shepherds above himself.

His primary concern was to “... Declare the whole counsel of God.” **Verse 27** The Amplified Bible puts it this way, “The whole purpose and plan and counsel of God.” Paul was concerned with not taking scripture out of context, but being careful to connect the dots presenting all of scripture as a whole. In doing this, he would prepare the people against the attacks of the wolves who would try to lead people away.

After being the pastor of one church for over 40 years, I understand what Paul was saying. All of the teaching of scripture must be connected to Jesus. Only Jesus can save. Only Jesus can deliver. Only Jesus can lead people to victory. This is the work of a pastor—to connect the dots of scripture to Jesus and connect people to Jesus.

Day 4

Read Ephesians 4:14-16

I have stood on a large cruise ship and looked out over the Atlantic Ocean in very rough waters with no land in sight. The water was dark and choppy. I cannot imagine what it would be like to go overboard, even with a life jacket. Paul gives a vivid picture of children in deep choppy water being tossed around by the winds. He said this is how we are if we are not rooted and grounded in the truth. There are many false doctrines floating around today, especially with the internet. There are people trying to pull believers to follow strange and foreign teachings which are contrary to the Bible.

What is the solution to this? I have been told the way people are trained to identify counterfeit bills is to know what the genuine bills look and feels like. The same is true about the Bible and biblical doctrines. The more clearly you know the Bible and biblical doctrines the better equipped you will be to discern falsehoods and lies.

Personally, I believe the more connected to God and His church a believer is the safer that person is. Every believer needs to be connected to God through salvation, His church through fellowship, His Word through discipleship, His service through ministry, and His mission through outreach and evangelism. Not only are we to be connected in this way, but we are to be connecting others in this way. Once again, the more connected believers are to God and His church, the safer they are. Believers need to be growing in maturity. This includes the maturity which comes through becoming like Christ. There is also the maturity which comes through stability as we grow in the truth of God's Word. In the body, we also have the maturity that comes by being joined together in love and there is the maturity that comes by cooperating with other believers.

I love God's church and am convinced that all people need what God provides through the gifts of the members of the body. Get connected to His church and connect everyone you can!

Day 5

Read Psalm 68:1-20

Today, we look at a Psalm 68 and see how it connects to Jesus and the gospel. Paul made this connection for us by quoting Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 and applying it to Jesus. In doing so, all of Psalm 68 becomes a connection to Jesus. Jesus was the one who first descended and also ascended. By doing this, He presented Himself as a victorious king who won a great victory. He descended and then ascended in victory.

Psalm 68 opens with a call to celebrate our joy and gladness by singing to God. This is a celebration of our great salvation. Jesus is our conquering king who first descended and then ascended for victory and to give gifts to men.

In Psalm 68:19-20, we read that David proclaims that God is our salvation. We fully understand this because we know personally God has made His salvation personal for us in Jesus Christ, God's Messiah.

In the Old Testament, there was not church or the concept of a church. Paul wrote that the church is a mystery. This means it was not known before, but now that Jesus has come, it has been made known. It is a wonderful thing to read in the Old Testament about Jesus and salvation, but how rewarding it is to have the dots connected in Jesus!

Give thanks to God for the incredible perspective we have to read and study His Word.

WEEK 89 PUTTING OFF THE “OLD SELF”-----

----- Chris Watson

In **Romans 7:19-20** Paul says, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Paul understood what it meant to struggle with the old self. I think we can all attest to what Paul was saying. In fact, I say “Amen.” This week, we will see the only way we can continuously put off our old self is through Christ.

Day 1

Read Ephesians 4:17-24

Pigs wallow in the mud, it’s what they do. You can wash them, give them a bath, and they might stay clean for a few minutes, but if there is mud around, they will find their way back to it. Pigs want to get dirty, they enjoy wallowing in filth. Paul tells us this should not be the case for the believer. If we have been truly saved, cleaned by the blood of Jesus, we should not want to go back to our old ways. Paul tells us in Romans that it is a constant battle. Why should we not want to go back to such ways? In **Verse 20** of today’s passage it says, “But have you not learned Christ.” It doesn’t say, “Have you not learned about Christ” but rather, it says “... not learned Christ Himself.” There is a big difference. One can learn about Christ and not know Him. But when one learns Christ Himself, he or she has come to know the person of Christ; they have experienced Him and realize that knowing Jesus is better than wallowing in the mud.

Warren Wiersbe says we have taken off the grave clothes and have put on the grace clothes. In other words, we don’t have to live like unbelievers anymore because we are not unbelievers; we have been cleansed and washed with the blood of Jesus. Have you been washed with His blood? Have you trusted Jesus? If so, God has given you the desire to walk with Him. It doesn’t mean you won’t be tempted to go back to your old ways; the temptation will always be there as Paul reminds us. However, God’s grace gives us what it takes to overcome and walk in tune with Him.

Take time today to thank the Lord for saving you and making you clean. If there is willful sin in your life you keep going back to, ask Him to give you victory over that sin. Daily ask Him to make you new, acknowledge that newness and allow Him to live through you.

Day 2

Read Ephesians 4:25-32

Paul goes from generic to specific today. In today's reading, he lists five sins: lying, anger, stealing, corrupt talk, and bitterness. He then takes these five and breaks them down.

Lying is contrary to truth and is spoken with intent to deceive. The life of a Christian is to be controlled by truth not lies. We know from scripture Satan himself is the father of liars. In the garden, Satan put the question in Adam and Eve's mind, "... Has God indeed said...?" **Genesis 3:1** Are you a person who speaks truth or lies? Ask God to help you to be a person of truth.

Paul then moves on to anger. **Verse 26** tells us to "... Be angry but sin not." We know this is easier said than done. In scripture God often had righteous anger, but in His anger He did not sin. However, in our anger, sin often creeps in. Warren Weirsbe says, "Sometimes a man's anger smolders, and this we would call malice; but this same anger can suddenly burst forth and destroy, and this we would call wrath." He goes on to say that, "the fire of anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of God."²³

Paul goes on to speak about stealing. We know the scripture tells us the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. Proverbs tells us to go to the ant you sluggard and consider its ways. In other words, we don't need to steal if we are working and using our hands and minds the way the Lord intended.

Then comes the words corrupt speech. The mouth and the heart are connected and Matthew 12:34 tells us that out of the overflow, the mouth speaks. The words which come out of our mouths tell us what's really in our heart. Satan wants us to use words that tear down and Christ wants us to use words that build up. How are your words, and how are you using them? This is a question that I try to continually ask myself as this is a struggle I deal with.

²³ Be Rich, Warren Weirsbe

Lastly, Paul talks about bitterness. “Bitterness refers to a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man.”²⁴ It has often been said that when things happen we can either become bitter or better. Bitterness is the easy route and better is the harder route but the right way.

What areas of your life, out of these five, does God need to work on? I have already shared for me, it’s my words! Ask God to work in your heart and remember all of the work will be an inward change which results in an outward change.

²⁴ *ibid*

Day 3

Read Ephesians 5:1-2

Any time we see the word *therefore* we need to ask what it's there for? If we go back to Chapter 4, we see Paul has reminded the believers they had put off the old self and put on Jesus. He then ended Chapter 4 by giving five things which should not be part of their lives as believers. **Ephesians 4:32** says to "... be kind to one another and forgive one another." In Chapter 5, we see the connection of the therefore. Because we have been forgiven by Christ we can, therefore, grasp and understand the words of Paul better in the first few verses of Chapter 5.

The first thing Paul instructs believers to do is be imitators of God. If Paul hadn't given the second verse, this first part, imitating God may seem a little mechanical or even legalistic. Some might say "I just have to imitate God." It's not just looking the part, but walking and knowing God. We should imitate God, but as Verse 2 tells us, we should do so as we walk in love. There it is, everything we are to do is because of love. We love because He first loved us, and because of that love, everything we do should be out of the love He gave us. Christ loves us and showed it when He gave Himself, the greatest sacrifice.

Why do you serve? Why do you love? Why do you go? Why do you teach and nurture? There are tons of questions and sometimes the answer is, "because it's the right thing to do." God works in our lives, the reason, our motivation for doing what we do, should be God's love and His free gift of salvation. We will sometimes get off the path, but when we are in tune and walking with God, our desire should be to imitate and walk with Him in love. All because He first loved us.

Day 4

Read Ephesians 5:3-21

Wherever you are, go find a dark room. Go in and turn on the light. What happened? As soon as you flipped the switch, the light dispelled the darkness. If you turn it off, it will be dark again. You might think this is a pointless exercise, but it is a great reminder of the world we live in. Our world is evil and often dark, but as Christians, if we shine the light, then the light will always dispel the darkness.

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” **1 John 1:5-7**. Do you have the light of Jesus? If so, your light should shine brightly in this world. John tells us if we continually walk in the darkness, the light is not in us and we are liars.

Matthew 5:14 says, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” We are that light. Just like going into a dark room and turning on a light, we are to be the light to the world. In Verse 3 Paul mentions many dark things of the world that, as believers, we should stay away from. Rather, we are to walk in the light and in the wisdom that comes only from God.

How are you walking today? Is it in the light or darkness? Do you feel the need to hide or cover up or is everything out in the open with nothing to hide? Walk in the light of Jesus today. Our world needs the light and God has left us here to make that light known. Don’t hide it under a bushell, or be ashamed of the light. His light is all we need.

Day 5

Read Psalm 44:11-22

Paul quotes **Psalm 44:22** in Romans. Here is the quote and context. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Verse 22 speaks of persecution. Many of the disciples died for their faith as have many others. In Acts, we read about Stephen, who preached the true word to a group of people. What he said was true, but the people didn’t like what He had to say and they stoned him to death. I feel certain Stephen realized he was about to die and he could have said something or done something to prevent his death. It would have involved going against what he believed and most likely denying Jesus for who He was. Instead, Stephen took the stoning and died a martyr. Acts 1:8 says that we will be Jesus’ witnesses. The word witness here is the same word as martyr. We are to be Jesus’ witnesses here and around the world even if it means dying for our faith and knowing we would be dying for the truth.

Because we live in America, we haven’t experienced persecution in the way we read about in the Bible. We hear of very few that have actually died for their faith today. I personally believe if God tarries, it may only be a matter of time before we reach this point. Do you have the truth? Do you know the truth, the person of Truth, Jesus? Pray and ask God for you to be able to stand on the truth of Jesus Himself, no matter what may come your way.

WEEK 90 MARRIAGE: CHRIST AND THE CHURCH-----Dennis Watson

This is one of my favorite sections in the Bible. From the first sentence in this passage, it appeared that Paul was talking about marriage. As you read this you come to the real significance.

Verse 32 says, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” Paul was not talking about marriage between a man and a woman, but he was talking about the relationship between Christ and His church. Marriage between a man and a woman was used to illustrate the relationship between Christ and His church.

Day 1

Read Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:16-25

Marriage is God’s idea. Two genders were God’s design. The reason for the two genders is so that mankind, created by God in His image and likeness, would be able to multiply and fill the earth. God’s plan is simple, biological and natural. He made animals of two genders and He made man of two genders for the purpose of propagation. In Malachi, God speaks through the prophet telling the people they had made a mess of marriage. He made the wife and the husband for the purpose of expanding the kingdom in history. In Malachi 2:15, he says He made them male and female because “...He seeks a godly seed.”

Here is what Tony Evans says of this verse: “What does the Lord seek through the marriage covenant? Too many people think the purpose of marriage is happiness. But happiness is a benefit of marriage, not its purpose. The purpose of God’s covenants is always the expansion of his kingdom in history. Through marriage, in particular, God seeks godly offspring. That means that having a child isn’t about gaining a “mini-me.” God wants us to have and raise children in the knowledge of the Lord so that his image is spread worldwide for his glory.”²⁵

²⁵Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda.

It is very logical, biological and natural. Right after Genesis 2:23 where Adam rejoices over the woman that they were man and woman, Moses writes, “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” **Verse 24** The *therefore* in the NIV reads, “... and for this reason.” One flesh is a marriage thing, and the marriage only works to bring about babies when there is a biological male and a biological female.

As in the days of Malachi and the stubborn Israelites, we have made a mess of marriage. May the Lord send a great revival and let mankind see once again what the animals have figured out.

Day 2

Read Ephesians 5:22-24

I believe that from these verses in Ephesians we are given two essential roles for marriage. One role is for the husband and the other is for the wife. If you back up one verse to Ephesians 5:26, in this context you will read it is directed at the relationships in the church body. **Verse 21** reads, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” The word submitting appears in Verse 21 in how believers in the church are to relate to one another and then it shows up in Verses 22-24 about wives submitting to their husbands. Within the church, members are to look to Jesus and have their relationships governed and guided by Him. Submission does not have to do with order of authority, but it governs the operation of authority. Submission is about respect, surrender, giving and receiving input.

Within the marriage, the wife’s role is to share with her husband what she sees, feels and senses. Women have a tendency to be more sensitive than men. I do not necessarily mean from an emotional perspective. I mean more sensitive to what is going on around them. In my home, Sheila is more sensitive and she is also discerning. She sees things I do not and she hears things I do not hear. She picks up on things to which I am oblivious. Her role is to submit this information to me so I can be the leader I am supposed to be.

I am not a woman. I need what she brings to the marriage. She also has needs which I do not know unless she submits them to me. I have shared with a multitude of wives the benefits of following what I have learned from Sheila. Tell your husband what you need, what you feel, and what you think. I must admit, I am not always as receptive as I need to be, but I cannot afford for her to stop sharing with me. As men, we must understand that it is a great burden for your wife to constantly be telling you what she sees, needs and feels. Seek the Lord! The wife’s role is essential.

Marriage needs to mirror the church submitting to Christ and man in submission to Christ. Jesus needs us to tell Him what we need, although He already knows. Husbands need their wives to submit because the husband probably does not know.

This is not an issue of distinction of value. God the Son is equal in essence to God the Father. He is; however, subordinate in terms of function. The wife submits and the husband loves which we will discuss tomorrow.

Day 3

Read Ephesians 5:25-26

Think about a roof on a house. There are two sides coming together at the peak. In a way, they are leaning on one another, giving strength to the roof structure. I see it the same in marriage where both sides are necessary for there to be proper function and strength. The wife submits, but I am not talking of obedience alone. Although obedience is not eliminated. Jesus said if you love me you will obey me. That is not a legalistic obedience but a desired obedience because of love. When you love someone you want to give them what they want and what they need. Both husband and wife should, out of love, do for one another.

The wife submits her ideas, needs, concerns and what she senses. The husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church. Each role is independent of the other, but will, in essence, compliment the other. The wife is not to concern herself with the husband's role and the husband is not to concern himself with the wife's role.

The husband's role requires a great deal of seeking the Lord. The role is to be carried out just as Christ loves His church. What man can do this? Not one! Husbands should have a very strong daily prayer life that includes this prayer, "Lord Jesus, enable me to love my wife as you loved your church and gave yourself up for her! I need you Lord!"

To fulfill this role as a husband constant humility is required. No man can do it alone. It requires desperate seeking of the Lord. Seek the Lord. The husband's role, like that of the wife, is essential.

Day 4

Read Genesis 12:10-20

There is a very significant phrase in **Ephesians 5:25** where husbands are told to "... love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." This is the highest view of a husband's love. Remember, Jesus died for His church. We read in the Old Testament where two of the fathers of the faith were willing to sacrifice their wives for their own safety. In today's passage, you read of the account of Abram (later his name was changed to Abraham and Sarai's to Sarah) plotting with Sarai, his wife, to tell the people of Egypt she was his sister. It was a half-truth because she was a relative, but the intent was to deceive in order to protect Abram. Here are his plotting words to Sarai: "Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you." **Genesis 12:12-13** Talk about premeditated! It was Abram's idea and Sarai went along with it.

Later, it became a case of like father like son because Isaac did the same thing with Rebekah. Both Abram and Isaac were willing to sacrifice their wives to save their skin. What a contrast with Jesus! He died for His bride, the church. He did all of the work to sanctify her, to make her holy and to present to Himself a glorious church.

I have to remind you, at this point, Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:32 he is talking about Christ and the church. He is using a human marriage to show us His plan for His bride, the church and the bridegroom Jesus! What a high view of marriage! Perhaps this should be our view of marriage.

Day 5

Read Revelation 19:1-10

The imagery of Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as the bride of Christ is clearly presented in scripture. The main passage this week in Ephesians is about Christ and the church. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses marriage as an illustration of the relationship of Christ and His church.

In the days of the writing of the New Testament, weddings followed a three phase format. The first phase was that of the betrothal. This corresponds to what we call the engagement. This is where Mary and Joseph were when Mary came to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Mary and Joseph were not married, but he would have to put her away if he chose not to marry her since she was pregnant. It was a more binding agreement than our engagement. The betrothal was an agreement between the bride's parents and the groom's parents, usually affirmed with a dowry payment. This illustrates the relationship with Jesus and His church. God sent Jesus and paid the payment of His Son's blood to have believers (the church) as His betrothed.

The second phase was the wedding. It involved the groom and his friends going to the home of the bride's father to get her and take her to his father's home. There would be a parade of the groom and his friends to take the bride for the wedding and the consummation of the marriage. This further illustrates the marriage of Christ and His church. He will come to get His bride, the church, and take her to His Father's house in an event called the rapture of the church. With the bride of Christ safely in heaven, the seven-year period of the tribulation will begin on the earth.

At the end of the tribulation, Jesus will return, known as the second coming, with His bride and there will be a one-thousand-year wedding feast during the Millennial reign of Christ.

What a picture God has given us of His relationship with His people! It is for us to use the picture of His love for His church and the church's submission to Him to be a reminder of the need for

us to all have a high view of marriage because God sure has one!

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." **Hebrews 13:4 (NIV)**

WEEK 91 THE ARMOR OF GOD-----Dennis Watson

We live in a pretty scary world is an obvious and troubling statement. Jesus told us that in this world we would have trouble. Peter reminded us Satan is like a roaring lion seeking to devour. This can be so scary! As God's children, we are not to be fearful, but to be people of love, power, and a sound mind. Where does that come from? This week's passages deal with this very thing. God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). He has provided for us instructions, the Holy Spirit, and armor which fits us for the battle.

Day 1

Read Ephesians 6:1-4

A lot of people get really bogged down with the question, "What is God's will for my life?" While they seek answers to the big question, they ignore many of the things they already know to be God's will. It has correctly been said, "If you take care of the small things, the big things take care of themselves" (Emily Dickinson). Today's passage seems to be rather insignificant; however, if it were followed faithfully, the earth would indeed be shaken. First, Paul told his readers, that children need to obey and honor their parents. The first place to learn how to treat other people with respect is in the home. The first place to learn to be obedient to authority is in the home. In Verse 1 He said this is right. If a person wants to be right, this person should obey and honor his or her parents. For how long? Always. Both of my parents have passed away, however, I still seek to honor them. It is right and it has a promise—long life.

Another seemingly little thing, also concerns parents. Family is so very significant in God's plan for the world. The family is where we grow and learn. It is the place of discovering ourselves and others. It is where we learn to relate. Parents, and more specifically in this context, fathers, are called upon to not provoke their children to wrath. Fathers and mothers provoke and discourage their children by saying one thing and doing another. They also do it by always blaming and never praising. When parents neglect their children, the children are discouraged. Children who do not have good, clear, focused time with their parents are discouraged.

He did not stop with what not to do, but he gave parents further instruction. The literal phrase is, “Nurture them in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Fathers have the responsibility of nurturing both the wife and their children in the Lord. A good father does this by showing love and giving encouragement in the home to the wife and the children. The father’s role is more than simply providing food, clothing, and shelter. He is also to nurture them emotionally and spiritually. When Jesus was a child we read that, “He increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” **Luke 2:52** The parents are the ones responsible for nurturing the children.

Fathers and mothers also have the responsibility for disciplining the children. The word here is admonition. The word discipline refers to more than the punishment a child might receive; we all need to be disciplined, so we can bring our appetites under control. It really offends me to see adults who have no discipline in their lives. They eat what they want, as much as they want. Perhaps they stay up too late or behave like a couch potato. Discipline and disciplines are learned early. Parents need to teach their children to be responsible in their actions, words, and use of time and money. This is to be done in a positive and constructive way. Without anger!

Little things done daily, like obedience, honor, nurture, and discipline all add up.

Day 2

Read Ephesians 6:10-13

Verses 5-9 have to do with what today would be work relationships between employers and employees. Paul addressed home relationships and then work relationships. We now see what he had to say about the main point of this week: the place of the real struggle. The place of the real struggle for us, as believers, is in the spiritual realm. Our struggle is not against people or even circumstances; our struggle is with our spiritual opponents—Satan and his demons.

Paul exhorted his readers to put on the armor of God. As Paul wrote these words, he spent all of his time chained to a Roman guard. While Paul had the image of the soldier's armor in his mind, most of his readers were quite familiar with the armor of a Roman soldier. The reason for the armor was the enemy his readers faced. By the way, we face this enemy, also. The reason for putting on the armor was to "... Stand against the wiles of the devil." **Verse 11** The word here for wiles is the word from which we get our word methods. He is saying we need the armor to deal with the methods of the devil. There are several different names used for this enemy. Devil means accuser because he accuses God's people day and night. Satan means adversary because he is the enemy of God. He is also called the tempter, murderer, and liar. He is the enemy of God and man. He wants to get people to give up on God and to get God to give up on people. The latter will never happen; God will never give up on you.

Satan, the devil, the accuser, murderer, and liar, was a direct creation of God. He was not created this way, but he chose to rebel against God. You can read about this in Isaiah 14:12-15. His name was originally "Lucifer, son of the morning." **Isaiah 14:12** He was cast down because of his pride and desire to have God's throne. His helpers are found in this passage in Ephesians as "principalities...powers...rulers of the darkness of this world...spiritual hosts of wickedness." **Verse 12** This could be the group that was expelled with Satan when he was booted out of heaven, as seen in Revelation 12:4.

We are to take seriously the devil's schemes and realize that God has given us what we need to stand against him. He desires to kill,

steal, and destroy. However, we are overcomers through Jesus and the weaponry that He has provided for us. “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” **1 John 4:4**

Tomorrow, we will look at specific parts of the armor of God. Thank God for His provisions to win the battles we face!

Day 3

Read Ephesians 6:14-15

A soldier needs to be confident he or she is ready to go into battle and his or her weapons are effective for facing the enemy. God has provided believers with weaponry which should instill confidence within us that we can live well and stand firm against the enemy. Today, we will look at three of the weapons Paul wrote about in Ephesian 6.

The first piece of armor mentioned is a girdle or belt. It is called the girdle of truth. The armor of the Roman soldier included a girdle on which other parts of the weaponry were attached. This belt or girdle integrated other parts of the armor so the soldier had quick and easy access to the available weapons. This refers to integrity and faithfulness. Everything was right there, available and accessible to be used. This inspired confidence. The believer who is confident in the truth, knowing what they have and believe is pure and right, is equipped to face and refute the lies and schemes of the enemy.

The next piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was made of metal plates which covered the front and back of the soldier from the neck to the waist. The believer finds security in knowing God has provided for righteousness (right standing) for the believer in Christ and that the believer who follows Christ can live a righteous life. The believer can be assured the righteousness God demands of us has been provided for us by God through Jesus' victory over the enemy. Nothing the enemy can do will take away the righteousness you have in Christ. This brings security.

The last piece of armor for today is the shoes of the gospel of peace. The Roman soldier wore sandals which had hobnails or cleats. These cleats allowed the soldier-warrior to gain a firm footing. It provided a way to stand without slipping. The literal translation is, "And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace of peace." **Verse 15** In other words, the believer needs to know he has a firm place to stand. The believer has the good news of real salvation, salvation cannot be lost. This brings peace.

We have confidence based on truth. We have security based on the righteousness, we have which was given to us by Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. We have peace that salvation is real and cannot be lost. We should be confident warriors. The enemy may harass and aggravate, but he cannot undo what God has done for us and in us. Give thanks for what He has provided. Stand firm! This connects us to the salvation that God freely gave to us in Jesus.

Day 4

Read Ephesians 6:16

The last three parts of the armor are the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Today, we will look at these three pieces of the armor.

The shield of the Roman soldier was similar to a door, 2 ½ feet wide and 4 feet tall. It was made of wood, covered with linen and leather to extinguish flaming arrows, and was held in front of the soldier, largely to provide for body protection. Our shield of faith gives us confidence that whatever the enemy shoots or throws our way, Jesus enables us to be kept safe from such attacks and to extinguish them. The shields also were made in such a way they could be connected, so that a whole line of soldiers could link their shields together. They would then move together like a solid wall, providing safety as they advanced. We are not in this battle alone. We need to be connected together for greater safety.

What the helmet provided is clear protection for the head. This applies more specifically to the mind. When Eve was attacked by the serpent in the garden, the attack was to her mind. The enemy played with her mind and caused her to turn away from what God had said, even to question what He said. The enemy wants to get our thinking off course from God's truth. The enemy uses people and programs in the hope of leading us to question what God has said. A grandmother told me this week about taking her grandchildren to see the Disney movie, "The Jungle Book." One of the children responded to a point in the movie where the panther says, "The elephants created the jungle." The child said, "That's not true!" I love it when even the kids can see through Hollywood's attempts to get us off track! Satan is not red and carrying a pitchfork around. He is subtle and seeks to gently lead us away from the truth (and the Truth). Put on the helmet of salvation and keep your mind safe from the enemy's lies.

The only offensive weapon in our arsenal is the sword, which is the Word of God. The Roman soldier was on the defense and was to stand against the enemy. Sometimes, he was compelled to go on the attack, so he also had a sword. The Word of God was God's

method of creating; He spoke and things came into existence. The Word of God pierces the heart, so people are convicted and saved. Jesus used the Word of God against the enemy when He was being tempted. We use the Word of God to aggressively defeat lies. The Word of God is the Truth and the only way to defeat lies is with the truth. David was speaking of himself, but the Spirit of God was telling us about Jesus. Keep on getting the dots connected!

I'll wrap this up with the words of Warren Wiersbe: "In one sense, the "whole armor of God" is a picture of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Truth (John 14:6), and He is our righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21) and our peace (Eph. 2:14). His faithfulness makes possible our faith (Gal. 2:20); He is our salvation (Luke 2:30); and He is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14). This means that when we trusted Christ, we received the armor. Paul told the Romans what to do with the armor (Rom. 13:11-14): wake up (Rom. 13:11), cast off sin, and "put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12). We do this by putting "on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14). By faith, put on the armor and trust God for the victory. Once and for all, we have put on the armor at the moment of salvation. But there must be a daily appropriation. When, King David put off his armor and returned to his palace, he was in greater danger than when he was on the battlefield (2 Sam. 11). We are never out of reach of Satan's devices, so we must never be without the whole armor of God."²⁶

²⁶ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The bible Expositin Commentary - New Testamnet, Volume 2

DAY 5

Read Psalm 69:19-25

When David was writing this psalm, he was certainly speaking of his own struggles. As is often the case, his words also spoke of the future, not just about his present circumstance. David expressed that his enemies had treated him so poorly he had actually become physically sick. There was no one to comfort him or take pity on him. We see the same with Jesus when He was praying in the garden, along with His own disciples who slept while He was "... Sorrowful and deeply distressed." **Matthew 26:37** David's lament points to Jesus and His experience of rejection and crucifixion. He, too, was given gall, a poisonous herb and vinegar. Even Judas who betrayed Jesus was included in David's words. Peter quoted Psalm 69:25 in Acts 1:20 when he referenced Judas.

Jesus was mocked and put to shame on the cross, with no one to come to His rescue. Even God, His Heavenly Father, forsook Him, because He had taken our sins on Himself.

The Bible is a single unit and it is made up of many different sections, accounts, and writings, but it is one unit that fits all together. Chuck Missler puts it this way: "The 66 books which we call the Bible constitute a highly integrated message system. What makes this so astonishing is the fact that they were penned by more than forty different people over a period of several thousand years! Yet we now discover that virtually every detail of the Biblical text evidences a highly skillful integrated design from cover to cover. In fact, every word, every place name, every detail was apparently placed there (in the original) deliberately as part of an overall intricate plan."⁴

God inspired the Bible and we pick it up and read it today. Too often we fail to connect the dots, thereby missing the big picture. God has given us the big picture in many different biblical historical accounts. It all comes out in a tremendous way when we spend the time and effort to properly connect the dots.

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