1 Corinthians Devotionals

ILLUSTRATIONS, DEVOTIONALS, HOMILIES
1 Corinthians

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1 Corinthians 1

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

Along the western coast of Ireland, fishermen use a round bottomed keelless craft known as a currach. This boat has a tarred canvas over a wooden frame. Because of its unique construction, it is vulnerable to sharp rocks or floating objects, and it requires the oarsmen to cooperate completely, rowing in perfect unison.

Out of this need for unity has come the Irish expression, "You will have to pull with the crew" Or, as another Irish proverb states, "There is not strength without unity"

What is true for Irish fishermen is especially true for believers in Jesus Christ. Unity is so important to the success of the cause of Christ that Paul pleaded with the believers in Corinth to eliminate division and to work as one. In our ministry efforts, are we striving to work together in harmony? If not, let's ask God to give us the spirit of unity so that we will always "pull with the crew" J D Brannon

A CHURCH WITH ONE HEART AND ONE MIND IS A WONDERFUL CHURCH.

1 Corinthians 1:1–9 Faithful to the End: Faithful as We Wait

Today in the Word

A video circulating on the Internet showed a huge black Labrador whose owner, a soldier, had just returned from an extended term of service. The animal could not stop leaping on his master, wagging his tail, and crying in small barks of joy. Finally, the man made it to an easy chair where the animal jumped on top of him, crying dog tears because the man he had waited so patiently for had at last returned.

In today's passage, the apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth. The letter specifically addresses them in verse 2 along with "all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Together we are followers of Jesus Christ, and we should be people who are longing for His return. Paul expresses his thankfulness for this community of believers (v. 4).

Paul is reminding the church that they are to remain faithful as they "eagerly wait" for Christ's return (v. 7). Our behavior should be influenced by our desire to please God, because we know that we will see Him soon. Paul mentions the use of our spiritual gifts in verse 7. These God-given gifts are evidence of the faith within us and of our relationship with Him. We are not to sit aimlessly waiting for Christ's return, but rather we should be serving Him with the abilities He has given us.

We are to remain faithful. Notice the dynamic here: while we are remaining faithful, God is keeping us "firm" in our faith so we do not stumble and sin. The wait may seem long as we serve God in this fallen world, but He has promised us His Holy Spirit to guide us and keep us "blameless" to the end (v. 8).

Apply the Word

Faithfulness is a characteristic that pleases God. How can we show our faithfulness to Him? Paul suggests here that when we serve God with our spiritual gifts, we are following Him well. What are the gifts God has given you? Are you using them to serve Him? If not, can you find a way to exercise those abilities as you wait for His return?

1 Corinthians 1:4–9

Thanksgiving: Gratitude for the Way Christ Enriches Lives

Today in the Word

A 2011 survey by the United States Postal Service indicated that the typical American home receives a personal letter—not including greeting cards or invitations—once every seven weeks. It was once every two weeks as recently as 1987. A stream of advertisements still arrives; but personal letters have largely been replaced by email, Facebook, and Twitter.

In Paul's days, letter writing was the only option if you wanted to send a message to far-flung friends. In the Greco-Roman world letters followed certain conventions. They would begin with a salutation followed by prosaic words of thanksgiving. Concrete directions of some sort (called the parenesis) often sat sandwiched between the main body of the text and the closing. Paul largely stuck to this convention when writing his letters, but he included modifications that underscored his Christian commitments. Among these was making the thanksgiving a strategic, dynamic force in his message.

In today's passage, Paul directed his thanksgiving to God for the gifts of grace He had given the Corinthians—"all kinds of speech and with all knowledge" (v. 5). This was an interesting choice for Paul; as the letter continues, it becomes clear these very gifts were at the root of the problems causing discord within the Corinthian church. It might seem that Paul was using sarcasm when he thanked God for qualities he then went on to critique. But this fails to appreciate the range of Paul's thought. As one scholar wrote, "Paul … believes in, practices, and celebrates the reality of God's spiritual gifts. He can easily distinguish between the use and abuse of spiritual gifts." God's gifts are real and Paul's confidence rests in the Giver, who is worthy of thanks for these gifts, even when they're being misused.

Apply the Word

Getting a personal letter in one's physical mailbox is a thrill. Consider taking time today to hunt down paper, an envelope, a stamp, and a pen and bless a fellow believer's life with a prayerful note. Perhaps you can write about a way in which your friend's faith has encouraged you. Or use this as an opportunity to testify about what God is doing in your life.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Today in the Word

In October 2009, a spate of articles in publications like the New York Times and The New Republic as well as on numerous parenting blogs all debated the same question: Is shouting the "new" spanking? As the practice of spanking children has declined in segments of the American population, parents admitted that they resorted to yelling and shouting instead. Now they wondered if that was really better than corporal punishment. When children misbehaved or exasperated them, was it okay to scream at them? Every parent can relate to the occasional frustration caused by their child's actions and attitude—and as a spiritual father, Paul felt this toward his beloved church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14,15). Yet in this letter to the Corinthians, which we'll study this month, Paul sent a message that is paternal and firm but never harsh or screeching. There was just cause for a tongue-lashing. The problems in the Corinthian church—including disunity, pride, misuse of spiritual gifts, and abuse of the Lord's Supper—were serious indeed.

In the opening portion of this letter Paul remains realistic in his appraisal of the Corinthians' spiritual life and practice, but he does not play the part of the scolding father. In fact, his tone is confident and expectant, because his hope for the Corinthians is rooted firmly in the unwavering faithfulness of God. Despite all their problems, Paul knows that in the end, they will be declared blameless on the day of Jesus' return. In these opening lines, he has full confidence that God has given the Corinthians a sure calling and hope, an enriching of their mouths and minds, and spiritual gifts for every need and occasion.

Exuberance abounds in the "every" and "all" of verse five. These words are only possible for those who call on the name of Jesus. In Christ, everything depends on grace, not on human performance. No one then, not even this strife-torn first-century church, falls beyond the reach of grace. God's rescue of salvation is evidence that He is committed to saving us and changing us.

Apply the Word

Like the Corinthians, we are followers of Jesus who sometimes struggle to get along with each other. Their problems, as we'll see throughout the month, aren't unlike ours. Divisions have grown up in the church, and the community is fractured and broken. A place to begin when broken fellowship seems irreparable is the unfailing grace of God: He never gives up on us. He has declared what we should be (saints), and He is determined to make our holiness a reality. If God doesn't give up on us, can we give up on one another?

1 Corinthians 1:10–17

Today in the Word

In an article in Sports Illustrated, sportswriter Rick Reilly dryly mocks today's self–esteem generation: "I know what all these NPR–listening, Starbucks–guzzling parents want. They want their Ambers and their Alexanders to grow up in a cozy womb of noncompetition where everybody shares tofu, and Little Red Riding Hood and the big bad wolf set up a commune. Then their kids will stumble out into the bright light of the real world and find out that, yes, there's weak and there's strong and teams and sides and winning and losing."

As the spiritual father of the Corinthian church, Paul struck a balance between coddling and competition, for he knew that either extreme was unhealthy spiritually. He was not afraid to talk to his spiritual children about where they were weak and where improvement was needed. His letter began with gracious words of encouragement, but he turned quickly to address the problems. Serious disunity plagued this church, producing quarrels and factions. The Christians in Corinth had divided themselves according to different allegiances and loyalties: "I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Cephas," and even "I follow Christ."

We aren't told the reasons for these factions. Apollos was an eloquent teacher of the Scriptures and may have been favored for his rhetorical talents (cf. Acts 18:24–28). Peter, or Cephas, was of course a prominent member of Jesus' original twelve disciples. Paul himself founded the church at Corinth. No doubt each faction argued why their guy was the best.

Notice that what is at stake here was more than the Corinthians simply not getting along or someone's hurt feelings. The disunity threatened the integrity of the gospel and the message of the Cross. The Cross of Christ wields the power to bring wildly diverse people into agreement of mind and thought. The Cross exchanges ethnic and cultural identities for the name, Christian. At the Cross, forgiveness is freely offered to all, and together the people of God are baptized into one name: Jesus Christ. When disunity prevails, it makes a mockery of the Cross.

Apply the Word

The church of Jesus Christ has yet to fully live into and claim the power of the gospel for which Paul fights fiercely in his letter. The gospel does not simply give us the capacity to be nice to people unlike us; far more than just niceness, it teaches us to work toward common goals and perspectives with people of different skin color, different social status, and different cultural backgrounds. Do you need to "reach across the aisle" in your church and community in the name of Jesus Christ?

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

Today in the Word

Aesop's fables give keen insight into the human condition; they expose the folly of human vanity and pride, laziness and trickery. A lesser–known fable, that of the olive tree and fig tree, warns against boasting due to the possibility of reversals of fortune: the olive tree taunts the fig tree for having lost all her leaves in the winter. She brags of her own year–round beauty. As she boasts, a thunderbolt strikes her and burns her to ashes, while the fig tree stands safe and sound.

The Bible is full of reversals of fortune like the one suffered by the olive tree. The story of Jesus Christ is the most powerful of all. God the King is born as a baby in a dirty stable into a carpenter's family. He enjoys no superior privilege, position, or education. He chooses ordinary fishermen and despised tax collectors to follow Him and preach His message. And eventually, He dies a criminal's death. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is the ultimate reversal in all of history. The good news of this God–Man's story subverts everything that the world esteems.

The culture of Corinth is similar to our culture today. They loved power and status, and in such a culture, a crucified Savior is absurd. How could the power and wisdom of God be executed on a cross with nails in His hands and feet? This portrait compels only those who believe. The Jews demanded a grand celestial display of God's power; the Greeks demanded carefully conceived and persuasively argued ideas. But the God–Man died without miraculous rescue from God and without eloquent philosophical treatises.

The purpose of God's plan is clear: He reserves all glory for Himself. Not one person deserves to boast in His presence. Man's abilities and achievements do not impress Him. This is a sobering message for the Corinthian church, whom Paul indicts for their boasting here and in later points in the letter (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18, 21; 2:7, 18; 5:2, 6). There's no room at the Cross for pride.

Apply the Word

The gospel, as we've seen from our reading today, tells us about the heart of God but also the methods of God. They aren't pragmatic, or necessarily clever and compelling. In fact, it seems that God wants to make sport of what matters most to foolish human beings, things like achievement, success, power, and influence. It's a sobering reminder to us as we "build" our churches today. Do we do so according to the foolishness of the world or the wisdom of Christ?

1 Corinthians 1:10

It is said that when the British and French were fighting in Canada in the 1750s, Admiral Phipps, commander of the British fleet, was told to anchor outside Quebec. He was given orders to wait for the British land forces to arrive, then support them when they attacked the city. Phipps' navy arrived early. As the admiral waited, he became annoyed by the statues of the saints that adorned the towers of a nearby cathedral, so he commanded his men to shoot at them with the ships' cannons. No one knows how many rounds were fired or how many statues were knocked out, but when the land forces arrived and the signal was given to attack, the admiral was of no help. He had used up all his ammunition shooting at the "saints."

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Being much concerned about the rise of denominations in the church, John Wesley tells of a dream he had. In the dream, he was ushered to the gates of Hell. There he asked, "Are there any Presbyterians here?" "Yes!", came the answer. Then he asked, "Are there any Baptists? Any Episcopalians? Any Methodists?" The answer was Yes! each time. Much distressed, Wesley was then ushered to the gates of Heaven. There he asked the same question, and the answer was No! "No?" To this, Wesley asked, "Who then is inside?" The answer came back, "There are only Christians here." (1 Cor. 1:10-17)

Martin Luther said, "I pray you leave my name alone. Do not call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians." John Wesley said: "I wish the name Methodist might never be mentioned again, but lost in eternal oblivion." Charles Spurgeon said, "I say of the Baptist name, let it perish, but let Christ's own name last forever. I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living."

1 Corinthians 1:18

Repelling and Compelling - The cross of Christ is both repelling and compelling. To the Oxford professor and philosopher Sir Alfred Ayer, the idea that Jesus died on a cross for our sins is "intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).

When the Lord Jesus came to live on the earth, He came at the Word of the Father (John 1). Everything He said and did was in obedience to God's will and therefore was a true expression of His Father's loving heart. Yet it was not by Christ's great teaching nor through His astounding miracles that He best represented the eternal purposes of God. Rather, He proclaimed the Father's love most eloquently by His sacrificial death on the cross.

A furniture maker trying to explain the theory of his designs to a blind yeoman said that he believed he could express himself best through his craft.

"Artists," he said, "express themselves in colors, in words, in stone; well, I don't see why a man can't express himself in wood."

The yeoman, with unusual spiritual insight, responded, "In wood? It has been done, sir; yes, the mightiest expression of a man ever the world knew has been in wood!"

"What, yeoman?" asked the craftsman.

"Sir," the yeoman replied, "the cross of Christ!"

(Arthur Hutchinson, One Increasing Purpose).

The sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus was the supreme expression of a loving God. That death, that sacrifice, that proclamation of unending love, was for you and for me. —D C Egner

Christ took the guilt of our sin that we might have the gift of His salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

WHEN Harvard University was founded, its motto was **Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae**—"**Truth for Christ and the Church.**" Its crest showed three books, one face down to symbolize the limitation of human knowledge. But in recent decades that book has been turned face up to represent the unlimited capacity of the human mind. And the motto has been changed to **Veritas— "Truth."**

The pursuit of knowledge is praiseworthy, yet learning can lead to pride and a refusal to acknowledge the limits of our mental abilities. When that happens, people ignore biblical truth.

What, then, is the truth about truth? A wise king wrote centuries ago, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). We must recognize the relationship between God and truth. They are inseparable. Without the work of God's Spirit and the instruction of God's Word, people will be ever "learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy

3:7). When we acknowledge and obey His truth, however, we will be set free from spiritual ignorance and error (John 8:32; 17:17). The reason we must be diligent in studying the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15) is because it is the only book that tells the truth about truth.—Vernon Grounds

1 Corinthians 1:20-31

AT a British university, a group of students asked one another,

"What do you want to be?"

Among the answers were these: champion athlete, influential politician, noted scholar. Shyly, yet definitely, one student said something that brought silence:

"You may laugh at me, but I want to be a saint."

Imagine—a saint! What an eccentric ambition. Yet for Christians, that ought to be our primary goal. To be a saint means to be like Jesus. Paul declared that the overarching purpose of God the Father is to make us like His Son (Romans 8:29). That's the essence of sainthood.

Of course, every believer is guaranteed conformity to Christ in the world to come. But God does not want us to wait passively until we enter eternity to begin that supernatural transformation (1 John 3:2). We are to cooperate now with the Holy Spirit and become more and more like Christ "in this world" (1 John 4:17).

Just as natural birth entitles infants to be called by their parents' name, spiritual birth entitles us to be called saints (Philippians 1:1). But we still have a lot of maturing to do to before we become saintly, just as children must mature before they become like their parents.—Vernon Grounds

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-2:5

A RENOWNED violinist announced before a concert that he would play one of the world's most expensive violins. He played the first composition flawlessly, and the audience was thrilled at the performance.

After taking his bows, the musician suddenly smashed the instrument, completely demolishing it, as the audience watched in horror.

The violinist explained that he had been playing a cheap violin, and then, picking up the expensive instrument, he drew the bow across the strings. The sound was beautiful, but most of the people couldn't tell any difference between the music from the expensive violin and the cheap one. The quality of the instrument was secondary to the skill of the violinist.

It's something like that in our service for the Lord. The Master can take ordinary instruments like us and produce beautiful music from our lives. The results of our service depends not so much on us as it does on Him. The apostle Paul said that "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27). God did so "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (v. 29).

Like that cheap violin, we can be instruments in the Master's hands to declare the beauty of the Lord and to bless others.—R W DeHaan

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26 A noblewoman once told the great Methodist preacher John Wesley that she was saved by an “m.” When Wesley asked for an explanation, she pointed him to 1 Corinthians 1:26, which in the King James Version reads, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” “God did not say ‘Not any noble are called,” she explained, “but ‘Not many noble.’ Were it not for that letter, I might be lost.” -Today in the Word

1 Corinthians 1:27 Numbers 22:1-35

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. - 1 Corinthians 1:27

TODAY IN THE WORD

The popular 1960s television show, Mister Ed, featured a horse who could talk. But Mister Ed would only talk to his owner, often putting the long-suffering Wilbur in embarrassing situations. A talking animal in Scripture also embarrassed her owner - story of Balaam and his donkey.

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1 CORINTHIANS 1:27

A renowned violinist announced before a concert that he would play one of the worlds most expensive violins. His first composition

was played flawlessly, and the audience was thrilled at the performance. After taking his bows, he suddenly smashed the instrument, completely demolishing it. The audience was horrified—that is, until the violinist explained that he had been playing a cheap violin.

Then, picking up the expensive instrument, the virtuoso began to draw the bow across the strings. The sound was beautiful, but most of the people couldn't tell any difference between the music from the expensive violin and the cheap one. The quality of the instrument was secondary to the skill of the violinist.

It's something like that in our service for the Lord. The apostle Paul said that "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27). Like that cheap violin, we can be instruments in the Masters hands to magnify the Lord and bring blessing to others. —R W DeHaan

GOD CAN USE ORDINARY INSTRUMENTS TO PRODUCE A CONCERT OF PRAISE.
Wanted: Ordinary people to do extraordinary work.

- Play and ponder the words of The Touch of the Master's Hand by Wayne Watson

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1 Corinthians 1:27

During a Billy Sunday evangelistic campaign, a mentally impaired boy came faithfully each night to sing in the choir. “Joey was not very bright,” said Homer Rodeheaver, the well-known song leader for Billy Sunday, “but he never missed any of our meetings and wouldn’t leave until he shook my hand. Sometimes I was embarrassed by the way he constantly tailed me, and I secretly wished he’d go away.”

Then one evening a man came to Rodeheaver and said, “Thank you for being kind to my son Joey. He’s not right mentally, but never has he enjoyed anything so much as singing in the choir. He worked hard doing simple chores for people so he could contribute to the collection. Through his pleadings my wife and five other children came to this evangelistic campaign and have now received Christ. Last night his 75-year-old grandfather, who has been an atheist all his life, was saved, and tonight his grandmother also came forward. Now our entire family is converted!’” Joey was one of God’s faithful servants.

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1 Corinthians 1:2

Francois Fenelon was the court preacher for King Louis XIV of France in the seventeenth century. One Sunday when the king and his attendants arrived at the chapel for the regular service, no one else was there but the preacher. King Louis demanded, "What does this mean?" Fenelon replied, "I had published that you would not come to church today in order that Your Majesty might see who serves God in truth and who flatters the king."

Why do you go to church? To meet your friends, to hear the preacher, to fulfill an obligation? These reasons are not wrong, but they do not represent our highest motivation. Our primary reason must be to worship Christ.

When we gather with God's people, let's not do so to be seen, nor to flatter the preacher. Let's be united in heart and keep Christ preeminent. Make worshiping Him your primary reason for going to church. —Paul R VanGorder

TRUE WORSHIP ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRUE WORTH-SHIP OF CHRIST.

Turn Back To Get Ahead

June 18, 1997

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 | Bible in a Year: Nehemiah 10-11; Acts 4:1-22

Repent and do the first works. —Revelation 2:5

The church in Corinth got off to a good start. In Paul’s first letter to them, he expressed his gratitude for the evidence of God’s grace among them. In their early days they had exercised their spiritual gifts harmoniously and had proven the genuineness of their faith.

But in his letter he also had stern words for them because they were quarreling and competing instead of agreeing and cooperating. He rebuked them for a tolerant attitude toward sexual immorality and a self-centeredness that led them to sue one another before secular judges. Instead of moving forward spiritually, many members were regressing.

The tendency toward spiritual decline was not limited to the early church. It has happened again and again down through the centuries, and has been especially evident when Christians prospered and enjoyed freedom from persecution. It’s a danger we must all be aware of.

Jesus gave us the antidote for this disorder. He said, “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works” (Rev. 2:5). This prescription will prevent the spiritual regression that brings so much harm to us individually and to our churches.

It's easy, it seems, to wander away,
Life is so busy with work and with play;
Lord, help me see the way that I'm going,
Give me a faith that's constantly growing.
—K. De Haan

To advance, we sometimes have to turn around.

The Power Of Affirmation

September 10, 2013

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 8-9; 2 Corinthians 3

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus. —1 Corinthians 1:4

During a recent study, 200,000 employees were interviewed to discover the missing ingredient in their productivity. The study concluded that appreciation and affirmation topped the list of what they wanted most from their superiors. This research implies that receiving affirmation is a basic human need.

The apostle Paul seemed to realize this basic need in the Corinthian believers, so before he peppered them with firm words of discipline, he showered them with affirmation. As their spiritual leader, Paul began his letter with thanksgiving to God for the grace being displayed in their lives.

Once far from God, these believers were now participating in His grace through the death and resurrection of Christ. United with Jesus, they were drawing their spiritual life from Him, and the fruit of this union was their spiritual growth in godliness (1 Cor. 1:4-7). Paul deliberately and continually thanked God for His work in the Corinthian believers’ lives. I imagine that they were better able to bear firm criticism from Paul because of his tender affirmation.

When we see people who are obeying God, let’s take time to affirm them and to thank God for what He’s doing through them.

Lord, You are at work in so many ways in my life and in the people around me. Help me to encourage my brothers and sisters in Christ by telling them

how I am blessed to see Your work in them.

Praise loudly—correct softly.

Rivals or Allies?

Be perfectly united in mind and thought. 1 Corinthians 1:10

Today's Scripture & Insight: 1 Corinthians 1:10–17

The city of Texarkana sits squarely on the state border between Texas and Arkansas. The city of 70,000 inhabitants has two mayors, two city councils, and two police and fire departments. The cross-town sporting rivalry between high schools draws an uncommonly high attendance, reflecting the deep allegiance each has to their own state’s school. More significant challenges arise as well, such as disputes over the shared water system, governed by two sets of state laws. Yet the town is known for its unity despite the line that divides it. Residents gather annually for a dinner held on State Line Avenue to share a meal in celebration of their oneness as a community.

The believers in Corinth may not have drawn a line down their main thoroughfare, but they were divided. They’d been quarreling as a result of their allegiances to those who taught them about Jesus: Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (Peter). Paul called them all to oneness “in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10), reminding them it was Christ who was crucified for them, not their spiritual leaders.

We behave similarly today, don’t we? We sometimes oppose even those who share our singularly important belief—Jesus’ sacrifice for our wrongdoings—making them rivals instead of allies. Just as Christ Himself is not divided, we, as His earthly representation—His body—mustn’t allow differences over nonessentials to divide us. Instead, may we celebrate our oneness in Him. By: Kirsten

Holmberg

Over what nonessential spiritual issues are you likely to allow division? How can you foster unity instead?

God, help me to remain focused on You and Your sacrifice for Your people. May I not be distracted by the less important issues but call others to oneness as a community of faith.

United Goal

March 12, 2010

Read: 1 Cor. 1:10-17 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 17-19; Mark 13:1-20

I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you. —1 Corinthians 1:10

The spotted owl has been disappearing in the US. Originally it was believed that old growth logging was its greatest threat. But research shows that one of the owl's relatives may be the problem. For the past 15 years, the barred owl has been rapidly migrating westward. Barred owls, which used to live exclusively east of the Mississippi, compete for the same food as spotted owls but are more aggressive and adaptable.

In a similar way, our greatest spiritual conflict often comes not from outside the church, but from other Christians. This was happening in the church of Corinth, and Paul took some time to address the divisive spirit that had grown in this congregation. This spirit threatened the unity of the church. Paul, with a pastoral nudge, encouraged the Corinthians to agree on the essentials and not be divided over the nonessentials. People were quarreling because they were aligning themselves with different Christian leaders—Paul, Apollos, Peter, and even Christ. In creating these divisions, they were valuing their favorite leader above unity in Christ.

Paul said the one essential that should unify the church is preaching the good news. That should be our united goal as well.

Lord, bless our congregation,
We humbly ask of Thee,
That we may walk together
In perfect unity.
—Fennema

A united church is a strong church.

Finding Harmony

December 10, 1995

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 | Bible in a Year: Hosea 1-4; Revelation 1

I plead with you, … that there be no divisions among you. —1 Corinthians 1:10

During the Christmas season, my wife and I attended a presentation of Handel's Messiah. In addition to being touched with the fine production of this stirring music, we were also moved by something else. After the first section, the primary conductor stepped down and handed the baton to another man who had directed this annual production for many years.

We noticed no change. For both conductors, the quality of the music remained high.

It made me think. What if some musicians had said, "We like the first guy better. Let's not do our best for this one." It would have ruined the majestic music. Instead, the musicians worked equally hard for both.

It should be that way in the church. We should give our best effort for the work of the Lord no matter who is our leader, provided of course that he is following God. But in many congregations there's a tendency to follow one leader over another, dividing their allegiance while damaging the effectiveness of the church.

Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to avoid divisions based on personalities. That advice still applies today. As we serve God, we need to realize that we can't have harmony until we're completely in tune with Christ.

Like a mighty army moves the church of God;
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod;
We are not divided, all one body we—

One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.
—Baring-Gould

Keeping in tune with Christ keeps harmony in the Church.

Try Out My Tiger

January 14, 1997

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:17-29 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 33-35; Matthew 10:1-20

To us who are being saved it is the power of God. —1 Corinthians 1:18

There's a Chinese tale about a young man who captured a tiger cub, brought it home, and raised it in a cage. When it was full grown, the man loved to brag about how ferocious and powerful it was. "That tiger isn't wild anymore," scoffed his friends. "He's as tame as an old house cat." This went on until a wise old man overheard them and said, "There's only one way to know whether this tiger is ferocious or not. Open the cage!" The young man smiled, placed his hand on the latch, and challenged his friends, "Want to try out my tiger?"

Many people view the gospel of Jesus Christ as a tame and powerless fantasy. Yet in 1 Corinthians 1:18 the apostle Paul called it "the power of God." He used the Greek word dunamis, which is the root for our word dynamite. Paul said that to an unbeliever the gospel is foolishness, but anyone who is willing to believe it will experience the "dynamite" of God. A tiger's strength, of course, is destructive and can bring death, but the power of the gospel always leads to life and freedom. It destroys guilt and breaks the stranglehold of sinful habits.

If we have experienced this power, let's challenge others to "try out our tiger."

Stir me now, I long to know You,
Know the fullness of Your power;
Help me, Lord, to yield completely
Day by day and hour by hour.
—Hallan

To experience God's power, we must first admit that we are weak.

The Foolish Way of New Life

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18

Today's Scripture & Insight: 1 Corinthians 1:20–31

Some things just don't make sense until you experience them. When I was pregnant with my first child, I read multiple books about childbirth and listened to dozens of women tell their stories of labor and delivery. But I still couldn't really imagine what the experience would be like. What my body was going to do seemed impossible!

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that birth into God's kingdom, the salvation that God offers us through Christ, seems equally incomprehensible to those who haven't experienced it. It sounds like "foolishness" to say that salvation could come through a cross—a death marked by weakness, defeat, and humiliation. Yet this "foolishness" was the salvation that Paul preached!

It wasn't what anyone could have imagined it would be like. Some people thought that salvation would come through a strong political leader or a miraculous sign. Others thought that their own academic or philosophical achievements would be their salvation (1 Corinthians 1:22). But God surprised everyone by bringing salvation in a way that would only make sense to those who believed, to those who experienced it.

God took something shameful and weak—death on a cross—and made it the foundation of wisdom and power. God does the unimaginable. He chooses the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the wise (v. 27).

And His surprising, confounding ways are always the best ways. By: Amy Peterson

How is God surprising you today? Why is it true that God's ways are better than your ways?

God, with Isaiah I pray, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are Your ways higher than my ways.

Controversy Of The Cross

July 4, 2011

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 | Bible in a Year: Job 28-29; Acts 13:1-25

The message of the cross is … the power of God. —1 Corinthians 1:18

A case before the US Supreme Court focused on whether a religious symbol, specifically a cross, should be allowed on public land. Mark Sherman, writing for the Associated Press, said that although the cross in question was erected in 1934 as a memorial to soldiers who died in World War I, one veteran's group that opposed it called the cross "a powerful Christian symbol" and "not a symbol of any other religion."

The cross has always been controversial. In the first century, the apostle Paul said that Christ had sent him "to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:17-18). As followers of Christ, we see the cross as more than a powerful Christian symbol. It is the evidence of God's power to free us from the tyranny of our sin.

In a diverse and pluralistic society, the controversy over religious symbols will continue. Whether a cross can be displayed on public property will likely be determined by the courts. But displaying the power of the cross through our lives will be decided in our hearts.

Christ takes each sin, each pain, each loss,
And by the power of His cross
Transforms our brokenness and shame
So that our lives exalt His name.
—D. De Haan

Nothing speaks more clearly of God's love than the cross.

The Way Made Plain

February 20, 1995

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:17-31 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 26-27; Mark 2

You see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh … are called. —1 Corinthians 1:26

It was Abraham Lincoln who said, "God must have loved the common people, since He made so many of them." I would modify that to say, "God must have loved the common people, since He made the way of salvation plain enough to be grasped by all"—yes, even me.

One need not have a high IQ to qualify for God's favor. Nor does experiencing salvation depend on a person's ability to understand a complex philosophical presentation of religious truth. If that were necessary, few could be saved!

Receiving salvation is a matter of faith. It's believing God and accepting His Word about His Son Jesus Christ, His payment for our sins through His death on the cross, and His resurrection. It's trusting Him completely for salvation. John 1:12 tells us, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."

The Bible says that the gospel "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Whether educated or uneducated, knowledgeable or ignorant, anyone can believe. No one will be able to stand before God and say, "I'm not saved because I couldn't understand the gospel." The way has been made plain.

A ruler once came to Jesus by night
To ask Him the way of salvation and light;
The Master made answer in words true and plain,
"Ye must be born again."
—Sleeper

Christ believed is salvation received.

Casting Shadows

March 22, 2009

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 10-12; Luke 1:39-56

No flesh should glory in His presence. —1 Corinthians 1:29

Legend has it that Michelangelo painted with a brush in one hand and a candle in the other to prevent his shadow from covering his masterpiece in progress.

That's the kind of attitude we should adopt if we are serious about wanting to display the masterpiece of God's glory on the canvas of our lives. Unfortunately, we tend to live in a way that draws attention to ourselves—our cars, our clothes, our careers, our position, our cleverness, our success. And when life is all about us, it's hard for people to see Jesus in us. Jesus saved us to be reflections of His glory (Rom. 8:29), but when we live for ourselves, our shadow gets cast on the canvas of His presence in us.

When the believers in Corinth were feeling too full of themselves, Paul warned them "that no flesh should glory [boast] in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:29), and reminded them of what Jeremiah said, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31; Jer. 9:24).

Think of your life as a canvas on which a picture is being painted. What would you rather have people see: the masterpiece of the presence of Jesus or the shadow of your own profile? Don't get in the way of a great painting in progress. Live to let others see Jesus in you.

My life is a painting created by God,
And as such I've nothing to boast;
Reflecting the image of Christ to the world
Is what I desire the most.
—Sper

A Christian's life is the canvas on which others can see Jesus.

Lead Them To The Cross

September 11, 2007

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 10-12; 2 Corinthians 4

God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. —Galatians 6:14

Many heart-touching stories were circulated after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. None seems more spiritually significant than that of ironworker Frank Silecchia. As he was helping to recover bodies, Frank noticed two steel beams in the shape of a cross standing upright in the middle of all the debris.

Appointing himself as the curator of that striking symbol of God's love, he often took heartbroken visitors to see it. Many of them were comforted by the silent testimony to the divine Presence in the worst of tragedies. One day when journalist Barbara Walters came with tearful friends who had lost a son in the catastrophe, Frank simply led them to the cross.

The answer to the world's terrible pain and evil is not a philosophical argument or a theological treatise. The all-sufficient answer is Calvary's cross, where in fathomless grace Jesus, the incarnate God, took upon Himself the burden of our sins and bore them "in His own body on the tree, that we … might live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

If you have not been led to Calvary's cross, let me take you there. He died for you and then rose again. Believe in Him and you will be saved (1 Cor. 1:21).

They are nailed to the cross, they are nailed to the cross!
O how much He was willing to bear.
With what anguish and loss, Jesus went to the cross,
But He carried my sins with Him there.
—Breck

The pathway to heaven begins at the foot of the cross.

The Hollywood Hills Cross

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Galatians 6:14

Today's Scripture & Insight: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

One of the most recognizable images in the US is the “HOLLYWOOD” sign in Southern California. People from all over the globe come to “Tinseltown” to gaze at cement footprints of stars and perhaps catch a glimpse of celebrities who might pass by. It’s hard for these visitors to miss the sign anchored in the foothills nearby.

Less well known in the Hollywood hills is another easily recognized symbol—one with eternal significance. Known as the Hollywood Pilgrimage Memorial Monument, this 32-foot cross looks out over the city. The cross was placed there in memory of Christine Wetherill Stevenson, a wealthy heiress who in the 1920s established the Pilgrimage Theatre (now the John Anson Ford Theatre). The site served as the venue for The Pilgrimage Play, a drama about Christ.

The two icons showcase an interesting contrast. Movies good and bad will come and go. Their entertainment value, artistic contributions, and relevance are temporary at best.

The cross, however, reminds us of a drama eternal in scope. The work of Christ is a story of the loving God who pursues us and invites us to accept His offer of complete forgiveness. The high drama of Jesus’ death is rooted in history. His resurrection conquered death and has an eternal impact for all of us. The cross will never lose its meaning and power. By: Dennis Fisher (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Thank You, Father, for the eternal significance of the cross. Help us to understand and appreciate the love that caused Your Son to embrace His cross for our sakes.

To know the meaning of the cross, you must know the One who died there.

Fashion Or Faith?

February 20, 1996

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 26-27; Mark 2

God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. —Galatians 6:14

Os Guinness tells of a Jewish man, imprisoned 15 years by Soviet authorities for political dissidence, who became a Christian while in the terrible Gulag. He was sustained throughout that long ordeal by his faith in the Savior, and by the memory of his 4-year-old son he hoped to see again one day. When he was finally released, the man anticipated the reunion with heart-pounding excitement. How thrilled he was to notice as they hugged each other that his son was wearing a cross! After they had talked about many things, he asked his son, now 19 years old, just what the cross meant to him. His heart was crushed by the answer: “Father, for my generation the cross is just a fashion statement.” The apostle Paul saw the cross as a symbol of the very core of his faith. It bore witness to his radically transformed life. He testified, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

What about you? Is the cross just a fashion statement? Or does it inspire you to echo Paul’s heartfelt boast in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ?

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.
—Bowring

Many who wear the cross never think of the Christ of the cross.

The Truth About Truth

July 13, 1994

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 7-9; Acts 18

… always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. —2 Timothy 3:7

When Harvard University was founded, its motto was Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae—“Truth for Christ and the Church.” Its crest

showed three books, one face down to symbolize the limitation of human knowledge. But in recent decades that book has been turned face up to represent the unlimited capacity of the human mind. And the motto has been changed to Veritas—“Truth.”

The pursuit of knowledge is praiseworthy, yet learning can quickly lead to pride and a refusal to acknowledge any limits on our mental abilities. When that happens, biblical truth is ignored.

What, then, is the truth about truth? A wise king wrote centuries ago, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). We must recognize the relationship between God and truth. Without the help of God’s Spirit and the instruction of God’s Word, man will be ever “learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). When we acknowledge and obey His truth, however, we will be set free from spiritual ignorance and error (John 8:32; 17:17). That’s why we must be diligent in studying the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15). It is the only book that tells us the truth about truth.

Holy Bible, Book divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine;
Mine to tell me whence I came,
Mine to teach me what I am.
—Burton

To know Christ the Living Word, study the written Word.

The Truth About Truth

July 15, 2004

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 13-15; Acts 19:21-41

… always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. —2 Timothy 3:7

In 1692, Harvard College adopted as its motto Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae—“Truth for Christ and the Church.”Its crest showed three books, one face down to symbolize the limitation of human knowledge. But in recent decades that book has been turned face up to represent the unlimited capacity of the human mind. And the motto has been changed to Veritas-“Truth.”

The pursuit of knowledge is praiseworthy, yet learning can quickly lead to pride and a refusal to acknowledge any limits on our mental abilities. When that happens, biblical truth is ignored or rejected.

What, then, is the truth about truth? A wise king wrote centuries ago,“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”(Proverbs 1:7). We must recognize the relationship between God and truth. Without the help of the Holy Spirit and the instruction of God’s Word, man will be ever“learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”(2 Timothy 3:7). When we acknowledge and obey His truth, however, we will be set free from spiritual ignorance and error (John 8:32; 17:17).

That’s why we must be diligent in our study of the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15). It is the only book that tells us the truth about truth.

For Your holy Book we thank you;

May its message be our guide,

May we understand the wisdom

Of the truth Your laws provide. —Carter

Study God’s written Word to know Christ the living Word.

Go Beyond The Cross

March 29, 2002

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 | Bible in a Year: Judges 7-8; Luke 5:1-16

The message of the cross is … the power of God. —1 Corinthians 1:18

In central India in the mid-20th century, tensions were running high between non-Christians and Christians. A young man was told to climb to the top of a 3-story building and tear down the cross from its roof. He was not successful, though. In fact, he fell off the roof to the street below and was severely injured. When he was taken to the hospital, he was placed on a cot next to a patient who was a Christian.

When the believer told the injured man what the cross represents and what Jesus did for him on the cross, his heart was touched. He cried out, “Lord Jesus! Forgive me! I didn’t mean to do it. They made me.”

No matter what people try to do to eliminate the symbols of Christianity, we know that they cannot stop its message. Paul said, “The message of the cross … is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Jesus said that even the gates of hell would not prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18).

The cross stands as the symbol of Christianity. But its symbolism has no value to someone who doesn’t understand what Christ did on that cross. He died there to provide forgiveness (Colossians 2:13-14), not to create an icon.

Have you gone beyond the symbol of the cross and trusted the Son of God who died there? If not, do it today! —JDB

The cross is a symbol of freedom,
From sin, separation, and shame;
For there our redemption was purchased—
Salvation in Christ's holy name.
—Fitzhugh

The pathway to heaven begins at the foot of the cross.

A Powerful Message

The gospel of Christ … is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. —Romans 1:16

Bible teacher Lehman Strauss was brought to Christ through the power of the Word when he was young. At his girlfriend’s suggestion, he read Romans 3:23, 5:8, and 10:13. As he did, he was convicted of his sin. He wept and believed. When his son Richard was 7 years old, he asked his father how to be saved. Lehman used the same verses that his girlfriend (who was now his wife) had used years earlier. His son believed too, and eventually became a pastor. God’s Word has tremendous power! The first recorded time God spoke, He created light (Gen. 1:3). He spoke a promise to Abraham (17:15-19) and enabled his 90-year-old wife Sarah to bear a child (21:1-2). God still speaks with power today, and all who hear and believe the gospel are saved (Rom. 1:16).

Yes, the message of Christ and His saving work on the cross can change the direction of a person’s life. It has the power to reach the heart of that person you love and have prayed for many times.

So don’t give up in your witness. Be consistent in your daily walk. Keep praying and sharing the gospel with others. It’s a powerful message!

Sweetly echo the gospel call—
Wonderful words of life;
Offer pardon and peace to all—|
Wonderful words of life. —Bliss

Our words have power to influence; God’s words have power to save.

Play and listen to the powerful hymn by Phillip Bliss....

Wonderful Words of Life

Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life,
Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life;
Words of life and beauty teach me faith and duty.

Refrain
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life,
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Christ, the blessèd One, gives to all wonderful words of life;
Sinner, list to the loving call, wonderful words of life;
All so freely given, wooing us to Heaven.

Refrain

Sweetly echo the Gospel call, wonderful words of life;

Offer pardon and peace to all, wonderful words of life;
Jesus, only Savior, sanctify us forever.

Refrain

Which Way?

January 17, 2007

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 41-42; Matthew 12:1-23

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. —1 Corinthians 1:18

Every night, Howard and Mel frequented the cheap bars in Grand Rapids, Michigan, hoping to drown away another miserable day. Finally, the pain of a wasted life was too much, so Mel hopped a train for Chicago, where he hoped to end it all. But as he walked barefoot through a Chicago snowstorm in 1897, heading for a self-imposed demise in Lake Michigan, he was stopped by a worker from the Pacific Garden Mission. Mel went inside, heard the gospel, and accepted Christ as his Savior. Later, Mel went back to Grand Rapids to start a mission. Howard heard that he was saved and sober. But instead of trusting Jesus, Howard just laughed at "Old Mel." To him, "the message of the cross [was] foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18). Finally, the drinking took its toll on Howard, and he committed suicide. More than 100 years later, the **Mel Trotter Mission** still welcomes people who need a place to stay and who need Jesus. And 100 years later, our family is still saddened by Howard's demise. He was my wife's grandfather.

Like Mel and Howard, we have a choice. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). What do you choose?

Which way will you take? The question is clear—
The choice you must make with a heart sincere;
To Jesus the Lord you now are inclined—
Today is the day to make up your mind. —Hess

To choose Christ now is a choice for eternity.

Amateur Christians

June 28, 2008

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | Bible in a Year: Job 11-13; Acts 9:1-21

The love of Christ compels us. —2 Corinthians 5:14

The word amateur has been redefined over the years and has lost the luster of its original meaning. The English word comes from the Latin word amore, which means "to love." An amateur is someone who does something simply for the love of it.

In today's way of thinking, receiving payment moves you into a "higher" category—that of a professional. The reasoning is that if someone is willing to pay for your service, you must be really good. An amateur, therefore, is considered to have less skill or talent.

As I read my Bible, however, I see a different hierarchy of values. During the time of Jesus, the religious professionals were using their position to gain power and prestige for themselves, not to serve the people. Jesus didn't choose those who were wise, mighty, or noble by human standards (1 Cor. 1:26). He sought those willing to follow Him and be trained for loving service.

In today's world, the scene is much the same. God is still looking for "amateurs," those who will serve the Lord for the sheer love of it. Compelled by our love for Jesus, may we, like the disciples and apostles before us, proclaim the love of God for the world by following Christ's example of loving and serving others.

I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow:
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.
—Featherstone

One proof of our love for God is our love for our neighbor.

A Dime Among Pennies

October 23, 1995

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 1-2; 1 Timothy 3

We are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. —Romans 8:16-17

One day, educator and comedian Sam Levinson was standing with a group of men who seemed to tower above him. Someone asked, “Sam, don’t you feel strange surrounded by so many tall people?” He replied, “Yes, I do. I feel like a dime among a lot of pennies!”

This reminded me that we who are Christians may not be very “tall” in the eyes of some, and in fact the world often looks down on us. But in God’s sight we are of great worth!

The apostle Paul wrote, “Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise” (1 Cor. 1:26-27).

We may not hold positions of prestige and power in society, but in Christ we are given a position far superior to those held by the “big shots” of this world. Because of our relationship with Christ, we have great value. Paul said in Romans 8 that “we are children of God … and joint heirs with Christ” (vv.16-17).

Regardless of how much abuse the world may heap on us or how small we may seem compared to others, we are precious in the sight of God. Because of Christ, we have immeasurable worth.

Not many wise has the dear Savior chosen,
Not many noble shall enter His rest;
Foolish, despised ones are heirs to His mercy—
Simple in faith, by His grace they are blest.
—HGB

The world may discount you, but in God's eyes you are priceless.

GOD CHOSE THE WEAK - 1 Corinthians 1:25-31

Johnny Damon of the 2004 Boston Red Sox dubbed his own team "The Idiots." They were known for their long hair, scruffy beards, and carefree spirits. These traits stood in contrast to the clean-cut rival Yankees, who were poised to sweep Boston on their way to the World Series. But Boston's failure to come to grips with reality helped them stage one of the most improbable comebacks in baseball history—those so-called idiots won the championship!

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.1 CORINTHIANS 1:27

Surprisingly, Paul used similar terminology to describe the believers in Corinth, saying they were not wise, influential, or noble. They were foolish, week, lowly, and despised. Yesterday we studied the apparent foolishness of the Cross in a world that valued miraculous signs and logic. Today we'll examine the fact that not only was the message foolishness—the recipients of the message were fools.

If the realization of their lowliness was cause for sorrow, the Corinthians could take solace in the two words Paul repeats in verses 27 and 28: God chose. The believers were chosen by God, and that gave them significance. It wasn't as if every Corinthian met all the negative criteria. Some of them were wise; some of them may have been of noble birth; but God's choice of the foolish and lowly nullified the significance of any wisdom or strength any members may have possessed. No one earned their salvation by being wise, nor did anyone earn their salvation by being poor. The sole cause of the people's salvation in Christ was God Himself (v. 30).

Paul's purpose wasn't to discourage the Corinthians, but to set their minds and affix their pride on Christ. Faith should not serve as a wellspring of pride and self-centered applause. God used a plan that made no human sense to save humans of no earthly consequence to prove that the efforts of man and the quality of their character or social standing had no role in the saving power of God. Salvation comes from God. The wisdom, holiness, and righteousness we have comes from Christ—that is reason to be proud!

APPLY THE WORD

Do you truly believe that God chooses the foolish to be His servants? To take it one step further, do you accept His choices? Rare is the person who does not complain about the church, and that probably comes from our pride. There is nothing wrong with holding the church to a high standard, but we must recognize Christ as the means to achieving that standard. We must trust in His power to overcome our obvious shortcomings—ask Him to start with you. Confess your weakness and praise His strength.

A Fatal Omission

March 31, 1998

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | Bible in a Year: Judges 11-12; Luke 6:1-26

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. —1 Corinthians 1:18

When a group of churches advertised their Easter celebration, no reference was made to the cross. The omission was deliberate. One church official explained, “The cross carries too much cultural baggage.”

The cross has always been offensive to some. The apostle Paul explicitly mentioned that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor. 1:18). To be saved eternally by the unjust execution of a Jew centuries ago—what an offense to human pride, goodness, and self-sufficiency! Without that cross, however, the empty tomb would be meaningless. That is why Paul gratefully exclaimed, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

Every year the Easter season brings great blessing to believers. As we remember our Lord’s death on the cross, our hearts are filled with love and gratitude. But we don’t linger on that Palestinian hillside where death seems to have triumphed. We hasten on to resurrection morning with its jubilant hallelujahs of victory. All the events of Holy Week are woven into an awesome tapestry of grace. The blood-stained tree and the empty tomb belong together. To leave the cross out of Easter is a fatal omission.

The empty cross and the empty tomb provide a full salvation.

PLAY AND PONDER THE WORDS OF THIS OLD HYMN
IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST I GLORY
John Bowring (1792-1872)

In the cross of Christ I glory,
  Tow’ring o’er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
  Gathers round its head sublime.

When the woes of life o’ertake me,
  Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me,
  Lo! It glows with peace and joy.

When the sun of bliss is beaming
  Light and love upon my way,
From the cross the radiance streaming
  Adds more luster to the day.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
** By the cross are sanctified;**
Peace is there that knows no measure,
** Joys that through all time abide.**

Higher Wisdom

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The message of the cross … to us who are being saved … is the power of God. —1 Corinthians 1:18

How difficult it is for some highly intelligent people to admit that in their own wisdom they can’t answer life’s ultimate questions.

The well-known astrophysicist Fred Hoyle said: “A common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature.” Yet he remains an unbeliever.

The late Carl Sagan spoke of “some kind of force or power” that enabled the universe to create itself. But he was “opposed to any

kind of revealed religion."

The majority of us as Christians may feel unqualified to debate such intellectual giants. But it's not God's purpose to refute human wisdom with intellectual arguments. Instead, He confounds human wisdom and power by displaying His greater wisdom and power. He does this by saving ordinary people like you and me through the "message of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18). The truth that Jesus died for our sins and rose again is viewed as foolishness by the world.

God's best evidence to refute worldly wisdom is a transformed life. What a privilege to bear this message! What a challenge to live it!

No wisdom gained through arduous quest
Can set a sinner free,
But God in wisdom sent His Son
To die for you and me.
—D. De Haan

True wisdom begins and ends with God.

Surprised by Wisdom

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! Romans 11:33

Today's Scripture & Insight: 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

"It seems like the older I get, the wiser you become. Sometimes when I talk to my son I even hear your words coming out of my mouth!"

My daughter's candor made me laugh. I felt the same way about my parents and frequently found myself using their words as I raised my kids. Once I became a dad, my perspective on my parents' wisdom changed. What I once "wrote off" as foolishness turned out to be far wiser than I had thought—I just couldn't see it at first.

The Bible teaches that "the foolishness of God is wiser" than the cleverest human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:25). "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness" of the message of a suffering Savior to rescue "those who believe" (v. 21).

God always has ways of surprising us. Instead of the triumphant king the world would expect, the Son of God came as a suffering servant and died a humbling death by crucifixion—before He was raised in unsurpassable glory.

In God's wisdom, humility is valued over pride and love shows its worth in undeserved mercy and kindness. Through the cross, our unconquerable Messiah became the ultimate victim—in order to "save completely" (Hebrews 7:25) all who place their faith in Him! By: James Banks (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Sign in to track your progress!

When have God's ways left you confused? How does it help to know His ways are not our own?

Heavenly Father, I praise You for the wisdom of Your ways. Help me to trust You and walk humbly with You today.

The Big Cover-Up

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 94-96; Romans 15:14-33

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. —1 Corinthians 1:27

Today's Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

If we are committed to pleasing Christ, we will try to have a good testimony among unbelievers. Some Christians assume that being a good example means keeping up an appearance of strength—even when they are weak. They have the misconception that any appearance of weakness hinders their testimony. Thus begins a subtle slide to spiritual play-acting, or what I call "the big cover-up."

When seeking to have a good testimony, we must ask whether we are trying to represent God or ourselves. And when seeking to be strong, we must ask, "In whose strength—God's or ours?"

According to Paul, the Lord enables us to testify of Him and His strength, not by despising our weakness but by using it, "that no

flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:29).

Are unbelievers best won to Christ by "strong" people who pretend they're never weak, or by "weak" people who testify of a strength not their own? Unbelievers often say of the former, "I could never be like that." But of the "weak" people, they more often say, "If Christ can help them, perhaps He has something for me."

Let's honestly admit our weakness and offer it to God for His use. By: Joanie Yoder

My life today I yield, O Lord, to Thee,
A channel for Thy love and grace to be;
Use me just as Thou wilt, I humbly pray,
To point some soul unto the living way.
—Christiansen

To show others what Christ will do for them, show them what Christ has done for you.

The Wisdom In God's Word

Read: Proverbs 8:12-21

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? … Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world. —1 Corinthians 1:20

We treasure Scripture. It's God's inspired Word, and it teaches us the way to abundant life in this world and eternal life in the world to come. Indeed, it is the source of a wisdom that goes beyond that of the wisest philosophers (1 Corinthians 1:20). But this fact is rarely acknowledged in our culture.

So I was glad to read an article by The New York Times columnist David Brooks extolling biblical wisdom. He praised Martin Luther King Jr. for insight into human nature derived from Scripture. He felt that King "had a more accurate view of political realities than his more secular liberal allies because he could draw on biblical wisdom about human nature. Religion didn't just make civil rights leaders stronger—it made them smarter." And Brooks said further: "Biblical wisdom is deeper and more accurate than the wisdom offered by the secular social sciences."

Are we drawing on that source of wisdom in our own lives? We need Scripture's wisdom to deal with our personal problems and political issues. If we study and obey the Bible, we will be able to humbly testify with the psalmist, "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:99).

The Bible is God's Word to us,
Still fresh through all the ages;
And if we read it we will find
God's wisdom on its pages. —Sper

One truth from the Bible is worth more than all the wisdom of man.

The Intrigue Of The Ark

Read: Exodus 25:10-22 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 7-8; Matthew 15:1-20

[God] has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts. —2 Corinthians 1:22

There has always been an element of mystery and intrigue surrounding the ark of the covenant. This carefully crafted box was built by the Israelites to be placed in the tabernacle during their wandering years in the wilderness. Inside it were the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's staff that had budded, and a golden jar of manna (Heb. 9:4). Atop the ark, on what was called the mercy seat, were two golden cherubim. The ark was situated inside the Most Holy Place, where once a year the high priest would stand in the very presence of God.

We don't know what eventually happened to the ark and its contents, but it is intriguing to hear various reports claiming that it could still be in existence.

As interesting as those unproven reports are, the real intrigue of the ark is its symbolism of God's presence. The people of Israel could experience God's presence vicariously through the high priest. That must have been a heart-pounding encounter! Yet we have it better. When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, we have the very presence of God in our heart—through the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22).

Yes, the ark is surrounded by intrigue, but it doesn't compare with God's presence in our lives.

Almighty, matchless, glorious God,
Inhabiting eternity,
I bow to You and give You praise,
In awe that You can live in me.
—Sper

To know God's presence is to know God's power.

No Small Deeds

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. — 1 Corinthians 1:27

Today's Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Do you sometimes feel that your life isn't making any impact for God? I do! The human race now numbers more than 6 billion people, the majority of whom don't know Jesus. World problems are overwhelming. My praying, witnessing, and giving seem to be doing little to change our ungodly world.

Recently when I was tempted to sink into a mood of futility, I read something by Frederick Buechner that lifted my heart. Comparing the world to a great spider web, Buechner wrote, "If you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling. . . . As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked. No man is an island."

Encouraged by Buechner's words, I returned to my seemingly small duties with new zeal. Who knows how the few souls we touch will touch others who in turn will touch still others! God uses us in our weakness and smallness to accomplish His far-reaching purposes (1 Cor. 1:26-31). By: Vernon Grounds

I cannot do great things for Him
Who did so much for me;
But, Lord, I'll do the little things
In fellowship with Thee.
—Anon.

No deed is small when done for Christ.

The Unlikely

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:25-31

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. —1 Corinthians 1:27

Fanny Kemble was a British actress who moved to America in the early 1800s and married a southern plantation owner named Pierce Butler. Fanny enjoyed the life afforded by the wealth of the plantation, until she saw the cost of that luxury—a cost paid by the slaves who worked her husband's plantations.

Having written a memoir of the cruel treatment slaves often suffered, Kemble was eventually divorced from her husband. Her writings were widely circulated among abolitionists and published in 1863 as Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839. Because of her opposition to slavery, the former wife of a slave owner became known as "The Unlikely Abolitionist."

In the body of Christ, God often wonderfully surprises us. He regularly uses the unlikely—people and circumstances—to accomplish His purposes. Paul wrote, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen" (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

This reminds us that God, in His grace, can use anyone. If we will allow His work to be done in us, we might be surprised at what He can do through us!

How will you let God use you today? God desires willing hearts ready to be used.

Does He Want To Use Me?

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. —1 Corinthians 1:27

The work of God is not done by great people but by ordinary people who are committed to Him. We may say to God, “I am nothing. I have no gifts. I often fail miserably. Do You really want to use me?”

The answer to that question is found in God’s Word. He used the hesitant, inarticulate Moses to lead Israel to freedom (Ex. 3:13; 4:10). He used men of the herds and flocks, as well as fishermen and farmers to accomplish His work and record His words. A simple carpenter and a peasant girl raised His Son.

That’s still the way God works. Although we have “mega-methods,” mass media, and superchurches, it is ordinary people who do God’s extraordinary work. A grandmother prays faithfully for her 14 grandchildren and talks to each one about trusting Christ. A clerical worker witnesses to everyone in his office. A Christian takes a meal to her unbelieving neighbors when their baby is hospitalized and assures them of her prayers.

When we ask, “Does God really want to use me?” the answer is clear. God chooses “the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27).

God has been using ordinary people like you and me for thousands of years. Why would He stop now?

Though oft our spirits long to rise
And bask in heavenly realms above,
The Lord has placed us here on earth
To live for Him—to serve, to love.
—DJD

Wanted: Ordinary people to do extraordinary work.

Christ—Our Everything

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

You are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God … and sanctification and redemption. —1 Corinthians 1:30

Thomas Shepard (1605-1649) was raised in a godly Puritan home, but while he was attending Cambridge University he fell into a life of sin. One Sunday morning, when he awoke from a drunken stupor, a heavy weight of sadness over the enormity of his guilt crushed him to the point that he left his former way of life.

For the next 9 months, the fear of God’s wrath almost drove him to “run my head against walls … and kill myself.” But while listening to a sermon on 1 Corinthians 1:30, he suddenly realized that Christ was everything he needed—that Jesus had lived the perfect life he couldn’t live, had paid for his sins on the cross, and was now his Advocate in heaven.

Commenting on John 1:12, “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God,” Shepard wrote, “The Lord gave me a heart to receive Christ with a naked hand, … and so the Lord gave me peace.”

If you want the kind of peace that only God can give, ask Him to give you a deep awareness of your own sinfulness. Then reflect on the wonder of the grace by which He made Jesus Christ everything you need. Finally, either renew the commitment you have already made to the Lord, or for the first time receive Jesus as your Savior.

The outstretched hand of God extends
To those weighed down by sin;
He offers to remove the load
And give His peace within.
—Sper

Jesus died in our place to give us His peace.

The Master's Hands

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the … mighty. —1 Corinthians 1:27

A renowned violinist announced before a concert that he would play one of the world's most expensive violins. His first composition was played flawlessly, and the audience was thrilled at the performance.

After taking his bows, the musician suddenly smashed the instrument, completely demolishing it. The audience was horrified—that is, until the violinist explained that he had been playing a cheap violin.

Then, picking up the expensive instrument, the virtuoso began to draw the bow across the strings. The sound was beautiful, but most of the people couldn't tell any difference between the music from the expensive violin and the cheap one. The quality of the instrument was secondary to the skill of the violinist.

It's something like that in our service for the Lord. The Master can use ordinary instruments like us. If we are yielded to Him, He will produce beautiful music through us. The apostle Paul said that "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27). God did so, "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (v.29).

Like that cheap violin, we can be instruments in the Master's hands to magnify the Lord and bring blessing to others.

Lord, use me as Your instrument

To magnify Your name;

May Your love be my song today,

My life Your grace proclaim. —Sper

God can use ordinary instruments to produce a concert of praise.

Unlikely Servants

Read: Judges 6:11-16

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. —1 Corinthians 1:27

We often hear people say things like: "I'm only a housewife." "I'm only a janitor." "I'm only an average student."

Underestimating one's usefulness to God is nothing new. In Old Testament times, for example, when God looked for someone to conquer the troublesome Midianites, He chose unimpressive Gideon, calling him a "mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12+). Gideon responded, "How can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Jdg 6:15). But God persisted, saying, "Have I not sent you? … Surely I will be with you" (Jdg 6:14-16).

Gideon became God's man for the task, because there's no such thing as a "nobody" in His eyes. The Lord gave Gideon just 300 men to help him, rather than thousands (Jdg 7:1-7+), so that God alone would receive the glory.

The apostle Paul also taught that God chooses and uses things that the world calls foolish, weak, lowly, and despised. He shames the wise and the mighty so "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29).

If you feel that you're "only a nobody," review God's call to Gideon. The Lord wants to use you more than you ever thought possible.

Gladly take the task God gives you,
Let His work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly when He calls you,
"I am willing, Lord, use me."
—Darch

God uses ordinary people to carry out His extraordinary plan.

Serving the Smallest

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things. 1 Corinthians 1:28

Today's Scripture & Insight: Luke 14:15–23

The video showed a man kneeling beside a busy freeway during an out-of-control brush fire. He was clapping his hands and

pleading with something to come. What was it? A dog? Moments later a bunny hopped into the picture. The man scooped up the scared rabbit and sprinted to safety.

How did the rescue of such a small thing make national news? That's why. There's something endearing about compassion shown to the least of these. It takes a big heart to make room for the smallest creature.

Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a man who gave a banquet and made room for everyone who was willing to come. Not just the movers and shakers but also "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:21+). I'm thankful that God targets the weak and the seemingly insignificant, because otherwise I'd have no shot. Paul said, "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things . . . so that no one may boast before him" (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

How big must God's heart be to save a small person like me!In response, how large has my heart grown to be? I can easily tell, not by how I please the "important people," but by how I serve the ones society might deem the least important. By: Mike Wittmer

What types of people do you have a hard time valuing? In what ways might God want you to change that?

God, as Your servants please help us to value others the way You do, regardless of who they are or what they do.

Flawed And Frail

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. —1 Corinthians 1:27

One of my boyhood heroes was Davy Crockett, the "King of the Wild Frontier." I looked up to him, admiring his courage and exploits.

Years later, my brother gave me a book that traced the experiences of the real-life David Crockett. I was surprised by his humanness. The real Davy Crockett made mistakes and had serious personal problems. The book depicted him as both flawed and frail.

This was both disappointing and reassuring to me. It was disappointing because he was less than I had come to believe, but reassuring because that reality made Crockett more accessible to me—and even more of a hero.

In the Bible we see that God consistently used people who were far less than perfect. That shouldn't surprise us. God is glorified by showing Himself strong through our weaknesses. It shows us that He desires to work through our lives not because we are perfect but because He is. And since He uses weak and foolish things (1 Cor. 1:27), it means you and I are prime candidates for His work.

The Lord isn't looking for superheroes. He uses those of us who are flawed and frail, so that He can show His strength and grace. He wants those with a willing and available heart.

It's not in the flash of the style that you hone,
Nor all the degrees you've compiled;
The Savior is looking for servants who own
The warm, willing heart of a child.
—Gustafson

In God's service, our greatest ability is our availability.

Giving Credit

Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:31

Today's Scripture & Insight: Jeremiah 9:23–26

In the early 1960s, some unusual paintings featuring a person or animal with huge, sad eyes became popular. Some considered the work "kitschy"—or tacky—but others delighted in it. As the artist's husband began to promote his wife's creations, the couple grew quite prosperous. But the artist's signature—Margaret Keane—didn't appear on her work. Instead, Margaret's husband presented his wife's work as his own. Margaret fearfully remained silent about the fraud for twenty years until the couple's marriage ended. It took a courtroom "paint-off" between them to prove the true artist's identity.

The man's deception was clearly wrong, but even as followers of Jesus, we may find it easy to take credit for talents we possess,

leadership skills we display, or even for our kind deeds to others. But those qualities are possible only because of God's grace. In Jeremiah 9, we find the prophet lamenting the lack of humility and the unrepentant hearts of the people. He wrote that the Lord says we shouldn't boast of our wisdom, our strength, or our riches, but only that we might understand and know that He is the Lord "who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth" (v. 24).

Our hearts fill with gratitude as we realize the identity of the true Artist. "Every good and perfect gift is . . . from the Father" (James 1:17). All of the credit, all of the praise belongs to the Giver of good gifts. By: Cindy Hess Kasper (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Dear Father, thank You for all the good gifts You so graciously give.

We were created to give God glory.

Different Goals

Read: 1 Cor. 1:18-31

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. —1 Corinthians 1:27

In 1945, professional golfer Byron Nelson had an unimaginable season. Of the 30 tournaments he entered, he won an amazing 18 times—including 11 in a row. Had he chosen to, he could have continued his career and perhaps become the greatest of all time. But that was not his goal. His goal was to earn enough money playing golf to buy a ranch and spend his life doing what he really loved. So, instead of continuing on at the peak of his career, Nelson retired at age 34 to become a rancher. He had different goals.

The world may find that kind of thinking to be foolish. It doesn't really understand the heart that looks beyond trying to gain more wealth or fame to real satisfaction and contentment. This is especially true when it comes to our choice to live for Christ. But it is in the world's perception of our alleged foolishness that we might best represent the Master's different goals to this world. Paul wrote, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. 1:27).

A commitment to living according to kingdom values might brand us as foolish in the eyes of the world, but it can bring honor to our God. By: Bill Crowder (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

What Christ will say on judgment day
Will finally make life's values clear;
He'll show that we were rich or poor
By what on earth we held most dear.
—D. De Haan

Core values are of no value unless they reflect God's values.

1 Corinthians 2

Are You A Parakeet?

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 17-18; Luke 11:1-28

No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. —1 Corinthians 2:11

On several occasions I visited a retired pastor who had a pet parakeet named Gibby Gibson. It would say, "Gibby Gibson is the prettiest bird in all the world." Or it would repeat, "Dr. Gibson is a preacher—a Baptist preacher." But, of course, the bird didn't understand one word it was saying.

Herein lies a lesson. Too many Christians go through the habitual motions of worship and Bible reading without the slightest idea of the meaning of what they are doing. They seem to think there is some secret charm or mystical benefit in just going through it.

The issue is not how much of the Bible you read, but how well you read it. I have heard many people boast about how many times they have read through the Bible, but their conversation revealed a tragic ignorance of the Word of God. Better to read one verse prayerfully, seeking the guidance of your "Paraclete" (translated as "Comforter" or "Helper" in John 14:16), the Holy Spirit, than to

rattle off a whole book from memory like a parakeet. The important question is, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30).

When you read the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit, your “Paraclete,” to guide you. Don’t be a parakeet.

Ever-present, truest Friend,

Ever near Thine aid to lend;

Guide us as we search the Word,

Make it both our shield and sword. —Anon.

It's better to live one verse of the Bible than to recite an entire chapter.

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1 Corinthians 2:5-11

DESPONDENT woman remained after a church service to talk with the minister. "For years I have been unable to pray," she began. "A woman came between me and my husband, and I cannot forgive her. Can you help me?"

The minister answered kindly, "You cannot forgive the woman for her own sake, but couldn't you forgive her for Christ's sake?"

At first the question did not register with the woman, but the light broke through as she thought about how much Christ had forgiven her. "You're right," she said. "I can't forgive her for her own sake, but I can for His sake—and I will!"

To forgive someone who hurts us is difficult. The offending person does not deserve forgiveness. If we focus on the injustice, forgiveness will not come. We must look beyond the offending person to the Savior and the work He has done on our behalf. He will dissolve our hatred if we will forgive for His sake.

When treated unfairly, we say, "That person doesn't deserve my pardon." But when we consider what it cost God to forgive us, we sense how undeserving we are. Then we begin to see the possibility of doing it for Jesus' sake. When we are willing to say, "I will," God's Spirit works in us and through us to do what we cannot do for ourselves.—D J DeHaan

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1 Corinthians 2:6–16

Today in the Word

A kindergarten teacher wanted to understand her students’ struggle to master the fine motor skills of writing, cutting, and tying their shoes. For a period of time, she decided to use her weaker hand for all of her own fine motor tasks. She soon understood how it felt to fumble clumsily with a pair of scissors or a pencil.

In his own ministry, Paul purposefully “disadvantaged” himself for the purpose of upholding the integrity of the gospel. There were methods and means he could have used that might have arguably been more persuasive, but he made the deliberate decision not to employ them. “I resolved to know nothing … except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). Paul did not avail himself of the rhetorical devices he could have used to make compelling arguments about Jesus. Instead, for Paul, there was only the cross and the God–Man, Jesus.

From portraits of Paul in the book of Acts, we know that he was capable of powerful oratory. He was well–versed in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the contemporary poetry and literature of his day. Notice his address to the scholars and philosophers of Athens in Acts 17! But Paul, for all his academic and religious training, gave up the tactics of logical persuasion and argumentation, at least in Corinth, to focus all the power of his message on the Cross. And the Cross, as we’ve seen yesterday, doesn’t fit neatly into common–sense categories.

In the culture of Corinth (and the Roman empire at this time), men were admired and esteemed for their rhetorical abilities. If one succeeded in public speaking, he earned the iconic status that movie stars and professional athletes enjoy in our day. Today, beauty and athletic ability are the currency of fame; in the Roman empire, philosophical wisdom and rhetorical eloquence were sought–after gifts. The Corinthians obviously held these in high esteem, which is why Paul would not, in his preaching, capitulate to their terms and compromise the gospel in any way.

Apply the Word

Everything seems upside–down in the kingdom of God. Weakness is power. Humility is strength. Foolishness is wisdom. But the force behind preaching that centers on this “foolish” gospel is the Spirit’s power. When the Spirit of God animates His Word with

power, there is healing, conviction of sin, and worship. There are real encounters with the living God, and in His presence everything is possible. Must we, like the Corinthians, repent of worldly values that displace our allegiance to the crucified Christ?

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1 CORINTHIANS 2:12-16

These things we also speak, in words which the Holy Spirit teaches (1 Corinthians 2:13).

Aphasia is a loss of the ability to speak, a condition that results when the message from the brain cannot get to the tongue because of an injury or illness.

A similar spiritual malady affects many Christians. They know Jesus Christ, but they never speak of Him. They are familiar with God's plan of salvation, but they never tell it to others. They do not demonstrate the impelling force of the early Christians who said, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). This faulty connection between knowledge and testimony must be corrected. Often fear causes the breakdown, or sometimes sin blocks our freedom to speak about Christ. Only as believers rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and forsake their sin can they consistently share Christ with others.

Just before His ascension, the risen Christ assured His disciples of power to transmit His message to the world (Acts 1:8). That power is the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. Every believer has this source. But if we quench or grieve the Holy Spirit, our witness in words will be either ineffective or nonexistent.

We must keep the message of the gospel flowing to those around us who need to hear it. We can't let spiritual aphasia silence our witness.—Paul R VanGorder

If we have God's Word in our minds, He can put the right words in our mouths.

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1 CORINTHIANS 2:14

Switzerland is known for its scenic mountains and beautiful waterfalls. A visitor to that picturesque country observed:

"Some guidebooks name the time when rainbows may be seen on many of the waterfalls in Switzerland. One day, when I was at Lauterbrunnen, I went to the famous Staubbach Falls and watched and waited. Others did the same, and we all went away quite disappointed. The next day one of my friends said he would show us how to find the rainbow. So I went again and saw a lovely one, and stood almost in the center of it. Then I found that not only were sunshine and spray necessary to produce a rainbow, but also that it could be seen and enjoyed only at a certain point."

The same is true in the spiritual realm. A person who knows Jesus as Savior is "in Christ," and from that vantage point he can see Jesus as He really is. The Holy Spirit lives in believers and enables them to appreciate and understand the treasures of the Bible. But those who have not received Christ as their Savior remain blind to eternal truths (1 Cor. 2:14). They can see the waterfall—but not the rainbow —R W DeHaan

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Distortion

October 3, 2009

Read: 1 Corinthians 2 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 17-19; Ephesians 5:17-33

Your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. —1 Corinthians 2:5

Cartographers (mapmakers) deal with the problem of distortion when they display the round shape of the earth on the flat surface of a map. Since there is no perfect way to do this, some world maps depict Greenland as larger than Australia.

Christians have to deal with the problem of distortion as well. When we try to understand the spiritual realm within the limitations of the physical world, we can end up exaggerating minor things and minimizing important things.

The New Testament often addresses the distortion that results when the ideas of popular teachers become more important to us than what God says. God's purpose, said the apostle Paul, is "love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). Sound teaching does not distort God's Word or divide the church. Rather, it unites believers and builds up the body of Christ to care for one another and to do the work of God in the world (1 Cor. 12:25).

All human attempts to explain God are inadequate, and can even distort our priorities, confuse our thinking, and flatten our understanding of the spiritual life. To keep from distorting God's truth, we must rely on God's power rather than man's wisdom (1 Cor. 2:5).

This mortal life is far too brief,

Eternity too vast,

To follow human sophistries

And lose the soul at last. —Clayburn

To detect error, expose it to the light of God's truth.

Conquering Our Fears

November 23, 1997

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 20-21; James 5

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. —Psalm 56:3

A young woman who lived in a crime-ridden area was waiting for a bus when a rookie policeman came up to her and asked, "Can I wait with you?"

"That's not necessary," she replied. "I'm not afraid."

"Well, I am," he said. "Would you mind waiting with me?"

The apostle Paul was candid with his readers in Corinth, admitting his fear and weakness, even to the point of trembling (1 Cor. 2:3). But he faced up to it, expressed his need for the Lord, and then relied on Him. He said that his speech and preaching were a "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (v.4). We may safely assume that Paul spent much time praying and depending on God while he was in this wicked city.

Admitting that we are sometimes fearful isn't a sign of being out of fellowship with God or that something is wrong in our lives. To acknowledge that we become anxious about dying, about getting cancer, about losing our mind, or about our children getting in trouble is being honest about our feelings. To overcome our fears, we must first acknowledge them. Then we must bring them to God and go forward in obedience. That's the only way to conquer fear.

Press forward and fear not, though trials be near;

The Lord is our refuge, whom then shall we fear?

His staff is our comfort, our safeguard His rod;

Then let us be steadfast and trust in our God. —Anon.

Do the thing you fear—and the death of fear is certain. —Emerson

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Spiritual Eyesight

February 28, 1999

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 20-22; Mark 7:1-13

The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. ——1 Corinthians 2:14

The great 19th-century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon told the story about a woman who said to Joseph Turner while he was painting, “Why do you put such extravagant colors into your pictures? I never see anything like them in nature.”

“Don’t you wish you did, Madam?” he said. It was a sufficient answer. He saw them, even if she did not.

In a similar way, believers in Christ can see many spiritual truths that unbelievers simply cannot recognize. When we are born again, the indwelling Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the “deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). With the help of the Spirit, we can apprehend the truths of the Word of God and appreciate their beauty and significance. We can see wonderful things in Scripture that are completely unnoticed by those who are spiritually blind.

As you faithfully read and study the Bible, as you listen to trustworthy Bible teachers, and above all as you rely on the Holy Spirit, be thankful that you can understand God’s message. Like the psalmist, we should pray, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Ps. 119:18). Scriptural insight is available only to those with spiritual eyesight.

Silently now I wait for Thee,

Ready, my God, Thy will to see;

Open my eyes—illumine me,

Spirit divine! —Scott

The Spirit of God enables the people of God to understand the Word of God.

Spiritual Deafness

June 13, 2005

Read: 1 Corinthians 2 | Bible in a Year: Ezra 6-8; John 21

The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. —1 Corinthians 2:14

Some people suffer from a strange hearing disorder—they can hear sounds but can’t understand words. They have no trouble hearing a bird sing or a watch tick, but words are as unintelligible as if they were a foreign language. The source of the problem is not in the ears. It stems from an injury to the brain.

There is also a spiritual deafness that affects many people. Because of a sinful heart, those without faith in Christ can read the Bible and hear the teachings of God’s Word, but its spiritual message is foolishness to them (1 Corinthians 2:14).

That explains why some people can appreciate the Bible as literature, as reliable history, and as a source of high moral standards, but they fail to understand its spiritual message. They don’t grasp the significance of what it says about Christ—His death on the cross for our sins, His resurrection, and His ministry of intercession for us in heaven today. These truths make no sense to them.

As you read the Bible, do you “hear” what it says? If not, ask the Lord to open your understanding to what it says about Jesus. Put your trust in Him as your personal Savior and experience a spiritual birth. That’s the cure for spiritual deafness.

We cannot understand God's truth

Until we know the Lord;

It's when our heart is home to Him

We understand His Word. —Anon.

The key to understanding the written Word is knowing the Living Word.

The Power Of Demonstration

February 18, 2013

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 23-24; Mark 1:1-22

The kingdom of God is not in word but in power. —1 Corinthians 4:20

For 2 decades, ecologist Mike Hands has worked to help farmers in Central America adopt more effective methods of growing their crops. It's difficult, however, for them to abandon their long tradition of "slash and burn" agriculture, even though they know it destroys the soil and pollutes the air.

So instead of merely talking to them, Mike shows them a better way. In the documentary film Up in Smoke, he says: "It has to be demonstrated. You cannot preach it. You can't describe it. People have got to be able to get their hands on it and see it."

Paul took a similar approach to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote to the believers in Corinth, "My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Later in his letter, Paul told them again, "The kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (4:20).

As you live each day, ask God to help you accompany your words with actions. When we allow God to show Himself through us, it's a powerful demonstration of His grace and love.

Allow us, Lord, to demonstrate

Our faith by what we do,

So that the gospel can be seen

By those who seek for You. —Sper

A Foolish Cross?

July 7, 1995

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 | Bible in a Year: Job 34-35; Acts 15:1-21

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. —1 Corinthians 1:18

Crucifixion is one of the most excruciating forms of death that the depraved human mind has devised. It is difficult for us to comprehend that the Son of God could be murdered in such a hideous manner. Yet today the cross is often used as nothing more than a mere ornament or something that is worn by people who attach no meaning to its rich spiritual significance.

But I know of one cross that may cause people to ponder its meaning. It stands outside a church in Old Greenwich, Connecticut, and is made of raw, unpolished steel. When it rains, red, rusty drops roll off that cross like blood. On sunny days in winter, rust-red holes dot the snow at its base.

What goes through the minds of those who pass by that weathered symbol? More important, what is their response to its message? Is the cross foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18), nothing more than a fashion trend? Or does it bring to mind the blood Christ willingly shed for our redemption?

Paul said that the "wisdom of this age" cannot grasp the mystery that is God's plan of salvation. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can understand the "foolishness" of the cross (2:13-14).

What does the cross mean to you?

When I survey the wondrous cross

On which the Prince of Glory died,

My richest gain I count but loss

And pour contempt on all my pride. —Watts

The cross reveals man's sin at its worst and God's love at its best.

Whom Do We Sound Like?

August 30, 2001

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 129-131; 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

We have the mind of Christ. —1 Corinthians 2:16

French scientists have succeeded in causing chickens to sound like quail. Researchers took tissue from the part of the Japanese quail brain thought to control the bird's call, and they implanted it in the brains of five chicken embryos. The experiment worked. Researchers say the hatched chicks sounded like quail.

Here's a far greater miracle: God has "implanted" the mind of Christ in those who have accepted His Son as their Savior. First Corinthians 2:12 tells us that the Spirit of God has taken up residence in us. In some mysterious way we now have a capacity for divine wisdom that no scholarly degree or natural experience could ever provide. Having the mind of Christ enables us to see life increasingly from God's perspective.

This doesn't mean that we can think on God's level and instruct Him (v.16). But it does mean that we have a new capacity to think and talk and act more and more like Christ Himself.

O Lord, forgive us for not using the good mind You have given us. Please help us to spend more time in Your Word absorbing Your thoughts so that we can think, talk, and live more and more like You.

May the mind of Christ my Savior

Live in me from day to day;

By His love and power controlling

All I do and say. —Wilkinson

To think and talk like Christ, you must walk with Christ.

Talking About Jesus

May 8, 2014

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 4-6; Luke 24:36-53

I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. —1 Corinthians 2:2

Former major league baseball player Tony Graffanino tells of an ongoing ministry effort in a European country. Each year his organization holds a week-long baseball camp. During this week they also offer a daily Bible study. In past years, the leader tried to find reasoned ways to convince the campers that God exists so they would place their faith in Him. After about 13 years, they had seen only 3 people decide to follow Jesus.

Then they changed their approach, says Graffanino. Instead of "trying to present facts, or winning arguments for a debate," they simply talked about "the amazing life and teachings of Jesus." As a result, more campers came to listen, and more chose to follow Him.

The apostle Paul said that when we tell others about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we should set "forth the truth plainly… We do not preach ourselves," he said, "but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:2,5 niv). This was Paul's standard for evangelism: "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

We should be knowledgeable about the Bible and about the reasons for our belief, and sometimes we need to explain those reasons. But the most compelling and effective story we can tell puts Christ in the center.

Father God, please use me in the lives of others.

Remind me to talk about who Jesus is and His life

and teachings. And not to be dragged into debates,

but to share Jesus' amazing life.

The risen Christ is the reason for our witness.

Limited But Useful

July 11, 2007

Read: Matthew 25:24-28 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 1-3; Acts 17:1-15

I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. —1 Corinthians 2:3

Suzanne Bloch, an immigrant from Germany, often played chamber music with Albert Einstein and other prominent scientists. She said that Einstein, though an accomplished violinist, irritated his fellow musicians by not coming in on the beat. "You see," Bloch explained, "he couldn't count." Einstein could project revolutionary theories about the cosmos, but he had difficulty with rhythmic counting. Despite his limitation, he remained an enthusiastic musician.

Do we sometimes lament our limitations? We all have abilities, but we are also afflicted with inabilities. We may be tempted to use our limitations as an excuse for not doing the things God has enabled us to do. Just because we may not be gifted to speak in public or to sing in a choir doesn't mean that we can sit on the spiritual sidelines doing nothing.

When we realize that all of us have limitations, we can move forward by seeking God's guidance in using our gifts. Surely we can pray. Surely we can show kindness to others. We can visit the lonely, the sick, the elderly. We can tell with effective simplicity what Jesus means to us. Paul said, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them" (Rom. 12:6).

Lord God, I humbly ask of You

The strength to do Your will;

I give to You my talents now

Your purpose to fulfill. —Cetas

Too many people make a mistake by burying their talents.

"Do Like He Done!"

October 29, 1996

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 18-19; 2 Timothy 3

My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. —1 Corinthians 2:4

A newly-hired salesman stunned his superiors with his first report, for it revealed that he was nearly illiterate. He wrote: "I seen this outfit who aint never got a dimes worth of nuthin from us an sole them sum goods." But before he could be fired, a second letter arrived. It read: "I came to Chicawgo an sole them haff a millyon."

The sales manager dumped the problem into the president's lap. The next day the staff was amazed to see the salesman's letters on the bulletin board, with this memo: "We ben spendin two much time tryin to spel insted of tryin to sell. I want everybody should read these letters from Gooch, who is doin a grate job, and you should go out and do like he done!"

Sometimes we get so preoccupied with appearances that we lose sight of our primary purpose. We care more about presenting the gospel flawlessly than we do about its real aim. How much better is a stumbling, stammering presentation of the gospel that points sinners to Christ than a cold, formal, precise address that leaves them unmoved!

When looking for opportunities to present the gospel, remember the priorities of that salesman. Then go out and "do like he done"!

It's not in the flash of the style that you hone,

Or all the degrees you've compiled;

The Savior is looking for servants who own

The warm, willing heart of a child. —Gustafson

If your aim is to glorify God, your witnessing is on target.

A Reminder Of The Cross

February 25, 2001

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 12-14; Mark 5:21-43

I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. —1 Corinthians 2:2

Telephone poles play a crucial role in developed countries. They support lines of communication that enable people to “reach out and touch” others in just about any corner of the globe. And in many communities, telephone poles carry power lines that make it possible for people to use lights and appliances.

Think about these poles and the vast roadside forest they form. What is their shape? They look like crosses, don’t they?

As I looked at the pole in front of my house, I was reminded of the old rugged cross of Christ. Think of the “lines” of communication and power it carries. Because of that cross, God listens to the prayers of any believer on the face of the earth. And because Jesus shed His blood on that cross for lost humanity, believers in Christ have a deep desire to “reach out and touch” others with the message of the gospel.

For the apostle Paul, the cross was everything. He had one message when he wrote to the Corinthian believers: “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Calvary was the heart of Paul’s communication and the basis of his power.

The next time you see a telephone pole, think about the cross of Christ and how much it means to you.

When Jesus died on Calvary's cross,

He took our sin and shame;

He gave to us His righteousness,

His glory, and His name. —Sper

Nothing speaks more clearly of God's love than the cross.

Our Message

January 13, 2002

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 31-32; Matthew 9:18-38

I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. —1 Corinthians 2:2

I’ve heard people say that the Lord sometimes uses simple hymns to impress them with profound truths. Songs like “He Lives,” “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” or “Jesus Saves” have jolted them as if they were hearing these truths for the first time.

Something similar happened to me in 1986. I attended a convention that drew 10,000 evangelists from many countries. Our unified concern was to bring God’s plan of salvation to our lost and needy world. As I went to seminars and listened to brilliant speakers, I began to wonder if the urgent task of evangelism was beyond me. Then a singer was invited to the platform. My spirit soared with reassurance and confidence as her rich voice proclaimed, “People need the Lord!” She reminded us in song that people all around us need to hear about Jesus and put their faith in Him.

Sharing the gospel means sharing Christ, His death, and His resurrection with people lost in sin. Paul said he didn’t minister with eloquence or worldly wisdom. He chose to know nothing “except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Yes, there is much knowledge to be learned, but the key to that knowledge is to know the Lord. That’s why people need Him. Remember, our message is Christ. —JEY

He is the way, the truth, the life—

That One whose name is Jesus;

There is no other name on earth

That has the power to save us. —Sper

The more you think about Jesus, the more you'll talk about Him.

Well-Chosen Words

October 20, 2010

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:1-9 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 59-61; 2 Thessalonians 3

[I] did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. —1 Corinthians 2:1

When I was a kid, I learned a big word that was fun to pronounce: “antidisestablishmentarianism.” What a mouthful! I recently took the time to look it up. The dictionary defines it as “the doctrine or political position that opposes the withdrawal of state recognition of an established church.” The definition is almost as difficult as the term itself. Neither I nor my school friends knew what it meant. But using the big word made me look knowledgeable.

When the apostle Paul ministered to people, he didn’t try to impress others. In his letter to the Corinthians, he wrote: “When I came to you, [I] did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God” (1 Cor. 2:1). “Excellence of speech” is the translation of Greek words meaning “high-sounding words” or “pompous speech.” This implies using words to exalt self instead of to instruct others. Paul was a brilliant scholar who expressed the deep things of God in Scripture. Yet he did not use lofty language to elevate his self-importance.

As we grow in our understanding of God’s Word, let’s follow Paul’s example and guard against parading knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Instead, let’s use well-chosen words that build up and encourage others.

The words we speak may indicate

A heart that’s filled with pride;

But godly self-control displays

The Spirit’s work inside. —Sper

It’s not the words we know that show wisdom, but how and when we use them.

The Forgotten God

October 11, 2011

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 37-38; Colossians 3

No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. —1 Corinthians 2:11

When we quote The Apostles’ Creed, we say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Author J. B. Phillips said, “Every time we say [this] we mean that we believe that [the Spirit] is a living God able and willing to enter human personality and change it.”

Sometimes we forget that the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. The Bible describes Him as God. He possesses the attributes of God: He is present everywhere (Ps. 139:7-8), He knows all things (1 Cor. 2:10-11), and He has infinite power (Luke 1:35). He also does things that only God can do: create (Gen. 1:2) and give life (Rom. 8:2). He is equal in every way with the other Persons of the Trinity—the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is a Person who engages in personal ways with us. He grieves when we sin (Eph. 4:30). He teaches us (1 Cor. 2:13), prays for us (Rom. 8:26), guides us (John 16:13), gives us spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11), and assures us of salvation (Rom. 8:16).

The Holy Spirit indwells us if we have received forgiveness of sin through Jesus. He desires to transform us so that we become more and more like Jesus. Let’s cooperate with the Spirit by reading God’s Word and relying on His power to obey what we learn.

God’s guidance and help that we need day to day

Is given to all who believe;

The Spirit has sealed us—He's God's guarantee

Of power that we can receive. —Branon

The Christian who neglects the Holy Spirit is like a lamp that's not plugged in.

Baffled?

October 10, 1998

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 34-36; Colossians 2

He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. —Luke 24:45

Read it three times." That was the advice William Faulkner gave when readers of his novel The Sound And The Fury complained that they couldn't understand it.

That's good counsel. Some books require a first reading, a second reading, and still another reading before they yield their meaning. If we believe that a book has value, we may be willing to spend time and effort in deciphering and grasping its message.

Faulkner's advice surely can be applied to passages in the Bible that initially puzzle and perplex us. After all, the apostle Peter commented that Paul's letters contained some things that are "hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:16). While some concepts may be difficult, they're not impossible to comprehend.

But suppose you encounter texts that continue to baffle you even though you read them over and over. What then? Ask the Lord to open your understanding (Lk. 24:45; 1 Cor. 2:10-16). Consult a commentary. Ask your pastor. If no light dawns, temporarily set those passages aside. Then wait patiently for the Holy Spirit to illuminate what may be baffling to you now. As you grow in grace, you will also grow in understanding. Meanwhile, put into practice the teachings you do understand.

Open my eyes that I may see

Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;

Place in my hands the wonderful key

That shall unclasp and set me free. —Scott

To understand the Word of God, Rely on the Spirit of God.

The Secret Is

May 15, 2009

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 22-23; John 4:31-54

We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages. —1 Corinthians 2:7

If you believe Rhonda Byrne, author of the bestselling book The Secret, "The shortcut to anything you want in your life is to be and feel happy now!" According to Byrne, this has to do with something called the law of attraction. If you think only about things that make you happy, she says, happy things will be attracted to you.

Sounds easy enough.

However, the Bible says that "the secret" to life is something very different. It has to do with "the law of the Spirit of life" that sets us free from "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2), not with the "law of attraction."

According to the apostle Paul, the most important thing to know is "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). To those who are concerned with happiness now, this is indeed foolishness (v.14). They do not recognize the power of God in what appears to them as weakness.

The Lord created us with a desire to know what is secret. In His wisdom, He kept certain things hidden in mystery for a time (v.7). But now, through His Holy Spirit, He has made them known. And the secret He reveals has nothing to do with having happy thoughts in order to obtain happy things; it has to do with having the mind of Jesus Christ (v.16).

There is a law that made us free—

In Romans 8 this truth is heard;

The secret is to walk with God

And daily lean upon His Word. —Hess

To know lasting happiness, we must get to know Jesus.

High-Tech Communication

May 23, 2010

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 19-21; John 8:1-27

Now we have received … the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. —1 Corinthians 2:12

When it comes to communication, our world is becoming increasingly high-tech. The popularity of things like Twitter and Facebook might cause some to think the Bible is too old-school. The tech-savvy people of our world might feel deterred because there are no sounds and no nifty graphics in the Bible. But the truth is, there's more high-tech power in God's Word than in any cutting-edge communication tool our world will ever know.

It's not uncommon for a pastor to be told, "When you said that in your message, it was just what I needed." Somehow during the sermon, God spoke to the person's heart with a message tailor-made for him or her. If you've ever read the Bible and sensed God speaking directly to you, you know what I'm talking about. God has hard-wired you with His Spirit, who illumines your mind to understand His Word.

Imagine getting a "text message" directly from the Creator of the universe telling you exactly what you need at exactly the right time. No matter how high-tech this world gets, you'll never experience a more powerful mode of communication!

Rejoice in the reality that "we have received … the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

Give me the insight, Lord,

As I hear Your Word today,

So I will truly understand

Your message and Your way. —Monroe

The Bible may be old, but its truths are always new.

Discovery

December 17, 2008

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 | Bible in a Year: Amos 7-9; Revelation 8

God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. —1 Corinthians 2:10

Imagine Christmas morning without wrapping paper! The joy would be short-lived, for much of the excitement is the anticipation of finding out what's in the package.

Apparently God created us with a "normal" setting that causes us to enjoy the process of discovery, because finding something is often more exciting than having it. That is, after all, why we wrap presents.

Many passages in Scripture allude to this concept. In Proverbs we read of wisdom: "Those who seek me diligently will find me" (8:17). And the prophet Jeremiah wrote of the Lord: "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (29:13).

God could have revealed all truth to all people at the very beginning of time, but He chose to reveal Himself gradually (1 Cor. 2:7-8). Perhaps that's because we value things more when we have to search and wait for them.

God is not playing a cruel game of hide-and-seek. He is allowing us to enjoy the process of discovering who He is and what He is up

to in the universe.

So don't be discouraged over what you don't know about God. Be excited about unwrapping all there is yet to discover.

More about Jesus let me learn,

More of His holy will discern;

Spirit of God, my teacher be,

Showing the things of Christ to me. —Hewitt

God's gift of Himself to us is a present we will always be unwrapping.

Beyond Imagination!

November 21, 2009

Beyond Imagination!

Read: Revelation 21:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 16-17; James 3

[It has not] entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. —1 Corinthians 2:9

A college professor at a Christian school perceived that his students held a distorted view of heaven; they considered it to be static and boring. So, to stir their imaginations, he asked them these questions:

"Do you wish you would wake up tomorrow morning to discover that the person you loved most passionately loved you even more? Wake up hearing music you have always loved but had never heard with such infinite joy before? Rise to the new day as if you were just discovering the Pacific Ocean? Wake up without feeling guilty about anything at all? See to the very core of yourself, and like everything you see? Wake up breathing God as if He were air? Loving to love Him? And loving everybody else in the bargain?"

In response to that professor's intriguing questions, the students all lifted their hands. If that's what heaven will be like, and even infinitely more so, they certainly wanted to be there.

"I go to prepare a place for you," Jesus told His disciples (John 14:2). We all share the desire—really a deep-down yearning—to be in that glorious home forever. It is a place of indescribable bliss. And the supreme blessing will be the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

When we all get to heaven,

What a day of rejoicing that will be!

When we all see Jesus,

We'll sing and shout the victory. —Hewitt

The greatest pleasures of earth cannot be compared to the joys of heaven.

Heaven's Greatest Delights

July 8, 2009

Heaven's Greatest Delights

Read: Revelation 22:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Job 36-37; Acts 15:22-41

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard … the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. —1 Corinthians 2:9

What will be one of heaven's supreme joys?

Joni Eareckson Tada, disabled as a teenager in a diving accident, has been a paraplegic for over 40 years. One would imagine that her greatest longing would be the ability to walk, even run, free from the confinement of her wheelchair.

But Joni tells us that her greatest desire is to offer a "praise that is pure." She explains: "I won't be crippled by distractions, or disabled by insincerity. I won't be handicapped by a ho-hum half-heartedness. My heart will join with yours and bubble over with

effervescent adoration. We will finally be able to fellowship fully with the Father and the Son. For me, this will be the best part of heaven."

How that speaks to my divided heart and grips my unfocused spirit! What a blessing to offer "a praise that is pure," with no wandering thoughts, no self-centered requests, no inability to soar above my earth-bound language!

In heaven, "there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him" (Rev. 22:3). May the prospect of heaven enable us to experience a foretaste of that God-glorifying worship even here and now.

To be with Him will crown it all!

To see His face—before Him fall,

To feast within His banquet hall;

To be with Him will crown it all! —Peterson

© Renewal 1987, John W. Peterson Music Company.

To see Jesus will be heaven's greatest joy.

On The Other Side

September 30, 1995

On The Other Side

Read: Revelation 21:9-27 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 9-10; Ephesians 3

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. —1 Corinthians 2:9

With her little face pressed against the display window, a girl gazes with rapture at the beautiful dolls inside the toy store. She is enthralled by the miniature houses with their tiny dishes and detailed furniture. Oh, to get inside and play with those beckoning toys!

A man stands on the seashore as dawn slowly floods the eastern horizon with glory. His hope is in Christ, and he thinks about heaven with all of its splendor. Oh, to enter into that world—what unimaginable joy!

C. S. Lewis said that while on this earth we are "on the wrong side of the door." But he added, "All the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor it will not always be so."

Jesus doesn't leave us "on the wrong side of the door." It is because of Him that we anticipate heaven. The hope He gives us is not due to our good character or service, nor because we have earned the right to enter heaven (Ti. 3:5). No, we will see our Savior only because of our faith in His supreme sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.

When we reach heaven, we'll understand the far-reaching implications of 1 Corinthians 2:9, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Had He not made the dazzling sun

To guide us till our day's work's done,

How could we understand that Light

Which makes the Heavenly City bright? —Sarah Lewis

God opens the windows of heaven to those who open their hearts to Him.

High-Tech Communication

May 23, 2010

High-Tech Communication

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 19-21; John 8:1-27

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Rejoice in the reality that "we have received … the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

Give me the insight, Lord,

As I hear Your Word today,

So I will truly understand

Your message and Your way. —Monroe

The Bible may be old, but its truths are always new.

Blurred Vision

February 5, 1996

Blurred Vision

Read: Exodus 32:1-20 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 36-38; Matthew 23:1-22

We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God. —1 Corinthians 2:12

Although I'm closer to 80 than 70, I still want to think of myself as "a modern man." So I keep up with the news, read current books, and use up-to-date sources when I research a subject. But more important, I want to be thoroughly biblical and Christian in all my thoughts and actions. Because of this, some people who don't like my convictions see me as being narrow-minded.

One temptation we face as believers is to adapt our views to our culture so that we will not be seen as out of touch with the modern world. When we give in to this tendency, however, we find ourselves compromising what we know is right. We find ways to justify immoral behavior that society finds acceptable. We may say that we still believe in the Bible, but we reinterpret its clear meaning on moral and spiritual issues and try to make it say what we want it to say.

Exodus 32 describes how the Israelites allowed their sinful desires to blur their spiritual vision. They wanted to be like their pagan neighbors, so they made an idol and had a sensual worship service. This angered both Moses and the Lord, and resulted in severe judgment.

If we don't take God's Word seriously, our spiritual vision becomes blurred and we will disobey Him.

If I would win the plaudits of the world,

Then I must lose the presence of my Lord;

I cannot please the godless by my works

And still enjoy the blessings of His Word. —Smith

Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold.

Dirty Laundry

September 23, 2005

Dirty Laundry

Read: Leviticus 10:8-11, 1 Corinthians 2:13-16 | Bible in a Year: Song of Solomon 1-3; Galatians 2

Distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean. —Leviticus 10:10

Whenever my husband and I leave the house, our dog Maggie goes sniffing for old shoes and dirty laundry. She surrounds herself with what she finds and then sleeps with it near her nose. The familiar smells comfort her until we return.

Of course Maggie doesn't realize she's following a levitical command to "distinguish between … unclean and clean" (Leviticus 10:10). Nor does she know she's violating it.

In a world still swirling in sin long after its catastrophic collision with evil, God commanded His followers to live holy lives (Leviticus 11:45). Distinguishing between clean and unclean is essential to that task.

Such discernment requires more than finely tuned physical senses. The apostle Paul wrote that the "natural man"—that is, a human being in his sinful state—"does not receive the things of the Spirit of God … ; they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is the Holy Spirit who provides this wisdom (v.13).

Just as Maggie finds comfort in old shoes and socks, many people seek comfort in old dirty sins. We must be mindful that our comfort and consolation come from God, who loves us and who establishes us in "every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;

Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. —Orr

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There is no true happiness apart from holiness, and no holiness apart from Christ.

Ask The Author

February 22, 2015

Ask The Author

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 4-6; Mark 4:1-20

We have the mind of Christ. —1 Corinthians 2:16

Over the years I've been part of various book groups. Typically, several friends read a book and then we get together to discuss the ideas the author has put forward. Inevitably, one person will raise a question that none of us can answer. And then someone will say, "If only we could ask the author." A popular new trend in New York City is making that possible. Some authors, for a hefty fee, are making themselves available to meet with book clubs.

How different it is for those of us who gather to study the Bible. Jesus meets with us whenever we get together. No fees. No scheduling conflicts. No travel expenses. Furthermore, we have the Holy Spirit to guide our understanding. One of the last promises Jesus made to His disciples was that God would send the Holy Spirit to teach them (John 14:26).

The Author of the Bible is not limited by time or space. He can meet with us at any time and any place. So whenever we have a question, we can ask with the assurance that He will answer—though perhaps not according to our timetable.

God wants us to have the mind of the Author (1 Cor. 2:16) so that through the teaching of the Spirit we will comprehend the greatness of the gift He has freely given us (v.12).

Lord, thank You that You are meeting with me

right now. I want to be taught by You. I don't

want just to have more knowledge about You; I

want to know You in the depths of my heart.

When you open your Bible, ask the Author to open your mind and heart.

God Loveth Adverbs

January 7, 2010

God Loveth Adverbs

Read: Colossians 3:8-17 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 18-19; Matthew 6:1-18

But we have the mind of Christ. —1 Corinthians 2:16

The Puritans wisely sought to connect all of life to its source in God, bringing the two worlds together rather than dividing them into sacred and secular. They had a saying, "God loveth adverbs; and careth not how good, but how well." Adverbs describe verbs—our words of action and activity. The proverb implies that God cares more about the spirit in which we live than the concrete results.

Pleasing God doesn't mean that we must busy ourselves with a new set of "spiritual" activities. As the Puritans said, whether cleaning house or preaching sermons, shoeing horses or translating the Bible, any human activity may constitute an offering to God.

We spend much time immersed in the mundane. "But we have the mind of Christ," Paul reminds us (1 Cor. 2:16). That truth is to guide everything we do. Caring for an elderly parent. Cleaning up after a child. Sitting on a porch with a neighbor. Fielding a customer's complaint. Filling out patient charts at a nurses' station. Sitting in traffic. Sawing lumber. Reporting tips. Shopping for groceries.

We need faith and the mind of the Lord Jesus to recognize something of lasting value in even our most ordinary tasks.

In the common round of duty

Lift thy heart in praise;

For the Lord hath surely promised

Strength for all thy days. —Tovey

The world crowns success; God crowns faithfulness!

1 Corinthians 3

1 Corinthians 3:1,3

Paul uses two different words. The word used in 1Cor 3:1 is **sarkinos** and the one used twice in 1Cor 3:3 is **sarkikos**. Some see no difference in the meaning of the two words, but probably most do. If there is a difference, it is this: **Sarkinos** means "made of flesh," that is, weak but without attaching any blame to that condition. In the case of the Corinthians, their weakness was due to their immaturity. On the other hand, sarkikos does have an ethical or moral connotation. It means "to be characterized by the flesh, something that is willful and blameworthy." The first word means "made of flesh," while the second means "controlled by the flesh." - So Great Salvation What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ Charles C. Ryrie

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1 Corinthians 3:6

I planted … but God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6).

A deacon rebuked an elderly preacher one Sunday morning before the service.

"Pastor," said the man, "something must be wrong with your preaching and your work. There's been only one person added to the church in a whole year, and he's just a boy."

The minister listened, his eyes moistening and his thin hand trembling.

"I feel it all," he replied, "but God knows I've tried to do my duty."

On that day the minister's heart was heavy as he stood before his flock. As he finished the message, he felt a strong inclination to resign. After everyone else had left, that one new boy came to him and asked,

"Do you think if I worked hard for an education, I could become a preacher—perhaps a missionary?"

Again tears welled up in the minister's eyes.

"Ah, this heals the ache I feel," he said.

"Robert, I see the Divine hand now. May God bless you, my boy. Yes, I think you will become a preacher."

Many years later an aged missionary returned to London from Africa. People spoke his name with reverence. Nobles invited him to their homes. He had added many souls to the church of Jesus Christ, reaching even some of Africa's most savage chiefs. His name was Robert Moffat, the same Robert who years before had spoken to the pastor on that Sunday morning in the old Scottish church.

Our service for Christ may sometimes seem fruitless. We wonder if anything significant is happening. But if we are faithful, God will give the increase. —D J DeHaan

Faithfulness is God's requirement, fruitfulness is His reward.

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1 Corinthians 3:1-4

Today in the Word

Recently, some Christian colleges loosened rules for how students dress and spend their leisure time. One reversed its no–dancing policy for students and no–drinking policy for faculty and staff—a long overdue decision, some supporters argued; a harbinger of moral laxity, opponents disputed.

Centuries after the church in Corinth, groups still use different criteria to evaluate spirituality. How do we preserve moral standards and a spiritual climate in our Christian communities? Some denominations value the manifestation of certain spiritual gifts to show that someone is spiritually mature. In other churches, the mastery of biblical knowledge is highly prized. For still other churches or denominations, someone is judged by how moral he is and how well he avoids certain highly visible sins.

The Corinthians judged one another by worldly standards of wisdom and eloquence and classified one another by these false categories. As Paul had argued, their standards were informed by the values of the culture, not the values of the cross. The result was factional in–fighting and attitudes of haughty superiority. Many within the church believed that they had attained a superior wisdom and spiritual standing, and this inflated their sense of self–importance.

Paul takes direct aim at their pride in the opening verses of chapter three. For those who take pride in their supposed spiritual maturity, he calls them worldly and infantile. In fact, he notes that he cannot even address them spiritually when they don’t have the spiritual maturity to understand or embrace what he says?

Paul radically redefines worldliness here. It isn’t the absence of spiritual knowledge (as the Corinthians might have thought) or moral laxity (as we tend to think). Worldliness is stubborn willfulness and inflated self–importance when it comes to matters of opinion. This attitude of pride and superiority leads to division and to jealousy. Haughty arrogance and self–certainty destroys the health of a Christian community. This is in direct contrast to the attitude of our Savior (see Phil. 2:5–11).

Apply the Word

When we think about advancing in our spiritual life, we often set our sights on knowing more Scripture, serving more vigorously, and avoiding sin. And all these are good! But we also need to take inventory of our relationships. Do any of those relationships suffer from a willful pride in our heart? Do we esteem ourselves better than another? Have we valued unity in the body of Christ as much as Paul does in his letter to the Corinthians? If there are relationships in your church that you can take a step toward mending, do that today.

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1 Corinthians 3:5–17

Today in the Word

Wheaton College recently hosted a panel of business leaders to discuss the topic, “Business as Mission.” They considered what it might look like to affect issues of global poverty and social injustice by establishing businesses in the poorest countries. One African man, when asked how to most effectively address the dire needs in Africa, answered, “Come and build relationships. Change happens in the context of relationship.”

His answer might not surprise us if we know a little something about African culture. It reflects the high priority Africans place on relationship and community. But it’s not the way we Americans think. We tend to prize the individual—his rights, his freedoms, and his potential.

That lens is one we have to readily acknowledge (and shed) when we come to a passage like the one we’ve read today. Paul isn’t addressing individual believers in this passage. The testing he alludes to in verses 13 through 15 isn’t the testing of one’s own individual spiritual life. The temple he refers to in verse 16 isn’t the individual body of the believer. This entire passage intends to defend the sacredness of the community of believers, the church. Paul uses three metaphors to explain this: the church as God’s field, the church as God’s building, and the church as God’s temple.

The field, the building, the temple—all belong to God. Although Paul, Apollos, and others have contributed to the work of building the church in Corinth, ultimately it’s been fully and completely the work of God. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but the church grew because God made in grow. Paul laid a foundation, others are building on that foundation, but the church stands because Jesus Christ Himself is the foundation. The church is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, and none can destroy that temple without the judgment of God falling heavy upon him.

This means that the factions into which the church at Corinth has splintered are ridiculous. They deny the unity and sacredness of God’s church.

Apply the Word

How often do you think of your identity beyond individual categories? What would it look like to consider more seriously the importance of your participation in your church? Would you treat the relationships you share with your brothers and sisters as more sacred? Would you expend more energy toward building up and serving the local church of which you are a part? It is all too easy to have a consumer mentality toward church: what does it provide me? How am I growing? What different questions does the passage beckon us to ask?

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1 Corinthians 3:18–23

Today in the Word

Beauty pageants, Disney princesses, and Barbie: in recent generations, they’ve fueled the ire of some and sparked cultural debate. The ideal of feminine beauty plastered on magazine covers and media screens seems dangerously unattainable, and considering the power of digital photo enhancement, altogether false.

The standard we use to compare ourselves matters. We judge ourselves by how we look, how smart we are, and how successful we deem ourselves to be.

What about in the church? The point that Paul makes in the final verses of chapter three is that we can’t be too careful when choosing the standard by which we judge ourselves, especially in the area of spiritual maturity.

The Corinthians had imbibed the cultural values of their day. They bought into the lie that what matters most is how eloquently one speaks and how much one knows. What mattered most in Corinthian culture was the so–called wisdom one had attained. This had created a dangerous disunity in the church. Each faction boasted of their superiority, and the church divided into “haves” and the “have–nots.”

Paul’s criticism is clear. Their self–judgment was deluded. They had been deceived. By judging themselves according to false, worldly standards, they had arrived at erroneous conclusions. They were not wise; they were fools. And if they thought themselves to be wise, they needed to cling more closely to the foolish message of the cross and to Jesus Christ, the supreme Fool.

In these final verses of chapter three, Paul inverts a popular saying of Greco–Roman philosophy of that time: “The wise man possesses all things.” It was a way of saying that wisdom, or Sophia, mattered more than anything else. Paul’s argument goes something like this: “All things are yours, but you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.” It encapsulates his whole argument of chapter three: everything belongs to God, and this truth unifies the church and defeats human pride.

Apply the Word

It is so easy to judge ourselves by false standards, isn't it? The world defines our worth by our physical attractiveness, our earning power, and the success of our families. When we judge ourselves by these standards, we can be led falsely into either shame or pride. But the standard Paul sets up throughout the entire letter of 1 Corinthians is radically defined by God: we have the standard of Christ crucified, the foolish wisdom of God who is "our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1:30).

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1 Corinthians 3:8

I was thumbing through one of the national periodicals and happened upon a picture of President Reagan sitting in the Oval Office. He was behind his desk, signing some documents. I noticed a small sign on his desk that was too small to read. It intrigued me. I found a magnifying glass and looked closer; the print was blurred. The next morning I had my secretary telephone the White House and talk with someone who could give us the information." She found out that the sign on the President's desk said: THERE IS NO LIMIT TO WHAT A MAN CAN DO OR WHERE HE CAN GO IF HE DOESN'T MIND WHO GETS THE CREDIT.

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1 Corinthians 3:9

THE PARABLE OF THE TOOLS

"For we are laborers together with God." 1 Corinthians 3:9

Some years ago R. T. Moore penned an interesting parable based on the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:9. "It seems," he says, "that the Carpenter's tools had a conference. Brother Hammer was in the chair, but the others had just informed him that he must leave because he was too noisy. `All right, I'll go, but if I leave, Brother Screw must go also. Why, you have to turn him around again and again to get him to go anywhere.' To which Brother Screw replied, `If you wish, I'll go, but Brother Plane must leave as well. All of his work is on the surface. There is never any depth to it.' To this Brother Plane replied, `Well, Brother Rule will also have to withdraw if I do, for he is always measuring folks as though he were the only one who is right.' Brother Rule in turn complained about Brother Sandpaper, saying, 'I just don't care, he's rougher than he ought to be, and he's always rubbing people the wrong way.' In the midst of the discussion the Carpenter of Nazareth walked in. He had come to perform His day's work. He went to the bench to make a pulpit from which to preach the Gospel to the poor. He employed the screw, the sandpaper, the saw, the hammer, the plane, and all the other tools. After the day's work was over and the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and said, `Brethren, I perceive that all of us are laborers together with God.' 0, how many Christians are just like those tools, fussing at each other because we think someone does not do things just the way he should. There was not an accusation made against any one of the tools but that was absolutely true; yet the Carpenter used every one of them; and there was not a place where He employed them that one of the others could have served as well."

Let us be careful not to find fault with any of God's chosen tools, for all of us are "laborers together" in the holy task He has assigned.

Alone our work is of little worth,

Together we are the "salt of the earth."

So it's all for each and each for all;

United we stand, divided we fall! —Anon.

Remember, the fellow looking down his nose at others usually has the wrong slant!

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1 Corinthians 3:1-10

PERHAPS some Christians are at odds with each other due to unresolved "agreements." In a book titled Logic, author Lionel Ruby makes a distinction between a verbal dispute and a real dispute. In a verbal dispute the parties believe that their statements cannot both be correct, when in fact they may be. Here's an example.

Bill claims, "People are not all equal. They differ in their physical and mental abilities. Thomas Jefferson was all wet when he said that all men are created equal." Jim argues, "All human beings are equal. They have equal dignity and are entitled to equal opportunities regardless of race, color, or creed." Bill and Jim don't really disagree. They are merely defining the word equal in different ways—one in terms of inherited traits and the other in terms of inherent value.

When a Christian brother or sister says something with which we disagree, we should try to understand what the person is really saying before we react. God gave us the ability to reason for a reason; He wants us to use it. But we often jump into a dispute before looking for the common ground of agreement.

To please God, we need to get rid of "envy, strife, and divisions" (1 Corinthians 3:3) and be committed to understanding one another. –D J DeHaan

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1 Corinthians 3:1-11

LOOK at the church page in a large city newspaper and what do you see? Advertisements for dozens of different churches representing various doctrinal positions and methods of worship.

Diversity was already present in the first-century church. Some believers in Corinth favored Paul, others Apollos, still others Peter. The fact that they were drawn to a certain leader wasn't necessarily wrong. Different temperaments account for different preferences. Some people are spiritually uplifted in a liturgical service, whereas others are enriched in an informal setting of praise, testimony, and preaching. But when these differences cause envy, strife, and divisions, they are bad. Paul reminded first-century Christians that he, Apollos, and other leaders were coworkers and that all believers constitute one body.

To prevent diversity from creating divisions, we must study the Scriptures with humility and with open minds. We must guard those teachings that cannot be compromised, holding fast to the essential doctrines of the Bible. We should be loyal to the local church to which God has called us, but we must also love and respect our brothers and sisters in Christ who don't see every-thing exactly as we do. —FM

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1 Corinthians 3:5-11

PEOPLE in the helping professions often become what some psychologists call burned-out Good Samaritans. After listening to so many people's problems and trying to help, they get to where they can't take it anymore. Doctors, ministers, psychiatrists, and police officers are especially vulnerable. To save themselves emotionally, they must either quit their jobs, stop caring about people, or readjust.

Christians can burn out, too, because helping others is part of our calling. When we continue to take on more and more problems, we eventually have a load too heavy to carry. But if we quit helping, we're not doing what Christ told us to do. And if we become unfeeling, we fall short of His example. But we can make changes. For example, Moses heeded the good counsel of his father-in-law and began delegating responsibility (Exodus 18:18). We too must recognize our human limitations and learn to act wisely.

Some believers assume that spirituality means pushing our-selves until we wear out for the Lord. According to the Bible, however, it's wiser to get more people involved in doing good things and thereby get more done with less effort.—M R DeHaan II

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1 Corinthians 3:9

"For we are labourers together with God."-- 1Corinthians 3:9

CO-OPERATING WITH GOD

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

IN THIS chapter the Apostle describes the Church as a garden or vineyard, in which the Divine Spirit is ever at work, superintending, directing, inspiring, and calling to co-operate with Him all His servants, whether they be Paul, Apollos, or Cephas; or as a vast temple, rising through the ages, requiring labourers to lay the foundations, others to build the walls, and others to put the final touches in the light of an accomplished purpose. In each case, the design, the successive stages of advancing progress, the engagement of the workers, the direction of their labours and their reward is entirely with the Husband-man and the Master-Builder. It is not our work, but His; we are not responsible for the results, but only to do His Will; He repays us by generous rewards, but there our responsibility ends. When the Garden stands in the Matture beauty, and yields the prolific fruitage of autumn; when the Building is completed and stands in symmetrical glory amidst the wrecks of time, then those who have co-operated will stand aside, and "God will be All in all."

All through human industry there is this co-operation between God and man. He stores the cellars of the earth with gold or coal, and it is for man to excavate it; He fills the hedgerows and woodlands with wild fruits and flowers, it is for man to cultivate them; He fills the earth with iron, copper, and other priceless treasures, it is for man to work them into all manner of useful implements. In every harvest-field, garden, orchard, industry, and employment of natural law for the purpose of civilization, there is this combined effort of God and man. God's energy works according to laws, which man must study as the key to the unlocking of the forces which he uses to flash his messages, guide the aero plane or motor, or speed him across the ocean.

In the Church the same law prevails. God has given the Word, but the company of preachers has been needed to proclaim it. The

Words of inspiration burn with the fire of God, but man is called in to translate them into every language under heaven. The saving power of Christ waits to heal and bless, but He needs the co-operation of the human hand and life as the medium through which His virtue passes. Those whom God calls into fellowship in serving others may count on Him for the supply of all their needs (1Co3:21-23).

PRAYER - Heavenly Father, show me how I may work with Thee, and in what direction are Thy energies going forth that I may walk and work in fellowship with Thyself. AMEN.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1

Outside a Minneapolis church several years ago, as the chairman of the board was about to enter the building, he saw an elderly man standing at the corner of the building. He seemed to be caressing the bricks. The chairman was fascinated by the action of the man, so he approached him and said, "Pardon me, sir, but you seem to have some special interest in this corner of our building. I'm curious to know what's so interesting about those bricks?" The old man answered, "Yes, I have a special interest. You see, when this building was erected many years ago, I was a workman on the project." Patting the bricks, he said, "These bricks—I set them here." With a smile of satisfaction, he added, "And I think I did a pretty good job." He had used good materials and had built well. The building was solid, and "his corner" was plumb to the line. His work stood approved.

How about the corner where God has placed you? Whether it's your work in the church or your daily occupation, a task done well can be a clear testimony of God's work in your life. —Paul R VanGorder

WORK DONE WELL FOR CHRIST

WILL RECEIVE A "WELL DONE" FROM CHRIST

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1 Corinthians 3:10-17

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. - Ephesians 2:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

During His earthly ministry Jesus predicted that Herod's temple would eventually be destroyed. Jesus responded with a dire warning when His disciples marveled at the beauty of the temple. " 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down'" (Matt. 24:2). The apostle Paul's description of the church as "God's temple," penned just a few years before Jesus' prediction was fulfilled, indicated that a change had already occurred.

The Greek word that is translated "temple" in verses 16 and 17 referred to the sanctuary. In tomorrow's study we will see that Paul used this term to refer to the individual believer. Here he has the whole congregation in view. God's people are collectively the temple of God. This is because God's Spirit "dwells" in their midst.

When God's people come together as the church, the result is both sacred and unique. The gathered church is unlike any other human gathering. The church does not have to do anything to achieve this status. It does not require a particular ritual, prayer, or incantation. Paul states it as a fact. We are God's temple.

Paul describes the church as a building that is still under construction. The foundation, Jesus Christ, has already been laid by preaching the gospel (v. 11) but the quality of the workmanship by those who build upon this foundation may vary. Two categories of people are in view. One consists of those who labor in "building" the temple, presumably those who exercise spiritual gifts to "build up" the church (cf. 1 Cor. 14:12). These are all believers who will be "rewarded according to their own labor" (v. 8).

The other category of people consists of those who attempt to destroy the church. The Greek word that is translated "destroy" also means to corrupt and appears elsewhere in contexts that refer to false teaching (2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 1:10). These unbelievers will eventually be punished for what they have done to the church (v. 17).

APPLY THE WORD

The church is at risk on two fronts. One is the danger posed by false teachers who attempt to corrupt the church's teaching. They distort the gospel and substitute their own ideas for Scripture. The other threat is posed by the church's own members who build on the right foundation but employ shoddy workmanship. As part of Christ's church we are workers and we are those who are "worked upon" by those who teach. Pray for their work as well as our own.

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1 Corinthians 3:10-15

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him. - 2 Corinthians 5:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

C. T. Studd (1862-1931) gave up a sports career to join six of his Cambridge University classmates in taking the gospel to China. Studd was considered the best cricket player in England during his college days, and at age 25 he inherited a great fortune. But he said no to cricket and gave away his fortune, spending many years on the mission field in China, India, and Africa. He also traveled in the U.S. recruiting students to the work of world missions, and the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade Studd founded is still active today as the WEC International.

C. T. Studd is a wonderful example of someone whose work for the Lord has survived the test of hardships and the passage of years. This committed missionary understood and practiced a ministry of stewardship on a level most people never reach. Studd gave away his inherited fortune, because he did not want to make the same mistake as the rich young man who came to Jesus, but rejected His call to follow Him.

It's encouraging to learn about people who live with Christ's judgment seat in view. This is the only judgment we will ever face as believers. Paul is clear that even the person whose work fails the test of fire will be saved. This is an evaluation of the quality of our stewardship--the Master saying to His managers, ""Give an account of your management"" (Luke 16:2).

The picture of fire and the possibility of suffering loss make this a judgment we need to take seriously. It's great to talk about the rewards we are storing up. But we also have to recognize that those things done for any other motive but to serve and please Christ will disintegrate.

That's why Paul cautions us to be careful about the kind of building material we lay on the foundation of Jesus Christ. It will all come to light on ""the Day"" (v. 13), the return of Christ for His church. The amount of our blessing and management responsibility in the kingdom will be based on the verdict we receive at the judgment seat.

Rather than causing us to pull back, the truth of Christ's judgment should give us determination to give all we have for Him. After all, there is a reward ahead for faithful service.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Just before he wrote the words quoted on this page, Paul stated that his consuming goal was to please Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:9).

That sounds pretty straightforward, and it really is. Pleasing the Lord isn't just some pious-sounding phrase we use when we want to sound spiritual. It's a real goal we can use to help us decide how we manage our lives. What decisions are you facing next week? Put your options to the test of whether they will result in ""fruit that will last"" (John 5:16).

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1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

IN 1992, Hurricane Andrew destroyed thousands of homes in South Florida. Yet in an area where the wreckage looked like a war zone, one house remained standing, still firmly anchored to its foundation.

When a reporter asked the homeowner why his house had not been blown away, he replied, "I built this house myself. I also built it according to the Florida state building code. When the code called for two-inch by six-inch roof trusses, I used two-inch by six-inch roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane—and it did."

Jesus talked about the importance of building our lives on a solid

foundation. He said that the person who obeys His Word is like "a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). If we build according to His code, we will not be swept away when a crisis hits with hurricane like force. The tempests of temptation and the storms of suffering cannot sweep a sturdy structure off a solid foundation. Adversity will come, but a life constructed of virtue and goodness and built on faith in Christ cannot be destroyed.—Vernon Grounds

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1 Corinthians 3:19, 2 Samuel 14

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. - 1 Corinthians 3:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

A small plane carrying a computer expert, a pastor, and a boy scout was going down. The pilot announced that there were only two other parachutes left after he took one for himself. The computer expert, claiming to be the smartest man alive, quickly grabbed a

pack and jumped. The pastor began explaining to the boy scout that he would sacrifice his own life for the young kid, when the boy scout interrupted: “Relax pastor, the computer whiz took my backpack and jumped out!”

Sometimes cunning and smarts are not the same thing as true wisdom, and today’s reading hints at that reality. David’s advisor, Joab, saw the king’s anguish over Absalom and sent for a “wise woman” from Tekoa. Much like the so-called “wise” Jonadab from chapter 13, this woman appeared to have practical cunning and intelligence. With Joab’s help, she told a heart-wrenching story to parallel David’s own situation. She had two sons; one killed the other; now the murdering son had been banished and his life was threatened by the people. She sought his return and secured David’s oath that her son would be protected from harm.

God Alone

December 21, 2009

God Alone

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 | Bible in a Year: Micah 4-5; Revelation 12

We are God’s fellow workers. —1 Corinthians 3:9

On May 29, 1953, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, became the first people to reach the peak of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. Since Tenzing did not know how to use the camera, Edmund took a photo of Tenzing as evidence that they did reach the top.

Later, journalists repeatedly asked who had reached the summit first. The expedition leader, John Hunt, replied, “They reached it together, as a team.” They were united by a common goal, and neither was concerned who should get the greater credit.

It is counterproductive to try to determine who deserves the most credit when something is done well. The church at Corinth was split into two factions—those who followed Paul, and those who followed Apollos. The apostle Paul told them, “I planted, Apollos watered … Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters” (1 Cor. 3:7). He reminded them that they were “God’s fellow workers” (v.9), and it is God who gives the increase in ministry (v.7).

Our concern about who deserves the credit serves only to take away the honor and glory that belong to the Lord Jesus alone.

Let others have the honors,

The glory, and the fame;

I seek to follow Jesus

And glory in His name. —Horton

Jesus must increase; I must decrease.

Many Voices, One Choir

February 20, 2000

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 26-27; Mark 2

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. —1 Corinthians 12:18

I was deeply moved as I listened to the choral group singing in unison. It seemed to be one powerful voice praising and glorifying God. Then on the chorus, the sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses sang their different parts, and the harmony was beautiful. It thrilled my soul and made their unison singing seem colorless by comparison.

Every follower of Christ “sings” a different part as together we work for the Lord. We come from various backgrounds and have different personalities and abilities. Even so, our labors together for Him can result in a beautiful harmony of service. Instead of appreciating this blend, however, some Christians demand conformity to their own methods and procedures. They want everyone to sing their way.

Although this kind of unity can produce limited results, nothing is quite as satisfying as to see different individuals, all with their own styles, talents, and identities, presenting in harmony the same theme—the love and salvation offered by the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our service for Christ, let’s not worry if the people next to us aren’t singing our “note.” If they’re in harmony with the Bible, we’re in

the same choir.

Help us, Lord, to work together

With the gifts that You bestow;

Give us unity of purpose

As we serve You here below. —Sper

God calls His children to unity—not uniformity.

It's Up To God

May 26, 1999

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 28-29; John 9:24-41

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:6

Tom Vreman of the Dorcas Society Mission was speaking to our church about the patience required to work on a mission field. He told about a friend and his family who had traveled to the Inner Mongolia region of China to proclaim the gospel.

For the first few years, all they did was get settled and learn the customs of the people. After almost 4 years, his friend reported with great excitement that he was discipling his first three converts. That's slow progress.

But after another 4 years, the missionary gave this amazing report: The entire village had turned in faith to Christ. The new Christians began praying for the people in a neighboring town. They sent witnesses, and soon that whole village received Christ. Now the entire region is hearing the gospel—all because one man and his family were willing to plant the seed and trust God for the results.

The apostle Paul gave his life to do God's work. But he knew who was responsible for the success of that work. "Neither he who plants is anything," he wrote, "nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7).

Evangelism calls for patience. We may plant the seed, as Paul did, or we may water, as did Apollos (v.6). The key is to do our part and leave the results to God.

You've fished for men's souls for years,

Yet little success you can claim;

Keep casting the net where God leads you—Your faithfulness honors His Name. —DCE

Faithfulness is God's requirement; fruitfulness is His reward.

'Fertilizer Sure Helps!'

May 25, 2001

'Fertilizer Sure Helps!'

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 25-27; John 9:1-23

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:6

A Sunday school teacher pointed to a large plant in the room and asked her young pupils, "Who made those beautiful flowers grow?" A boy quickly answered, "God did!" The teacher was pleased by the response, but before she had a chance to comment, another boy shouted, "But fertilizer sure helps!"

That youngster touched on a profound reality—the mingling of the human with the divine in God's plan for growth. For example, even though the Lord created this world with its growing things, He put man in the garden to tend and cultivate it.

We find a parallel to this truth in the spiritual realm. The apostle Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). His main intent in writing these words was to emphasize that God was the one responsible for "the increase." Even so, the Lord had worked through the faithful endeavors of men. Notice what the record states: Paul "planted," and Apollos

“watered.”

We recognize that God alone is the one who makes things grow—both in nature and in the church. But we also know that He chooses to work through people, and what we do “sure helps!” God is faithful in doing His part. Are we faithful in doing ours?

The Lord gives each of us a task

He wants us to fulfill;

To love and serve Him faithfully

Accomplishes His will. —Sper

Pray for a good harvest, but keep on hoeing.

The Richness Of Humility

March 30, 2008

The Richness Of Humility

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-10 | Bible in a Year: Judges 9-10; Luke 5:17-39

Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:7

She lived out spiritual humility, yet she had much on a human level to be proud of. As an author of over 70 books and a translator of many others into Afrikaans, Annalou Marais had much cause to brag—but she was more concerned about honoring Christ than advancing herself. She worked behind the scenes of the Bible conference, doing a servant’s tasks with a smiling face and a joyful heart. It would have been natural for her to desire, and even deserve, the spotlight. Instead, she quietly served, joyfully weeping as God worked in people’s hearts. It was an impressive humility, because it was completely genuine.

I have heard it said, “It is amazing what can be accomplished when we don’t care who gets the credit.” This is certainly true of Christian service. Paul told the church at Corinth, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Paul had learned that great lesson of the servant’s heart, as Annalou has learned—it’s entirely about God. What we do is accomplished by His power and grace, and all the glory must go to Him.

It was a lesson in humility watching Annalou, and one that reminded me of the richness of serving God.

God often uses lowly things

His purpose to fulfill,

Because it takes a humble heart

To carry out His will. —D. De Haan

Pride and grace cannot dwell in the same place.

Let God Do His Work

December 13, 2003

Let God Do His Work

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Hosea 12-14; Revelation 4

Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:7

In our zeal to serve the Lord, it’s easy to think that it’s our responsibility to produce results. This causes us to place too much faith in our ability and too little faith in God’s.

Paul observed this same tendency in the Corinthian church. Certain believers extolled the seed-planting ministry of Paul, while others favored the seed-watering ministry of Apollos. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul reminded them that it is God who brings the seed to fruition (vv.4-7). Yet Paul acknowledged that their faithful efforts were part of God’s plan, “and each one will receive his own reward

according to his own labor” (v.8).

Imagine a farmer sitting on his front porch. You ask him what he’s doing. He answers, “Farming.” You ask him what he’s growing. He replies, “Wheat.” “But your fields look unplowed and unplanted,” you say. “That’s right,” he answers, “I’m farming by faith. Believing God for a harvest.” “But shouldn’t you be doing something?” you protest. He replies, “I am. I’m praying and believing!”

This story reminds us that God won’t do our work for us, and 1 Corinthians teaches us that the results are not up to us. The best way to serve is to faithfully plant and water the seed, then trust God for the results.

God does not expect us

To make the seed bear fruit;

Jesus said to plant it,

And pray that it will root. —Pendergraft

We can plant the seed, but only God can give the harvest.

Who Is The Foolish One?

September 17, 1995

Who Is The Foolish One?

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-15 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 27-29; 2 Corinthians 10

Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it. —1 Corinthians 3:13

Everyone in the community knew Carl. He was a farmer and family man whose dedication went beyond his own productive fields. He also was known for his greater dedication to what he called “God’s harvest field.”

Carl’s neighbors sometimes considered him foolish, especially over his reluctance to work on Sundays. Instead, he would go to church, visit shut-ins, and focus on family life. Choosing God’s priorities over crop priorities seemed foolhardy.

One Sunday, while neighbors hastily gathered their harvest before a predicted storm, Carl went to church as usual. Later a neighbor mocked, “Think, Carl, by the end of the month the rest of us will be enjoying a big payoff because of our work. But you may end up with nothing, all because of your work for God. Where will you be then?” With quiet confidence, Carl replied, “Working for God has a payoff too, but not necessarily at the end of the month. The question is, when that day comes, where will you be?”

Which payday takes priority in your life? The one at the end of the month or the day you stand before Christ? Now is the time to evaluate your goals in life, for one day the Lord will reward the wise choices you’ve made.

O use me, Lord, use even me,

Just as Thou wilt, and when, and where,

Until Thy blessed face I see—

Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share. —Havergal

Serving the Lord is an investment that pays eternal dividends.

Spiritual Superstars

April 6, 2011

Spiritual Superstars

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-15 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 4-6; Luke 9:1-17

When one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? —1 Corinthians 3:4

Superstars abound in today’s culture. Great soccer players can create such excitement that fans have been known to riot in the bleachers. Popular musicians have fans who stand with adoration throughout entire concerts. And Hollywood celebrities hire bodyguards to protect themselves from adoring stalkers.

The first-century Corinthian believers had become divided over their own “spiritual superstars.” Paul viewed such favoritism as a reflection of the sinful nature in a believer’s unyielded heart. “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?” he asked (1 Cor. 3:4).

The apostle’s teaching on how we view Christian leaders puts the topic in a biblical perspective that provides mutual appreciation for those who minister: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase” (v.6). Each person did his part: Paul had planted spiritual seed through evangelism, and Apollos had watered it with his eloquent Bible teaching. But it was God alone who made the seed of spiritual life grow. He alone is the “superstar.”

We should be careful not to put any Christian leader on a pedestal. Instead, let’s appreciate how God is using a variety of spiritual leaders for His honor and His glory.

Lord, give us wisdom. We know it’s good to follow the

example of our godly leaders, but help us not

to think so highly of them that we worship them

instead of You. Amen.

Each person has his place in God’s service, and only God deserves the glory.

Making Music

February 5, 2012

Making Music

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-17 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 1-3

Be filled with the Spirit, … singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. —Ephesians 5:18-19

On a lovely summer evening, a capacity crowd gathered in a beautiful outdoor venue for a concert by one of my college friends. It happened to be his birthday, so the emcee hinted that we might want to sing “Happy Birthday” to him. One by one, people started singing, each in a different key, each at a different tempo. As the jumble of notes and words joined together, the result was, well, less than harmonic. It wasn’t even melodious. It was in fact downright pitiful. When my friend took the stage, he gave us another chance. He didn’t give us the pitch, but he did give us a downbeat, so at least we were singing together. By the end of the song most people were somewhat close to the same key.

The noise that was supposed to be a song reminded me of a problem in a first-century church. They couldn’t agree on their leader. Some followed Paul; others Apollos (1 Cor. 3:4). The result was conflict and division (v.3). Instead of music, they were making noise. When people don’t agree on a leader, they all “sing” (I’m speaking metaphorically here) at the pace and pitch most comfortable for them.

To make beautiful music that will attract unbelievers to Jesus, all believers must follow the same leader, and that leader must be Christ.

Lord, give us wisdom. We know it’s good to follow

the example of our godly leaders, but help us not to

think so highly of them that we worship them

instead of You. Amen.

Keeping in tune with Christ keeps harmony in the church.

Gatekeepers

April 16, 2009

Gatekeepers

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-17 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 30-31; Luke 13:23-35

The temple of God is holy, which temple you are. —1 Corinthians 3:17

In journalism, the term gatekeeper refers to reporters, editors, and publishers who consider various news items and determine which stories are newsworthy. Some long-time news professionals warn that the Internet allows information to get through without being checked at the gate.

In Old Testament times, gatekeepers guarded the temple to prevent those who were unclean from entering (2 Chron. 23:19). In ad 70, the temple was destroyed by the Roman armies of Emperor Titus. But the destruction began years earlier when the Levites assigned to guard it failed to do so after coming under the corrupt influence of the Syrian king Antiochus iv.

Paul called our bodies God's "temple" (1 Cor. 3:16-17), and many forces are at work to assault God's new dwelling. Evil may gain a foothold through unfortified areas of our spiritual life—places where envy, strife, or divisions may undermine us (3:3). Each of us must be on guard against the enemy of our souls and never give place to the devil (Eph. 4:27).

The criteria for what may enter is found in Philippians 4:8—whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. The resulting peace will guard the gate of our hearts and minds.

Help me to guard my troubled soul

By constant, active self-control.

Clean up my thought, my speech, my play;

Lord, keep me pure from day to day. —Thomas

If you're not on guard against evil you'll be influenced by evil.

Building A Life That Matters

May 9, 2012

Building A Life That Matters

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 | Bible in a Year: Nehemiah 7-9

I have laid the foundation … But let each one take heed how he builds on it. —1 Corinthians 3:10

My grandkids love to play with Legos. These small colorful building blocks capture their imagination for building forts, planes, houses, or whatever the instructions may call for.

Emptying the contents of the box onto the floor, my grandchildren begin to put the pieces together. But soon they think they don't need to consult the directions. This eventually leads to a point when they realize that building according to their own instincts has resulted in a bad outcome. So, they break it apart and start over again—but this time they have a keen sense of how important the directions are.

Do you need the pieces of your life broken apart and put back together according to God's directions? If you have Jesus Christ as your foundation, begin to follow His blueprint for living. Paul wrote, "Let each one take heed how he builds" on the foundation (1 Cor. 3:10-11). What is the blueprint? Value others above yourself by humbly serving them (Phil. 2:3-4), give generously of your resources to those in need (James 2:14-17), respond with love to those who have wronged you (Rom. 12:14-21). These are just a few of the pieces that God wants you to put together to build a life that is worthy of being His temple (1 Cor. 3:16).

Because of the grace and forgiveness that You have

shown me, Lord, I want to live a life that's worthy of

knowing You. Help me to follow Your plans that

You've laid out in the Scriptures. Amen.

The Bible is the Christian's blueprint for life.

The Right Stuff

July 8, 2007

The Right Stuff

Read: Galatians 1:6-12 | Bible in a Year: Job 36-37; Acts 15:22-41

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

David, I missed you in class today," I told one of my college students when we ran into each other in the Information Services office. He gave me that stunned "freshman in the first week of college" look, and then it struck him—he had misread his schedule and had gone to the wrong class.

The funny thing was, there were two grammar labs—mine, and another professor's—and he had attended the wrong one. I told him, "That's okay. You were getting the right information, so I won't count you absent."

As I thought about it, I concluded that this is a little like the options many Christians have regarding the churches they attend. The key factor is to attend a church where the right information is shared—where salvation through Jesus Christ is preached (1 Cor. 15:3-5), where the Bible is the standard for faith and practice, and where an opportunity to serve in Jesus' name is provided. It's important that the message proclaims the true gospel and the historical message of Jesus—not a "different gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). It's not the messenger that's most important; it's the message.

What "gospel" are you hearing? Is it built on the foundation of Jesus Christ? (1 Cor. 3:11).

A guilty sinner needs to hear

The simple gospel true and clear

That tells how Jesus bled and died,

And for man's sin was crucified. —D. De Haan

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord.

A Little Piece Of Heaven

May 10, 2010

A Little Piece Of Heaven

Read: Exodus 25:1-9 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 10-12; John 1:29-51

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? —1 Corinthians 3:16

A couple of weeks ago my wife met a woman who needed a ride. She sensed that this could be from God, so she agreed to take her to her destination. During the ride, the woman revealed to my wife that she was a believer but she struggled with drug addiction. My wife listened to and talked with this hurting woman. As she gave her hope for a better tomorrow, I believe that the woman experienced in some small way a little piece of heaven on earth.

When God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle according to His specifications, it was so that God's people would sense His presence. I like to think of it as a little piece of heaven on earth. The temple was a physical example of God's presence on earth also (1 Kings 5–8). The purpose of these holy places was for God to dwell among His people. This was God's plan when Jesus, the perfect temple, "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14).

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His followers (John 14:16-17), so that we would be God's tabernacles and temples in the world (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). As God's representatives of His presence, let's find ways to bring the peace and hope of heaven to others on earth.

For Further Thought

Ask God to use you in the lives of others and to show you some ways to apply this devotional at work, in your home, and in your neighborhood.

A Christian who is willing to do little things for others can do great things for the Lord.

Fighting Off Jealousy

September 24, 2012

Fighting Off Jealousy

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-10 | Bible in a Year: Hosea 5-7

For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? —1 Corinthians 3:3

The story is told of two shopkeepers who were bitter rivals. They spent each day keeping track of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile triumphantly at his rival.

One night an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, "I will give you anything you ask, but whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much. What is your desire?" The man frowned and then said, "Strike me blind in one eye." Now that's jealousy of the worst kind!

The self-destructive emotion of jealousy had the potential of tearing apart the Corinthian church. These believers had received the gospel but had not allowed the Holy Spirit to change their hearts. As a result, they became jealous of one another, which led to a divided community. Paul identified their jealousy as a sign of immaturity and worldliness (1 Cor. 3:3). These believers were not acting like people who had been transformed by the gospel.

One of the clearest indicators that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives is our contentment and our thankfulness for what we have. Then, instead of experiencing jealousy, we are able to genuinely celebrate the gifts and blessings of others.

God, You are so good! You have provided all

we need and so much more. Help us to be content

with what we have, knowing that without You

we would have neither life nor breath.

The remedy for jealousy is thankfulness to God.

What's A Church For?

October 19, 2003

What's A Church For?

Read: Ephesians 4:1-16 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 56-58; 2 Thessalonians 2

Where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? —1 Corinthians 3:3

Every time I hear about a church fight, I cringe. When my wife and I went out to eat with a pastor friend, he told us about some of the things that people in his church have squabbled about. Christians have been pitted against Christians over such issues as the color of the carpet, the thermostat setting, and whether the choir should wear robes.

Pastors have been run out of town during these kinds of arguments. Christians have cut off friendships. Churches have split because folks argued about such things.

Why does this happen? People who get caught up in petty squabbles have lost sight of what a church is for. The church is the place we go for worship, for reading the Word, for singing to God's glory, for serving others, and for helping one another to grow. It's supposed to be a place of love, forgiveness, and encouragement.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesian church, he described the unity of purpose (4:1-16) that should help us to work through disagreements without creating divisions. He knew all too well how selfish desires, personal agendas, and playing favorites could create havoc (1 Corinthians 3:1-9).

Let's make sure our churches are safe havens from squabbles by remembering what a church is for.

O Lord, help us to turn aside

From words that spring from selfish pride,

For You would have Your children one

In praise and love for Your dear Son. —D. De Haan

Christians at war with each other cannot be at peace with their heavenly Father.

Lead Them To Jesus

January 23, 2006

Lead Them To Jesus

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:4-8 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 7-8; Matthew 15:1-20

When one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? —1 Corinthians 3:4

Over the years of working with Sports Spectrum magazine, I’ve heard many stories about athletes and the help they receive from spiritual mentors. That relationship is usually helpful, but occasionally it seems that the athlete is not guided toward the true source of divine power.

I interview many athletes who illustrate this point. When I say, “Tell me about your faith,” they reply, “Our chaplain really helps us. We know that we can go to him with anything. He is always there for us. We really believe in the chaplain.”

I’m glad that the chaplain is there for them, but I’m sad that the name of Jesus is seldom mentioned. It seems that their focus is on the human helper and that their true source of power, Jesus, is being ignored.

We must remember not to let our devotion to a leader replace our devotion to Christ. Paul reminded us that “neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7). Too often, we put our focus on the leader and not on the One the leader is following.

Are you a leader? Teach people to follow the Savior, not you the servant. Are you a follower? Follow only those who point toward Jesus-not themselves.

They truly lead who lead by love

And humbly serve the Lord;

Their lives will bear the Spirit's fruit

And magnify His Word. -D. De Haan

Looking for a leader? Follow the Lord.

Doing What We Can

October 5, 2006

Doing What We Can

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:5-15 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 23-25; Philippians 1

He who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward. —1 Corinthians 3:8

Sometimes we may get discouraged because what we’re doing for the Lord seems unsuccessful. The children in the Sunday school class we teach are restless and inattentive. The neighbors we’re trying to reach with the gospel are politely indifferent. The members of our own family are far from the Lord. The world we lift up to God in fervent intercession grows increasingly violent and anti-Christian. All of this can add up to deep soul-discouragement.

Listen to the words of a Salvadoran clergyman who was murdered for his fearless denunciation of violence and injustice. He wrote: “We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development… We cannot do everything, and there’s a sense of liberation in realizing that.” This attitude helps us to do small things and to leave “an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.”

That agrees with the apostle Paul’s encouragement to be faithful in our tasks and to wait on God who “gives the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

Don’t allow discouragement to cause you to quit. In God’s own time our work will bear fruit.

Go, labor on, spend, and be spent,

Thy joy to do Thy Father's will;

It is the way the Master went;

Should not the servant tread it still? —Bonar

You are a success in God's kingdom if you are faithful where He has placed you.

Consumer Mentality

August 20, 2007

Consumer Mentality

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:5-15 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 105-106; 1 Corinthians 3

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. —1 Corinthians 3:14

I like to read, and I enjoy buying books. But I don't like it when publishers refer to me as a "consumer." The word consume can mean "do away with completely" or "spend wastefully." It brings to mind forest fires that devour acre after acre of vegetation, leaving behind only scorched remnants of trees and homes. When we read books, we don't consume them in that sense, for they don't cease to exist after we've used them. In fact, quite the opposite is true. They become a part of us; they change us.

This is especially true of the Bible. When the words of Scripture remain in us, they keep us from taking the destructive way of sin (Ps. 119:11). Jesus said that when His words abide in us, we will bear much fruit (John 15:5-8). In other words, we will be creators, not consumers; givers, not takers.

The apostle Paul referred to Christians as "God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9), who are to build things that cannot be consumed in the fire of God's judgment of their works (vv.13-15). Later he urged readers to excel in gifts that build up the church (14:12).

As Christians, let's be known not for the goods we consume but for the good fruit we produce.

Thinking It Over

Why does God give us spiritual gifts? (Eph. 4:11-13).

On what are we to build our works? (1 Cor. 3:10-11).

What is the result of work that will last? (1 Cor. 3:14).

A selfless life reaps an eternal harvest.

Ash-Heap Christians

September 25, 2011

Ash-Heap Christians

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:5-15 | Bible in a Year: Song of Solomon 6-8; Galatians 4

Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it … the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. —1 Corinthians 3:13

Someone once asked me why she should be like Jesus now since she would become like Him when she got to heaven (1 John 3:1-3). Great question! Especially when it's easier to just be yourself.

Actually, there are several reasons why becoming like Him now is important, but one is near the top. When we see and stand before Him, we will give an account as to whether or not we lived in ways that were consistent with His will. Or, as Paul put it, whether or not we have built on Him as our foundation with "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, [or] straw" (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

All that we do to advance His kingdom—things like contribute to the strength of His church, serve the poor and needy, and promote righteousness and justice as He did—is like building with essential materials that will survive the fire of His judgment. On the contrary, building with things that reflect our fallen ways, and living to advance ourselves and our earthly desires are commodities that will turn into a pile of ashes before the consuming fire of His glory.

I don’t know about you, but I’d rather love Jesus enough to live like Him now, for the thought of standing before Him in a heap of ashes is an unthinkable alternative.

Father, thank You for the Spirit,

Fill us with His love and power;

Change us into Christ’s own image

Day by day and hour by hour. —Anon.

Build your life with commodities that will stand the test of God’s judgment.

Who's The Builder Of Your House?

June 16, 1998

Who's The Builder Of Your House?

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:5-23 | Bible in a Year: Nehemiah 4-6; Acts 2:22-47

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. —Psalm 127:1

The S. C. Johnson & Son Building in Racine, Wisconsin, has been labeled “the greatest piece of 20th-century architecture in America.” Its magnificent half-acre “Great Workroom” has a 3-story skylighted ceiling that produces an ever-shifting interplay of light and shadows.

Despite its placement on the National Register of Historic Buildings, the Johnson Building is far from an ideal workplace. The same glass tubes that produce stunning light effects also serve as unintended mousetraps. The Great Workroom is so cavernous that employees can hear conversations 100 feet away. Water leaks through the expansive flat roof, and condensation drips from the glass tubes.

Could we be building a “house” that looks terrific but is flawed and totally impractical? We’re doing just that with our life if we are building it according to our own ideas instead of God’s Word. Our skewed sense of morality lays a crooked foundation. Our neglect of our spiritual life allows our house to fall into disrepair. Our self-centeredness leaves gaping holes for the enemy to creep through.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps. 127:1). Let Him build the house of your life, and you’ll be sure it’s built right!

For Further Study

Who is the believer's foundation? (1 Cor. 3:11).

How are we to build on that foundation? (vv.10,12-13).

What do we gain by doing so? (v.14).

With God as the Architect and His Word the blueprint, your life will be built on a sure foundation.

Our Awesome Responsibility

August 19, 2000

Our Awesome Responsibility

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:6-4:5 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 103-104; 1 Corinthians 2

It is required in stewards that one be found faithful. —1 Corinthians 4:2

What activity, what confusion surrounds us day after day! And we ourselves are busily carrying out plans and projects. In the midst of all this, the Lord is also at work. He’s building His church, extending His kingdom of grace and love, moving history to its God-honoring goal.

In all of His activity, the Lord is seeking to bring people into a love relationship with Himself. But love can’t be mechanically coerced. It must be freely offered from the heart. God doesn’t get people to love Him by proclaiming ear-splitting messages as if He were using a supernatural loudspeaker. He doesn’t dispatch angels to astound unbelievers all around the globe. He doesn’t fill the sky

with spectacular signs.

The Lord wants the free trust and grateful love of men and women, boys and girls. So He works through believers as we obey the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and build our lives on a relationship with Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-23). It's through your life and mine, through our dedicated talents, through our personal witness and united ministry that God is winning the trust and obedience of lost people everywhere.

What an honor to be God's co-laborers—and what a big responsibility to be faithful stewards! (1 Corinthians 4:2).

We know that millions haven't heard

About God's only Son,

So we must witness where we are

And tell them one by one. —Sper

We must go to sinners if we expect sinners to come to the Savior.

Our Work Matters

May 28, 2002

Our Work Matters

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:7-15 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 4-6; John 10:24-42

We are God's fellow workers. —1 Corinthians 3:9

One of the world's greatest architects, Sir Christopher Wren, undertook the task of helping to rebuild London after it had been nearly destroyed by fire in 1666. One day he visited the site where a large church building was under construction. He called out to a laborer perched high on a scaffold, "What are you doing up there?" With pride that man called back, "I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build a cathedral!"

That was not an empty boast, for without the help of unnamed workers, Wren could not have constructed any of his impressive structures. The beautiful churches are as much a memorial to the workers as to Wren.

Do you ever feel that what you're doing in life is boringly humdrum and unimportant? Most of us probably feel as if we're on that sort of treadmill. And it's hard at times to keep in mind that as we serve Christ, "we are God's fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9), assisting Him in the building of His church (vv.10-11; Matthew 16:18). But no matter what our job or task in life, as we are faithful to the Lord in the use of our time, talents, and gifts, we are helping Him to build.

Praise God for the privilege of working alongside of Him. For with the Lord, our work matters! —VCG

We need each other as we serve the Lord,

With all the workers equal to their tasks;

No matter if the jobs are large or small—

Our faithfulness is all the Savior asks. —Hess

In God's symphony of service, every part is important.

Fellow Workers

January 27, 2006

Fellow Workers

Read: Exodus 17:1-6 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 16-18; Matthew 18:1-20

We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. —1 Corinthians 3:9

When it came time for Moses to strike the rock in the desert to get water for the thirsty Israelites, his part was very small-just strike the rock. Anyone in Israel could have done it. The main thing was what God was doing in the heart of the earth to provide a bountiful river of water.

But the two worked together: Moses before the people; God in the hidden depths of the earth. Moses and God were fellow workers.

There are always two agents in every fruitful work: willing workers and a faithful God. The human part is to do whatever God has asked us to do-strike the rock. God's work is to make the water flow.

Was Moses weighed down with anxiety that day as he approached the rock, thinking that he might fail? I doubt it. He had only to follow the Lord in obedience. God had promised to do the rest. And Moses had seen God work mighty miracles in the past.

Are you anxious about the task God has given you to do today? Do you believe that everything depends on you? Just strike the rock. God is working in secret to pour out rivers of water for every man, woman, and child. And when living waters begin to flow, praise Him.

Just do your part and He'll do His.

As a fellow worker with the Lord,

Do the work He's given you today;

You will find His blessings all outpoured-

He will do His part if you obey. -Hess

"Apart from Me, you can do nothing." -Jesus

We Have Work To Do

May 11, 2001

We Have Work To Do

Read: Ephesians 2:8-10 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 13-14; John 2

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand. —Ephesians 2:10

When you love someone deeply, you long to share in a common purpose. In a similar way, your heavenly Father loves you and yearns for your willing participation in His glorious purposes. Of course, no one is indispensable to God, but His destiny for each of our lives cannot be fulfilled without our active cooperation.

We are sometimes reluctant to emphasize this fact. We freely quote Ephesians 2:8-9, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." But not wishing to sound contradictory nor to appear boastful, we stop there and avoid verse 10 about "good works." Yet Paul's meaning is clear—although we're not saved by good works, we are saved for good works.

Mysterious as it is, God has planned our good works in advance, so that as we fulfill them "we are God's fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9). The great maker of the Stradivarius violin rightly said of God: "He could not make Antonio Stradivari violins without Antonio."

God has chosen to bless others uniquely through you, and you can do what no one else can do. But when He does use you, be careful to give Him all the glory.

When we are partners with the Lord,

Our work is not in vain;

Eternal blessings will abound—

His good will be our gain. —Sper

Faith never stands around with its hands in its pockets.

Worthy Of Reward

February 21, 1999

Worthy Of Reward

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 1-3; Mark 3

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. —1 Corinthians 3:14

A co-worker told me about taking a walk near his home and noticing this imprint on a number of sidewalk slabs: “A. Anderson, 1903.” That name and the date were indelibly inscribed in the concrete, indicating the year it had been poured and identifying the man who did the work.

If that contractor were still living, he could certainly be proud of his work. The concrete had not cracked in all those years. It had stood the test of time and had brought no shame to A. Anderson, the man whose reputation was attached to the workmanship.

As Christians, everything we do bears our name. Someday, depending on whether our works pass or fail the test, we will either receive praise and reward (1 Cor. 3:14) or experience regret and loss (v.15). How can we make certain that our service for Christ is the kind that endures? The way to be sure we are building for eternity is to build on the foundation of Christ (v.11) and to “do all things through Christ who strengthens [us]” (Phil. 4:13).

As you serve the Lord today, remember this important fact: The work that is worthy of reward is the work that endures.

Press on in your service for Jesus,

Spurred on by your love for the Lord;

He promised that if you are faithful,

One day you'll receive your reward. —Fasick

Salvation depends on what Christ did for us; rewards depend on what we do for Him.

Work That Won't Burn

January 6, 1998

Work That Won't Burn

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 16-17; Matthew 5:27-48

The fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. —1 Corinthians 3:13

My father-in-law spent 30 years helping people in the public health field. When he went to heaven at the age of 76, he left a closet full of files and a wall full of awards.

When it came time for us to clean out his “work” closet, the family pictures and a few mementos were kept, and all the rest had to go. I got the job of disposing of it. I hauled it up past the barn into an open field, doused it with diesel fuel, and set it on fire—old project files, slide presentations, plaques of appreciation, correspondence, everything—and I watched it burn.

It was a sobering experience as I thought that someday when I stand before God, all my “work” will meet the same test. Only what survives the fire has eternal value.

Watching letters and proposals turn to ashes gave me a new understanding of 1 Corinthians 3:13. Paul said, “Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.”

Today the work. Tomorrow the fire.

That afternoon in the pasture made me more careful, more thoughtful, about my fleeting opportunities to do work that won’t burn.

To know our works will all be judged

Should give us deep concern:

But if for Christ our works are done,

Then they'll endure—not burn. —Hess

Live today as if you will stand before God tomorrow.

God's Building Program

March 2, 1997

God's Building Program

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 26-27; Mark 8:1-21

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

Some architects and builders have contributed magnificent beauty to the world. Others have created wretched ugliness. The noted architect Frank Lloyd Wright commented, “The physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his clients to plant vines. So architects should go as far as possible from home to build their first buildings.”

The apostle Paul wrote the manual on church building programs. To the church in Corinth he wrote, “You are God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9). He was not referring to the place but to the people themselves. Their church began when Paul laid the foundation—the truth about Christ. Then he urged the Corinthians to consider carefully how they would build on that foundation.

What we as believers build on the foundation will be tested by fire—not the fire of punishment for sin, which is hell, but the fire of judgment, which is disclosure (1 Cor. 3:15). Everyone without Christ will be punished, but every Christian will be judged for his works. The fire of judgment will reveal what was God-honoring and what was not. Good doctrine and righteous living are the solid stuff that will last. Everything else will go up in flames.

Are you building for eternity?

The day will come when we will stand

Before our Judge, God's Son;

Have we so lived that He will say,

"Well done, My child, well done"? —Sper

Christ's judgment will reveal, reject, and reward.

God's Tool Kit

May 7, 2001

God's Tool Kit

Read: 2 Timothy 3:13-17 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 1-3; Luke 24:1-35

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, … that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. —2 Timothy 3:16-17

A friend of mine is a gifted handyman, but for years he was unable to develop his gifts. The reason was simple: He lacked the right tools. So for his birthday I gave him a tool kit that opens like a large book, containing the basic tools a handyman needs. As he examined each tool, his eyes shone with anticipation.

After completing his next job, my friend told me excitedly, “There’s nothing more satisfying than having the right tools for the job.” Then, applying that thought to his spiritual life, he added, “I know where I can find the right tool for every job—in the Bible!”

The apostle Paul, a tentmaker by trade and a “master builder” in God’s kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:10), knew he needed the right spiritual tools. He understood that the most practical tool kit for meeting spiritual needs is the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3, he declared that all Scripture is God-inspired (v.16). It’s indispensable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training, and equipping believers for every good work.

Open and use God’s “tool kit” every day. Experience the deep satisfaction of finding in it the right tool for each spiritual task you have to do. It’s the tool kit that has all you need. Just use it!

You cannot be successful as a worker

Unless you have the tools to fit your trade;

And you cannot be effective as God's servant

Until God's holy Word you have surveyed. —Hess

The Bible has all we need to know, so we can do all God wants us to do.

A Place To Stand

August 4, 2008

A Place To Stand

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 66-67; Romans 7

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

While taking a break during a ministry trip, we were snorkeling in the Caribbean Sea. The boat that had taken us to the deep water for better sites had gone back to shore, and I began to feel panicky about being in the open water. Finding it hard to control my breathing, I asked my son-in-law Todd and a friend, Dave Velzen, for help. They held my arms while I searched for an outcropping of coral close enough to the surface for me to stand on. Once I had a place to stand, even though surrounded by deep waters, I was okay.

Are you feeling a bit panicky about events in your life? Maybe it seems as if you are surrounded by the open waters of relationship problems, or money woes, or simply an inability to put your life in order. Perhaps you feel as if you are drowning in a sea of trials and trouble.

May I suggest two things? First, find a fellow Christian or two who can come beside you and hold you up (see Eccl. 4:10), pray for you, talk with you, and remind you that you are not alone. Then rest your feet on the only solid foundation in life: Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

Life's troubles are too tough to take on alone. Get some help and find in Jesus a place to stand.

God often meets our deepest need

With help we gain from others,

From caring members of His church—

Our sisters and our brothers. —Brown

Build your life on the solid foundation—Jesus Christ.

The Right Stuff

July 8, 2007

The Right Stuff

Read: Galatians 1:6-12 | Bible in a Year: Job 36-37; Acts 15:22-41

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

David, I missed you in class today," I told one of my college students when we ran into each other in the Information Services office. He gave me that stunned "freshman in the first week of college" look, and then it struck him—he had misread his schedule and had gone to the wrong class.

The funny thing was, there were two grammar labs—mine, and another professor's—and he had attended the wrong one. I told him, "That's okay. You were getting the right information, so I won't count you absent."

As I thought about it, I concluded that this is a little like the options many Christians have regarding the churches they attend. The key factor is to attend a church where the right information is shared—where salvation through Jesus Christ is preached (1 Cor. 15:3-5), where the Bible is the standard for faith and practice, and where an opportunity to serve in Jesus' name is provided. It's important that the message proclaims the true gospel and the historical message of Jesus—not a "different gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). It's not the messenger that's most important; it's the message.

What "gospel" are you hearing? Is it built on the foundation of Jesus Christ? (1 Cor. 3:11).

A guilty sinner needs to hear

The simple gospel true and clear

That tells how Jesus bled and died,

And for man's sin was crucified. —D. De Haan

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our Foundation

August 20, 2014

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 105-106; 1 Corinthians 3

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

The Bavarian city of Nördlingen is unique. It sits in the middle of the Ries Crater, a large circular depression caused by the impact of a huge meteorite a long time ago. The immense pressure of the impact resulted in unusual crystallized rock and millions of microscopic diamonds. In the 13th century, these speckled stones were used to build St. George's Church. Visitors can see the beautiful crystal deposits in its foundation and walls. Some might say it has a heavenly foundation.

The Bible talks of a different kind of heavenly foundation. The Lord Jesus came to our world from heaven (John 3:13). When He went back into heaven after His death and resurrection, He left His followers who became the "living temple" of God, of which He is the foundation. The apostle Paul says, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

The church building in Bavaria is built on a foundation from pieces of rock from the physical heavens. But the spiritual church—all believers in Christ—is founded on the ultimate heavenly foundation, Christ Jesus (Isa. 28:16; 1 Cor. 10:3-4). Praise God that because of what Jesus has done our salvation is secure.

On Christ salvation rests secure;

The Rock of Ages will endure;

Nor can that faith be overthrown

Which rests upon the "Living Stone." —Anon.

Christ, the Rock, is our sure hope.

A Rock-Solid Foundation

August 17, 2004

A Rock-Solid Foundation

Read: Matthew 7:21-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 97-99; Romans 16

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

As Christians we can become so preoccupied with our earthly affairs that we shift our confidence from Jesus Christ to faith in our own intellect. Then something happens to shake the foundation on which we had been building.

Phillip E. Johnson, a gifted lawyer and primary spokesman for the Intelligent Design movement, suffered a stroke and was likely to have another. Plagued by frightening thoughts during those first few days after his stroke, he was profoundly touched when a friend came and sang, "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand—all other ground is sinking sand."

Johnson writes, "What was the solid rock on which I stood? I had always prided myself on being self-reliant, and my brain was what I had relied on. Now the self with its brain was exposed as the shaky instrument it had always been. I was a Christian, even an ardent one in my worldly fashion, but now all the smoke was blown away, and I saw Truth close up." He resolved to keep Jesus at the center of his life and is now a different man.

How quickly we rely on our intellect and reasoning, only to find that it is a "shaky instrument." Let's never forget that Jesus is the only rock-solid foundation of truth on which we can always depend.

My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus' name. —Mote

Build your life on the solid foundation—Jesus Christ.

Building to Code

March 2, 1994

Building to Code

Read: Matthew 7:21-29 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 26-27; Mark 8:1-21

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

In 1992, Hurricane Andrew destroyed thousands of homes in South Florida. Yet in an area where the wreckage looked like a war zone, one house remained standing, still firmly anchored to its foundation.

When a reporter asked the homeowner why his house had not been blown away, he replied, “I built this house myself. I also built it according to the Florida state building code. When the code called for 2″ x 6″ roof trusses, I used 2″ x 6″ roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane— and it did.”

Jesus talked about the importance of building our lives on a solid foundation. He said that the person who obeys His Word is like “a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24). If we build according to His code of obedience, we will not be swept away when crises hit with hurricane-like force. The tempests of temptation and the storms of suffering will not be able to sweep us off a solid foundation of faith and obedience. Adversity may come, yet because we have built according to the code of the unshakable Rock, Jesus Christ, we can emerge with our character strengthened.

Are we building our lives according to Jesus’ code?

Living for the Lord, serving Him each day,

Best prepares the soul for the stormy way;

Then as trials come, tempting to despair,

We can rest secure, safe within His care. —DJD

The storms of our life prove the strength of our anchor.

Flying Solo

September 13, 2012

Flying Solo

Read: John 14:15-27 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 31-33

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? —1 Corinthians 3:16

May 20-21, 1927, marked a turning point in aviation history as Charles Lindbergh made the first-ever solo, nonstop, trans-Atlantic flight. There had been other flights across the Atlantic, but none were accomplished by a pilot flying alone. It was a historic achievement. When Lindbergh landed at Le Bourget Field in Paris, he was thronged by thousands of admirers applauding his success. And when he returned to America, he was further honored with parades and awards in celebration of his individualistic courage and spirit.

Even though Lindbergh’s solo flight was dangerous, living in this fallen world of ours can be far more so. Followers of Christ, however, can be encouraged and comforted that we never have to “fly solo.” The night before His crucifixion, Jesus promised that He would not abandon us but would send His Spirit to be with us and in us (John 14:16-17). The apostle Paul later affirmed this, saying, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

In a world filled with despair and trouble, we can take courage. The Holy Spirit lives within us, providing us with His peace and comfort (John 14:26-27). Aren’t you thankful that you never have to fly solo?

Father, allow me today to rest in You, to walk with

Your Son, and to lean on Your Spirit.

Thank You for Your never-failing presence,

helping me in all the challenges of life. Amen.

The Spirit within us guarantees that we're never alone.

Your Biography

May 11, 2006

Your Biography

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 13-14; John 2

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. —2 Timothy 4:7

When D. L. Moody was moving into old age, he was asked to grant permission for his biography. Moody refused, saying, "A man's life should never be written while he is living. What is important is how a man ends, not how he begins."

For better or worse, I have failed to follow that dictum. My biography has been published. Yet I agree with Moody that the way our lives end is the crucial test of authentic discipleship. Only if we remain in a steadfast relationship with the Savior can we be confident not merely of entering heaven, but of obtaining the victor's crown (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Paul was concerned about the possibility of being disapproved by his Lord (v.27). He was a redeemed believer who was serving the Lord, yet he feared that his service might prove to be wood, hay, and straw rather than gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

What will be the Lord's appraisal of our lives? Will someone evaluating us be able to say honestly that we continued to bear fruit in old age? (Psalm 92:14). Whatever vocation we pursue, with the help of the Holy Spirit we may be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

For the ignorant, old age is as winter; for the learned, it is a harvest. —Jewish proverb

Guard Your Focus

May 20, 2015

Guard Your Focus

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 10-12; John 6:45-71

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. —Hebrews 12:2

"That's my disciple," I once heard a woman say about someone she was helping. As followers of Christ we are all tasked with making disciples—sharing the good news of Christ with people and helping them grow spiritually. But it can be easy to focus on ourselves instead of Jesus.

The apostle Paul was concerned that the Corinthian church was losing its focus on Christ. The two best-known preachers in those days were Paul and Apollos. The church was divided: "I follow Paul." "Well, I follow Apollos!" They had begun focusing on the wrong person, following the teachers rather than the Savior. But Paul corrected them. We are "God's fellow workers." It doesn't matter who plants and who waters, for only God can give the growth. Christians are "God's field, God's building" (1 Cor. 3:6-9). The Corinthian believers didn't belong to Paul nor to Apollos.

Jesus tells us to go and make disciples and to teach them about Him (Matt. 28:20). And the author of the book of Hebrews reminds us to focus on the Author and Finisher of our faith (12:2). Christ will be honored when we focus on Him; He is superior to any human being and He will meet our needs.

Father, I confess that it is easy to shift my focus from You to less important things. Thank You for putting people in my life that help point me to You. Help me point others to You in a way that makes You more and me less.

Put Jesus first.

A White Stone

May 11, 2005

A White Stone

Read: Revelation 2:12-17 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 13-14; John 2

I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. —Revelation 2:17

Our Lord's message to the church at Pergamum has a curious reference to "a new name" written on "a white stone" (Revelation 2:17). What could this mean?

There are two plausible explanations. In an ancient court of law, when defendants were condemned, they received a black stone with their name on it. If they were acquitted, they received a white stone. Similarly, those who have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation will receive an acquittal from the judgment of God. What a relief it is to know that our sins are forgiven!

Another explanation comes from the ancient olympic games. When athletes won, they were awarded a white stone, which was a token of honor.

Together, these illustrations show us the wonderful balance of the Christian life. We are saved by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet obedient Christians often struggle as they seek to serve the One who saved them. One explanation of the white stone is a picture of unearned acquittal. The other shows that we will be rewarded for acts of good works (1 Corinthians 3:13-14).

Trusting Christ for salvation gives us a new identity. It's like receiving a new name written on a white stone, which shows that we are forgiven—completely.

We're saved by grace through faith alone,

Good works can have no part;

But God rewards each loving deed

That's done with all our heart. —D. De Haan

Jesus removes our sin and rewards our service.

1 Corinthians 4

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

A PERSIAN king wanted to teach his four sons never to make rash judgments. So he told the eldest to go in winter to see a mango tree, the next to go in spring, the third in summer, and the youngest in the fall. After the last son returned from his autumn visit, the king called them together to describe what they had observed. "It looks like a burnt old stump," said the eldest. "No," said the second, "it is lacy green."

The third described it as "beautiful as a rose." The youngest said, "No, its fruit is like a pear." "Each is right," said the king, "for each of you saw the tree in a different season."

How often we forget that brothers and sisters in faith are not all alike; they are at different stages of spiritual growth. Conversion to Christ is just the beginning. Spiritual maturity requires a lifetime of replacing old thoughts, attitudes, habits, and actions with new ones created by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

To avoid making unfair and unfounded conclusions about people, we need to realize that each one of us is a work in progress. To judge prematurely is to judge wrongly. When we take the time to get to know people, understand them, learn their back-grounds, and find out what season of spiritual development they are in, we will be less hasty in our judgments and more kind in our attitudes and actions. God sees the whole picture, and He never draws hasty conclusions. Neither should we. —D J DeHaan

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. - 1 Corinthians 4:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

An estimated 26 percent of Americans now choose to be cremated rather than buried in a coffin—and, according to ABC News columnist Buck Wolf, there are a growing number of offbeat options for what to do with the ashes. They can be mixed with fireworks and shot off as part of the funeral service. They can be scattered from a high-altitude balloon. They can be compressed into synthetic diamonds, mixed into an artificial coral reef, shot into orbit, or, of course, kept in a traditional urn.

People are apparently desperate to give meaning to their lives in the face of death. For believers, however, death holds no sting (1 Cor. 15:51-57). Our goal at the end of the day is not to make a “dramatic exit,” but to be found faithful (v. 2). In today's reading, Paul referred especially to apostles and church leaders as stewards of the gospel (v. 1), but this foundational principle of stewardship is the same for all of us.

In the end, human judgment of our life's endeavors has no value; only God's opinion matters (vv. 3-4). Paul didn't worry about human verdicts on his leadership skills or ministry success, and he didn't make his own opinion primary either. His conscience was clean—but conscience is fallible. Only God is wise and perfect, so only His evaluation matters. Paul was no individualist, marching to his own drumbeat, but rather a man called of God. He knew the proper authority who deserved our submission and who would not be distracted by lesser tribunals.

From this perspective, our assessments of value and success are tentative (v. 5). God alone can render final judgment. Only He sees all and knows all (Heb. 4:13). A day of accountability is coming when all words, thoughts, actions, motives, and consequences will be revealed. This is a positive truth—faithful believers can look forward to God's “praise” or “commendation” (esv) for a life well lived in Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today take some time to make a list of all that you steward. For what items or resources has God given you responsibility? These should be things that can be spent or used in one way or another. Things over which you hold a significant decision-making authority on when, how, and why to use them. Money and time are two large examples, of course, but examine your life for other resources as well. Make your list as specific as possible. It will help you apply the themes and principles of our month's study.

1 Corinthians 4:1–7

Today in the Word

This year, Toyota executives have been called before congressional panels to answer questions regarding the safety of their vehicles. Reports of unintended acceleration (and injuries and death) have obviously alarmed the general public, and these executives were called to give an account for their products.

All of us are accountable to someone. If we work for a company, we’re accountable to our boss. When working for the government, we’re accountable to the taxpayer. But as servants of the Christ, we’re accountable to the Lord. Paul makes the case that neither he nor any other apostle can or should be judged by the Corinthians. Later in the letter, we learn that the Corinthians were in fact second–guessing his authority and performance as an apostle (cf. 9:3). But Paul dismissed their criticism by explaining that he and the other apostles have been appointed by God and are ultimately accountable to God. No other judgment but God’s matters. The Corinthians, who think they are so wise, are not in a position to judge Paul, and Paul certainly doesn’t make it his goal to please them or curry their favor. The tone of the letter and the force of his criticisms are evidence enough of that.

Paul even disqualifies himself from the task of judging his own heart. Though his conscience is clear, he does not presume to be the final word in his own judgment. When Christ returns, He will judge. He is the arbiter of what is true. He can evaluate the motives of our hearts. And He is the only one whose commendation matters.

Again and again, Paul deals a blow to human pride and arrogance. Our ability to judge the hearts of others—even to judge our own motives completely—is flawed. Everything we have, we’ve been given by God. There is no reason for boasting of the privileges and gifts we’ve received. And there cannot be boasting before the Lord’s return, for only then will we finally know the truth of the content of our character, our conduct, and our service.

Apply the Word

This passage teaches us never to presume that we are fully blameless in any given situation. We can rationally analyze any situation and deduce that our methods and motives have been pure. But the truth is that we cannot with certainty understand ourselves. There are unexplored places in our hearts and minds we do not know. Peter was an example of this. “Lord, I will die with you!” he declared emphatically when only a short time later, he denied the Lord three times. Pray the words of Psalm 139:23–24 and trust God to be the judge.

1 Corinthians 4:8–20

Today in the Word

In A.D. 155, Polycarp, the 86–year–old Christian bishop of Smyrna, was brought into the city arena where the Roman governor demanded he swear allegiance to Caesar. The crowd murderously chanted, “Death to the godless! Death to Polycarp!” Refusing to renounce Christ, Polycarp was tied to the stake, and the straw and wood kindling were doused with oil and the fire lit.

Many Christians still suffer violent persecution across the globe, and the possibility of martyrdom was real for apostles like Paul, who suffered innumerable hardships. Commitment to Christ and missionary work cost them material comfort and personal reputation. Hunger, thirst, homelessness, public ridicule—these followers paid a high price for faith in Jesus.

Contrasted with the willingness of the apostles to suffer hardship for the gospel is the Corinthians’ attitude of entitlement. They saw themselves as meriting the treatment of kings! We’ve already seen how the Corinthians had been lured into the corrupt and godless value system of the culture around them. They prized the wisdom of the world rather than the Cross. And because they saw themselves as already possessing this worldly wisdom, it had only served to inflate their self–regard. In fact, Paul notes that they are so self–satisfied that they have no hunger for the things of God (v. 8). Paul had to challenge such arrogance, and he does so by holding up as example the suffering of the apostles.

If God had meant for each of His followers to achieve the stature of kings and queens, why had He subjected the apostles to such public humiliation? In verse nine, God is compared to a victorious Roman general who parades triumphantly after battle through the city, His enemies trailing behind Him in procession. Surprisingly, those at the end of the procession aren’t the enemies of God. They are the apostles themselves! No special, privileged treatment is reserved for the apostles. Instead, they are humiliated in the worst kind of way, having become “the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world” (v. 13).

Apply the Word

What demands have we put on God? Do we believe that we deserve certain things from Him or that we should be exempt from hardship? Would we rather be content with the trappings of the world’s comfort and success than eagerly pursue the kingdom of God? The suffering of the apostles proves that while God is certainly good and faithful, bad things can happen to His people. In fact, the Bible promises suffering to those who want to follow Christ faithfully (2 Tim. 3:12). Our hope is that God’s strength is made perfect when we are most weak.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:5

According to a legend, a desert wanderer found a crystal spring of unsurpassed freshness. The water was so pure that he decided to bring some to his king. He filled a leather bottle with the water and carried it many days beneath the desert sun to the palace.

When he finally laid his offering at the feet of his sovereign, the water had become stale in the old container. But the king would not let his faithful subject even imagine it was unfit for use. He tasted it with expressions of gratitude and delight, and the loyal man left with a happy heart.

After he had gone, others sampled the water and expressed their surprise that the king had pretended to enjoy it. "Ah," said he, "it was not the water I tasted, but the love that prompted the offering."

Our service may be marked by many imperfections, but the Master looks at our motives. He rejoices in our loyal actions, no matter what others may think. —H. G. B.

WHAT IS DONE FOR CHRIST NOW WILL BE REWARDED IN ETERNITY.

1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 3:1-13

My way of life in Christ Jesus … agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. - 1 Corinthians 4:17

“Do as I say, not as I do,” is one of the worst kinds of parenting. Children left with no clear example to follow don't know what to do or who to be! The angry retort of a child infuriated by his parents' hypocrisy is: “Practice what you preach!”

The example of leaders is powerful in the church, whether for good or for bad. When leaders make bad choices, churches are deeply wounded by their hypocrisy, sometimes even causing people to doubt the gospel. But when leaders make good choices and lead exemplary lives, this inspires all those watching. That's why the issue of personal conduct is the root of many of these qualifications for overseers and deacons. Surprisingly, this list in 1 Timothy has little to say about what leaders should believe. But it has much to say about how they should live. While it's often easy to assert what we believe, it's much harder to prove it by our actions.

Our Desire for Praise

April 5, 1994

Our Desire for Praise

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 1-3; Luke 8:26-56

Many believed in Him, but … they did not confess Him, … for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. —John 12:42-43

Children enjoy being commended by parents, teachers, and others in authority. I saw this recently on the faces of boys and girls who were being publicly honored for their accomplishments in a youth program.

Even adults like to receive the approval of people they respect. This built-in desire for praise is not wrong. Honest commendation can be very encouraging and can bring out the best in us. And the Bible tells us to look forward to the day when we will receive praise from God (1 Cor. 4:5). The problem, however, is that we often place more value on applause we receive from people in this life than on praise from God in the life to come.

A teenage boy is on drugs today because he wanted to be accepted by a group of his peers he considered “cool.” Another young man admitted that he exaggerates about his relationship with girls because he thinks it makes him appear macho to the men with whom he works. Both of these fellows made the same mistake as those first-century believers who “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43).

Lord, help us to take the long-range view and want Your praise more than the praise of people.

May everything we do

By word or deed or story

Be done to please the Lord—

To Him be all the glory. —Roworth

Living for God’s approval is better than living for man’s applause.

Color Courage

September 29, 2013

Color Courage

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:10-17 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 7-8; Ephesians 2

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

A radio ad for watches suggests that listeners buy a watch with a bright color band and then wear it with clothes of other colors. When people notice your watch because of its contrasting color, the ad says, “They’ll see that you have ‘color courage.’ And they’ll want to be like you.” Something in us enjoys having others follow our example.

If you do a quick reading of 1 Corinthians 4, you might think the apostle Paul sounds a bit boastful when he says to follow his example of self-sacrifice (v.16). But a closer look at Paul’s words shows why he wrote so confidently. He could ask people to imitate him because he imitated Christ (11:1), the greatest Servant of all.

The persecution he endured and the position he held in the church (4:10-17) all happened because Paul followed Jesus. When he mentioned that even if the Corinthians had 10,000 teachers he would still be their father in the faith (v.15), he was acknowledging that Jesus is the only reason people could trust his teaching.

If we want people to imitate us, we must first imitate our Lord. If we have any reason for people to follow our example—if we have any courage to point others to the Savior—it is because of Him, not us.

Joyfully following Jesus the Lord

And trusting His lead every day

Makes us examples that others can see

To follow when trials come their way. —Sper

Others should imitate us only as far as we imitate Christ.

Home At Last

December 18, 2002

Home At Last

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Obadiah; Revelation 9

Each one's praise will come from God. —1 Corinthians 4:5

An elderly missionary couple who had served God for 50 years in a remote African village returned to the United States for a well-earned retirement. When they arrived, however, no one was there to greet them because of some confusion at the mission office. They had no one to help them with their suitcases and trunks, and no one to move them into their home. The old gentleman complained to his wife, “We’ve come home after all these years and there’s no one who cares.”

The man’s bitterness grew as they settled into their new home. His wife, a bit fed up with his complaining, suggested that he take up the matter with God. So the man went to his bedroom and spent time in prayer. When he came out he had a new look on his face, which prompted his wife to ask what had happened.

“Well,” he replied, “I told God that I’ve come home and no one cares.” “And what did God say?” she asked. “He said, ‘You’re not home yet.’”

You too may serve for years in a place where no one notices you or cares what you’ve done. But God sees and cares. One day, when we reach our eternal home, “each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Corinthians 4:5). In the meantime, let’s be faithful (v.2).

Think not your work of no account

Although it may be small;

The Lord marks well your faithfulness—

He knows you gave your all. —D. De Haan

The world rewards success; God rewards faithfulness!

'Do Your Best!'

July 7, 2002

'Do Your Best!'

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Job 34-35; Acts 15:1-21

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. —Romans 12:6

When Leonardo da Vinci was still a pupil, his elderly, well-known teacher asked him to finish a painting he had begun. Young da Vinci stood in such awe of his master’s skill that at first he respectfully declined. But his teacher would accept no excuse. He simply said, “Do your best.”

Trembling, da Vinci took his brush and began. With each stroke, his hand grew more steady as the genius within him awoke. Soon he was so caught up in his work that he forgot his timidity. When the painting was finished, the frail and weak master was carried into the studio to see it. Embracing his student, he exclaimed, “My son, I paint no more!”

Every Christian has unique God-given abilities. Some believers, however, feel inferior because they don’t have as much talent as others. But we mustn’t think that way. God doesn’t hold us accountable for what we don’t have. He wants us to discover and develop the skills we do have.

Of course, we can’t all be a Leonardo da Vinci. But we don’t have to be. The apostle Paul said, “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). That means doing our best and leaving the results with God. Who knows, we may just surprise ourselves! —RWD

Give of your best to the Master,

Give Him first place in your heart;

Give Him first place in your service,

Consecrate every part. —Grose

The greatest ability is dependability.

Judge Not!

July 16, 2010

Judge Not!

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 16–17 & Acts 20:1-16

Judge not, that you be not judged. —Matthew 7:1

When Jesus commanded, “Judge not,” He was not implying that we should be naïve or imprudent. Of course we need to think critically and analytically in this world where we are often confronted with error and wrongdoing. Instead, He meant that we should not be condemning or accusing, a point Paul made eloquently: “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5).

Poet Robert Burns made a similar point, writing of those whose actions are in doubt: “One point must still be greatly dark—the [motive]. Why they do it.” No one knows another’s motives. God alone can bring to light what is hidden in darkness; He alone can expose the intentions of the heart.

Jesus knows the latent forces that motivate others: the cruel beginnings, the fear, the disappointment, the broken heart, the sin that is resisted. Moreover, He is working in every submissive heart to bring it to maturity. Thus in the end—quite often contrary to our expectations—He will bring praise to those He has brought to completion.

The Lord alone can try the heart. Until He returns, let’s ask Him to help us examine our own.

“Condemn not, judge not”—not to man

Is given his brother’s faults to scan;

One task is yours, and one alone—

To search out and subdue your own. —Elliott

Be slow to judge others, but quick to judge yourself.

Faithfulness Required

April 14, 2004

Faithfulness Required

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5,14-20 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 25-26; Luke 12:32-59

It is required in stewards that one be found faithful. —1 Corinthians 4:2

Much of our attention and praise is directed toward highly visible and successful people. But occasionally we read about an ordinary, obscure person being honored for many years of faithful service. It may be a school custodian, a cafeteria worker, a handyman, or a clerk in a store who has served others in a dependable and unselfish way.

That kind of reliability often goes unnoticed, but I believe it’s a powerful picture of how we are to live. Although consistency may not be flashy, days add up to a life of great significance to God.

Paul wrote, “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). If we live faithfully for Christ, God has promised to reward us at His appointed time. When the Lord comes, He “will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God” (v.5).

When we long for success, God says, “I will reward you.”

When we ache for recognition, God says, “I see you.”

When we are ready to quit, God says, “I will help you.”

Whether our service is public or private, our responsibility is the same—to be faithful.

In all the little things of life,

Yourself, Lord, may I see;

In little and in great alike,

Help me to faithful be! —Anon.

God doesn't ask us to be successful but to be faithful.

Compliments Given Here

September 8, 2008

Compliments Given Here

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 3-5; 2 Corinthians 1

Each one’s praise will come from God. —1 Corinthians 4:5

Artist Tom Greaves knows how to give compliments. He designed a bright red-and-white-striped box for an art exhibit in Washington, DC, called “The Compliment Machine.” As people walk by, the machine dishes out compliments from an internal iPod. It says things like, “Your eyes are beautiful,” “You smell good,” and “People are drawn to your positive energy.”

Greaves won’t say what his motive is for the box, other than that it’s in response to a saccharine culture in which everyone is special and nobody is criticized, regardless of performance.

Everybody loves to hear a compliment now and then; that is, if it’s genuine. It makes us feel good about ourselves to have the approval or admiration of others—for a few minutes at least. The apostle Paul, though, looked at what others thought of him or even what he thought of himself as “a very small thing” (1 Cor. 4:3). He said, “He who judges me is the Lord” (v.4). He knew that one day our hearts will be revealed, and “then each one’s praise will come from God” (v.5).

Could there be any greater compliment than this from our heavenly Father when we meet Him: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:23).

What joy ’twill be to hear Him say,

“Rejoice, My child, well done!

You’ve fought the battles there on earth,

The victor’s crown you’ve won.” —Sherbert

Work well done for Christ will receive a “well done” from Christ.

What Really Matters

July 13, 2002

What Really Matters

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 7-9; Acts 18

He who judges me is the Lord. —1 Corinthians 4:4

In 1985, Frederick Holliday, the superintendent of Cleveland’s public schools, shot himself through the heart with a .357 magnum. In a suicide note he said that although he had achieved great success, he could not tolerate being stripped of his dignity by the unfair and vicious accusations leveled against him by his opponents.

Taking his own life, though, left family and friends heartbroken. I wish that Holliday would have chosen instead to follow the example of the apostle Paul. Although subjected to indignities and insulting accusations, Paul was so conscious of living in the presence of God that His verdict was all that really mattered to him. I am sure the accusations of fellow humans hurt him, and the approval of his own conscience helped him, but his overriding conviction is found in his words, “He who judges me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:4).

Others' unfair opinions of you may be hurting you deeply and causing you to think more unfavorably about yourself than you should. But if you have placed your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, and you're trying to do what is right, don't despair. God, who provided for your salvation and has accepted you as His child, sees you and approves of you. And that is what matters most. —HVL

Thinking It Over

Do you truly believe that pleasing God is what matters the most? How does that affect the way you relate to family members, co-workers, neighbors, strangers?

If you are convinced that God is for you, it doesn't matter who is against you.

Beware Of Warnings

March 20, 1998

Beware Of Warnings

Read: Ezekiel 3:16-21 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 4-6; Luke 1:1-20

As my beloved children I warn you. —1 Corinthians 4:14

Americans are getting warned to death. Manufacturers are growing increasingly wary of being sued when their products are misused, so they are attaching warning labels to hundreds of items.

For example, a Batman outfit bears this caveat: "Parents, please exercise caution—For Play Only. Mask and cape are not protective; cape does not enable user to fly."

So many warnings appear on items sold in our stores, say the experts, that they've lost their effectiveness.

While these kinds of warnings may fall on deaf ears, the Bible points out the importance of heeding God's warnings. Ezekiel's words in chapter 3 make it clear that a warning is vital not only for the person receiving it but also for the person giving it (vv.16-21).

God's words must be taken seriously. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit," we are told (Eph. 4:30). "Abstain from every form of evil," we are reminded (1 Th. 5:22). Jesus warned against adultery and lust (Mt. 5:27-28) and against judging others self-righteously (Mt. 7:1-5).

The Lord who made us knows how we should live. He longs to protect us from danger. Let's make sure we take all of His warnings seriously.

The devil is subtle, deceptive, and sly;

He cleverly tricks us to swallow his lie,

But his cunning methods we're sure to discern

By making God's warnings our daily concern. —DJD

God's warnings are to protect us, not to punish us.

Just Watch

July 11, 2005

Just Watch

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 1-3; Acts 17:1-15

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

The young boy looked up at his grandfather and wondered aloud, "Grandpa, how do you live for Jesus?" The respected grandfather stooped down and quietly told the boy, "Just watch."

As the years went by, the grand-father was an example to the boy of how to follow Jesus. He stayed rock-steady in living for Him. Yet the grandson often lived in a way that was not pleasing to God.

One day the young man visited his grandfather for what both knew would be the last time. As the older man lay dying, his grandson leaned over the bed and heard his grandpa whisper, "Did you watch?"

That was the turning point in the boy's life. He understood that when his grandpa had said, "Just watch," he meant, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). He vowed that from then on he would live as his grandfather did—striving to please Jesus. He had watched, and now he knew how to live.

Is somebody watching you? Are there younger Christians who need to see that it is possible to live for Jesus every day and in every way? Challenge them—and yourself. Challenge them to "just watch." Then show them the way.

Be aware that someone's watching

As you go along your way;

Your example is remembered

More than anything you say. —Hess

There's no better sermon than a good example.

Imitate Me

June 12, 2007

Imitate Me

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:9-17 | Bible in a Year: Ezra 3-5; John 20

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

Andrew Marton recalls the first time he met his future brother-in-law Peter Jennings, who was a top foreign news correspondent in 1977. He said he was so nervous that he acted like "a jittery fan in the presence of a journalistic hero whose personal wattage could light up Manhattan."

Andrew looked up to Peter and tried to emulate him. He became a journalist too and approached his assignments the way Peter did —"he dove in and worked harder than everybody else." Andrew tried to walk like Peter, to dress like him, and to have the same "aura."

We all tend to follow the patterns of others. The Corinthians did too. But they shifted their focus away from Christ and onto individual leaders. Rather than emulating the Christlike qualities of these leaders, they let their allegiances lead to various divisions and contentions in the church (1 Cor. 1:10-13). The apostle Paul recognized their error, so he sent Timothy to remind them of his teachings and the importance of walking in obedience to the Lord (4:16-17).

We are to imitate Christ (1 Peter 1:15-16). It can also be helpful to have mentors who imitate Him. Those who walk in step with Christ provide a model for us to emulate. But our ultimate example is Jesus Himself.

To follow in the steps of those

Whose eyes are on the Lord

Will help to keep us strong and true,

And faithful to His Word. —D. De Haan

Imitate those who imitate Christ.

Apprenticeship Program

June 16, 1997

Apprenticeship Program

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16 | Bible in a Year: Nehemiah 4-6; Acts 2:22-47

I urge you, imitate me. —1 Corinthians 4:16

Life certainly was a lot simpler years ago. If a man was a carpenter, his son was likely to be the same. That's because the shop was at home and the boy worked with his father. The son watched carefully as Dad cut the wood, planed and smoothed it, then fastened it together to build a table or a bench. It was apprenticeship by example.

Most young people don't learn their trades like that anymore. Vocations are far too complex and the training way too demanding.

One aspect of life, however, is the same as it was years ago. Children not only learned how to do things from Dad and Mom, they also learned about life. They saw their parents' values and ethics in action every day in their homes.

Christian moms and dads still have "little apprentices" watching how they put their beliefs into practice. It goes on at mealtime, in the car, in the store, in conversation with or about neighbors—all the time. What a wonderful opportunity to teach our children how to live for Christ! And young people not only need it, they want it.

Paul told his children in the faith to imitate him—to follow his example (1 Cor. 4:16). Are we living for Christ in such a way that we want our children to imitate us?

Our children watch and imitate

The things we say and do;

So if we imitate the Lord,

They'll imitate Him too. —Sper

Children may close their ears to advice, but their eyes are always open to example.

1 Corinthians 5

1 Corinthians 5:1–13

Today in the Word

In recent years the Roman Catholic Church has been riddled with scandal and charged with complicity in numerous accounts of child abuse by clergy. Victims who were sexually abused as children by their priests have come forward to say that church leaders knew of the abuse and yet refused to do anything about it. Are silent church leaders any less guilty than the abusers themselves?

Paul levels a charge of complicit sin against the Corinthians in today's reading. With the knowledge of the church, a man was still publicly enjoying an incestuous relationship with his father's wife. It's a grievous sin that even the pagans themselves would have disdained. The church had done nothing about it. In fact, Paul describes their attitude as arrogant (once again)!

What we have in this passage are solemn words of instruction. First, Paul wants his readers to understand what it means to be the church. The blood of the Passover Lamb, Christ, has given us a distinct identity as God's covenant community. The moral standards to which we are held are different than the moral standards of the prevailing culture. Not only that, but the way we treat church members who compromise those standards is different than the way we would treat those outside the church.

When flagrant sin has been committed in the church, and when there has been no remorse or repentance (as seems to be the case here), the church's first reaction should be grief (v. 2). We hardly need explosive, self–righteous tirades. We need tears. We are called to grieve the power of sin to destroy fellowship with God and the integrity of the church's identity.

Grieve, we must, and with that sorrow we must also exclude the guilty person from our fellowship (v. 9). This is an act of hope. By handing "this man over to Satan" (v. 5), by removing him from the protection and privilege of one belonging to the church community, we pray fervently that his new vulnerability will renew a fear of God and ignite repentance.

Apply the Word

Church discipline is rare today, probably because we're confused about our responsibilities and the biblical commands. This case from 1 Corinthians contains several elements to guide us. First, this man's sin was egregious; second, he was continuing in that sin publicly and shamelessly. We don't need to be scouring each other's lives to find places of moral failure, but when there is shameless, unrepentant, and public sin in our church, that must be dealt with. Matthew 18:15–20 gives us further instruction for this process.

Conduct Unbecoming

November 24, 2001

Read: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 22-23; 1 Peter 1

Those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person." —1 Corinthians 5:13

An Air Force pilot who was court-martialed on bigamy charges paid a high price for his actions. According to the Los Angeles Times, a jury of five officers sentenced him to 3 months in a military jail and ordered that he be discharged from the service. The Air Force captain was 9 months shy of having 20 years in the service and would lose his monthly pension. The prosecutor called his action “conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.”

Just as a military court saw the need to take strong action against behavior unbecoming to an officer, so too the church needs to discipline any member whose behavior is a reproach to the name of Christ.

Some people will call this harsh and unmerciful, but it is for the person’s good as well as the good of the church. Genuine love doesn’t let a Christian go on sinning and hurt the reputation of Christ. Just as a branch of the military is respected for its ability and readiness to serve with honor, so also must the church of Jesus Christ hold its members accountable so they will be above reproach. Yet, too often we are reluctant to correct and restore an erring member.

Father, if we are dishonoring Your name, forgive us. And if we must take part in disciplining another, help us to do it with humility, courage, and especially love.

When Christians turn from serving God

And choose the path of sin,

The church should seek to turn them back

With loving discipline. —D. De Haan

Discipline yourself and others won't have to

The Passover Picture

August 14, 1999

The Passover Picture

Read: Exodus 12:1-20 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 89-90; Romans 14

Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. —1 Corinthians 5:7

The day of Israel’s first Passover was full of excitement and mystery for the Hebrew boys and girls. They saw their fathers roast lambs over an open fire. They watched them sprinkle blood from the lambs on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses. They listened with wide-eyed wonder as their fathers told them that an angel of death would kill the firstborn in every house that was not marked by the blood.

In the evening, wearing their sandals and dressed for immediate departure, family members gathered in groups just large enough to consume a whole lamb. They ate the Passover meal, which included bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. After midnight they gathered up their possessions and left Egypt to begin a new way of life as a free people.

Israel’s slavery in Egypt pictures for us as believers in Christ the bondage to sin from which we have been delivered. The slaughtered lamb points to Jesus Christ, “our Passover, [who] was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). The sprinkling of the blood speaks of the act of faith by which we receive salvation.

Have you experienced the joy of salvation that comes to those who put their trust in the Lamb of God?

All praise to the Lamb, accepted I am,

Through faith in the Savior's adorable name;

In Him I confide, His blood is applied;

For me He has suffered, for me He has died. —Wesley

The Lamb who died to save us is the Shepherd who lives to lead us.

Purge Out The Old

January 21, 2012

Purge Out The Old

Read: 1 Corinthians 5 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 18-20

Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. —1 Corinthians 5:7

Several days before their New Year celebration, many Chinese families give their home a thorough cleaning. There's a Cantonese saying that goes: "Wash away the dirt on ninyabaat" (28th day of month 12). They practice this tradition because it is believed the cleaning sweeps away the bad luck of the preceding year and makes their homes ready for good luck.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, he asked them to give their lives a thorough cleansing—not for good luck but to please God. He told them to "purge out the old leaven" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Paul used the Jewish feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:1-28) as a backdrop for this statement. Leaven (yeast) was a symbol of sin and corruption and was to be removed from Jewish homes to celebrate these festivals (Deut. 16:3-4). Because Jesus is the Passover Lamb who cleanses us from sin, the Corinthians were to scour their hearts and remove the leaven of sexual immorality, malice, and wickedness from their lives and their assembly (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Out of gratitude to Jesus for His sacrifice, let us purge out the sin in our lives and celebrate the holiness that only He can bring.

The holiness of God demands

A heart that's pure within,

Yet grace unites with holiness

To purge the heart from sin. —D. De Haan

Sin's contamination requires the Savior's cleansing.

1 Corinthians 6

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

[Jesus] bore our sins…that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness (1 Peter 2:24).

Counseling, mood-altering drugs, psychosurgery, and other forms of therapy are often needed to help and cure people with emotional disorders. But these treatments can't make them good. Charles Col-son tells of a frustrated prison psychiatrist who exclaimed, "I can cure a person's madness, but not his badness." To do that calls for getting to the heart of the problem—sin.

The only way to make bad people good is to expose them to the gospel. Even Charles Darwin, the man who contributed so much to evolutionistic thinking, admitted this. He wrote to a minister: "Your services have done more for our village in a few months than all our efforts for many years. We have never been able to reclaim a single drunkard, but through your services I do not know that there is a drunkard left in the village!"

Later Darwin visited the island of Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of South America. What he found among the people was horrifying—savagery and bestiality almost beyond description. But when he returned there after a missionary had worked among the people, he was amazed at the change in them. He acknowledged that the gospel does transform lives. In fact, he was so moved by what he saw that he contributed money to the mission until his death.

First Peter 2 reminds us that Christ's sacrifice on the cross not only paid sin's penalty but also broke its power. The apostle Paul, listing some terrible sins, wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "Such were some of you. But you were washed" (1Pe 2:9-11). Praise God. Jesus does make bad people good. —H. V. Lugt.

God formed us; sin deformed us; Christ transforms us

1 Corinthians 6:1–11

Today in the Word

In 2009, Jonathan Lee Riches earned the honor in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's most litigious man: he had

sued scores of people, including the coach of the New England Patriots and Martha Stewart. How did Riches handle the prestigious nomination to a world record? Why, he sued, of course.

In the United States, the most litigious nation in the world, we're well acquainted with the subject of today's reading: lawsuits. The Corinthians also lived in a litigious culture. There are some differences between the historical context and what should be true today. The majority of plaintiffs in the Corinthian context would have been wealthy and privileged. The judges, too, would have shared a high social status. This corrupted the legal system. court cases were a sham. Lawsuits were decided in favor of those with the most money, power, and social standing.

The Corinthians participated in this unjust system. Apparently, believers within the church were taking other believers to court. And based upon the historical evidence, the privileged and wealthy were cheating and defrauding their poorer brothers. Paul would not tolerate such behavior in the community of saints, and he gives a number of reasons why.

First, he frames the issue as an eschatological one, calling to mind eternal realities. In eternity, we will judge the angels. Can it be, then, that no believer in the Corinthian church is competent for judging disputes of "trivial matters" today? (Notice Paul's ironic use of the word, wise, in verse 5.) Can these cases be rightly discerned by "the wicked," those who will not inherit God's kingdom?

The real question concerns identity. Just as in the case of flagrant sin in the church, unlawful court cases between believers compromised the church's identity. We are God's people, God's family. We are brothers and sisters. Not only does this bear on our relationship in heaven, but it must impact the way we relate to each other here and now.

Apply the Word

Paul challenges the Corinthian believers to be willing to suffer wrong and be cheated rather than do anything to compromise the unity and integrity of the church. Whether or not you've actually brought a formal lawsuit against another believer, maybe it's true that you've drawn up a list of "charges" against another brother or sister. You've spent time enumerating the ways you've been wronged. You've tallied the offenses and declared a verdict. What might God say to you today through today's reading?

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-11

In a children's story popular during the middle 1800s, a small boy disobeyed his mother by taking a piece of cake when she wasn't looking. The book referred to him as "mean," "contemptible," and "with-out one particle of honorable or generous feeling." It asked, "And can anyone love or esteem a child who has become so degraded?" A description of "the deceitful child" at the judgment of the great white throne followed, and we learn of his harsh sentence, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

Unwise Christians get like that. They emphasize God's wrath so much that they lose sight of His mercy. On the other hand, some put so much stress on God's love that they lose sight of His holiness. Neither extreme is healthy. Wisdom keeps truth and love in proper balance.

The story disturbs me because it gives a distorted view of God. It was right in warning against disobedience, but it said nothing about forgiveness. How unlike 1 Corinthians 6:1-11. There we see the solemn warning about unrighteousness and immorality followed by the words, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified" (v. 11).

We must take seriously God's holiness and wrath against sin. But we must not forget His love and grace. We will live right and guide others correctly only as we gain wisdom and learn to hold the truth in balance. —H. V. Lugt.

We must be careful not to teach the wrath of God apart from the grace of God.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

A NEWSPAPER carried an article entitled "Victimless Crimes Get Second Look." The writer stated that practices such as prostitution and gambling are being reevaluated by state and federal authorities. Because laws governing these activities are hard to enforce, some think they should be legalized. Some states no longer consider drunkenness a crime. And a few have no laws against illicit sexual acts between consenting adults. It's claimed that such behavior is victimless because no one gets hurt.

We must not be fooled by this faulty reasoning. Sin always hurts people, the one committing it as well as others. No person lives in isolation, and a society is only as strong as the individuals in it.

Pressing even deeper, we see that sin offends a holy God who made us in His image and who tells us what's right and wrong. His commands are always for our good. To disobey them is to miss knowing His best for us.

As Christians, we do not belong to ourselves—we are the possession of another. To violate body, mind, and soul through indulging

the lusts of the flesh, therefore, is to strike out at God who made us and indwells us by His Spirit.

We may think some things are harmless. But even when no one else is directly affected, we hurt ourselves and grieve the One who created us. —DID

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

You were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body. - 1 Corinthians 6:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Robert's doctor had been urging him for years to watch his diet, exercise more, and lose some weight. Robert declined to follow his doctor's advice, however. He reasoned, “I'm not sinning by drinking soda or eating french fries, and I'm going to die sometime anyway. It will be my time to die whenever God is ready to take me.”

Robert reflects common thinking among Christians and non-Christians alike. It's not a sin to eat doughnuts and tater tots—so what's the big deal? Who cares if I don't take care of my body as long as I'm taking care of my soul?

Scripture doesn't support this way of thinking. God is concerned about the way that we use our bodies—we are often ready to acknowledge this regarding obviously sinful behavior, but we're less likely to consider the same concerning actions that are not in themselves sinful. The context of our passage is Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian believers to live so as to bring glory to God. By professing to be Christians but acting like the unsaved world brought shame on the entire church and dishonor to the name of Christ.

We see several principles in our text. The first relates to whether something is beneficial. A particular action (like eating) may not be a sin, but that doesn't mean it's a good idea to eat whatever we want (v. 13). God cares about how we care for our bodies.

Second, we must be alert to the price we pay for using our bodies for sin. Sexual sin in particular is in view here, but the principle applies to other sin as well. We damage our bodies, spirits, and the name of the Lord. Third, we must understand the depth of this exhortation. The entire Trinity has a relationship to our physical being: God will raise our bodies in the resurrection (v. 14); our bodies are part (or members) of the body of Christ (v. 15); and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 19).

Our bodies belong to God, and how we use them matters for our health, His glory, and the testimony of the church.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you been content to “take care of your soul” while disregarding your body? Church attendance, prayer, and Bible study are surely important, but God also cares about such everyday matters as how we eat or how much television we watch. In a world that seems caught between the extremes of either worshiping or ignoring the human body, Christians can be a witness to the way that the triune God impact the way we view our physical beings.

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Today in the Word

Uncle Tom’s Cabin, published in 1850, provoked a maelstrom of public outrage at the institution of slavery. The novel gives voice to the suffering of slaves, such as this Kentucky slave named George: “Why, now comes my master, takes me right away from my work, and my friends, and all I like, and grinds me down into the very dirt! And why? Because he says, I forgot who I was… I am desperate. I’ll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe!”

To George, freedom was something worth dying for. And freedom is central to the gospel of Jesus. Paul preached and wrote extensively about the freedom Jesus Christ purchased for us on the cross: the freedom from sin and the freedom for restored fellowship with God. But the Corinthians had been abusing their freedom in Christ. Today’s reading brings us to the first of several examples of that abuse.

Their freedom had been used to justify sexual misconduct. It might have been that the Corinthian men were continuing in the accepted cultural practice of visiting prostitutes. But their promiscuity might also have been broader than that. The line of defense by which they had justified their actions sounds something like this: In Christ, we are free to do what we want. There is no law that forbids us these sexual pleasures. And of what consequence is it really, for do our physical bodies matter? The stomach for food, food for the stomach—and well, we know why we have our sex organs!

Paul counters their rationalizations with a theological framework. Here he seizes yet another opportunity to address the subject of identity: every Christian believer is part of the body of Christ. This isn’t merely a symbolic or mystical reality. It means that our physical bodies, every appendage, organ, and skin cell, belong to God. Our bodies do matter. They will one day be resurrected just as Jesus was raised bodily.

Do we dare join what is holy to what is defiled? Can we carelessly desecrate the dwelling place of God?

Apply the Word

We easily slip into Gnostic thinking, a danger many of the early Christians also faced. Gnosticism taught that the spiritual was good and the material was bad. With such a view, it would be easy to diminish the importance of the body. But this passage today clearly challenges that kind of thinking. Our bodies matter to God, and this will force us to confront a number of things in our own lives: body image, sexual behavior, eating practices, and addiction to unhealthy substances.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Winston Churchill - A wealthy English family once invited friends to spend some time at their beautiful estate. The happy gathering was almost plunged into a terrible tragedy on the first day. When the children went swimming, one of them got into deep water and was drowning. Fortunately, the gardener heard the others screaming and plunged into the pool to rescue the helpless victim. That youngster was Winston Churchill. His parents, deeply grateful to the gardener, asked what they could do to reward him. He hesitated, then said, “I wish my son could go to college someday and become a doctor.” “We’ll pay his way,” replied Churchill’s parents.

Years later when Sir Winston was prime minister of England, he was stricken with pneumonia. Greatly concerned, the king summoned the best physician who could be found to the bedside of the ailing leader. That doctor was Sir Alexander Fleming, the developer of penicillin. He was also the son of that gardener who had saved Winston from drowning as a boy! Later Churchill said, “Rarely has one man owed his life twice to the same person.”

What was rare in the case of that great English statesman is in a much deeper sense a wonderful reality for every believer in Christ. The Heavenly Father has given us the gift of physical life, and then through His Son, the Great Physician, He has imparted to us eternal life.

May the awareness that we are doubly indebted to God as our Creator and Redeemer motivate us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto Him. - D J DeHaan

1 Corinthians 6:20

Your Body is Not Your Own (Secular Version) - In 1910 Olav Olavson, a Swedish citizen, fell upon hard times and decided to sell his body for medical research to the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. The following year he inherited a fortune and resolved to buy himself back. The institute refused to sell its rights to his body, went to court, and won possession of it. Moreover, the institute obtained damages, since Olav had two teeth pulled out without asking their permission as ultimate owners of his body. **Why Christians Sin Avoiding the Dangers of an Uncommitted Life J. Kirk Johnston**

1 Corinthians 6:18-7:9

A SITUATION that most people once considered immoral has become commonplace. According to the National & International Religion Report, before the majority of American marriages take place, the man and woman have lived together.

The report points out the devastating effects of this practice. "Marriages that are preceded by living together have 50 percent higher disruption [divorce or separation] rates than marriages without premarital cohabitation."

Even among Christians there is no shortage of those who think they can violate God's moral standards without consequence.

The temptations were similar in the first century. That's why Paul had to make it clear to the believers at Corinth that they had no business being involved in sexual immorality. If their passions became so strong that they could not control their sexual desires, there was an answer. But the answer was not an immoral relationship; it was marriage.

In a day when immorality continues to devour people with its lies, Christians need to live out the kind of love that honors God—the love that is shared in marriage. There is no substitute for pure, unadulterated love. —J D Brannon

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness. - Romans 6:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

In a lecture given at Multnomah Bible College, genetic engineer John Medina observed that the human heart pumps more than a thousand gallons a day and more than 55 million gallons in a lifetime. The heart beats 2.5 billion times in the course of our life. The

lungs contain a thousand miles of capillaries. But for those who know Jesus Christ as Savior, the most amazing fact about the body is its status as the temple of God.

What is true of the church collectively is also true of the individual believer. Every believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 19). The same God who manifested His presence in the tabernacle and the temple is also present with the individual believer. This means that there is spiritual significance to what we do with our bodies. Some in the Corinthian church did not think that the body had any spiritual significance. The slogans of verses 12 and 13 reflect their approach, which combined extreme views of liberty with a dualistic philosophy that regarded the spiritual as good and the physical as inconsequential.

Paul corrected their thinking on both counts. They were under grace and therefore not bound by Mosaic Law. But that did not mean that they were free to do anything. As for their strict dichotomy between the value of the spirit and not the body, they were partially correct in this thinking. It is true that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50). But they failed to realize that the capstone of the believer’s redemption will be bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42-58). The body is meant for the Lord both now and for all eternity. The practical implication of this theological truth is to see our bodies as “members of Christ himself” (1 Cor. 6:14).

In his book The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard characterizes our relationship to the body as a kind of dominion. “In creating human beings in his likeness so that we could govern in his manner, God gave us a measure of independent power. The locus or depository of this necessary power is the human body.”

APPLY THE WORD

You exercise control over your own body. But you do not have the freedom to do whatever you please with it. Your body is not truly your own: “you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 Cor. 6:20). We confront messages that tempt us either to worship our bodies (instead of the Lord who created and indwells them) or to ignore our bodies and disregard them as God’s good gift. Think of a way today that you can intentionally honor God with your body.

1Corinthians 6:19-20 (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk).

CONSECRATION

THE FACT that we have been bought with a price, not with corruptible things, as silver or gold, but with the precious Blood of Christ, lies at the foundation of all consecration (1Pe1:18). In consecration we do not make ourselves Christ's but recognize that we are His by an unalienable right. In the slave market human beings were sold like cattle; but this institution is set forth as the first step in our devotion to the service and person of Jesus Christ, the Lord who bought us. Slaves pass from one master to another. Among the Hebrews an Israelite would sometimes sell himself into slavery until the year of Jubilee, or until one of his kinsmen redeemed him (Lev25:47-50). So our Kinsman, Christ, bought us back from sin and guilt and condemnation; He says, as He buys us: "Ye shall be for Me, ye shall not be for another."

Our Lord's claim upon us is built on His own supreme sacrifice. "He gave Himself for us," says the Apostle Paul, "that He might redeem us from all iniquity" (Tit2:14). He gave Himself up to the Death of the Cross, that we might reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin. The Apostles constantly speak of themselves as "the slaves of Jesus Christ." Oh, that we might all live like this, counting nothing as our exclusive possession, but believing that all we have has been given to us to use in trust for our Lord and Master. He assigns to us each and all the work that we can do best. Some are called to work for Him in the high places of the Church, and others to toil in lowly obscurity, but everything is important in the great House of the Master, and all He requires is faithful service. I shall never forget when I first entered into the realization of the Ownership of my Lord; that I was His chattel, and had no longer any option or choice for one's enjoyment or emolument. The life which was commenced then has been one of perfect freedom, for this is the enigma of His service, that Christ's slaves are alone free; and that the more absolutely they obey Him, the more completely do they drink of the sweet cup of liberty!

PRAYER - O Lord, I give myself to Thee. I am born to serve Thee, to be Thine, to be Thy instrument. I ask not to see--I ask not to know--I ask simply to be used. AMEN.

Watch What You Watch

November 24, 1997

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 22-23; 1 Peter 1

Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things. —Psalm 119:37

Is your living room the site of daily murders? Do you routinely entertain guests who swear at you and make fun of your faith? Have you ever had somebody drop by and try to convince you that sexual sin is a joking matter and that violence is entertaining?

You've had all these things happen in your house if you've watched many of the programs on TV. This is not late-breaking news. The moral content of television has been on the decline for years. But that doesn't mean we have to go down with it.

The psalmist, who knew as much about TV as most of us know about tending sheep, said, "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things" (Ps. 119:37). That's a good verse to post over our TV set.

For the most part, the entertainment world is serious about casting off restraints. Just as seriously, we should protect our minds. These guidelines can help:

Avoid jokes about sex (1 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 5:3-4,12).

Don't listen to vulgar language (Eph. 5:4).

Don't let ads cause you to covet (Ex. 20:17; Col. 3:5).

Don't let your eyes cause you to sin (Mt. 18:9).

Honor God with your viewing habits. When it comes to entertainment, watch what you watch.

Temptation's face is young and soft

And smooth in its appeal;

But when it's through it ruins lives

With velvet fists of steel. —Gustafson

Use self-control with your remote control.

My Kind Of People

May 7, 2014

My Kind Of People

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 1-3; Luke 24:1-35

Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. —1 Corinthians 6:11

Years ago in a worship service, pastor Ray Stedman stepped to the pulpit and read the text for the day: "Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that" (1 Cor. 6:9-11 nlt).

Then he looked up, a bemused smile on his face, and said, "I'm curious: How many of you have one or more of these sins in your background? If so, will you stand?"

There was a young man there who had never been in a church before. He had recently been saved at a Billy Graham crusade and came with fear and trembling to church that Sunday, not knowing what he would find. He later told me that when he heard the pastor's question, he looked around to see if anyone would stand. At first no one did, but then most of the congregation was on their feet. He said to himself, "These are my kind of people!"

We can all find ourselves in Paul's list in 1 Corinthians. But when we confess our sin and accept the gift of eternal life paid for by the death of Jesus, we become a new creation saved by grace (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17).

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.

Clearing Out The Clutter

March 14, 2009

Clearing Out The Clutter

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 23-25; Mark 14:1-26

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

—1 Corinthians 6:19

My garage serves as “storage” for things that don’t have a place in our home, and, frankly, there are times when I am ashamed to open the door. I don’t want anyone to see the clutter. So, periodically, I set aside a workday to clean it up.

Our hearts and minds are a lot like that—they accumulate lots of clutter. As we rub shoulders with the world, inevitably, perhaps unknowingly, we pick up ungodly thoughts and attitudes. Thinking that life is all about “me.” Demanding our rights. Reacting bitterly toward those who have hurt us. Before long, our hearts and minds are no longer clean and orderly. And while we think we can hide the mess, eventually it will show.

Paul pointedly asked, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Cor. 6:19)—which makes me wonder if God often feels like He is living in our messy garage.

Perhaps it’s time to set aside a spiritual workday and, with His help, get to work clearing out the clutter. Discard those thoughts of bitterness. Bag up and throw out the old patterns of sensual thoughts. Organize your attitudes. Fill your heart with the beauty of God’s Word. Make it clean to the core, and then leave the door open for all to see!

More like the Master I would ever be,

More of His meekness, more humility;

More zeal to labor, more courage to be true,

More consecration for work He bids me do. —Gabriel

Don’t let the Spirit reside in a cluttered heart. Take some time to clean it up today!

Enjoyment Or Addiction?

September 6, 1996

Enjoyment Or Addiction?

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 148-150; 1 Corinthians 15:29-58

All things are not helpful… I will not be brought under the power of any. —1 Corinthians 6:12

With the growing use of computers and on-line services, an increasing number of people are withdrawing into cyberspace. Despite eye and wrist strain, and complaints from their families and employers, they continue to spend hours a day browsing bulletin boards and visiting discussion groups on the Internet.

How can we tell when something legitimate has moved from enjoyment to addiction? Dr. Joseph Gerstein, a Massachusetts physician, says, “When people cling to activities despite negative effects, it generally indicates addictive behavior.”

As the apostle Paul addressed the danger of excusing sin under the guise of Christian liberty, he wrote, “All things are not helpful… I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor. 6:12). His words can guide us in evaluating those gray areas that the Bible does not specifically label as sin.

Has a friend or family member recently spoken to us about overindulgence in some area of our life? A defensive attitude may indicate that it’s time to step back and view ourselves through the eyes of those who love us.

It takes humility to admit that our enjoyment has become addiction and to seek God’s help to break free.

Think It Over

What sins did Paul mention in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20?

How can legitimate activities become sinful? (v.12).

Has something good become a sin in your life?

To gain self-control, give Christ control.

Are You Free?

July 4, 2002

Are You Free?

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Job 28-29; Acts 13:1-25

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit … , and you are not your own? —1 Corinthians 6:19

Who owns you? When I ask myself that question, my first impulse is to dismiss it as nonsensical. With Paul, who enjoyed the rights and freedoms of a Roman citizen, I too can boast that I am free—at least politically.

Olav Olavson was a free citizen of Sweden, but he found himself hardpressed for money. So in desperation he sold his body for medical research to the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm in 1910. A year later, he inherited a fortune, so he tried to buy himself back. But the Institute refused to sell him his rights to his own body, and in a lawsuit they retained possession of it. The Institute even collected damages from him because he had two teeth extracted without permission.

All of us are slaves to sin and spiritually dead—unless we have been born again. We can be set free from the penalty and power of sin (and how I rejoice that I have been set free) by prayerfully asking Jesus Christ to become our Liberator. We experience spiritual freedom as we accept His gift of forgiveness and then offer ourselves as slaves to God (Romans 6:22).

What a blessed paradox! As God's slaves we enjoy a life of true freedom, peace, and hope. —VCG

We were imprisoned by our sin,

Controlled by evil ways;

But then the Savior set us free

To serve Him all our days. —Sper

To gain true freedom, give your life to Christ.

When Royalty Comes To Town

February 4, 2011

When Royalty Comes To Town

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 34-35; Matthew 22:23-46

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you … and you are not your own. —1 Corinthians 6:19

My friend Tim Davis tells the story of being in Trinidad as a little boy when Queen Elizabeth came to visit their town. He recalls going with his missionary parents to join hundreds of others who gathered to greet the queen. Waving his little flag, he watched as the entourage came down the street—first the soldiers, then the mounted guard, and then the limousine from which she waved to the cheering crowd. He looked on as the queen drove out of town, leaving everyone to return to life as usual. In Tim's words, "Royalty came to town and nothing changed!"

For those of us who have accepted Jesus as Savior, there was a day when royalty arrived—in our heart. As Paul put it, our body is "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19)—a reality that has huge ramifications. His residence in our life is intended to transform us to live in a way that brings glory to Him. Our relationships, the way we serve our employer, how we use our money, how we treat our enemies, and everything else in our lives should reflect the wonderful reality that royalty lives within.

Has anything changed since King Jesus came into your heart? Does your world notice or do they think He was just passing through?

By this shall every person know

That we serve God above:

His Spirit dwells within our hearts

And fills us with His love. —D. De Haan

If Jesus has taken up residence in us, the world should notice a lasting change.

A Man Named "Large"

January 6, 1996

A Man Named "Large"

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 16-17; Matthew 5:27-48

Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. —1 Corinthians 6:13

A man dubbed the King of Franks downed 20 hot dogs in 12 minutes of Coney Island competition. The man, whose nickname is “Large,” devoured his competition in the process, and then boasted that he was off to a barbecue. His nearest challenger consumed only 15 dogs.

Large complained that the humidity kept him from matching his record meal of 21 franks the year before, but said he relishes the chance to break his record next year.

Large was interviewed later as he took a break from cooking some of his winnings—365 hot dogs. He quipped, “I feel a little tired, but I’ll probably eat something a bit later.”

It seems that Large lives to eat. We too can choose to live for food, drink, or any other kind of pleasure, but overindulged appetites will consume us in the process. Our bodies were not made to be served; they were designed to serve the Lord.

Eating contests can be fun, but not when they become a way of life. Only when we realize that our bodies are temples (1 Cor. 6:19), made to be filled and controlled by the Spirit of God, will we find what quiets the hunger within. We won’t find true satisfaction until we are filled with the Lord, who made us for Himself.

God gave me a life in this body of mine

To have and to use for a specified time;

So I must be careful of life, for you see

My body does not belong to me. —Anon.

We all must eat to live, but some just live to eat.

Return On Investment

April 21, 2008

Return On Investment

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 12-13; Luke 16

You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit. —1 Corinthians 6:20

Long before the US professional baseball season begins each spring, team owners and managers are busy negotiating trades and contracts. They’ll pay large sums of money to get the athlete who will help them win the championship. When the season starts, all eyes are on the newly acquired talent to see if he was worth the cost. The ultimate measure of the player’s success is whether his contribution to the team is a good return on the investment.

In 1 Corinthians 6:20, Paul reminds us that we too have been “bought at a price.” The context paints a compelling picture of Christ’s great sacrifice. He liberated us from the cruel slavemaster of sin by buying us with the high price of His own life.

Getting a grip on God’s great and loving investment in us should motivate us to gladly consider making His sacrifice rich in dividends. How is that return on His investment measured? By living to bring glory to Him! Our eyes, hands, feet, thoughts, dreams, and desires have been purchased to reflect the wondrous glory of God’s will and wisdom. In other words, we are no longer our own.

Paul concluded, “Therefore glorify God in your body” (v.20). Living to reflect His glory is the return on investment that makes the Owner of our lives look good!

Redemption's price our Savior paid

When all our sins on Him were laid;

He took our guilt, He bore our shame

That we may glorify His name. —D. De Haan

Our choice to bring glory to God yields a great return on Christ's investment.

Flee!

April 16, 2004

Flee!

Read: James 4:1-10 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 30-31; Luke 13:23-35

Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. — James 4:7

I didn't see the movie The Exorcist, but I do recall its impact on my community. It left a lasting impression on many people about Satan's power. Even many Christians began to live in fear, swayed by the vivid images of evil. It seemed as if the devil was almost as powerful as God.

Is this perspective biblically sound? Of course not. God is the Creator, and all others, including demons, are just created beings. Only God is almighty.

It's easy to blame the devil when things go wrong. Although he does propagate wickedness and sin, we must be careful not to conclude that we are powerless against him. We are told in the Bible that the Holy Spirit within us "is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

The Bible also says we have a role to play in overcoming evil and doing what is good. We are to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20), "flee from idolatry" (10:14), "flee" from the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10-11), and "flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22).

James said that our attitude toward the devil should be to "resist" him (James 4:7). How do we do this? By submitting ourselves to God, allowing Him to direct our lives. Then it will be the devil who will flee from us.

When Satan launches his attack,

We must take heart and pray;

If we submit ourselves to God,

He'll be our strength each day. —Sper

To defeat Satan, surrender to Christ.

Pure Love

October 18, 1994

Pure Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:18–7:9 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 53-55; 2 Thessalonians 1

If they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. —1 Corinthians 7:9

A situation that once was viewed by most people as unacceptable and immoral has become commonplace. According to the National & International Religion Report, before the majority of American marriages take place, the man and woman have already been living together.

The report goes on to point out that this practice has devastating effects. "Marriages that are preceded by living together have 50 percent higher disruption (divorce or separation) rates than marriages without premarital cohabitation."

Even among Christians there is no shortage of those who think they can violate God's moral standards.

The temptations were similar in the first century. That's why Paul had to make it clear to the believers at Corinth that they had no business being involved in sexual immorality. He said that if they found their passions becoming so strong that they could not control their sexual desires, there was an answer. It was not found in an immoral relationship; it was found in marriage.

In a day when immorality continues to devour people, let's do all we can to promote the joys and privileges of love that is honoring to God—the love that is shared in marriage. There is no substitute for pure love.

Those who feed their passion

Outside God’s holy plan

Forsake the loving pattern

He has designed for man. —K. DeHaan

Saving yourself for marriage will help to save your marriage.

Garbage In The Temple

January 26, 2002

Garbage In The Temple

Read: John 2:13-22 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 14-15; Matthew 17

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? —1 Corinthians 6:19

A number of years ago, a government investigation discovered that some truckers were hauling garbage in the same refrigerated trucks that were used to transport food. Part of the problem was that trucks making long trips could not afford to return empty.

According to the truckers, some considered garbage a dream commodity. They were paid to transport something that couldn’t be damaged. During congressional hearings, a food science professor likened the problem to serving potato salad from a cat’s litter box.

This “pollution for profit” scandal is nothing compared to the one described in John 2:13-22. Jesus cast out the money changers from the temple because their schemes for financial gain had desecrated His Father’s house. But just as bad is polluting the temple of our bodies with thoughts and practices that don’t belong there (1 Corinthians 6:19).

In many ways, we are no better than those truckers or the temple merchants of Jesus’ day. We think it would be more profitable for us to carry the garbage of this world’s values in our minds. May God forgive us, cleanse us, and help us to cast out everything that defiles the temple in which He alone has the right to dwell. —MRD II

Lord, help us love what's good and right—

O make us pure within;

And give us courage to repent

When we would choose to sin. —D. De Haan

Christians must live in the world, but not let the world live in them.

Whose Are You?

May 22, 2006

Whose Are You?

Read: Psalm 24 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 16-18; John 7:28-53

The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. —Psalm 24:1

You’re not the boss of me!” Have you ever heard a child make this statement to someone in authority? It’s the child’s attempt to assert his or her independence.

It’s not just children, though. No matter what our age, we don’t like having someone tell us what to do. After all, that person might ask us to do something we don’t want to do, or put us in a situation we don’t want to be in.

Therein lies the fear of trusting God. Afraid of putting control of our life into His hands, we prefer to dig in and say, “You’re not the boss of me.”

There’s a serious problem with that line of thinking: It’s not accurate. In reality, we cannot tell God that He’s not in charge. In Psalm 24, David said, “The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (v.1). God is the boss of “those who dwell” in the world. That means all of us.

Our response, therefore, of trusting Him and turning our life over to Him comes when we acknowledge His authority. We say to Him,

“Lord, You are the boss of me! I acknowledge Your ownership, and I want to work with You to accomplish Your will.”

We are God’s. He is in charge. Our job is to trust in Him and live for Him.

Now I belong to Jesus,

Jesus belongs to me,

Not for the years of time alone,

But for eternity. —Clayton

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You are not your own… You were bought at a price. —1 Corinthians 6:19-20

The Total Package

August 15, 2004

The Total Package

Read: Colossians 1:19-23 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 91-93; Romans 15:1-13

You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit. —1 Corinthians 6:20

Our family had lived in the same house for many years, and it was time for a change of scenery. When we finally discovered a house we liked, we began negotiating for its purchase.

We had to find out if the refrigerator stayed. And the stove. But we knew some things were not going to stay. The furniture didn’t come with the house. And I jokingly wondered if we could keep the cars in the garage.

When you buy a house, you may not get the total package. The owner takes his belongings with him, although you may have the option to buy some of them.

Many things in life have purchase options. But that’s not how it is with our faith in Jesus Christ. When Jesus purchased us with His blood on the cross, He didn’t get only a portion of us. He’s not just the Lord of the religious stuff; He owns everything. So why do we sometimes live as if parts of us don’t belong to Jesus? That’s not fair to the buyer.

“You were bought at a price,” Paul wrote. “Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Christ bought us—body, soul, and spirit. Let’s make sure we let Him use the total package for His glory.

You have bought us, and no longer

Can we claim to be our own;

Giving freely, naught withholding,

We shall serve You, Lord, alone. —Murray

Jesus gave His all; He deserves our all.

Spared From Death

August 6, 2006

Spared From Death

Read: Colossians 1:24-29 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 70-71; Romans 8:22-39

You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. —1 Corinthians 6:20

On August 6, 1945, Kanji Araki, then a toddler, was playing on the floor. Although an air-raid siren had sounded a warning, few paid it any heed since Hiroshima had previously escaped bombing. Then a blinding flash lit up the sky. Superheated air rushed at tremendous speed, knocking down buildings and setting the center of the city ablaze. In the days that followed the nuclear detonation, Kanji’s grandmother, brother, and sister died from radiation sickness.

As Kanji grew up, he experienced emotional conflict about those who suffered and died because of the bomb. His parents were Christians, but Kanji adopted a secular view of life. Yet he felt a growing emptiness inside. He began to study the Bible to discover for himself who Jesus is. At a spiritual turning point, Kanji put his trust in Christ, and his empty heart was filled with God's wonderful assurance. When the Lord led him into the ministry, he cited 1 Corinthians 6:20 and said, "I was spared from death so that my life might have a higher purpose in serving God."

The apostle Paul had also been spared to serve God. "I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you," he said (Colossians 1:25). What has God entrusted to you?

Lord, I thank You for salvation,

For Your mercy, full and free;

Take my all in consecration,

Glorify Yourself in me. —Codner

Knowing God gives meaning to life, and obeying God gives purpose to life.

1 Corinthians 7

1 Corinthians 7:22

The image of a duck flying through the air with an arrow embedded in her body is still fresh in my memory. A local newspaper carried the story and picture of a mallard duck that had eluded rescuers who wanted to remove the foreign object. A couple of months later a Canada goose flew into Wisconsin with the same problem. A young bow hunter had hit his mark, but his arrow hadn't stopped the bird. She had evaded game wardens, avoided tranquilizer-laced grain, and even dodged cannon-fired nets. After about a month, apparently exhausted from her injury, the goose was caught with a fishing net. Soon after surgery, veterinarians returned her to freedom. If geese could think, she probably wondered why she had tried so hard and for so long to elude her captors.

The experience of these reluctant captives reminds me of the men Christ spoke to in John 8. They too were slow to realize the seriousness of their condition. They didn't understand Christ's motives. To them, He looked like a captor. He wanted them to surrender their lives to Him. He asked them to become His disciples. He implored them to become spiritual bond-slaves. They were unable to comprehend that by surrendering they could "be made free" (v. 33).

Is it possible we have forgotten that real freedom is found only in being secure in Christ? This relates not only to our ultimate salvation but also to our daily walk with the Lord.

As servants of Christ, we are bound to be free. —M. R. De Haan.II

Salvation produces a change within that releases the chains of sin

1 Corinthians 7:3; Song of Solomon 2:1-7

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. - 1 Corinthians 7:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

The British mathematician Charles Babbage wrote to Alfred Tennyson complaining that two lines from his poem "The Vision of Sin" were inaccurate. The lines went, "Every moment dies a man / Every moment one is born." Babbage argued that if this were true, world population would never change. Instead, he wrote, the lines ought to read: "Every moment dies a man / Every moment one and one-sixteenth is born."

1 Corinthians 7:1–24

Today in the Word

Legalism is an ever–present danger in the church. It's tempting to find confidence by the rules we're keeping. Legalism confuses universal biblical truth with the preferences of any one community, and then asserts its own spiritual superiority over others not adhering to its rules and preferences.

The struggle of the Corinthians with legalism in today's reading might seem surprising, given our earlier study of their abuse of

freedom. In fact, both problems plagued this church. Someone (or some faction) in the community had reportedly been teaching that it was best for everyone, married and unmarried alike, to remain abstinent. And just a chapter earlier, Paul was forbidding the Corinthians from having sexual intercourse with prostitutes! It may be that because the Corinthian community was fractured by dissent, one faction had been reveling in their “freedom” in Christ while another had been forbidding every kind of sexual activity. Notice that both extremes are rooted in a disregard for the bodies God has created.

To set the record straight about sex and marriage, Paul answers a letter that the Corinthians had written to him previously. He had been asked to either validate or refute this teaching on sex. Paul answers this way: first, sexual intercourse is reserved for marriage. Second, within the confines of the marriage relationship, husbands and wives should enjoy sex frequently.

The reasons are two–fold. First, a wife’s body belongs to her husband, and the husband’s body belongs to his wife. Second, the temptation to sexual immorality is real. When husbands and wives enjoy healthy and meaningful sex in their marriage, this serves to protect them from sinfully pursuing their passions and pleasures in illicit relationships.

The key verses of today’s reading are verses 17 and 24. They explain in part how it is that we must understand and live out our identity in Christ. One godly saint echoed Paul when he said, “Our sanctification does not depend as much on changing our activities as it does on doing them for God rather than for ourselves.”

Apply the Word

This weekend, take some time to think through your own identity. On a sheet of paper, make a list of the words you would use to describe yourself. When you have finished, review your words in light of what 1 Corinthians has said about our identity. Are there any attributes that you rank too highly? Do you need a stronger grasp of your membership in the body of Christ? In your prayer time, ask God to shape your understanding of your actions and attitudes as a Christian.

1 Corinthians 7:29

A CALENDAR AND A WASTEBASKET

"… brethren, the time is short." 1 Corinthians 7:29

It was the last day of the month. Taking my desk calendar and reviewing the engagements fulfilled, the projects accomplished, and the obligations met, I tore it from the pad, rolled it up into a wad and threw it into the wastebasket. As I did so, however, I was arrested with the thought: that which I'm disposing of represents an entire month of my life. Have I been faithful in accomplishing that which the Lord has given me to do during those days? Were those precious minutes and hours utilized in the very best way? Or could it be that time has been squandered, opportunities disregarded, and the minutes wasted? Could it be possible that the month itself had been spent in such a way that God considered it fit only for the "wastebasket" of broken vows and dead works?

Frequently we categorize our misdemeanors, putting some down as greater than others. If we are at all justified in doing this, I believe one of the worst sins on the list is that of wasting time. Those hours, minutes, and seconds which are given to us must be considered as a treasured trust. They must not be wasted nor put to improper use, for they can never be recalled. On various occasions I have been startled by the sudden realization that the immediate, passing seconds would soon be beyond recall. This particular moment which is mine right now will never come again. Each passing second slips away, never to return. Especially Christians, who believe the coming of the Lord draweth nigh, and that we are living in the midnight hour of this age, should endeavor to spend every day in pursuits which are profitable and which glorify God.

Yes, another month is gone! It's time to tear that current page from the calendar and throw it into the wastebasket. May that act, however, not characterize the quality of its activity. Rather than throwing away the months, let us give them to the Lord.

Don't just count days, make the days count; for "lost time" is never "found" again!

1 Corinthians 7:25–40

Today in the Word

The movie, The Bucket List, is the story of the unlikely friendship between two men, one a corporate executive, the other an auto mechanic. They’ve landed in the same hospital room, and both are facing unwelcome diagnoses and their own mortality. But courageously and humorously, they set off together on the adventure of doing what they had both always meant to do before “kicking the bucket.” Every dream and ambition mattered now that time was short.

Paul writes with a similar kind of urgency in the second half of 1 Corinthians 7. In verse 26, he refers to “the present crisis.” In verse 29, he emphasizes, “The time is short;” and in verse 31, he concludes, “This world in its present form is passing away.” Sooner rather than later, he expects Jesus’ visible, bodily return to earth, and time is running out to tell the world about the good news. He

passionately wants the church to be on a mission in the last days.

Because Paul anticipated Jesus' imminent return, he encourages unmarried believers in the Corinthian church not to marry. As he answers their questions from the previous letter (this time about those single or betrothed but not yet married), he does so with the sole aim of securing their "undivided devotion to the Lord." He is not, as some have argued, against marriage. He does not promote celibacy as the most spiritual of choices. But he does teach that an unmarried person is free from the distractions of a married person and more able to concern himself with the things of God.

From our vantage point, we now know what Paul did not: that Jesus would not return in his generation. That doesn't mean, however, that the Scriptures are somehow in error. Paul even tempers the tone of this discussion with disclaimers like, "I think that it is good," and "In my judgment." He has reasoned that if one can choose freely not to marry, exercising self–control in the area of sexual purity, this is best. However, no one sins by choosing to marry (v. 28).

Apply the Word

The church can be a very difficult place for singles. They see the ideal of marriage and family promoted (as it should be), but they often feel exempt from the blessings of God. The church needs the biblical understanding provided by today's passage. Singleness is also a gift from God! If we're married, we should be satisfied in our situation and seek to glorify God through our marriage. And if we're single, we can embrace the freedom and flexibility we have to serve God.

Find Your Own Calcutta

March 10, 1999

Read: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 11-13; Mark 12:1-27

Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you. —Mark 5:19

"Find your own Calcutta." That was the response Mother Teresa sent to a woman who wanted to join her in ministering to one of India's most crowded cities.

Was there a touch of romanticism in the woman's desire to leave all her past behind and serve in a distant, exotic land? Whatever her motives, the terse advice she received is a discerning word we all should heed. It captures the essence of Paul's message to the church at Corinth: Serve the Lord in whatever situation He has placed you (1 Cor. 7:17-24).

I recall the illusion-puncturing challenge John Alexander, one-time president of InterVarsity, gave to a group of students: "What have you done this past year to make a helpful difference within a mile of your home?" The hungry, the suffering, the unevangelized at our doorstep lack the more appealing aura of the needy souls elsewhere on the planet. But the ones closest to us are those whose needs we are best equipped to meet.

Let's take personally what Jesus said to a man He had set free from demons: "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you" (Mk. 5:19).

If we look around us through the eyes of Jesus, we're sure to find a Calcutta close by.

The mission field is closer to home than you may think.

1 Corinthians 8

1 CORINTHIANS 8

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak (1 Corinthians 8:9).

Many states in the U.S. allow motorists to make a right turn when the traffic signal is red—if the way is clear. This gives drivers liberty and keeps traffic moving. At some intersections, however, signs say, "No turn on red." These corners are exceptions because they are potential danger spots. By turning on red there, a motorist could cause a serious accident.

In 1 Corinthians 8, we have a similar situation concerning Christian liberty. Paul had perfect freedom to eat meat offered to idols. He knew that there was only one true God and that idols were nothing. Eating meat offered to them was neither right nor wrong. But not all believers felt that way. A person who had a weak conscience believed that the meat was defiled by the idol, and therefore it was off limits. Paul recognized the need to take special care lest by eating he would influence such a person to eat, thus violating his

conscience. Concern for weaker believers kept him from exercising his liberty.

As Christians, we are free in Christ—free to engage in social practices and customs not specifically forbidden by biblical commands. Yet the Holy Spirit may prompt us to refrain from some legitimate practices. Then the principle of love must take precedence over the principle of liberty. A mature Christian will heed the "no turn on red" sign to keep from causing a weaker believer "to have a serious accident." —D J DeHaan

None of us has a right to do as we please,unless we please to do right.

1 Corinthians 8:1-6

Every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. - Philippians 2:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

The popular television series Bonanza followed the adventures of the Cartwright family, owners of a huge ranch in Nevada called the Ponderosa. In one episode, Little Joe Cartwright (actor Michael Landon) was bringing a visitor from back East out to the ranch. At one point in their long ride from town the man looked around at the countryside, then turned to Little Joe and said, ""I'm looking forward to seeing the Ponderosa.""

Little Joe looked at the man and said, ""Mister, you've been on Cartwright land for the last two hours."" The Cartwright family was master of everything as far as the visitor could see.

That's a good picture of what the name ""Lord"" means. The Lord is the owner, the master, the one who decides how things are going to be. It is also a title of respect and reverence. When this name is applied to Jesus Christ, it speaks of His supremacy as the Master, the only One deserving of our reverence. There is room in the universe for only one Lord.

The New Testament contains several illustrations of the way this name is used to express ownership. Jesus is ""Lord of the harvest"" (Matt. 9:38) and ""Lord of the Sabbath"" (Matt. 12:Cool, meaning He decides how the harvest will be reaped and what is appropriate to do on the Sabbath.

Paul was writing to the Corinthians about a real-life issue, whether to eat meat offered to idols. But he also pointed out the truth that although there were pretenders to the title ""Lord,"" they were nothing (v. 4). ""There is but one Lord, Jesus Christ"" (v. 6) is a powerful doctrinal statement.

You may recognize today's verse as the conclusion to one of the Bible's great passages about Jesus Christ, tracing His life and ministry from the glory of heaven to the humiliation of death on a cross. His exaltation will be universal when every person bows and admits that He is Lord.

For some people, that confession will be too late in terms of their eternal destiny. But we who know the Lord as Savior are privileged to bow before Him now in humble repentance and worship, rather than later when He is revealed for all the world to see. For this, we'll be eternally grateful to Jesus.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If Jesus is Lord of your life, you can join the rest of the Today family in thanking Him for the gift of salvation. This is the focus of our praise the day before Thanksgiving. But it's possible that some of our readers have not yet bowed before Christ in repentance and faith. If that describes you, there's no better season to enter into a relationship with God. Put your faith in Christ alone today to save you, and you'll have the best reason for thanksgiving you've ever had.

1 Corinthians 8:1–6

Today in the Word

Like any major city in the Roman Empire, Corinth’s streets were lined with shrines and statues of pagan gods. Feasts in the pagan temples celebrated birthdays, weddings, and other important social events. These feasts would have been hard to avoid, especially for the wealthier members of the Corinthian church. The question the Corinthians posed to Paul in their letter was a real problem: Could they eat meat that had been used in the pagan sacrifices?

In Pauline fashion, he takes the next three chapters to answer their question fully. Based on an understanding of what happened at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the question might have warranted a straightforward answer. There, the apostles and elders had gathered to decide whether or not the Gentile Christians should obey Jewish law and tradition. They formally decided no, but they did author a letter asking the Gentile Christians to abstain from eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Apparently, they feared that this issue had the potential to divide Gentile and Jewish Christians.

In Corinth, the church was pre–dominantly Gentile, but the issue of eating idol meat was still divisive. One side touted their own position: idols are nothing; consequently, eating idol meat is also nothing. Paul seems to agree with them on the matter of whether it was sinful to eat the meat, but he was concerned about a deeper issue in the church. Rather than delivering a simple black–and–white decision, Paul challenged the attitude of arrogance he saw fueling this debate.

As they have on other issues, the community has fallen into the trap of valuing what they know over and above everything else. Knowledge has trumped Christian character, and Paul wants to reorient them towards the priority of love. His reasoning goes something like this: You can know something, but if you have used that knowledge to become proud, you have missed what is most important. Pride is the evidence you failed to know love, which is what really counts in God's economy. Whether they ate or didn't eat the meat was less important than how they treated their fellow believers.

Apply the Word

Paul is building towards the climax of his letter in chapter 13 where he describes what Christian love looks like. His teaching on love echoes some of the last words of Jesus: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Consider the spiritual practices of your life. Are you simply seeking more knowledge? Or do you desire to become more loving? Humbly ask someone who's known you a long time whether he or she sees you growing in your ability to love.

1 Corinthians 8:7–13

Today in the Word

The language of rights is woven into the fabric of American identity. Our Declaration of Independence asserts inalienable human rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our Constitution offers a Bill of Rights, guaranteeing freedom of speech, religion, and the press. Valuing freedom has been central to being American.

Our readings the next few days will explore the subject of "freedom" within the context of Christian community. Paul intends to show us that there will be occasions where we're called to forfeit certain rights in deference to another believer. The opening of chapter eight launches us into the question of whether or not it is permissible to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols. A certain faction of the Corinthian church proudly claimed to have the answer. They are "free" to eat meat sacrificed to idols. With such knowledge, they have acted in careless disregard to their brothers and sisters. They boldly attended public feasts in the pagan temples, and their actions have emboldened the "weaker" believers to compromise their conscience and follow suit.

On the one hand, these "stronger" believers have reasoned correctly: idols are nothing. Eating meal offered to idols was morally neutral ground. But this did not acquit them—there was more to this question than simple definitions of right and wrong. Paul is clear. Freedom and knowledge are not to be prized and protected above anything else. Indeed, the "strong" must lay down their freedoms for the purpose of protecting the unity of the community and the spiritual health of each of its members, especially the "weak." In the process of reasoning out the answer to the question of eating idol meat, the Corinthians overvalued knowledge and neglected love.

Disunity, factions, and pride had impaired the church in Corinth. They threatened the integrity of the gospel and the message of the Cross. And now, Paul raises this issue of unity to even higher stakes. When we sin against one another, we sin against Christ.

Apply the Word

Paul is not saying in this passage that each of us must be bound by the conscience of every member of our church. Consider the difficulty and impracticality of having to understand all the varying (and conflicting!) convictions held by even a small group of believers. Paul challenged the Corinthians' behavior, not because they had disagreed, but because the stronger brothers flouted their freedoms and "emboldened" the weaker brothers to sin. "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way" (Rom. 14:13).

1 Corinthians 9

1 Corinthians 9:3-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor. - 1 Timothy 5:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Warren Wiersbe, well-known Bible teacher and former pastor of Moody Memorial Church here in Chicago, writes that when it comes

to the giving of Christians, ""Our first obligation is to our local church… Our own pastor is our shepherd, and he ought to have our spiritual and financial support."" Dr. Wiersbe goes on to say, ""We should put our church first and then, as the Lord directs, share with those ministries He has laid on our hearts.""

Dr. Wiersbe's advice is solidly biblical, as usual, and he expresses well the commitment of our hearts at the Moody Bible Institute. Paul drew on every example possible to prove the principle that Jesus taught when He said, ""The worker deserves his wages"" (Luke 10:7). The Lord made this statement in the context of sending the disciples out to minister and to receive support from their hearers.

Paul himself did not use this privilege in Corinth, but that was because of the Corinthians' attitude problems, not because he didn't deserve the support. Taking care of the pastoral staff in the local church is another basic obligation we need to fulfill as the managers of God's resources.

God has always taken pains to take care of His servants. As Paul reminded his readers, the Old Testament law taught the same principle, because ""those who work in the temple get their food from the temple"" (1 Cor. 9:13).

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul added the concept of ""double honor"" for elders, or pastors, whose work is ""preaching and teaching."" This is a reference to the respect we are to give our spiritual leaders (Heb. 13:17), and to the financial support they deserve for their ministry.

The word translated ""work"" is a strong one. The idea is ""laboring to exhaustion,"" a picture of a pastor who gives all his energies to teaching the Word to his people. Pastors can't give full attention to the work of God when they are distracted by having to earn a living on the side.

It's obvious to Paul that this is the way things should be in the church (1 Cor. 9:11). It's not ""too much"" for a spiritual leader to expect a fair salary. After all, the rest of us expect to get paid for our work.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

First Timothy 5 gives us two ways we can help take care of the leaders God has given to the church as His ""gifts."" The first is the respect we mentioned above. Don't worry about ""overspending"" on prayer and encouragement for your pastor! In fact, God says our pastors are His gifts to us--and when you receive a gift, it's good manners to say ""Thank you"" to the giver. In addition, your generous giving, and urging other Christians to do the same, will help provide for your pastor's needs.

1 Corinthians 9:1–14

Today in the Word

In the musical, The Music Man, con man Harold Hill waltzes into River City, Iowa, posing as the organizer of a boys' band. He wins over the townspeople who pay money for instruments and uniforms, money with which Harold intends to skip town. He's a fraud, and the town librarian, Marian, knows it and determines to expose him.

Just as Marian questioned Harold, some skeptics had raised doubts about Paul and questioned the legitimacy of his apostleship. In chapter four, Paul announced that he was unwilling to subject himself to the scrutiny of others; God alone would judge his ministry. In chapter nine, however, he seems to offer, if not a defense, then an explanation for his ministry methods.

While it may seem like a digression from the argument of chapter eight regarding the eating of meat in pagan temples, chapter nine is purposefully connected to that conversation. Paul cites his own ministry as an example to imitate when it comes to deciding issues where personal freedoms collide. Though Paul had the right to collect financial compensation for his work as an apostle, he forfeited it for the sake of the gospel.

He gives many reasons for this apostolic right. First, many other apostles received support from the churches where they ministered. Second, he gave the examples of the soldier, the vineyard grower, and the keeper of the flock. Could they be expected to work at their own expense? Then, he asks them to consider the Law of Moses. It prescribes that oxen not be muzzled when treading out grain. Such treatment would be inhuman and cruel. Even the Jewish temple rituals provided for the food of the priests who served there.

By offering himself as an example of setting aside his rights, Paul answers what it might look like to address the questions and divisions emerging from the issue of meat sacrificed to idols in chapter eight. What if the "strong," like Paul, forfeited their freedom to eat idol meat and chose not to attend feasts in the pagan temples, simply for the sake of the gospel and the community?

Apply the Word

This passage teaches the right every minister of the gospel has to earn his living through his ministry; in fact, on the question of pastors' salaries, verse 14 sends us right back to the teaching of Jesus! Questions for us to consider: do we pay our pastor(s) a fair and living wage? Do we expect our pastor to work tirelessly for meager compensation? Each of us should be contributing our money generously to a local body of believers as well as to other Christian ministries where the gospel is being preached.

1 Corinthians 9:15–27

Today in the Word

When Amy Carmichael began her missionary assignment in Japan, she insisted on wearing traditional Victorian dress: multiple petticoats, stockings, laced–up shoes, and a bonnet. But one day, bundled up in her thick woolen coat and her fur gloves, she made a visit to an older Japanese woman with the intention of sharing the gospel. The woman paid no attention to the message Amy shared. She was distracted by the curious gloves that Amy wore. Amy wept on her way home, saying, "Never again will I risk so much for so little! She traded her lace petticoats for a kimono.

Both Amy Carmichael and Paul are in a long line of missionaries who made these cultural choices about how they will live and behave in foreign contexts. The question prominent in the apostle Paul's mind was, "Will what I choose advance or hinder the gospel?" He was committed to spreading the gospel and refused to make any choice that might cause someone to reject Christ on the grounds of his personal behavior.

First, he chose not to receive financial support from the Corinthian churches. Other churches did in fact give Paul money, but in Corinth he refused such support. His reasons may have been to avoid either being accused of greed (which characterized certain philosophers in Corinth) or of losing the independence of thought and action he had, were he to depend on either the church or a handful of wealthy patrons. Instead, he worked his day job, making tents. He had the right to earn his living from his ministry, but Paul determined to offer the gospel free of charge.

Not only did Paul forfeit his salary for the sake of the gospel, he forfeited other rights and freedoms, humbling himself to win as many converts to Christ as he can. As a minister to the Gentiles, he no longer subjected himself to the constraints of Judaism. And yet, when it was required of him to make adaptations so as not to offend a Jewish audience, he did so (cf. Acts 21:17–26).

Apply the Word

Paul showed tremendous flexibility in his choices. He did not abandon faithfulness to Christ, but he was able to discern which issues mattered and which didn't. He asked the same of the Corinthians, especially when it came to eating meat sacrificed to idols. Some might accuse Paul of relativism, but Paul isn't teaching that moral choices don't matter. He demonstrated that love for Christ and others is more important than rights and preferences. Do we have such a disciplined commitment to Christ, which advances the gospel?

1 Corinthians 9:24

Do you not know that … one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it (1 Corinthians 9:24).

A computer study of five thousand racehorses has revealed a way to predict whether or not a young horse will develop into a good runner. According to an article in USA Today, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology used computers and high-speed cameras to find out how a good horse runs. He discovered that the legs of a fast horse operate much like the spokes of a wheel. Each leg touches down only as the leg before it pushes off, resulting in peak efficiency. Later studies disclosed that a horse's manner of walking changes little after the first few months. Therefore, motion analysis when a horse is young can predict how well it will run when it matures.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah talked about running well in the course of life. He said that the people who run the best are the ones who learn to wait on the Lord (ISAIAH 40:27-31). They don't waste energy trying to do things on their own. They make the Lord their strength and hope.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul compares the Christian life to a race. He said that those who run well are characterized by efficiency of effort. For the Christian, this means running with control and self-discipline (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The author of Hebrews said that a good runner gets rid of anything that adds extra weight (Neb. 12:1).

To earn an imperishable crown we must wait on the Lord, practice self-control, and lay aside sinful burdens. These are the secrets of running well. —M.R.D.II

Those who wait on the Lord will run without the weight of sin.

1Cor 9:25 (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT--SELF-CONTROL

IN HIS early life Paul must have been keen on sport! He uses the phrases for the gymnast, the boxer, and the racer. He had probably stood, many times, watching the great games, which were held in various parts of the Greek-speaking world. He knew the long and arduous training through which competitors had to pass.

Paul was running a race for an imperishable wreath. He had no doubt as to his goal, and therefore did not run uncertainly. He went straight as an arrow to its mark, and his mark was to win souls for Christ. To gain some, to save some, was his passion (1Co9:22). He needed to discipline himself, putting aside much that was innocent in itself, and which others could enjoy without reproach (Rom14:13-21). The Apostle was also engaged in a boxing-Mattch, his own body being the antagonist. He knew that spiritual power existed for his appropriation in Christ, but to have it he must be a spiritual man, and to be that necessitated the subdual of his fleshly appetites.

We must exercise "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control." It is best to hand over the whole of our nature to the Master, and ask Him to direct, control, suggest each day whatever we think, or do, or say. It is infinitely happier to be Christ-controlled than self-controlled. Happy are they who from the earliest are able to subordinate the delights of sense, however innocent, to some high quest of the spirit. The soldier has to forfeit many things which are legitiMatte for the civilian, because he must be able to march rapidly from place to place. He has to forego the use of many comforts, but he is compensated if his name is placed on the honours list. The husbandman has to submit to hardships of weather, and to encounter difficulties and discomforts which do not occur in the lives of others; but there is no other way if he is to procure the fruits of his toil. These deny themselves for lower considerations, but we have an infinitely higher object in view; but by so much the more should we lay aside every weight. Never forget Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, your great Exemplar and Life-giver--the source of all spiritual power.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, engraft Thy Son, Jesus Christ my Lord, inwardly in my heart, that I may bring forth the fruit of holy living, to the honour and praise of Thy Name. AMEN.

1 CORINTHIANS 9.24

In the film Chariots of Fire, just before the first turn in a 400-meter race, Eric Liddell was shoved off balance and stumbled onto the infield grass. When he looked up, he saw the other racers pulling away. With a look of intense determination, Eric jumped to his feet, and with his back cocked and his arms flailing he rushed ahead. He was determined not only to catch up with the pack but to win. And he did!

This was the kind of fervor the apostle Paul brought to his ministry In 1 Corinthians 9:24 he said, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." Paul saw himself as an Olympic athlete competing for a gold medal, straining every muscle, nerve, and sinew to get to the finish line. And what's the prize? Not a temporary reward but "an imperishable crown" (v. 25). —HWR.

WINNERS NEVER QUIT, AND QUITTERS NEVER WIN.

A world-class woman runner was invited to compete in a road race in Connecticut. On the morning of the race, she drove from New York City, following the directions—or so she thought—given her over the telephone. She got lost, stopped at a gas station, and asked for help. She knew that the race started in the parking lot of a shopping mall. The station attendant also knew of such a race scheduled just up the road and directed her there.

When she arrived she was relieved to see in the parking lot a modest number of runners preparing to compete. Not as many as she'd anticipated; an easier race than she'd been led to expect. She hurried to the registration desk, announced herself, and was surprised by the race officials' excitement at having so renowned an athlete show up for their race. No, they had no record of her entry, but if she'd hurry and put on this number, she could just make it before the gun goes off. She ran and, naturally, she won easily, some four minutes ahead of the first male runner in second place.

Only after the race—when there was no envelope containing her sizable prize and performance money— did she confirm that the event she'd run was not the race to which she'd been invited. That race was being held several miles farther up the road in another town. She'd gone to the wrong starting line, run the wrong course, and missed her chance to win a valuable prize. - From **Thinking and Acting Like a Christian**

Thinking And Acting Like A Christian, D. Bruce Lockerbie, p. 52

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? - 1 Corinthians 9:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

At the 1908 Olympic Games in London, Italian runner Dornado Pietri collapsed in exhaustion just a few yards from victory in the marathon. Two helpful British Olympic officials dragged Pietri across the finish line but the Italian was disqualified for using 'external support' and denied his gold medal.

Imagine giving a race everything you had for more than twenty grueling miles, but then falling short of the finish line by a few yards and losing the prize. That kind of finish would be an athlete's worst nightmare.

Being disqualified in the Christian race was Paul's worst nightmare, because he was running for an eternal prize. Paul figured that if the competitors in the Isthmian Games held near Corinth every two years could discipline themselves to win a wreath that would fade, he could discipline himself for the eternal prize of God's approval and rewards in heaven. We need to adopt the apostle's attitude.

We don't know exactly how Paul would have handled all the millennium hype and legitimate concerns this month. But based on passages like today's, we think his advice to Christians today would be something like this: 'Just keep running the race God has given you to run. Don't let all the distractions throw you off track. God will take care of those, and you.'

Running a winning Christian race has never been that easy. It has always required discipline and a strong focus on the goal. In that sense, December 1999 is no different than any other month in any other year. Running around 'aimlessly' (v. 26) won't get us anywhere. Let's keep running to win!

Paul then changed athletic metaphors, but the message stayed the same. 'Beating the air' was probably a reference to a boxer throwing wild punches that hit nothing during a match.

Running around aimlessly and wildly punching the air is an accurate picture of the way some people have reacted to the Y2K issue and the fears it has generated. Rather than panic, Paul prescribed the practice of solid discipline the kind that enables a runner to finish the race.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How disciplined has your 'practice schedule' been lately?

We hope you're making prayer and Bible study a daily priority. It's a great way to maintain an eternal perspective. Given the unusual nature of this December, and the importance of our subject, why not plan now to meet with God in His Word every day? Whether this is simply the continuation of a regular practice for you, or a relatively new form of daily discipline, we encourage you to make this commitment today.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

“Everything is permissible”--but not everything is beneficial. - 1 Corinthians 10:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, this year gathers the elite athletes of the world in one place to compete for the most prestigious prize in sports–the coveted gold medal. Most of these men and women have focused their entire lives on reaching this goal. They have been willing to eat certain foods and avoid others, schedule their lifestyle to ensure enough sleep, and undergo intense physical training. They exercise this amount of discipline because they want their bodies to be able to respond perfectly during competition.

Few of us could ever be described as elite athletes. But we are still called to exercise self-control over our bodies and minds. We are running a spiritual race, and every part of our lives needs to be in conformity with this goal (Rom. 12:1–2).

In our passage today, Paul explicitly uses this athletic metaphor to discuss self-control. To begin, he stresses that our finish line brings greater rewards than a gold medal. Our eternal future is in view here (v. 25). Paul continues to emphasize the high stakes of self-control: if we fail in this way, we are discredited and our potential for ministry compromised.

Sadly, we can think of numerous examples of high-profile Christians whose ministries were ruined through sexual or financial misconduct. Paul uses strong language here to describe his approach toward self-control: “I beat my body and make it my slave” (v. 27). Paul is not recommending self-flagellation, the practice of literally flogging oneself. He uses these intense images of beating and slavery to make sure that his readers understand what is at stake. We discipline our bodies, not in order to look good or win athletic glory, but so that we can serve God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Christian life isn't just about our souls and spirits–it includes our bodies and minds, too. Is there an area where you need to exercise more self-control?

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 It is a most lamentable thing to see how most people spend their time and their energy for trifles, while God is cast aside. He who is all seems to them as nothing, and that which is nothing seems to them as good as all. It is lamentable indeed, knowing that God has set mankind in such a race where heaven or hell is their certain end, that they should sit down and loiter, or run after the childish toys of the world, forgetting the prize they should run for. Were it but possible for one of us to see this business as the all-seeing God does, and see what most men and women in the world are interested in and what they are doing every day, it would be the saddest sight imaginable. Oh, how we should marvel at their madness and lament their self-delusion! If God had never told them what they were sent into the world to do, or what was before them in another world, then there would have been some excuse. But it is His sealed word, and they profess to believe it. - Richard Baxter. (See **FINISH THE RACE - Sermon by Joe Guglielmo**)

1 Corinthians 9:27

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. 2 Timothy 2:15

In Paul's exhortation, "Study to show thyself approved unto God," he encourages us to avoid the very thing he feared might happen to him personally; namely, that he might be set aside and no longer used in the Lord's service. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:27,

"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

This word is a translation of the same Greek root rendered "approved" in 2 Timothy 2:15, only in 1 Corinthians 9:27 it appears in a negative form and means "disapproved."

When the apostle speaks of his dread of being a "castaway," he is really thinking of the shame of being a "disapproved" one, not of being lost again. His fear is that he might not receive approval as a workman. He has service in mind, not salvation!

I have been told that a huge block of stone lies in a Syrian quarry near Baalbek. It has been carefully cut, hewed, and squared. Sixty-eight feet long, fourteen feet high, and fourteen feet wide, its size is overwhelming. And yet, in spite of all the labor and effort which went into this gigantic piece of rock, there it stands. It was never fitted into that place in the temple for which it was intended! This massive stone seems to lift a voice of warning, repeating the words of the apostle, "lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

May we be faithful in our devotional life, obedient to the will of God, and zealous in our service for Him. In so doing, we will stand "approved"!

I want among the victor throng

Someday to have my name confessed;

And hear my Master say at last,

"You stand approved, you did your best!"—Simpson

Serving the Lord is much like riding a bicycle—either you keep moving forward, or you fall down

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

AN overweight woman, displeased with what she saw in the mirror, prayed, "Lord, why don't You take away my desire to eat?" But she heard this answer in her heart: "What would be left for you to do?"

God doesn't make it easy for His children to develop character and overcome their weaknesses. He has so ordered the world that we must discipline ourselves in every area of life. To lose weight, we must discipline ourselves in matters of diet and exercise. If our goal is spiritual maturity, we achieve it through personal and corporate worship, fellowship with other believers, Bible reading and meditation, obedience, prayer, and worthwhile conversation and behavior.

A young boy asked me to pray for him because he habitually failed to get his homework done. Bobby spent most of every evening eating junk food and watching television. I refused to pray with him because prayer alone wouldn't solve his problem. He needed self-discipline. I suggested, "Ask God to help you and then start disciplining yourself."

Paul compared the Christian's life to that of an athlete who trains hard to win a prize. The coach tells the athlete what to do, but the athlete has to get out there and do it. Likewise, we must depend on God for His help, but we must also do our part—the difficult part of self-discipline.—HVL

Loving Freely

January 29, 1999

Loving Freely

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:7-23 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 21-22; Matthew 19

Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. —1 Corinthians 9:23

A woman desperately needed a kidney transplant. The outlook for her was not good unless a compatible donor could be found. Then came the break. The woman's brother offered to be the donor. His personal sacrifice seemed to provide the perfect solution; their matching blood types made successful surgery almost certain.

But then came the catch. The brother was willing to give the kidney as a gift, but he wanted $25,000 for the stress he would suffer. The sister, deeply offended by the apparent profit motive, rejected her brother's terms and decided to take her chances in finding another donor.

This story illustrates two spiritual principles found in 1 Corinthians 9. The first is that a worker has a right to be compensated for his personal sacrifice (v.14). The second is that doing things for others without monetary reward is sometimes the only appropriate action (v.18). In Paul's case, he wanted his personal sacrifice to be a testimony of the reality of his relationship to the Lord. His desire to help the Corinthians was best served, he felt, by being a model of faith and love without any monetary consideration.

We should have that same willingness. Our primary motivation should be love, not compensation.

The worker's worthy of his hire—

His wages he can claim;

But by the grace of God we can

Give love in Jesus' name. —Sper

Those who serve God only for money are spiritually bankrupt.

Worse Than Dying

February 23, 2001

Worse Than Dying

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:11-23 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 7-8; Mark 4:21-41

It would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. —1 Corinthians 9:15

The apostle Paul said he would rather die than give the impression that he was serving the Lord for money. That's why he supported himself while preaching in Corinth. To him, anything that marred his testimony for Christ was worse than dying.

Down through the centuries, many have held that same conviction and have proven it by dying as martyrs rather than denying their Lord. Most of us will not face a "deny Christ or die" ultimatum. But our lifestyle must reflect that we believe some things are worse than dying.

On New Year's Eve 1951, I was deeply impressed as I read Paul's declaration in Philippians 1:20. He said that his supreme expectation was that he would be ashamed "in nothing." His only hope was not that he be released from prison but that Christ would be magnified in his body, "whether by life or by death." I was also struck by his confident statement in verse 21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Since that evening, I've told the Lord many times that I would rather die than do anything to dishonor His name, break the hearts of my wife and family, or disappoint those who respect me.

Yes, some things are worse than dying, and dishonoring Christ is one of them.

I'd rather die than bring disgrace

Upon my Lord, His name debase;

So I will live my life each day

To honor Christ and walk His way. —Hess

To keep your testimony alive, you must die to sin.

The Lingo

August 27, 2007

The Lingo

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 120-122; 1 Corinthians 9

I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. —1 Corinthians 9:22

What do teenagers mean when they say they're "chillaxin"? (They're chilling and relaxing.) What if they ask for some "cheddar"? (That's cash.) If a teen likes someone's new clothes, he might just say, "money," meaning cool. Teenagers have their own lingo that some of us might not understand, and it seems to be always changing.

Believers in Jesus have their own lingo as well. We use common jargon that nonbelievers may not comprehend. For instance, we use the words grace, saved, and repentance. These are all good words, but as we're sharing our faith, it might be more helpful to say, "God's gift of unearned forgiveness" instead of grace. Or "rescued from death and given eternal life" for saved. We could say, "to turn away from wrongs" for repentance.

The apostle Paul was willing to be flexible in his ministry in order to reach as many as possible with the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23). That might have even included the words he used as he explained the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Explaining our faith in easy-to-understand terms may help someone to grasp the meaning of being born again—transformed by Jesus' love and forgiveness.

You have called us, Lord, to witness—

To tell others of Your Son;

Spirit, give us words so simple

That they'll reach some seeking one. —D. De Haan

If we have God's Word in our mind, He can put the right words in our mouth.

True Teamwork

August 11, 2008

True Teamwork

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 81-83; Romans 11:19-36

They [train] to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. —1 Corinthians 9:25

Sports brings out the best and the worst in people. The news media often focus on the worst. Those who comfort players with "It's not whether you win or lose that counts; it's how you play the game" seldom make world news. But once in a while they do.

After a baseball team from Georgia defeated a team from Japan in the Little League World Series, one reporter wrote: "The boys from Warner Robins left a lasting impression of their inner character for the world to see. They proved again, it's not whether you win or lose that counts. It is, how you play the game."

When the losing players broke down in tears, the winning team members stopped their victory celebration to console them. "I just hated to see them cry," said pitcher Kendall Scott, "and I just wanted to let them know that I care." Some referred to the moment as "sportsmanship at its best."

It was indeed heartwarming, but it points out that sports—even at its best—is an imperfect metaphor for Christianity. In sports, someone always loses. But when someone is won to Christ, the only loser is Satan.

For Christians, true teamwork is not about defeating opponents; it's about recruiting them to join our team (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

Lord, too often I view as my enemies those who don't know You. Help me love them as You love them. Help me gently share Your truth with them. Help me see them as part of Your great mission field. Amen.

Tact is the knack of winning a point without making an enemy.

Run!

June 13, 2010

Run!

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 | Bible in a Year: Ezra 6-8; John 21

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. —1 Corinthians 9:24

In the award-winning film Chariots of Fire, one of the characters is legendary British sprinter Harold Abrahams. He is obsessed with winning, but in a preliminary 100-meter dash leading up to the 1924 Olympics, he is soundly beaten by his rival, Eric Liddell. Abrahams' response is deep despair. When his girlfriend, Sybil, tries to encourage him, Harold angrily declares, "I run to win. If I can't win, I won't run!" Sybil responds wisely, "If you don't run, you can't win."

Life is full of reversals, and we as Christians are not excluded from disappointments that make us want to give up. But in the race that is the Christian life, Paul challenges us to keep running. He told the Corinthians, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it" (1 Cor. 9:24). We are to run faithfully, Paul is saying, spurred on by the knowledge that we run to honor our King and to receive from Him an eternal crown.

If we falter in our running—if we quit serving God or give in to sin because of our difficulties—we risk losing a rich reward we could have received had we run our best.

Sybil was right. "If you don't run, you can't win."

While running with patience the race for the King,

With obstacles taking their toll,

We slow down to look up for help from our Lord;

He keeps us aware of our goal. —Branon

Greater than winning any medal will be hearing the Master say, "Well done!"

Train To Finish Strong

August 23, 2004

Train To Finish Strong

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 113-115; 1 Corinthians 6

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. —1 Corinthians 9:27

Eighty years ago, Eric Liddell electrified the world by capturing an Olympic gold medal in the 400 meters—a race he was not expected to win. Liddell was the favorite at 100 meters, but he had withdrawn from that race after learning the qualifying heats would be on Sunday, a day he observed as one of worship and rest. Instead of lamenting his lost chance in the 100, he spent the next 6 months training for the 400—and set a new Olympic record.

Paul used a sports metaphor to emphasize the Christian's need for spiritual discipline. "Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things" (1 Corinthians 9:25), that is, goes into strict training. "Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown." Paul longed to remain faithful to Christ because he wanted to bring the message of salvation to others (vv.19,27).

Throughout Liddell's life, he disciplined himself spiritually each day by spending time in God's Word and in prayer. He remained faithful until he died of a brain tumor in a Japanese internment camp during World War II.

Strengthened by the grace and power of God, Eric Liddell ran well and finished strong in the race of life. And so can we.

To win the race of life in Christ,

This must become our daily goal:

To trust in God for grace and strength,

For discipline and self-control. —Sper

In the race of life, it takes discipline to finish strong.

Make Your Body Listen

August 2, 1995

Make Your Body Listen

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 60-62; Romans 5

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection. —1 Corinthians 9:27

The apostle Paul was serious about the gospel. He gave himself to the task of serving God with the same dedication that an athlete devotes to preparation for competition. While athletes train for a temporal prize, Paul endured tremendous hardship to win an eternal reward.

Although he had experienced several years of fruitful ministry, the apostle had every reason to quit. On five occasions he had felt the searing bite of 39 lashes as leather cords tore into his flesh (2 Cor. 11:24). He was also beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked, and he endured hunger, thirst, cold, and many other troubles (vv.25-27).

Paul's body must have rebelled each time he prepared to go to another place of service. I imagine it told him, "Look, Paul. I'm tired and hurt. I've done enough. Why do you insist on such insane acts of love for these difficult people? There's no way I'm going to risk more abuse. It's time to retire!"

But Paul disciplined his body. "I know you hurt," I can hear him say. "I would like to give in to you. But for the gospel, for Christ's kingdom, for Jesus Christ Himself, I have to keep going. And I can't go without you. Come on!"

Paul made his body his servant and the servant of the gospel. Are we as determined to serve Christ?

For Further Thought

Do you ever feel like quitting?

Where did Jesus find the strength to continue

to minister? (Matthew 14:13,23; 26:36-44).

When you're working for Jesus, it's always too soon to quit.

Running The Race

January 29, 2010

Running The Race

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 21-22; Matthew 19

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. —1 Corinthians 9:24

Spiridon Louis isn't well known around the world, but he is in Greece. That's because of what happened in 1896 when the Olympic Games were revived in Athens.

During the competition that year, the Greeks did quite well—winning the most medals of any nation. But the event that became a source of true Greek pride was the first-ever marathon. Seventeen athletes competed in this race of 40 kilometers (24.8 miles), but it was won by Louis—a common laborer. For his efforts, Louis was honored by king and country, and he became a national hero.

The apostle Paul used running a race as a picture of the Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 9:24, he challenged us not just to run but to run to win, saying, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” Not only did Paul teach this but he lived it out. In his final epistle, he said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2Tim. 4:7). Having finished his race, Paul joyfully anticipated receiving the victory crown from the King of heaven.

Like Paul, run your earthly race to win—and to please your King.

As we run in this race—

As our best effort we bring—

We are spurred on by the fact

That we must win for the King. —Branon

The Christian’s race is not a sprint—it’s a marathon.

Common Ground

September 7, 2006

Common Ground

Read: Acts 17:22-31 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 1-2; 1 Corinthians 16

That I might win those who are without law. —1 Corinthians 9:21

Roman emperors are not generally remembered for their wisdom, but there are a few exceptions. One great thinker was Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome from AD 161 to 180. Gifted with a brilliant mind, he was one of the great intellectual rulers in Western civilization.

Although he never became a convert to the new faith that would be called Christianity, he displayed remarkable insight. His wisdom reflects the law of God written in the heart of someone who did not have God’s Word (Rom. 2:14-15). For example:

• The happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts.

• You have power over your mind—not outside events.

• Your life is what your thoughts make it.

These words sound similar to Proverbs 23:7, “As [a person] thinks in his heart, so is he.” We can learn helpful principles from non-Christians and use their beliefs as common ground for sharing the gospel. When Paul stood on Mars Hill addressing some of the leading intellectuals of his day, he did not belittle their beliefs but established common ground with them and then gave the gospel (Acts 17:26-28).

Let’s look for common ground with our neighbors, so that we may lead them to Christ.

What common ground do you share with your friends?

Books read Hobbies Travel

Children Sports Upbringing

Work A grief experience Military service

A faith worth having is a faith worth sharing.

Running Well

August 9, 2001

Running Well

Read: Isaiah 40:27-31 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 77-78; Romans 10

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. —1

Corinthians 9:24

A computer study of 5,000 racehorses has revealed a way to predict whether or not a young horse will develop into a good runner. A professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology used computers and high-speed cameras to find out how a good horse runs. He discovered that the legs of a fast horse operate much like the spokes of a wheel. Each leg touches down only as the leg before it pushes off. The effect is peak efficiency of effort and speed.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah talked about running well in the course of life. He said that the person who runs the best is the one who learns to “wait on the Lord” (Isaiah 40:31). He doesn’t waste energy trying to do things on his own. He looks to the Lord for his strength and hope.

In the New Testament, the Christian life is likened to a race. The apostle Paul indicated that those who run well are characterized by self-control and self-discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The author of Hebrews said, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Do you want to earn an imperishable crown? Then wait on the Lord. Practice self-control. Lay aside sinful burdens. These are the secrets of running well.

To run the race of life in Christ,

This must become your daily goal:

Confess your sins, trust God for strength,

Use discipline and self-control. —Sper

Those who wait on the Lord run without the weight of sin.

Your Biography

May 11, 2006

Your Biography

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 13-14; John 2

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. —2 Timothy 4:7

When D. L. Moody was moving into old age, he was asked to grant permission for his biography. Moody refused, saying, “A man’s life should never be written while he is living. What is important is how a man ends, not how he begins.”

For better or worse, I have failed to follow that dictum. My biography has been published. Yet I agree with Moody that the way our lives end is the crucial test of authentic discipleship. Only if we remain in a steadfast relationship with the Savior can we be confident not merely of entering heaven, but of obtaining the victor’s crown (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Paul was concerned about the possibility of being disapproved by his Lord (v.27). He was a redeemed believer who was serving the Lord, yet he feared that his service might prove to be wood, hay, and straw rather than gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

What will be the Lord’s appraisal of our lives? Will someone evaluating us be able to say honestly that we continued to bear fruit in old age? (Psalm 92:14). Whatever vocation we pursue, with the help of the Holy Spirit we may be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

For the ignorant, old age is as winter; for the learned, it is a harvest. —Jewish proverb

The Finish Line

November 26, 2006

The Finish Line

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 27-29; 1 Peter 3

Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.” —Colossians 4:17

When I was in college, I ran on the cross-country team. In the final event of the season, the state’s small colleges competed against

each other, with about 75 runners in the event. We ran the 5K course in the rain and mud on a cold November day.

As I neared the finish line, I spied a runner from one of the other schools just a short distance ahead of me. He became my goal. I ran as hard as I could and passed him just as I crossed the finish line. That last dash meant I finished 42nd, which seemed a lot better than 43rd! It meant our team finished one position higher in the final standings than the team represented by the runner I had beaten. The point? I didn't give up—I ran all the way through the finish line.

This is probably what Paul had in mind as he wrote to Archippus, one of his young ministry protégés: "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it" (Col. 4:17). When we feel discouraged and want to quit, it's good to remember that the Lord who entrusted us with the privilege of spiritual service will give us the grace and strength to carry out that service. Let us "run with endurance" (Heb. 12:1) so that we will receive the "imperishable crown" (1 Cor. 9:25).

Run the straight race through God's good grace,

Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;

Life with its way before us lies,

Christ is the path and Christ the prize. —Monsell

Running with patience is perseverance in the "long run."

Grooves Of Grace

February 21, 2006

Grooves Of Grace

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 1-3; Mark 3

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection. —1 Corinthians 9:27

A man was traveling in Canada one springtime when frost and melting snow made it nearly impossible to drive farther. He came to a crossroads and saw a sign that said, "Take care which rut you choose. You will be in it for the next 25 miles." That's a wise warning for all of us—and not just when we're driving in rough road conditions.

Whenever we come to a crossroads in life, what choice do we make? In other words, in what direction will we travel and what habits —which ruts of routine—will we establish?

A habit is a pattern of behavior that we follow consistently. We need to decide prayerfully what habits we will practice. Will our habits be mere ruts of routine? Or will they become "grooves of grace"?

Paul referred to his life's journey as a race. He learned that the only way to stay the course was to "discipline [his] body and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians 9:27). That implied establishing a consistent pattern of godly behavior.

Good health habits are important, but spiritual disciplines are far more important. Are we choosing to develop consistent habits of prayer, Bible reading, and kindness?

A habit is just a rut of routine. But good spiritual discipline can transform our ruts into grooves of grace.

Lord, keep me in Your groove of grace,

The chosen path for me;

Your will I daily will embrace

Until eternity. —Hess

In the beginning we make our habits; in the end our habits make us.

Too Soon To Quit

July 7, 2007

Too Soon To Quit

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Job 34-35; Acts 15:1-21

Lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and … run with endurance the race. —Hebrews 12:1

Chris Couch was only 16 years old when he first qualified to play golf at its highest level on the PGA Tour. He was quickly declared the next golfing prodigy and a surefire success for years to come.

Life, however, turned out to be more of a grind. Chris did not enjoy a sprint to success but endured a marathon that would take 16 years and 3 different stints on “mini-tours.” Tempted to quit, Couch persevered and finally, at age 32, became a Tour winner for the first time when he captured the New Orleans Open in a thrilling finish. His persistence had paid off, but it had not been easy.

In his book A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, Bible teacher Eugene Peterson reminds us that the Christian life has much more in common with a marathon than with a 100-meter dash. Peterson says we are called to persevere in “the long run, something that makes life worth living.”

With the grace and strength of Christ, we too can “run with endurance” this race of life (Heb. 12:1). And, with our Lord’s example to help and encourage us, we can, like the apostle Paul, run to win the prize of “an imperishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25).

It’s always too soon to quit.

O for a faith that will not shrink,

Though pressed by every foe,

That will not tremble on the brink

Of any earthly woe. —Bathurst

Run the race with eternity in view.

Run To Win

May 21, 2001

Run To Win

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 13-15; John 7:1-27

Run in such a way that you may obtain [the prize]. —1 Corinthians 9:24

As a teenager, James Martinson had one dream—to someday be on the US Downhill Ski Team. But the army drafted him and sent him to Vietnam, where he suffered a severe injury from a land mine, resulting in the loss of both his legs. He became hateful toward people and toward God, abused alcohol and drugs, and even considered suicide.

Then James met several Christians who explained how Christ could change him. Initially he didn’t believe them, but finally he invited Christ into his life. He recalls, “I didn’t get my legs back, but I began to experience something new from the inside.”

Eager to share Christ, James started working with teenagers. “Come run with us!” they begged. He answered, “I can’t. I don’t have legs.” “You’ve got a wheelchair,” they replied. This was the start of his wheelchair racing, a challenge that eventually made him a big-time winner. People often ask, “Was it wheelchair marathoning that changed your life?” He answers with conviction, “No, it was Jesus Christ.”

Feeling like a loser? Turn in faith to Jesus Christ. Then accept the apostle Paul’s challenge to run for the prize of an eternal trophy (1 Corinthians 9:24). Jesus will not only transform your losses into gains, but He’ll transform you!

O Lord, I now admit my sin,

And I accept Your grace;

Transform my life and help me grow

Until I see Your face. —Hess

When Jesus comes into a life, He changes everything.

Foolish Baggage

July 2, 2005

Foolish Baggage

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Job 22-24; Acts 11

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us. —Hebrews 12:1

In 1845, the ill-fated Franklin Expedition sailed from England to find a passage across the Arctic Ocean.

The crew loaded their two sailing ships with a lot of things they didn't need: a 1,200-volume library, fine china, crystal goblets, and sterling silverware for each officer with his initials engraved on the handles. Amazingly, each ship took only a 12-day supply of coal for their auxiliary steam engines.

The ships became trapped in vast frozen plains of ice. After several months, Lord Franklin died. The men decided to trek to safety in small groups, but none of them survived.

One story is especially heartbreaking. Two officers pulled a large sled more than 65 miles across the treacherous ice. When rescuers found their bodies, they discovered that the sled was filled with table silver.

Those men contributed to their own demise by carrying what they didn't need. But don't we sometimes do the same? Don't we drag baggage through life that we don't need? Evil thoughts that hinder us. Bad habits that drag us down. Grudges that we won't let go.

Let's determine to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1).

The world has lost its transient lure—

Its evil spell I shun;

I've set my course for higher things

Till earth's brief race is run. —Bosch

Keep out of your life anything that would crowd Christ out of your heart.

Run To Win!

March 14, 1994

Run To Win!

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 23-25; Mark 14:1-26

Run in such a way that you may obtain [the prize]. —1 Corinthians 9:24

It's as true in life as in running: Only the determined achieve their goals. Olympic medals don't go to overweight businessmen who puff around the track for exercise.

Eric Liddell, in the film Chariots of Fire, illustrates this principle. Just before the first turn in a 400-meter race, Eric was shoved off balance, and he stumbled onto the infield grass. When he looked up, he saw the others pulling away. With a look of intense determination, Eric jumped to his feet, and with his back cocked and his arms flailing he rushed ahead. He was determined not only to catch up with the pack but to win. And he did!

This was the kind of fervor that the apostle Paul brought to his ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 he said, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." Paul saw himself as an Olympic athlete competing for a gold medal, straining every muscle, nerve, and sinew to get to the finish line. And what's the prize? Not a temporary reward but "an imperishable crown" (v.25).

For us as Christians, victory is possible. So let's run as though we want to win!

We must fix our eyes on Jesus

If we're going to win the race—

Working hard at godly living,

Trusting in His saving grace. —Sper

Winners never quit, and quitters never win.

Winning The Race

August 7, 1995

Winning The Race

Read: Hebrews 12:1-6 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 72-73; Romans 9:1-15

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. —Hebrews 12:1

On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first man in history to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Within 2 months, John Landy eclipsed the record by 1.4 seconds. On August 7, 1954, the two met together for a historic race. As they moved into the last lap, Landy held the lead. It looked as if he would win, but as he neared the finish he was haunted by the question, “Where is Bannister?” As he turned to look, Bannister took the lead. Landy later told a Time magazine reporter, “If I hadn’t looked back, I would have won!”

One of the most descriptive pictures of the Christian life in the Bible is of an athlete competing in a race. First Corinthians 9:24-27 tells us that discipline is the key to winning. In Hebrews 12:1-2, we are encouraged to lay aside anything that might hinder our spiritual advancement and to stay focused on Christ. And in Philippians 3:12-13, the apostle Paul said, “I press on, … forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.”

Lord, give us endurance as we run this race of life. Help us not to wallow in past failures, but to be disciplined and to shun sinful ways. May we fix our eyes on the eternal goal set before us and keep looking unto Jesus.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,

Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;

Life with its way before us lies,

Christ is the path and Christ the prize. —Monsell

You can't make spiritual progress by looking back.

Brother Donkey

March 1, 1995

Brother Donkey

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 23-25; Mark 7:14-37

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest … I myself should become disqualified. —1 Corinthians 9:27

One of the early church leaders referred to his body as “Brother Donkey.” Like that hardy animal with a reputation for being stubborn, his body served him well as long as he placed it under firm discipline.

In today’s Scripture reading, the apostle Paul wrote about this matter of self-discipline. Using analogies from athletic competition, he said we must be just as zealous about our spiritual training as athletes are when they compete for a prize. That’s a big order when you consider the hard work and personal discipline that a world-class athlete endures to become an Olympic contestant.

Paul said, “I discipline my body” (1 Cor. 9:27). The Greek term for discipline, says the scholar Henry Alford, means “to strike heavily in the face, to render black and blue.” The apostle was speaking figuratively, of course, but his message is clear. If we want to be winners in our spiritual marathon, we must discipline ourselves: reading the Bible, praying, loving self-sacrificially, forgiving freely, and rejecting every sinful thought and inclination.

Lord, help me always to do what is right and to reject sin so that I will never become disqualified in my service for you.

If you'd be a winner, Christian,

Over every sin,

You must yield your mind and body

To God's discipline. —Hess

Victory is the fruit of dedication and discipline.

Racing Toward The Goal

October 3, 2003

Racing Toward The Goal

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 17-19; Ephesians 5:17-33

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. —1 Corinthians 9:24

When my son began his sophomore year of high school, he also began his second year of cross-country running. Steve started the year fighting for a spot on the varsity team, which was not an easy task.

It meant running miles and miles and miles. It meant lifting weights. It meant getting extra rest and eating right (well, some of the time). And it meant running his heart out at races.

His times gradually improved. Then he pulled a muscle and had to start over. But he didn't quit. Finally he gained a spot on the varsity. And by the time they ran in the regional meet, he was the third fastest runner on the team.

Having goals in life can give us the purpose and drive to accomplish something truly valuable. This principle is especially helpful in our lives as believers in Christ. As we run the Christian race, our goal is to "run in such a way" that we may win an imperishable crown—an eternal reward from our Savior (1 Corinthians 3:12-14; 9:24-25). This requires personal discipline, hard work, and continual improvement. It includes a Spirit-enabled commitment to do our very best for the Lord.

That takes perseverance, an all-out effort, and a push to become increasingly like Christ. But running that way is worth it, for the prize will last forever.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,

Lift up your eyes and seek His face;

Life with its way before us lies,

Christ is the path and Christ the prize. —Monsell

Great achievement requires great perseverance.

Run To Win!

March 18, 2002

Run To Win!

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 32-34; Mark 15:26-47

Run in such a way that you may obtain [the prize]. —1 Corinthians 9:24

It's as true in life as in running: Only the determined achieve their goals. Olympic medals don't go to overweight businessmen who occasionally puff around the track for exercise.

Eric Liddell, in the film Chariots of Fire, illustrates this principle. Just before the first turn in a 400-meter race, Eric was shoved off balance, and he stumbled onto the infield grass. When he looked up, he saw the others pulling away. With a look of intense determination, Eric jumped up. With his head cocked back and his arms flailing, he rushed ahead. He was determined not only to catch up with the pack but to win the race. And he did!

This was the kind of fervor that the apostle Paul brought to his ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 he said, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." Paul saw himself as being like an Olympic athlete who is competing for a gold medal, straining every muscle in his body to get to the finish line. And what is the prize? It's not a temporary reward but "an imperishable crown" (v.25).

Victory is possible for every Christian. So let's run as though we want to win! —HWR

We must fix our eyes on Jesus

If we're going to win the race—

Pressing on toward godly living,

Trusting in His saving grace. —Sper

Winners never quit, and quitters never win.

Running Every Day

August 15, 2009

Running Every Day

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 91-93; Romans 15:1-13

Run in such a way that you may obtain [the prize]. —1 Corinthians 9:24

The Pikes Peak Ascent is a challenging mountain foot race, covering 13.32 miles while gaining 7,815 feet in altitude. My good friend Don Wallace ran it 20 times. In his final race, he crossed the finish line one week before his 67th birthday! Instead of training just before a race, Don ran 6 miles a day, year round, with rare exceptions, wherever he happened to be. He's done that for most of his adult life and continues to this day.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul uses running as a picture of his own discipline as a Christian in the race of life. He ran with purpose and discipline to win an eternal crown, and he encouraged others to do the same: "Run in such a way that you may obtain [the prize]" (v.24).

The word temperate in verse 25 carries the meaning of self-control practiced by athletes who train to win the prize. As a consistent habit of life, regular discipline is of far greater value to any athlete than last-minute preparation.

Are we approaching "the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1) with a hit-or-miss spiritual regimen or with purpose and discipline born from a desire to please God?

The key to going the distance is the discipline of running every day.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,

Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;

Life with its way before us lies,

Christ is the path and Christ the prize. —Monsell

Running the Christian race takes dedication and discipline.

Lasting Rewards

December 13, 2013

Lasting Rewards

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Hosea 12-14; Revelation 4

Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things. —1 Timothy 4:8

Ukrainian gymnast Larisa Latynina held the record of 18 Olympic medals. She won them in the 1956, 1960, and 1964 Olympics. The 48-year-old record was surpassed when Michael Phelps swam for his 19th gold in the 4 x 200-meter freestyle relay in the 2012 London Games. "[Latynina] kind of got lost in history," the publisher of the International Gymnast magazine said. When the Soviet Union broke up, "we had forgotten about her."

Paul, the apostle, reminds us that sometimes hard work is forgotten. Athletes subject their bodies to great discipline as they train to win perishable medals for their effort (1 Cor. 9:25). But it is not just that the medals are perishable. Over time, people's memory of those achievements dim and fade. If athletes can sacrifice so much to achieve rewards on the earth, rewards that will eventually be forgotten, how much more effort should followers of Christ exert to gain an imperishable crown? (1 Tim. 4:8).

Athletes' sacrifice and determination are rewarded with medals, trophies, and money. But even greater, our Father in heaven rewards the discipline of His children (Luke 19:17).

God will never forget our service done out of love for Him who first loved us.

I thank You, Lord, for the opportunities to use

the gifts You have given me for Your service today.

Help me to do so in obedience, expecting nothing

more than Your “well done” as reward.

Sacrifice for the kingdom is never without reward.

Going For The Prize

March 22, 2013

Going For The Prize

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 10-12; Luke 1:39-56

Everyone who competes for the prize … [does] it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. —1 Corinthians 9:25

Every March, the Iditarod Trail Race is held in Alaska. Sled dogs and their drivers, called “mushers,” race across a 1,049-mile route from Anchorage to Nome. The competing teams cover this great distance in anywhere from 8 to 15 days. In 2011, a record time was set by musher John Baker who covered the entire route in 8 days, 19 hours, 46 minutes, and 39 seconds. The teamwork between dogs and driver is remarkable, and those who compete are tenacious in their efforts to win. The first-place winner receives a cash prize and a new pickup truck. But after so much perseverance in extreme weather conditions, the accolades and prizes may seem insignificant and transient.

The excitement of a race was a familiar concept to the apostle Paul, but he used competition to illustrate something eternal. He wrote, “Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25).

Sometimes we are tempted to place our emphasis on temporal rewards, which perish with the passing of time. The Scriptures, however, encourage us to focus on something more permanent. We honor God by seeking spiritual impact that will be rewarded in eternity.

Here we labor, here we pray,

Here we wrestle night and day;

There we lay our burdens down,

There we wear the victor’s crown. —Anon.

Run the race with eternity in view.

Purpose in Routine

August 27, 2015

Purpose in Routine

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 120–122; 1 Corinthians 9

I run with purpose in every step. —1 Corinthians 9:26 nlt

A rolling-ball clock in the British Museum struck me as a vivid illustration of the deadening effects of routine. A small steel ball traveled in grooves across a tilted steel plate until it tripped a lever on the other side. This tilted the plate back in the opposite direction, reversed the direction of the ball and advanced the clock hands. Every year, the steel ball traveled some 2,500 miles back and forth, but never really went anywhere.

It’s easy for us to feel trapped by our daily routine when we can’t see a larger purpose. The apostle Paul longed to be effective in making the gospel of Christ known. “I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air” (1 Cor. 9:26 niv). Anything can become monotonous—traveling, preaching, teaching, and especially being confined in prison. Yet Paul believed he could serve Christ his Lord in every situation.

Routine becomes lethal when we can't see a purpose in it. Paul's vision reached beyond any limiting circumstance because he was in the race of faith to keep going until he crossed the finish line. By including Jesus in every aspect of his life, Paul found meaning even in the routine of life. And so can we.

Lord, give us renewed vision and energy to pursue the goal of making Christ known in the midst of our daily routine.

Jesus can transform our routine into meaningful service for Him.

Plan To Win

August 29, 1997

Plan To Win

Read: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 126-128; 1 Corinthians 10:19-33

I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. —1 Corinthians 9:26

Many years ago, a young heavy-weight fighter held the world boxing title. But his reign was short-lived. He was a power hitter—strong as a bull. But he hadn't learned how to avoid getting hit. He also had a problem exercising self-discipline in his social life. As a result, he soon lost his title.

This boxer's experience is duplicated all too often in the spiritual arena. Many talented Christians make a fast start in the Lord's service. But without an overall plan to conquer the enemy, they are soon defeated.

The apostle Paul said that in his battle with sin he tried to make every blow effective. He did not want to be like a boxer whose punches merely strike the air (1 Cor. 9:26). The apostle was a competitor who disciplined himself to make all his moves count toward the ultimate decision.

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 show the strategy that is needed to endure spiritual battles and to have a lifetime of effective service for the Lord. He said the Christian life takes commitment, knowledge, stamina, and love, which are gained through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, to have a victorious Christian life, we need a comprehensive strategy for winning.

Come, Lord, and give the vision

To arm me for the fight;

Make me an overcomer

Clothed with Your Spirit's might. —Anon.

Life is a series of battles—Are you training to win?

Where Is Your Trust?

April 5, 2005

Where Is Your Trust?

Read: Jeremiah 17:5-10 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 1-3; Luke 8:26-56

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. —Jeremiah 17:7

Let's be honest. Are we always able to trust ourselves in everything? Even the apostle Paul said emphatically about himself, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). He wouldn't trust himself to do the right thing unless he kept his body under strict discipline.

Today's Bible reading reminds us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9.) It is not possible for any of us to fathom the extent of the deceptions of our heart. How then can we ever trust ourselves or anyone else completely?

Jeremiah warned the last Judean kings against placing their trust in earthly kings (vv.5-6). But they continually sought help from Egypt. How foolish they were! They should have repented of their wickedness and returned to Almighty God for His help.

Where can we put our trust for help in difficult and uncertain times? God's Word tells us that those who place their trust in God are

like trees planted by the waters. Even in drought they will not cease to bear fruit (vv.7-8).

Let’s trust God to produce fruit in our lives.

We find it easier to trust

In what our eyes can see,

But God asks us to trust in Him

For our security. —Sper

Don't let self-confidence replace your trust in God.

1 Corinthians 10

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13

God is faithful, who… with the temptation will also make the way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13)

In 1346, during the Hundred Years' War, the English army of King Edward III met a French battalion at Crecy, France. The King's son, Prince Edward, led one vital division of the British force while Edward III stood nearby with a strong band of soldiers, ready to send relief if needed. Soon after the battle started, the prince thought he was in danger, so he sent for help. But the king didn't come. Young Edward sent another message, pleading for immediate assistance. His father responded by telling the courier, "Go tell my son that I am not so inexperienced a commander as not to know when help is needed, nor so careless a father as not to send it."

This story illustrates the heavenly Father's relationship with believers as we battle temptation and sin. Often we cry out for help, but it seems that God sends no relief. Yet at no time does He withdraw His eye from our precarious position. He never allows us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, and when He sees that we are about to be overcome He rushes to our aid or provides a way to escape. So we need not get frantic—our Father is aware of our situation. In 1 Corinthians 1:9 the apostle Paul said, "God is faithful." Commenting on this, Ambrose Serle noted, "He is wise to foresee and provide for all my dangers. He is faithful to perfect and perform all His promises."

No matter how hot the conflict, the Lord is ready to intervene at the right moment. He is always standing by. —Paul R VanGorder

When God sends us, He also goes with us.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

LITTLE Jeff was trying his best to save enough money to buy his mother a present. It was a terrible struggle because he gave in so easily to the temptation to buy goodies from the ice cream vendor who came through the neighborhood in a brightly colored van.

One night after his mother had tucked him in bed, she over-heard him praying, "Please, dear God, help me to run away when the ice cream truck comes down our street tomorrow." Even at his young age he had learned that one of the best ways to over-come temptation is to avoid what appeals to our weaknesses.

All believers are tempted to sin. Yet we need not give in. The Lord provides the way to be victorious over evil enticements (1 Corinthians 10:13), but we must do our part. Sometimes that involves avoiding situations that would contribute to our spiritual defeat.

Writing to his son in the faith, the apostle Paul admonished Timothy to run away from the evil desires of youth. He was to keep his distance from temptations that might, because of their strong appeal, cause him to yield. That's good advice!

If possible, we should never let ourselves be in the wrong places or with people who will tempt us to do the things we should be avoiding.—R W DeHaan

1 Corinthians 10:1–22

Today in the Word

Judaism is a religion where meals have always mattered. The Passover Seder is a ritual meal commemorating the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. The tithes, which God commanded His people to bring to the temple, were consumed as meals in the presence of God (cf. Deut. 14:23). Christians, having inherited a rich tradition of meal–sharing from their Jewish forefathers,

now celebrate Christ's death and resurrection through the Lord's Supper.

In today's reading, Paul draws parallels between the story of the Israelites and the experiences of the first–century Gentile Christians of Corinth. Not only is Paul teaching the content of the Old Testament Scriptures to the Corinthians, he also introduces a method for reading those Scriptures, whereby the Corinthian Christians are invited to find themselves in the history of Israel. While theirs is not a shared ethnic heritage (the Christians in Corinth are Gentile, not Jewish), spiritually they share the same ancestry. What happened to the Israelites serves as examples and warnings to Christians of the first century and to Christians today.

The parallels between the generation of the Exodus and first–century Corinthian Christians are unmistakable: both shared experiences of spiritual privilege. The Israelites tasted the divine Presence, drank spiritual drink from the rock in the desert, ate bread from heaven, and were baptized under the leadership of Moses. Similarly, the Corinthians had the blessings of baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, just as the Israelites suffered the fierce wrath of God for their idolatrous practices, so, too, the Corinthian Christians needed to tremble at the prospect of God's judgment.

God would not tolerate divided allegiance, and the Corinthians were on the precipice of idolatry. Paul warns them against sexual immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling (vv. 8–9). Later in the chapter, Paul will denounce the act of feasting in pagan temples. For now, he illuminates their precarious spiritual standing. Their pride has given them a false sense of confidence, and Paul illuminates the Old Testament Scriptures as a word of warning.

Apply the Word

The Corinthians lived in a pluralistic culture, just as we do. The word Paul speaks to them is relevant today. In what ways do we compromise our allegiance to God? Do we participate in idolatrous practices? We might want to consider our culture's gods of sex, money, and power. Where have we casually shared fellowship with these gods? And what would uncompromised obedience to God look like in a culture like ours?

1 Corinthians 10:23–33

Today in the Word

In the past few decades, American churches have staked out positions on whether women could wear pants, whether drums or hand–held microphones could be used in worship services, whether Christian parents could send their children to public schools, and whether only the King James Version of the Bible could be used. Since the first century, the church in every time and place has had particular cultural issues that have prompted strenuous disagreement.

In today's passage, Paul quotes Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (v. 26). One issue dividing the Corinthian church concerned eating meat that had been offered to idols. Rather than characterize the issue as right and wrong, Paul provides an explanation for both the strong and the weak positions.

On a certain level, Paul agrees with the strong. They've been arguing that eating idol meat is ultimately meaningless since idols themselves are nothing. Yes, Paul says, the earth is the Lord's. Everything belongs to Him. As long as we eat and drink with thankfulness, we are free to enjoy all that God has created and should not be denounced for the exercise of this freedom.

Paul doesn't close the argument there, however. He is careful to retrace some ground, tempering the freedom of the strong for the protection of the weak. To the strong, he warns: don't exercise your freedom in such a way that you cause a brother or sister to fall into sin. Don't just think of yourselves, as if your rights and your freedoms were all that mattered. Think about the good of others. Does your freedom build them up or tear them down?

The way for the church to navigate these questions of conscience isn't simply to determine what's absolutely right and what's emphatically wrong. For a Christian, Paul is quite clear that we've got extensive freedom. God invites us to enjoy His good creation. They key, however, is to always think of others first instead of ourselves. Our highest calling is love.

Apply the Word

Paul's given us a series of questions to ask in ambiguous situations. Going beyond the question of right and wrong, we can ask: How does this affect my brothers and sisters in Christ? Does it offend them and cause them to fall into sin? Does it burden them with regulations beyond the truth of Scripture? How does this affect God's reputation? Does it ultimately glorify Him? And does this serve to advance the gospel? We must remember the example of Christ, who forfeited His rights for the good of others (see 1 Cor. 11:1).

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12

Several years ago a severe ice storm hit southern lower Michigan, causing great damage to trees. As I surveyed the destruction, I

checked the two large white birches in my backyard. One had lost some of its limbs, but its partner had suffered a worse fate. The entire tree had toppled over and was completely uprooted. Why the one and not the other? The answer was simple. Instead of standing straight up, this thirty-five-foot tree had grown at a pronounced angle. So when the heavy ice accumulated on its branches, it fell in the direction it was leaning.

If we don't live in fellowship with the Lord each day, our lives will lean toward some weakness or besetting sin. Then if a crisis comes or if we are caught off guard, we will be unable to resist the pressure of our circumstances. Let's stand tall in the strength of the Lord so it won't happen to us. —D. J. D.

WE NEED GOD'S STRENGTH TO KEEP US TRUE AND STRAIGHT IN EVERYTHING WE DO.

The Castle That Thought It Would Stand - Anyone who travels to Edinburgh, Scotland will find Edinburgh castle a tower of seemingly insurmountable strength. But the truth is that the castle was once actually captured. The fortress had an obvious weak spot which defenders guarded--but because another spot was apparently protected by its steepness and impregnability, no sentries were posted there. At an opportune time, an attacking army sent a small band up that unguarded slope and surprised the garrison into surrender. Where the castle was strong, there it was weak. - Today in the Word

1 Corinthians 10:13

In July 1911, a stuntman named Bobby Leach went over Niagara Falls in a specially designed steel drum and lived to tell about it. Although he suffered minor injuries, he survived because he recognized the tremendous dangers involved in the feat, and because he had done everything he could to protect himself from harm. Several years after that incident, while skipping down a street in New Zealand, Bobby Leach slipped on an orange peeling, fell, and badly fractured his leg. He was taken to a hospital where he later died of complications from that fall. He received a greater injury walking down the street than he sustained in going over Niagara. He was not prepared for danger in what he assumed to be a safe situation.

Some great temptations that roar around us like the foaming cataract of Niagara will leave us unharmed, while a small, insignificant incident causes our downfall. Why? Simply because we become careless and do not recognize the potential danger in it. A victorious Christian is an alert Christian. —R W DeHaan

A PREPARED CHRISTIAN IS A PRAYING CHRISTIAN.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Concerned about his personal life, Ed went to his pastor for help. After listening to the young man's mild list of supposed sins, the wise preacher felt that he had not been completely honest. "Are you sure that's all?" the preacher asked. "Yes, pastor," Ed said. "Are you positive you haven't been entertaining any impure thoughts lately?" the pastor continued. "Oh, no," Ed replied, "but they've sure been entertaining me."

Temptation may be defined as a desire for sinful pleasure. If it didn't offer pleasure, it would be easy to resist. Perhaps that's why we under-stand the truth behind the cartoon in which a man says, "I don't mind fleeing temptation—as long as I can leave a forwarding address." And, if we're honest, we admit that sin often takes place first in our mind. For many people, illicit sexual thoughts provide pleasure.

Temptation is not sin. For it to develop into sin, we have to welcome it, dwell on it, and enjoy it. For example, the temptation to get back at someone who has hurt us is wrong only when we begin to think about ways to harm that person and get revenge. Paul said that every thought must be brought "into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

When we allow wrong thoughts into our minds, we must confess them as sin, ask God to help us, and then fill our minds with good and pure thoughts. When we submit to God and resist the devil, we can say no to tempting thoughts. —D C Egner

Character is shaped by what the mind takes in.

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. - 1 Corinthians 10:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

No doubt you've heard of a "Puritan work ethic" or a "Protestant work ethic." At its best, such an ethic can contribute to professionalism, integrity, and compassion in the workplace. But what about the other side of the coin? What about a Christian "play ethic"? The phrase may sound strange, but that's essentially what we've been developing during this month's study. As much as we

need wisdom to guide us when we're on the job, we also need wisdom to guide us when we're at play!

In light of today's reading, we might frame the question this way: how can we play to the glory of God? Paul reiterated two truths we've found central all month long: freedom, "everything is permissible," and love, "but not everything is beneficial." Even in leisure, we are to seek the good of others (10:23–24).

"That's just great," you may be thinking. "Even in my free time I have to worry about God's glory and others' edification. What about me?!" So deep runs the influence of our me-first culture that we might actually think this is a legitimate question. We must grasp that loving God and our neighbor will bring us all that really matters in life.

How did Paul apply these truths? Freedom meant that anything could be eaten to the glory of God, even meat sacrificed to idols. But love meant that strong believers might abstain from eating such meat under certain circumstances for the sake of those with weak consciences. While it may not be easy to distinguish between weaker believers who need a helping hand and those who are judging us based on their own convictions or choices, our priority is to seek the good of our fellow disciples. The bottom line: "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (10:31).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In light of our study this month, set a specific godly leisure goal for next month. We know that this season can be a busy "back to school" time for those with kids, and it's the "end of vacation" season at the office as well. All the more reason to set a leisure goal! Otherwise, God's gifts of rest, beauty, and pleasure might get neglected in the rush of urgent needs and tasks. What-ever goal you choose, ask that it would glorify God and fulfill the principles we've studied.

1Corinthians 10:23-31 (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

GLORIFYING GOD IN OUR RECREATIONS

THE WORD Recreation is preferable to Pastime, for as one realizes the priceless moments, with all their opportunities, getting fewer, one is averse to hear people talk of "killing time." But "recreation" is a good word, and we all need to find some way of re-creating the exhausted grey-Matter of the brain which is being used up in long application to study or work.

We must not be the "dull boys" of the old adage, but as Christians our faces should shine like the morning sun; we should be quick, bright, intelligent, and in no danger of being reckoned among the "back-numbers," of which the piles are generally shabby and dusty!

"All things edify not" is one of the first conditions of healthy recreation. There is really no limit but this to the recreations in which a Christian person can indulge. He may play at manly games, row, skate, swim, drive a motor, sail the ocean, or scale the mountain snows! The more the better, so long as they are recreative; and are not the end, but the means to the end of a healthy manhood and womanhood. That is, they must edify, build up physique, muscle, brain, to be used afterwards in the main business of life. Nothing is a greater curse than when people neglect their real business in order to get to their sports and games. Then, so far from edifying, these in turn begin to pull down and destroy.

Probably the words "edify not" put in a plea on the behalf of others. We are not to do things which in themselves may be lawful and innocent enough, but which might have a prejudicial effect on those who are watching every movement of our life.

"Do all to the glory of God." So many seem afraid of joy! They fear if they are too happy, God will send some trouble as make weight. How different is the command in Deut26:11 and Phil4:4. Even when things do not appear to be good, let us dare to be thankful in all things, and give praise for all. All our Father's gifts are good, whatever be the wrappings or packing-cases in which they come to hand.

PRAYER - May the Holy Spirit so fill us with Christ our Lord, that there may be no room in our life for anything inconsistent with His perfect purity and love. AMEN.

1 Corinthians 10:23

IS IT PROFITABLE? - J. Wilbur Chapman said, "My life is governed by this rule: Anything that dims my vision of Christ or takes away my taste for Bible study or cramps my prayer life or makes Christian work difficult is wrong for me, and I must, as a Christian, turn away from it."

This was how Susannah Wesley defined "sin" to her young son, John Wesley: "If you would judge of the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of pleasure, then take this simple rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, and takes off the relish of spiritual things—that to you is sin."

1 Corinthians 10:31

Drifting snow and bitter cold threatened the lives of Indian evangelist Sadhu Sundar Singh and his Tibetan companion as they crossed a Himalayan mountain pass. Fighting the "sleep of death," they stumbled over a mound in the trail. It was a man, half-dead. The Tibetan refused to stop but continued on alone. The compassionate Sadhu, however, shouldered the burden the best he could. Through his struggling, he began to warm up, as did the unconscious man. But before reaching the village they found the Tibetan—frozen to death.

Jesus taught that if we put our selfish desires first, we become losers. But if we use our lives for His sake, we receive life in abundance. Only when life's energies are put into the cause of Christ do we know the joy of being finders instead of losers. —D. J. DeHaan.

YOU DENY CHRIST WHEN YOU FAIL TO DENY YOURSELF FOR CHRIST.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

DATING and drinking are spiritual as well as physical activities. One reader wrote about a Christian couple who get upset at church suppers when their table can't go through the serving line first. Then, when their turn comes, they "rush up and pile their plates full and never speak to anyone till they are done." She mentioned another couple who admit that they "live to eat." The woman bulges in her tight dress, and the man's buttons strain to hold his shirt together. "Can they be effective witnesses?" she asked.

People whose weight is due to health problems need encouragement not ridicule. But I am bothered by Christians like the couples mentioned above who exercise no self-control because self-control is evidence of a Spirit-controlled life. I never feel good about myself when I eat too much, and I shouldn't, because self-indulgence of any kind—whether it involves food, alcohol, sex, or anything else—is evidence that I am putting my desire for physical gratification above my need for spiritual satisfaction, which comes only when I decide, for the sake of my relationship with God, to exercise self-control.

When thanking God for food, perhaps we also need to ask Him to show us how to eat and drink in a way that glorifies Him. —D J DeHaan

Heed The Warning

May 3, 2006

Heed The Warning

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1,5-11 | Bible in a Year: 1 Kings 14-15; Luke 22:21-46

These things … were written for our admonition. —1 Corinthians 10:11

In the months following the devastating Asian tsunami of December 2004, an amazing story of survival emerged from Simeulue Island, the closest inhabited land to the epicenter of the earthquake.

A news report said that only 7 of the remote Indonesian island’s 75,000 inhabitants died when 30-foot waves struck just half an hour after the quake. For decades, the people had heard stories told by their grandparents of giant waves that killed thousands on this same island in 1907. So when the ground shook and the sea retreated from the shore, the people recalled their grandparents’ warnings and fled to high ground.

First Corinthians 10 describes a spiritual disaster we can avoid. After the people of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt, they continued to turn away from the Lord. Recounting their recurring self-indulgence and its disastrous results, Paul wrote: “Now these things became our examples … And they were written for our admonition” (vv.6,11). The story of their failure has been preserved so we can avoid the same disaster of disobedience.

If there are warning signs in our lives today, it’s time to run from self-destructive sin to the high ground of God’s forgiving grace.

The Bible is filled with example and teaching

On how to avoid all the pitfalls of sin;

And if we will learn from its people and precepts,

The struggles and battles of life we can win. —Hess

A warning heeded is a disaster avoided.

Tell Me The Story

August 3, 2008

Tell Me The Story

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 63-65; Romans 6

All these things happened to them as examples, and … for our admonition. —1 Corinthians 10:11

Now that I have grandkids, I'm back into the classic children's Bible stories. Wide-eyed stories like David and Goliath, Noah's ark, and Jonah and the big fish quickly capture a child's imagination!

But there's a danger here—not with the stories themselves but rather with our attitude toward them. If we view them simply as kids' stories, kind of like the Grimm's Fairy Tales of the Bible, we miss the point.

The stories of the Bible were never meant to be outgrown. There are profound lessons to be learned from the amazing accounts of those who faced giants, floods, and fish!

Hundreds of years after the fact, the apostle Paul explained that the things that happened to Moses and the Israelites as they wandered through the desert "happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). These stories are about us. They mirror the tensions we face daily as we too seek to apply God's will and ways to the realities of our lives. They teach us of the treachery of sin, our desperate need to trust God unflinchingly, and the importance of staying faithful and true to Him regardless of what happens.

Don't ignore the old stories. You might be surprised what God wants to teach you through them.

We learn the blessed Word of God

To fix it firmly in our heart,

And when we act upon that Word

Its truth from us will not depart. —D. De Haan

Stories from the past can give us pointers for the present.

Black Boxes

March 14, 2013

Black Boxes

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 23-25; Mark 14:1-26

These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition. —1 Corinthians 10:11

Commercial aircraft carry two flight-data recorders called "black boxes." One logs the performance and condition of the aircraft in flight, and the other records the conversation of the crew with air-traffic controllers on the ground. These boxes are insulated to protect against extreme temperatures and are fitted with underwater locator beacons that emit sounds to the surface. After an airplane crash, these boxes are retrieved and the data carefully analyzed to determine the cause of the crash. Air safety experts want to learn from past mistakes, among other things, so they won't be repeated.

As Christians, we too should look at mistakes from the past and learn from them. Paul, for example, alluded to some of the mistakes the Israelites made in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. He wrote that because God was not pleased with them, many died in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5). Paul went on to explain that "these things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age" (v.11 nlt).

The inspired Word of God is written for our instruction for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Thank You, Lord, for the guidance of Your Word.

For Your holy Book we thank You;

May its message be our guide,

May we understand the wisdom

Of the truth Your laws provide. —Carter

God’s warnings are to protect us, not to punish us.

The Pain Of Falling

May 27, 2007

The Pain Of Falling

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 1-3; John 10:1-23

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. —1 Corinthians 10:12

There I was, sailing along on my rollerblades, my wife at my side. Suddenly, the wheels on my left boot began to wobble, and a second later I was face down on the asphalt. Just like that, I had a broken finger and some nasty cuts on my face.

This happened a couple of years ago, but the results of that fall are still fresh on my mind. The pain of falling is still with me, making me much more cautious on my rollerblades. Having fallen once, I take every precaution to avoid doing so again.

Falling isn’t good. But for anyone who has stumbled in life, something positive can result—if the fall leads to a more careful way of living.

Paul admonished, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Believers do fall. But when we do, our goal must be to learn from our error and to avoid a second spill.

If you have stumbled along the course of life’s journey, there’s hope. First, ask God for guidance, for He “upholds all who fall” (Ps. 145:14). Next, read the Word and begin to live carefully by its principles—“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

Have you fallen? Ask God to help you get up and keep from falling again.

We’re thankful, Lord, that when we fall

We can begin anew

If humbly we confess our sin,

Then turn and follow You. —Sper

When we walk in the Light, we won’t stumble in the darkness.

Confidence In What?

July 23, 2010

Confidence In What?

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 33–34 & Acts 24

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. —1 Corinthians 10:12

While walking through a home-improvement store, I saw a man wearing a bright red T-shirt bearing this melancholy message: “Confidence: The feeling you have just before you understand the situation.”

I laughed at this humorous concept, but I also realized that the shirt carried a sane and sound warning. It’s a reminder to all of us who try to get things done through confidence in our own ability or credentials but without consciously trusting in the strength of God. If we think we can accomplish life’s tasks in our own strength, that false confidence will inevitably become our undoing—and we’ll collapse under the weight of our own failings.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about this by recalling ancient Israel’s penchant for self-confidence and self-sufficiency. He described everything the Israelites thought they had going for them; then he told how they had turned those benefits into a license to sin and an almost arrogant confidence that would prove to be their undoing.

Paul said their self-confidence should warn us. His conclusion? “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Psalm 118:8 shows us the best way: “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man,” or in ourselves. Where is your

confidence?

Let all who think that they can stand

Take heed lest they should fall;

These words remind us of the truth

That God is Lord of all. —Branon

Confidence in Christ is the right kind of confidence.

On Guard!

October 5, 2001

On Guard!

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 23-25; Philippians 1

God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. —1 Corinthians 10:13

A man whose company provides data security for military space operations told me how vulnerable computers are to outside attack. During a training exercise, hackers shut down a highly protected system without stealing a password or cracking a code. They simply accessed the unsecured maintenance program for the building that housed the computers and turned off the air conditioning. When the computer room became too hot, the system automatically shut down.

As in military situations, overconfidence and a false sense of security can lead to defeat in our battle against the forces of evil. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, Paul cautioned, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse by saying, “Don’t be so naive and self-confident. You’re not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it’s useless. Cultivate God-confidence.”

We are not told to try to outsmart the enemy of our souls, but to trust the One who can. “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape” (v.13).

Confidence in God, not in ourselves, is the key to staying spiritually on guard.

When all goes well and I feel strong,

Oh, help me, Lord, to see

That I must place my confidence

In You and not in me. —Anon.

When temptation knocks, send Jesus to the door.

Least Powerful People

October 5, 2012

Least Powerful People

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Habakkuk 1-3

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. —1 Corinthians 10:12

An unusual list called The 100 Least Powerful People in the World appeared in the online publication 24/7 Wall St. Among those selected were corporate executives, sports figures, politicians, and celebrities who shared one common characteristic—they used to be powerful. Some were victims of circumstances, others made poor business decisions, while others lost their influence because of moral failure.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul draws a somber lesson from Old Testament history. The people Moses led from slavery in Egypt toward freedom in the Promised Land kept turning their backs on God who had delivered them (vv.1-5). Idolatry, immorality, and grumbling were among the things that brought them down (vv.6-10). Paul points to their collapse as an example to us, and sounds this warning: “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (v.12).

Every follower of Jesus can stand firm on God's promise: "He will see to it that every temptation has a way out, so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it" (v.13 Phillips). All of us have power to influence others in their faith. How tragic to squander it by yielding to a temptation that God has empowered us to resist.

Lord, there are temptations to sin everywhere. Help me

not to give in. Make me sensitive to see the ways out

that You provide. I want my love for You to be real and

to encourage others in their faith journey.

The best way to escape temptation is to run to God.

A Sense Of History

May 19, 2012

A Sense Of History

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Job 18-20

All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition. —1 Corinthians 10:11

As my wife and I toured the British Museum, we were struck by the history and legacy contained in that massive facility in London. We looked at artifacts that were centuries older than anything found in the United States, reminding me how valuable it is to have a sense of history. History gives us a record of perspective, context, and consequences that can help us make wise choices as we learn from both the successes and failures of those who have gone before us.

Paul also saw the value of embracing the lessons of history. He warned of the destructive nature of bad choices by recounting the story of the children of Israel and their wilderness wanderings—a result of their refusal to trust God and enter the Promised Land (see Num. 14). Then Paul told the believers in Corinth, "All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11).

God has given us the Bible, partly to help us learn from the history of His people. Biblical lessons contain both examples and warnings to guard us against our worst inclinations and to lead us into wiser living. The question is whether we will learn from the lessons of the past or repeat the mistakes of those who came before us.

Lord, teach us from the stories in Your Word.

We know You've put them there to guide us and

give us wisdom. Help us to make obedience

out of love for You our purpose. Amen.

Valuable lessons are learned from examining the lives of God's people who've gone before.

Be Careful!

January 28, 2003

Be Careful!

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 19-20; Matthew 18:21-35

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. —1 Corinthians 10:12

Several years ago my wife Carolyn and I were hiking on Mount Rainier in Washington when we came to a swollen, glacial stream. Someone had flattened one side of a log and dropped it across the river to form a crude bridge, but there was no handrail and the log was slippery.

The prospect of walking on the wet log was frightening, and Carolyn didn't want to cross. But she found the courage, and slowly, carefully she inched her way to the other side.

On the way back we had to walk on the same log, and she did so with the same care. "Are you afraid?" I asked. "Of course," she

replied, “that’s what keeps me safe.” Again, fully aware of the danger, she made her way to safety.

Much of life poses moral danger for us. We should never assume in any situation that we’re incapable of falling. “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Given the opportunity and circumstances, any of us are capable of falling into any sin. To believe otherwise is sheer folly.

We must watch and pray and arm ourselves for every occasion by putting our total trust in God (Ephesians 6:13). “God is faithful” (1 Corinthians 10:13), and He will give us the strength to keep from falling.

The hand of God protects our way

When we would do His will;

And if through danger we must go,

We know He's with us still. —D. De Haan

God provides the armor, but we must put it on.

Way Out

May 10, 2014

Way Out

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 10-12; John 1:29-51

God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape. —1 Corinthians 10:13

While in London recently, I decided to take the underground train to my destination. So I paid my fare and descended into the depths of London to catch my train. But getting out of the station can be a scary experience for someone who is unfamiliar with the system. If you don’t find the exit, you can quickly get lost in the tunnels.

Being alone in a sparsely populated underground tunnel is an unsettling feeling, so believe me, you don’t want to get lost. Needless to say, I was glad when I spotted the sign that says, “WAY OUT” and followed it to safety.

Paul reminds us that when we are vulnerable to falling into sin, “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out” (1 Cor. 10:13 niv). It’s easy to assume that God is not with us when we are tempted to sin. But this verse assures us that He is present and not just standing idly by. Rather, He is actively providing a way out so we can endure it.

So, the next time you feel tempted, remember that you are not helpless. There is a divinely provided “way out”! Look for the sign, and follow it to safety.

Lord, keep us mindful that Your presence with us

in times of temptation means that we need not fall.

Give us the desire to seek Your way out so we can

know the joy of living a life that is pleasing to You.

God is actively working to keep you from the danger of getting lost in sin.

Ice-Cream Man

January 29, 2005

Ice-Cream Man

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 21-22; Matthew 19

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. —2 Timothy 2:22

Little Jeff was trying his best to save money to buy his mother a present. It was a terrible struggle because he gave in so easily to

the temptation to buy goodies from the ice-cream man whenever the brightly colored van came through the neighborhood.

One night after his mother had tucked him in bed, she overheard him pray, “Please, God, help me run away when the ice-cream man comes tomorrow.” Even at his young age he had learned that one of the best ways to overcome temptation is to avoid what appeals to our weaknesses.

All believers are tempted to sin. Yet they need not give in. The Lord provides the way to be victorious over evil enticements (1 Corinthians 10:13). But we must do our part. Sometimes that involves avoiding situations that would contribute to our spiritual defeat.

The apostle Paul admonished Timothy to run away from the evil desires of youth (2 Timothy 2:22). He was to keep his distance from the temptations that might cause him to yield because of their strong appeal. That’s good advice.

If possible, we should never let ourselves be in the wrong places or with people who will tempt us to do the things we should be avoiding.

Be sure to run from the “ice-cream man”!

It's wise to flee when tempted—

A fool is one who'd stay;

For those who toy with evil

Soon learn it doesn't pay. —D. De Haan

We fall into temptation when we don't flee from it.

Load Limit

July 21, 2003

Load Limit

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 29-30; Acts 23:1-15

God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. —1 Corinthians 10:13

We’ve all seen load-limit signs on highways, bridges, and elevators. Knowing that too much strain can cause severe damage or complete collapse, engineers determine the exact amount of stress that various materials can safely endure. Posted warnings tell us not to exceed the maximum load.

Human beings also have their load limits, which vary from person to person. Some people, for example, can bear the pressure of trial and temptation better than others; yet everyone has a breaking point and can take only so much.

At times, circumstances and people seem to be pushing us beyond what we can bear. But the Lord knows our limitations and never allows any difficulties to enter our lives that exceed our strength and ability to endure. This is especially true when we’re enticed by sin. According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.”

So when trials and temptations press down on you, take courage. Remember, your heavenly Father knows the limits of your ability to stand up under life’s pressures. Draw on His strength; no temptation will ever be greater than that!

When sorrows assail us or terrors draw nigh,

His love will not fail us, He'll guide with His eye;

And when we are fainting and ready to fail,

He'll give what is lacking and make us prevail. —Anon.

If you yield to God, you won't give in to sin.

Too Much For Me

April 15, 2015

Too Much For Me

Read: Matthew 26:36-46 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 27-29; Luke 13:1-22

O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. —Matthew 26:39

“God never gives us more than we can handle,” someone said to a father whose 5-year-old son had just lost his battle with cancer. These words, which were intended to encourage him, instead depressed him and caused him to wonder why he wasn’t “handling” the loss of his boy at all. The pain was so much to bear that he could hardly even breathe. He knew his grief was too much for him and that he desperately needed God to hold him tight.

The verse that some use to support the statement “God never gives us more than we can handle” is 1 Corinthians 10:13, “When you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (niv). But the context of these words is temptation, not suffering. We can choose the way out of temptation that God provides, but we can’t choose a way out of suffering.

Jesus Himself wanted a way out of His upcoming suffering when He prayed, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death… O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matt. 26:38-39). Yet He willingly went through this for our salvation.

When life seems too much to bear, that’s when we throw ourselves on God’s mercy, and He holds on to us.

Father, I feel vulnerable and weak. I know You are my refuge and strength, my help in trouble. I call upon Your name, Lord. Hold on to me.

With God behind you and His arms beneath you, you can face whatever lies ahead.

What's Your Load Limit?

March 9, 1995

What's Your Load Limit?

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 8-10; Mark 11:19-33

God … will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but … will also make the way of escape. —1 Corinthians 10:13

We’ve all seen load-limit signs on highways, bridges, and elevators. Knowing that too much strain can cause severe damage or complete collapse, engineers determine the exact amount of stress various materials and manufactured items can safely endure. Posted warnings tell us not to exceed the maximum load.

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At times, circumstances and people seem to be pushing us beyond what we can bear. But the Lord knows our limitations and never allows any difficulties to enter our lives that exceed our strength and ability to endure. This is especially true when we’re enticed by sin. According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.”

So when trials and temptations press down on you, take courage! Remember, your heavenly Father knows the limits of your ability to stand up under life’s pressures. Draw upon His strength. No temptation will ever be greater than that!

When sorrows assail us or terrors draw nigh,

His love will not fail us, He'll guide with His eye;

And when we are fainting and ready to fail,

He'll give what is lacking and make us prevail. —Anon.

If you give in to God, you won't cave in to sin.

When Someone Falls

January 19, 2011

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 46-48; Matthew 13:1-30

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. —1 Corinthians 10:12

It has become so commonplace to hear of the misconduct of a respected public figure that even though we may be deeply disappointed, we are hardly surprised. But how should we respond to the news of a moral failure, whether by a prominent person or a friend? We might begin by looking at ourselves. A century ago, Oswald Chambers told his students at the Bible Training College in

London, “Always remain alert to the fact that where one man has gone back is exactly where anyone may go back … Unguarded strength is double weakness.”

Chambers’ words echo Paul’s warning to be aware of our own vulnerability when we see the sins of others. After reviewing the disobedience of the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-5), Paul urged his readers to learn from those sins so they wouldn’t repeat them (vv.6-11). He focused not on past failings but on present pride when he wrote, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (v.12).

The head shaken in reproach is a common response to public sin. More helpful is the head that nods, “Yes, I am capable of that,” then bows in prayer for the one who has fallen and the one who thinks he stands.

Blessed Savior, make me humble,

Take away my sinful pride;

In myself I’m sure to stumble,

Help me stay close by Your side. —D. De Haan

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. —Proverbs 16:18

Orange Peels

July 29, 2005

Orange Peels

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 49-50; Romans 1

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. —1 Corinthians 10:12

Back in 1911, a stuntman named Bobby Leach went over Niagara Falls in a specially designed steel drum—and lived to tell about it. Although he suffered minor injuries, he survived because he recognized the tremendous dangers involved in the feat, and he had done everything he could to protect himself from harm.

Several years later, while walking down a street in New Zealand, Bobby Leach slipped on an orange peel, fell, and badly fractured his leg. He was taken to a hospital where he died of complications from that fall. He received a greater injury walking down the street than he sustained in going over Niagara Falls. He was not prepared for danger in what he assumed to be a safe situation.

Some of the great temptations that roar around us like the rushing waters of Niagara will leave us unharmed, while a small, seemingly insignificant incident may cause our downfall. Why? We simply become careless and do not recognize the potential danger. We mistakenly think we are secure (1 Corinthians 10:12).

We must always be on guard against temptation. A victorious Christian is an alert Christian who watches out even for those little “orange peels.”

Take the name of Jesus ever

As a shield from every snare;

If temptations round you gather,

Breathe that holy name in prayer. —Baxter

Whenever we fall, it is usually at the point where we think we are strong.

Idols Of The Heart

February 26, 2004

Idols Of The Heart

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:1-14 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 15-16; Mark 6:1-29

My beloved, flee from idolatry. —1 Corinthians 10:14

In Old Testament times, idolatry was easy to recognize—dancing around the golden calves, bowing before the Baals. Even when

the apostle Paul wrote to followers of Christ in first-century Corinth, pagan idolatry was openly practiced. He warned them to avoid any association with it (1 Corinthians 10:14).

Idolatry is still a danger to the people of God, though it isn't always so open or obvious. Idols are usually more subtle and hard to detect, for they set up their home in the hidden places of our heart.

If we want to know our idols, we need to consider our predominant thoughts, for what we think about most of the time may be an idol. Our last thought before we sleep, our first thought when we awake, our reveries throughout the day, are spent on the items and issues we treasure and trust. Any possession or person we put our hope in to bring us fulfillment, any goal or aspiration that becomes more important to us than God—these are the "gods" that attract our allegiance and subtly control our lives.

Only God can satisfy the deepest needs of our heart and make us truly alive. That's why we would be wise to heed the loving counsel of the apostle Paul: "My beloved, flee from idolatry."

The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me tear it from Thy throne

And worship only Thee. —Cowper

An idol is anything that takes the place of God.

Rumblings

March 1, 1997

Rumblings

Read: Numbers 16:41-50 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 23-25; Mark 7:14-37

Some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. —1 Corinthians 10:10

How would you feel if today's newspaper reported that the military had executed 15,000 people? Suppose the victims were not criminals, foreign agitators, or political radicals, but ordinary citizens who were protesting the way their country was being run.

Such a possibility seems unthinkable. Yet in Numbers 16 we read that God responded like that to ancient Israel. He took the lives of 15,000 of His chosen people because they were complaining about the way He was caring for them.

Not long after their miracle-filled deliverance from Egypt, they started dragging their feet. They didn't like the trouble they were encountering on the way to the Promised Land. They murmured about their leaders, about what God was feeding them, and about the risk involved in moving into the land of Canaan. The people longed for "the good old days," and their unbelief provoked the righteous indignation of God.

Their kind haven't died out entirely. They weren't the last to complain rather than move ahead in faith. How many of us grumble when God doesn't give us what we want? A wise person wouldn't be caught dead complaining against God.

The ones who of their lot complain

Displease the Lord and cause Him pain;

But thankful hearts are His delight,

And they find favor in His sight. —Bosch

Faith flourishes in the garden of gratitude.

Who's In The Picture?

December 28, 2000

Who's In The Picture?

Read: 2 Samuel 12:1-15 | Bible in a Year: Zechariah 5-8; Revelation 19

Nathan said to David, "You are the man!. —2 Samuel 12:7

My daughter came home from school one day with a brain teaser. See if you can figure it out.

Imagine that you are a school bus driver. A red-haired student gets on the bus and begins combing her hair with a green brush. At the next stop two more students get on and say in passing that they like the color of the driver's new blue cap. As they walk to the rear of the bus, the shorter of the two shouts back, "I wouldn't let that red-head stay on the bus if I were you. Her brush clashes with your hair!" What color is the bus driver's hair? Think about it. Remember, you are the bus driver. (Answer: your hair color.)

If you didn't see yourself in that story until I told you, you're not alone. King David made a similar mistake with another story. He became furious when a prophet of God told about a rich man who stole a poor man's pet for his dinner. Yet it became very clear as Nathan bluntly said to David, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7).

We can read the Bible but fail to see ourselves in the picture. We tend to forget that the Bible was "written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Do you see yourself in the pages of Scripture? How long since you've realized how personal these letters from God are to you?

Your heart and conscience cannot safely guide,

For they are darkened by the sin inside;

But if you want to have a picture true,

The Word of God will mirror what is you. —Hess

The Bible gives us a picture of who we really are.

Real People

August 9, 2002

Real People

Read: Psalm 78:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 77-78; Romans 10

All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition. —1 Corinthians 10:11

Author Ronald Rood visited a class of second-graders and gave a slide presentation of a Hawaiian volcano. The pictures showed molten lava pouring into the sea and steam rising a mile into the air. The scene was so graphic that the children could almost hear the roar. Rood then passed around a piece of lava for the youngsters to examine. After it was handled by two dozen hands, one little boy brought the rock back to the front. Carefully cradling it in his hand, he exclaimed with wide eyes, "Mr. Rood, it's still warm!"

That's the power of imagination! If only the biblical accounts of God's people would come alive like that to us. The reality expressed in the stories of the Bible needs to take hold of us. Moses, for instance, knew what it was like to feel insecure. The people he led out of Egypt cried hot, salty tears that left streaks on their windblown faces. Their hearts pounded when they were scared. Their heads hurt when they were tired and hungry. The vessels in their necks bulged when they were angry. Their eyes watered when they laughed.

The people of the Bible were real. Let's ask God to make their experiences come alive to us, so we can learn from their examples (1 Corinthians 10:11). —MRD II

The stories in the Word of God

Are there for us to see

How God has worked in people's lives

Throughout all history. —Sper

People from the past can give us pointers for the present.

Yield Not

August 4, 2001

Yield Not

Read: Matthew 4:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 66-67; Romans 7

God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. —1 Corinthians 10:13

Imagine a song with a message so powerful it could stop a prison riot. According to one account, the song “Yield Not To Temptation” served that purpose. As the story goes, a group of women prisoners had been allowed out of their cells to listen to a visiting speaker. During the meeting, the supervisor gave an order that some of the prisoners didn’t like, so they began to scream and hurl threats at her. The confrontation was escalating.

The supervisor sent for help, and it came in an unusual way. A voice was heard singing over the tumult of the upset prisoners: “Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin; each victory will help you some other to win.” Amazingly, the rebellion quieted, and the women joined in singing as they filed back to their cells.

We save ourselves a lot of trouble by not yielding to the temptation to let anger control us. Likewise, we protect ourselves when we “yield not.” Yielding not to the temptation to lie protects us from a loss of respect and further misrepresentations. Yielding not to the temptation of greed helps us avoid a gnawing dissatisfaction. But most important, when we “yield not” to temptation, we please God.

With each temptation God provides an “escape” (1 Corinthians 10:13). You’ll find it as you yield to Him.

Ask the Savior to help you,

Comfort, strengthen, and keep you;

He is willing to aid you—

He will carry you through. —Palmer

To escape temptation, flee to God.

A Way Of Escape

August 28, 2013

A Way Of Escape

Read: Matthew 4:1-11, 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 123-125; 1 Corinthians 10:1-18

[God will] make the way of escape, that [we] may be able to bear it. —1 Corinthians 10:13

Highway 77, which passes through the Appalachian Mountains in West Virginia, features a series of runaway truck ramps. These semi-paved exits appear in an area of the highway where the altitude drops nearly 1,300 feet over the course of about 6 miles. This steep descent combined with the road’s winding path can create problems for motorists—especially truck drivers.

Just as a runaway truck needs an escape route from a highway, we also need “a way of escape” when out-of-control desires threaten our spiritual well-being. When we face temptation, “[God will] make the way of escape, that [we] may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). God enables us to say “no” to enticement through the power of His Word. Jesus conquered Satan’s temptation relating to food, authority, and trust by quoting verses from Deuteronomy (Matt. 4:4-10). Scripture helped Him resist the devil despite the effects of a 40-day fast in the wilderness.

When we are tempted, we may feel like disaster is just around the bend. Memories of past failure and isolation from others can intensify this feeling. However, we can trust God in moments of temptation; He is faithful. He will provide a way for us to resist sin’s allure.

I need Thee every hour, stay Thou near by;

Temptations lose their pow’r when Thou art nigh.

I need Thee, O I need Thee;

Every hour I need Thee. —Hawks/Lowry

The best way to escape temptation is to run to God.

Tested And True

September 19, 2003

Tested And True

Read: Daniel 3:8-18 | Bible in a Year: Ecclesiastes 1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up. —Daniel 3:18

A young nurse was assisting a surgeon for the first time. As he was completing the operation, she told him he had used 12 sponges, but she could account for only 11. The doctor curtly replied that he had removed them all from inside the patient. The nurse insisted that one was missing, but the doctor declared he would proceed with sewing up the incision.

The nurse, her eyes blazing, said, “You can’t do that! Think of the patient!” The doctor smiled and, lifting his foot, showed the nurse the twelfth sponge, which he had deliberately dropped on the floor. “You’ll do fine!” he said. He had been testing her.

Daniel’s three friends faced a different kind of test (Daniel 3), but they too would not budge. They knew their refusal to worship the image might result in their death, yet they never wavered. They proved they were true to God by standing firm.

The Lord still permits trials and temptations to enter the lives of His children. The challenge may come as an opportunity to gratify the lusts of the flesh, or as a series of disheartening circumstances. Whatever form it takes, we must not yield. Rather, we must stand for what is right and trust God to supply the grace we need (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Are you “tested and true”?

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin—

Each victory will help you some other to win;

Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue,

Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through. —Palmer

A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor can we be perfected without trial.

Struggling With Addiction

December 1, 2014

Read: Hebrews 4:14-16 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 40-41; 2 Peter 3

God is faithful. —1 Corinthians 10:13

Eric was struggling with an addiction, and he knew it. His friends and family members encouraged him to stop. He agreed that it would be best for his health and relationships, but he felt helpless. When others told him how they had quit their bad habits, he replied, “I’m happy for you, but I can’t seem to stop! I wish I had never been tempted in the first place. I want God to take the desire away right now.”

Immediate deliverance may happen for some, but most face a daily battle. While we don’t always understand why the temptation doesn’t go away, we can turn to God on whatever path we find ourselves. And perhaps that is the most important part of our struggle. We learn to exchange our futile efforts to change for complete dependence on God.

Jesus was tempted also, just as we are, so He understands what we’re feeling (Mark 1:13). He sympathizes with our struggles (Heb. 4:15), and we can “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (v.16). He also uses others, including trained professionals, to lean on along the way.

Whatever battles we may be facing today, we know this—God loves us much more than we can imagine, and He is faithful to come to our assistance.

For Further Thought

Read Matthew 4:1-11 about how Jesus handled

temptations. Also read 1 Corinthians 10:11-13

to learn how He can help us when we are tempted.

We are not tempted because we are evil; we are tempted because we are human.

Victory Over Temptation

June 1, 2004

Victory Over Temptation

Read: Matthew 4:1-11 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 15-16; John 12:27-50

God … will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but … will also make the way of escape. —1 Corinthians 10:13

Wanda Johnson, a single mother with five children, was on her way to the pawn shop, where she was hoping to get a loan of $60 for her TV set. Then something bizarre happened. As an armored truck filled with sacks of money drove past her, its rear door flew open, and a bag dropped out. Wanda stopped and picked up the sack. When she counted the cash, she found that it totaled $160,000.

A battle raged in her soul. That money would pay all her bills and provide for the needs of her children. But it wasn't hers to keep.

After a fierce 4-hour struggle with her moral convictions, Wanda called the police and turned in the money. Her sense of doing the right thing won a victory over the temptation to keep what wasn't hers to keep.

How strong is your ethical fiber? Will it break down if you are faced with an enticing chance to do something wrong? Adam and Eve, as well as Jesus, were attacked by Satan on three fronts: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Our first parents succumbed to the serpent's solicitation (Genesis 3:1-6). Jesus did not (Matthew 4:1-11).

No matter what evil is pressuring us, let's follow Jesus' example and do what's right.

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin—

Each victory will help you some other to win;

Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue,

Look ever to Jesus—He will carry you through.—Palmer

To withstand temptation, stand with Christ.

Something Else To Serve

March 19, 1999

Something Else To Serve

Read: Judges 3:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 1-3; Mark 16

My beloved, flee from idolatry. —1 Corinthians 10:14

If you were to spend 26 hours a week staring at the same object, what would you call that? If you were so mesmerized by what you saw that you couldn't tear yourself away from it, what would it become to you? If you let it change the way you think and act, would it be too powerful? If you let this object show and tell you things that you knew were wrong and that God didn't want you to be involved with, would it be replacing Him? Wouldn't that be called an idol?

The average American family spends 26 hours a week watching television. It certainly isn't the only idol we have in our society, but it's one of the most powerful. Other things that might be displacing our devotion to God are sports, money, work, hobbies, or even other people. Perhaps music or movies or the Internet has captured our devotion.

Idols come in various forms, and they can control our lives. When they do, we need to look again at God's anger with the Israelites to see what He thinks of idols. They served Baals and Asherahs (Jud. 3:7), and "the anger of the Lord was hot" against them (v.8).

Let's check our devotion. Have we given our allegiance to anything other than the Almighty God who created us? We should serve nothing but Him.

The gods of this world are empty and vain,

They cannot give peace to our heart;

The living and true One deserves all our love—

From Him may we never depart. —DJD

An idol is anything that takes the place of God.

Removing Barriers

October 5, 2003

Removing Barriers

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:16-22 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 23-25; Philippians 1

You are all one in Christ Jesus. —Galatians 3:28

A missionary in Calcutta said that she was profoundly influenced by a communion service she had attended during World War II. The leader of that meeting was a Swedish minister. Among those present were a Chinese pastor, a Japanese teacher, a German doctor, several English citizens, and a few Indian believers.

The missionary recalled that she felt a closeness to each person in that diverse gathering, especially when they partook of the bread and the cup. They felt a bond of Christian fellowship, even though some of them were from countries engaged in a brutal war.

The next time you celebrate the Lord's Supper, think about your oneness with all who are participating in the service with you. Resolve to look beyond all cultural distinctions and do what you can to remove the barriers between you and others.

Be merciful to those who have wronged you. Tell God you will forgive them and accept them. Determine that with His help you will show kindness to everyone, whether you feel like it or not. See the people around you as fellow members of the body of Christ.

This type of unity will enrich your life and enhance your church's influence in the world.

In Christ there is no East or West,

In Him no South or North,

But one great fellowship of love

Throughout the whole wide earth. —Oxenham

When Christians draw close to Christ, they draw closer to one another.

The Trouble With Me

October 1, 2001

The Trouble With Me

Read: Jonah 4:1-10 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 11-13; Ephesians 4

Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. —1 Corinthians 10:24

Selfishness comes in many forms, and we are all prone to it. I was reminded of this while driving on a toll road. My wife Ginny and I were hoping to get home early that evening, but a traffic jam held us up for almost 2 hours.

Although Ginny mentioned that there may have been a serious accident up ahead, I gave this little thought and kept grumbling about the delay. But when the traffic began to flow again, we saw six mangled cars next to the highway. A wave of conviction swept over me. "Forgive me, Lord," I prayed, "and please help the victims and their families."

The Bible gives many examples of selfish attitudes. Jonah was upset because a worm had destroyed a vine that shaded him from the scorching sun (Jonah 4:9). Yet he didn't care that many men, women, and children in Nineveh might be destroyed.

In Mark 10:37, we read that two disciples selfishly asked for positions of power in Christ's coming kingdom. And in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, we see many examples of selfish behavior (1:10; 3:3; 5:1; 6:6-8; 11:21).

God calls us to put the good of others ahead of our selfish desires (1 Corinthians 10:24). Forgive us, Lord, and help us to do just that!

O Lord, how often selfishness

Will raise its ugly head,

So help us, Lord, to conquer it

And show Your love instead. —D. De Haan

The heart of our problem is selfishness in our heart.

More Than Just A Job

September 1, 1997

More Than Just A Job

Read: Colossians 3:22-4:1 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 135-136; 1 Corinthians 12

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. —1 Corinthians 10:31

George Herbert was a gifted 17th-century English poet. At one point in his life he wasn't sure he wanted to do what God wanted him to do. Being the pastor of a church didn't appeal to him, even though he sensed that God was directing him to that vocation. He hesitated because he felt that he would have to give up too much.

After a time of rebellious struggle, he came to realize that submitting to Christ's lordship is the way out of self-centered bondage and opens the door to authentic freedom and fulfillment. He also came to realize that serving the Savior does not usually entail heroic martyrdom. Rather, it is the willing and worshipful performance of the most menial tasks for His glory.

Many of God's people are troubled because they can't give themselves to what is called "fulltime ministry." All of us, though, whatever our vocation—accounting, farming, nursing, homemaking, or something else—need to recognize that we are always to work for the Lord. In Colossians 3:23 we read, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men."

Any job will take on greater significance if we consciously do our work for the Lord.

Thinking It Over

Is it difficult to give your best

to your employer? Why? How can you

glorify God today in your work and in your

relationships with co-workers and supervisors?

All Christians work for the same employer.

Living For God

July 5, 2000

Living For God

Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 | Bible in a Year: Job 30-31; Acts 13:26-52

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. —Colossians 3:23

The practice of some believers in Ireland centuries ago can help us in our spiritual journey today. They wanted to be aware of God's presence in every activity of life. For example, they would say this prayer when they woke up in the morning: "Thanks to Thee, O God, that I have risen today to the rising of this life itself."

An Irish housewife, starting a fire at dawn, would whisper a prayer that the Lord would kindle in her heart a love for her family, friends, neighbors, and enemies.

Many believers would end their day with these words: "I lie down with God, and God will lie down with me."

The practices of these Irish believers challenge us to perform even the most mundane and humble tasks "as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). We are to carry out the apostle Paul's directive: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

That directive embraces the whole gamut of life—eating breakfast, doing the dishes, sharing in a conversation, operating a computer. Let's remind ourselves throughout the day that whatever we do is to be done for the Lord and with an awareness of His

presence.

Instead of living for human acclaim, do everything in Jesus' name.

Pascal’s Prayer

August 23, 2008

Pascal’s Prayer

Read: Philippians 4:4-13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 113-115; 1 Corinthians 6

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. —1 Corinthians 10:31

Blaise Pascal, the brilliant 17th-century intellectual, made significant contributions in the fields of science and mathematics. He established the groundwork for the development of mechanical calculators and modern hydraulic operations.

As a young man, Pascal had a profound encounter with Jesus Christ. This life-changing experience motivated him to refocus his study from science and math to theology.

Pascal wrote a remarkable prayer that can help each believer in facing the tasks of life. He prayed: “Lord, help me to do great things as though they were little, since I do them with Your power; and little things as though they were great, since I do them in Your name.”

Pascal’s supplication is profoundly scriptural. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13) and admonishes us that “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Pascal echoes these admonitions to depend upon God for His power and to view every act as important, since it will reflect on His glory.

The next time you face a huge task, remember that God is your strength. And when you encounter a seemingly insignificant one, determine to do it with excellence to the glory of God.

If you have some work to do,

Start this very hour;

You supply the willingness,

God supplies the power. —Anon.

Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God. —William Carey

Give It Your Best!

May 6, 1996

Give It Your Best!

Read: Colossians 3:16-25 | Bible in a Year: 1 Kings 21-22; Luke 23:26-56

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. —1 Corinthians 10:31

On the 80th birthday of the famous musician and conductor Arturo Toscanini, someone asked his son what he considered to be his father’s greatest achievement. He replied, “For him there can be no such thing. Whatever he happens to be doing at any moment is the biggest undertaking in his life, whether it be conducting a symphony or peeling an orange.”

We ought to have a similar attitude as we serve Christ. By yielding to the Holy Spirit, we can have such a strong assurance of doing the Father’s will that we’ll be able to engage in every endeavor with zest and enthusiasm.

Toscanini gave himself so completely to every task that he could become totally involved in peeling an orange or in conducting a symphony. How much more we as God’s children should take continual delight in the deeds of love we do for the Lord and for others!

Whether we are engaged in a project of great magnitude or simply helping a neighbor, we must consider our responsibility to God and man. The apostle Paul said, “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord” (Col. 3:23). Anything we do for Jesus, whether large or small, should be “the biggest thing” in our lives.

Whatever you are working on,

Engage in it with zest,

Because your work is for the Lord,

And He expects your best. —Sper

It's a great thing to do a little thing well.

Those Dirty Jobs

June 13, 1994

Those Dirty Jobs

Read: John 13:3-17 | Bible in a Year: Ezra 6-8; John 21

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. —1 Corinthians 10:31

Before he became an outspoken critic of Communist oppression, Milovan Djilas was one of Yugoslavia's top Marxists. Jailed in his early twenties for his anti-government activities, he took on the repugnant task of smuggling party literature through the prison sewer system. He was willing to perform such duty, he says, because "no job is dirty, low, or inconsequential."

If a former communist who didn't believe in God could be so committed, we who serve God, whose purpose is infinitely higher, ought to have a similar attitude. A supreme motive enables us to perform the most menial labor with a sense of divine mission. Christ, by His washing of the disciples' dirty feet, set an example for us to follow (John 13).

If God's saving purposes are to be accomplished in this world, society must function with predictable order. Somebody must collect garbage, work the fields to provide food, and labor in factories to produce necessary goods. Because of the inter-connectedness of life, we should be grateful for those who do the drab and menial tasks.

If we follow the example of Christ, and if we do everything for the glory of God, even unpleasant chores take on dignity.

Teach me to do the humble task

The very best I can,

And not to seek a higher place

That is not in Your plan. —Anon.

Don't let the trivialities of life blind you to the supreme importance of the eternal.

Virtuoso

March 2, 2011

Virtuoso

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 26-27; Mark 8:1-21

Therefore, … whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. —1 Corinthians 10:31

A major US newspaper has called Christopher Parkening "the leading guitar virtuoso of our day, combining profound musical insight with complete technical mastery of his instrument." There was a time, however, when Parkening gave up playing the guitar professionally. At the height of his career as a classical guitarist, he retired at age 30, bought a ranch in Montana, and spent his days fly-fishing. But early retirement did not bring him the satisfaction he had hoped for.

Then during a visit to California, he was invited to a church where he heard a clear presentation of the gospel. Of this he wrote: "That night I lay awake, broken over my sins… I had lived very selfishly and it had not made me happy… It was then that I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life, to be my Lord and Savior. For the first time, I remember telling Him, 'Whatever You want me to do with my life, Lord, I'll do it.'"

One of Parkening's favorite verses is 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Therefore, … whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." He has taken up the guitar again, but this time with the motivation to glorify God.

Each of us has been given gifts; and when we use them for God's glory, they bring satisfaction and joy.

The gifts we offer to the Lord

Are by His standards measured;

Our sacrifice and lives of praise—

Such gifts are highly treasured. —Sper

We were created to give God the glory.

What On Earth Are We Doing?

January 16, 2008

What On Earth Are We Doing?

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 39-40; Matthew 11

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. —1 Corinthians 10:31

“What on earth are you doing?!” You may have heard that phrase when your mom told you to clean your room and found you playing with your toys instead, or maybe when your teacher caught you passing notes in class.

But if God were to ask you this question, how would you respond?

Paul tells us that as followers of Jesus we have been put on this earth to bring glory to God in everything we do. So what should that look like?

God’s glory is the manifestation of all that He is in His unsurpassed, stunning perfection. It is His amazing love, His wide mercy, His deep grace. His glory is seen in His truth, justice, wisdom, and power. To glorify Him means that we have the high privilege of showing Him off in a world that is totally unaware of what He is really like. Acts of mercy to the undeserving, grace to the needy, forgiveness to an offender, living wisely according to His will—all give glorious visibility to the character and quality of our God.

There are a lot of misconceptions floating around about God. It’s our job to let others see what He is really like. And, when they like what they see, let’s be sure to let them know who taught us to live like that. It’s not a good idea to steal God’s glory!

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read more about living a life that gives glory to God by visiting this Web site: www.rbc.org/bible-study/strength-for-the-journey/2006/11/03/daily-message.aspx

May our lives be a “show and tell” for God’s glory.

1 Corinthians 11

1 CORINTHIANS 11:5

William Carey a simple cobbler who knew that he was not his own but God's possession, changed the history of world missions and the face of India over 200 years ago. However what is little known is that William Carey’s sister was paralyzed and bedridden for 50 years and unable to speak much of that time. Nevertheless she allowed herself to be propped up in bed to write encouraging letters to her brother. And even more powerful is the fact that she prayed for her brother several hours per day during that 50 years! Her body may have been paralyzed but not her soul and spirit.

1 Corinthians 11:1–16

Today in the Word

Augustine St. Clare, a Louisiana slaveholder in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, claims he’s not religious. He’s cynical about religion, since preachers defend the institution of slavery from the pulpit. “Well, suppose that something should bring down the price of cotton once and forever … don’t you think we should soon have another version of the Scripture doctrine?”

Has each generation simply sought to interpret the Scriptures in such a way as to favor what we already want, and then to silence it should it challenge something we cherish? Today’s passage is difficult to interpret, and the temptation might be to qualify what Paul

says in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 11 as entirely cultural and in effect, dismiss what he is saying.

Without denying the text's complexities, we can begin with what is clear in today's passage. First, on the basis of the creation account as well as the dynamic of the marriage relationship, Paul explains that gender distinction does in fact matter. And though men and women are different, they are still interdependent. Neither inherently occupies a more important role in the church. In fact, Paul does not challenge here the practice of women praying and prophesying in the church. He wants to ensure, however, that they do so in suitable and seemly ways.

Women whose heads are uncovered while they pray (the original Greek language here suggests not that she lacks an actual veil but that her hair falls loosely on her shoulders) would resemble women praying in the pagan temples, where they did so with their hair unbound. This actually had serious implications, because women whose hair was not bound up might be mistaken for the equivalent of temple prostitutes. Thus, the discussion here about head coverings is consistent with the earlier exhortations regarding sexual immorality and Christian freedom.

Just as he has in many other places in his letter, Paul is identifying the church as unique and separate from the world. The preservation of that identity matters for the integrity of the gospel.

Apply the Word

C. S. Lewis once noted that Christians need to distinguish between social and cultural norms that change in different times and places (he gave the example of modesty in Victorian England and the Polynesian Islands) and biblical principles that are true in all times and places (for example, chastity). Are you able to tell the difference between a principle and a preference? Are you willing to give up a preference for the sake of church unity and the advancement of the gospel?

1 Corinthians 11:17–33

Today in the Word

The Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, is observed in many different ways in various church traditions, but one point upon which all Christians agree is its special significance. One theologian noted that in Jesus' final moments with His disciples, He did not impart theory to them, but instead, gave them a meal. In the Lord's Supper, we have a picture of redemption: Jesus, Son of God, is the bread of life who was broken for the sins of the world. We remember His life and death in a very earthly sort of way: at the table.

The Lord's Supper in the times of the early Christians was celebrated as a communal meal. In the case of the Corinthians, this is exactly where the problems emerged. In Roman culture (and Corinth was a Roman colony), social conventions dictated that those of highest rank and social standing should be served the largest portions and better quality food. Instead of challenging those social conventions, the Corinthians capitulated to them. (They've been guilty before of accepting wholesale the messages of culture rather than reinterpreting their worldview according to the gospel. See August 3, 10, 11, 12.)

As the Corinthian Christians gathered for the Lord's Supper, the rich were humiliating the poor by not sharing their food with them. The divisions in the church (which Paul has been boldly confronting throughout his entire letter) were falling along socioeconomic lines. The situation was so dire that Paul says their worship gatherings do more harm than good. They would be better off staying at home!

Paul brings them back to the gospel, to the message of Jesus Christ crucified. The new covenant community is called to unity and to selfless sacrifice, following in the footsteps of their Lord. The Lord's Supper is an occasion for remembering and reflecting on their call to live as the body of Christ. To "recognize the body of the Lord" has a double meaning: first, we acknowledge the sacrifice of our Savior. Second, we recognize that we are part of His body, the church, in the practice of participating in the Lord's Supper.

Apply the Word

On a personal level, each of us must try to reconcile our grievances with one another in our local community before we eat the Lord's Supper. But on a more global level, the Lord's Supper is also an invitation to think of other brothers and sisters in Christ in poorer parts of the world whose burden we are called to share. We must not be like the Corinthians, wallowing in our affluence without thought to Christians in distress. Could the Lord's Supper provoke in us greater generosity to those in need around the globe?

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-26

"This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Every year Americans observe a holiday called Memorial Day to re-member those who gave their lives that others might live in freedom. Remembering their sacrifice should be the emphasis of the day, but many citizens forget, and think only of themselves.

In a Detroit Free Press article, Jack Kresnak wrote about a Memorial Day service near the Detroit River where 150 people were listening to a Naval Reserve captain lament the fact that the meaning of the day had been lost. A short distance away a young man in a safari hat and a three-piece suit rode a decorated bicycle dubbed "Spotlight." This "super-customized Schwinn" was covered with cardboard, gold spray paint, and pictures of girlfriends. It had two radios and twenty flash-lights shining in all directions. Later, when asked about his escapade, the biker said, "I do this to get attention."

In 1 Corinthians 11 we read of a different kind of memorial day. It too lost its true meaning because people treated it casually. Instead of remembering Christ, who had died so that sinners could live, many Corinthian Christians thought only of themselves. The memorial meal became a time for eating, drinking, and making merry.

A similar thing can happen in churches today. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we must examine ourselves to make sure we are not preoccupied with our own desires instead of thinking of Jesus' death. We must be sure to focus our attention on Christ. — M.R.DeHaan. II

The host at the Lord's supper is the Lord of hosts

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

State employment officials in Tucson, Arizona, posted an interesting sign over a full-length mirror. Directed to all job hunters, it read, “Would you hire this person?” In another office a mirror and sign posed this question: “Are you ready for a job?”

Self-evaluation was what the apostle Paul called for in 1 Corinthians 11. Believers in Christ need to judge themselves, he said, to avoid being judged by the Lord as unfit for His service. In the Corinthian church, the “appearance problem” was especially serious. Those Christians “looked” awful. They were actually getting drunk and quarreling among themselves while going through the motions of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. So Paul said, in effect, “Look at yourselves. What a mess! If you don’t get your lives straightened out, the Lord will have to do it for you.” Then the apostle added the sobering fact that God had already begun to cleanse the church by sending some of them to an early grave. This is a hard truth, but one the church still needs to hear today.

1 Corinthians 11:24

I once heard my friend Roger Rose tell this story He said that when he was a boy, his family lived on a farm alongside a dirt road. Only on rare occasions would an automobile pass by. But one day as Roger's young brother was crossing the road on his bicycle, a car came roaring down a nearby hill, struck the boy, and killed him. Roger said, "Later, when my father picked up the mangled, twisted bike, I heard him sob out loud for the first time in my life. He carried it to the barn and placed it in a spot we seldom used. Father's terrible sorrow eased with the passing of time, but for many years whenever he saw that bike, tears began streaming down his face." Roger continued, "Since then I have often prayed, `Lord, keep the memory of Your death as fresh as that to me! Every time I partake of Your memorial supper, let my heart be stirred as though You died only yesterday. Never let the communion service become a mere formality, but always a tender and touching experience.'"

As we partake of the Lord's Supper, meditating on His suffering and death should always fill us with a deep sense of gratitude to God for providing our redemption. -H. G. B.

REMEMBERING CHRIST'S WOUNDS SHOULD ENCOURAGE US TO DO HIS WILL.

Matthew 26:17-30; Revelation 19:6-10

Do this … in remembrance of me. - 1 Corinthians 11:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

For many people, the ideal Thanksgiving looks a lot like the Norman Rockwell painting, “Freedom from Want,” which appeared on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post in 1943. This famous painting depicts a grandmother in a bright, white apron placing a large turkey before a grandfather in his Sunday best, who stands ready to carve the roasted bird. Happy faces surround a bounteous table, eager for the meal to begin. What an endearing image of a Thanksgiving feast!

The disciples anticipated a special meal when they made preparations for the Passover meal described in today's passage. The Passover setting is important because it recalls the Exodus (God's previous act of deliverance), and anticipates Jesus' death and resurrection, which would be God's supreme and final act of deliverance.

This Passover meal began similarly to many previous meals. It soon became apparent, however, that this was not a normal gathering. Jesus' statement that one of the disciples would betray Him sounded a sorrowful, confusing note. As Jesus fulfilled the role of the household head and gave thanks for the various elements of the meal, tension and fear resurfaced when He began to

reinterpret the traditional Passover symbols in terms of His own sacrificial death (vv. 26-28). Jesus' claim that He would not drink the fruit of the vine again until the disciples were in the Father's king- dom (v. 29) troubled and perplexed the disciples.

We know that Jesus commanded His followers to celebrate communion, or the Lord's Supper, as a way of remembering His sacrificial death. And Jesus' final meal with His disciples not only looked back to the first Passover, it also looked forward to a future meal, the joyous marriage feast of the Lamb. Today's passage from Revelation sets the stage for this heavenly celebration that will be beyond anything we could ever imagine.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps for you, Thanksgiving, or any other holiday meal, is far from the seemingly perfect Norman Rockwell painting. Maybe these are times of tension or loneliness instead of joyous celebration. If so, you can be thankful that there will be no disappointment or pain at that final heavenly celebration with our risen Lord. In the meantime, if you are facing Thanksgiving alone, consider volunteering to serve at a local rescue mission, rejoicing in the ability to share with others because of the certainty of your own future.

C. H. Spurgeon wrote…

> The Lord's Supper is not for all men, but only for those who are able spiritually to discern the Lord's body. It is not meant for the conversion of sinners, but for the edification of disciples. Hence the need of examination, lest we intrude ourselves where we have no right to be. (**Application**: Examine Your: Company, Habits, Thoughts, Affections, Motives)

1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-34

For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged (1 Corinthians 11:31).

In the 1960s, a respectable club in New York State refused member-ship to a young Jewish man. A minister who belonged to the club took a strong stand against this prejudice by denouncing it from the pulpit, even though many members of his congregation also belonged to that club. In his sermon, he said, "I must insist that the members of my congregation take a stand against a policy that is morally reprehensible." He ended by saying, "Anyone who has in any way—by thought, word, or deed—acquiesced with this position … is no longer welcome to receive holy communion … until he has worked out his own peace with God."

That clergyman had scriptural backing for citing unconfessed sin as a barrier to coming to the Lord's Supper. Some first-century Christians had made a mockery of the Lord's Supper by splitting into little groups and getting drunk on the wine (1 Cor. 11:21). The apostle Paul therefore made individual self-examination a part of the preparation for the communion celebration.

This requirement still holds true today. Although we all approach the bread and the cup as unworthy people, we must not harbor sinful thoughts, attitudes, and deeds. We dishonor our Savior's shed blood and broken body if we refuse to renounce and turn from what we know is wrong. The communion service is a blessed time—but first it is a judgment time. —D J DeHaan

The Lord's table is first a test, then a testimony.

1Corinthians 11:28-32

Have You Tested Yourself?

Lindsay was busily preparing for the toughest test of her life. She would spend all day taking the examination to see if she qualified as a lawyer. To get ready, Lindsay wrote down every question she could think of, and she didn't rest until she could answer them all. When the day of the exam arrived, she passed it because she had tested herself beforehand.

Paul told the Corinthian Christians something that applies to us as well. In preparation for the Lord's Supper we should examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28). Any sin, any deficiency in love, any spirit of bitterness should be confessed and taken care of before proceeding with Communion. Why? Because ultimately, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are accountable to God.

How do we test ourselves? We can begin by looking at two issues: First, are we expressing and demonstrating our love for God and for others? (Mt. 22:36-40). And second, are we seeking to please God more than anything else? (Mt 6:33).

As Lindsay tested herself in order to be prepared for her exam, we too must test ourselves so that we can pass the toughest exam—God's evaluation of our lives (1 Cor. 11:29-32). Then we can participate in the Lord's Supper and worship Him with a clear conscience. —D C Egner

I want to bow before You now,

Dear Lord, without chagrin;

So search my heart and soul today,

And make me pure within. —Hess

To know where you stand before God, test yourself by His standards

Imitate Me

June 12, 2007

Imitate Me

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:9-17 | Bible in a Year: Ezra 3-5; John 20

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

Andrew Marton recalls the first time he met his future brother-in-law Peter Jennings, who was a top foreign news correspondent in 1977. He said he was so nervous that he acted like “a jittery fan in the presence of a journalistic hero whose personal wattage could light up Manhattan.”

Andrew looked up to Peter and tried to emulate him. He became a journalist too and approached his assignments the way Peter did —“he dove in and worked harder than everybody else.” Andrew tried to walk like Peter, to dress like him, and to have the same “aura.”

We all tend to follow the patterns of others. The Corinthians did too. But they shifted their focus away from Christ and onto individual leaders. Rather than emulating the Christlike qualities of these leaders, they let their allegiances lead to various divisions and contentions in the church (1 Cor. 1:10-13). The apostle Paul recognized their error, so he sent Timothy to remind them of his teachings and the importance of walking in obedience to the Lord (4:16-17).

We are to imitate Christ (1 Peter 1:15-16). It can also be helpful to have mentors who imitate Him. Those who walk in step with Christ provide a model for us to emulate. But our ultimate example is Jesus Himself.

To follow in the steps of those

Whose eyes are on the Lord

Will help to keep us strong and true,

And faithful to His Word. —D. De Haan

Imitate those who imitate Christ.

Color Courage

September 29, 2013

Color Courage

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:10-17 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 7-8; Ephesians 2

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

A radio ad for watches suggests that listeners buy a watch with a bright color band and then wear it with clothes of other colors. When people notice your watch because of its contrasting color, the ad says, “They’ll see that you have ‘color courage.’ And they’ll want to be like you.” Something in us enjoys having others follow our example.

If you do a quick reading of 1 Corinthians 4, you might think the apostle Paul sounds a bit boastful when he says to follow his example of self-sacrifice (v.16). But a closer look at Paul’s words shows why he wrote so confidently. He could ask people to imitate him because he imitated Christ (11:1), the greatest Servant of all.

The persecution he endured and the position he held in the church (4:10-17) all happened because Paul followed Jesus. When he mentioned that even if the Corinthians had 10,000 teachers he would still be their father in the faith (v.15), he was acknowledging that Jesus is the only reason people could trust his teaching.

If we want people to imitate us, we must first imitate our Lord. If we have any reason for people to follow our example—if we have any courage to point others to the Savior—it is because of Him, not us.

Joyfully following Jesus the Lord

And trusting His lead every day

Makes us examples that others can see

To follow when trials come their way. —Sper

Others should imitate us only as far as we imitate Christ.

Just Watch

July 11, 2005

Just Watch

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 1-3; Acts 17:1-15

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

The young boy looked up at his grandfather and wondered aloud, “Grandpa, how do you live for Jesus?” The respected grandfather stooped down and quietly told the boy, “Just watch.”

As the years went by, the grand-father was an example to the boy of how to follow Jesus. He stayed rock-steady in living for Him. Yet the grandson often lived in a way that was not pleasing to God.

One day the young man visited his grandfather for what both knew would be the last time. As the older man lay dying, his grandson leaned over the bed and heard his grandpa whisper, “Did you watch?”

That was the turning point in the boy’s life. He understood that when his grandpa had said, “Just watch,” he meant, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). He vowed that from then on he would live as his grandfather did—striving to please Jesus. He had watched, and now he knew how to live.

Is somebody watching you? Are there younger Christians who need to see that it is possible to live for Jesus every day and in every way? Challenge them—and yourself. Challenge them to “just watch.” Then show them the way.

Be aware that someone's watching

As you go along your way;

Your example is remembered

More than anything you say. —Hess

There's no better sermon than a good example.

Scattered Fruit

January 11, 2008

Scattered Fruit

Read: John 13:3-15 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 27-28; Matthew 8:18-34

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

The story is told of a Christian who was home on furlough from serving in the armed forces. He was rushing to catch his train when he ran into a fruit stand on the station platform, knocking most of the piled-up apples to the ground.

The young boy who operated the stand tried to pick up his scattered fruit but was having difficulty. The apologetic serviceman put down his luggage and started collecting the apples. He polished each one with his handkerchief and put it back on the counter. So impressed was the boy that he asked gratefully, “Soldier, are you Jesus?” With a smile the soldier replied, “No, but I’m trying to be like Him.”

Sometimes, as we hurry about our own responsibilities, we become too busy to care about other people. But we must remember that Jesus urges us to show kindness and concern for our fellow travelers. He set the example for us in John 13 by being a servant. We need to take the time to be helpful also.

Would anyone ask of us, “Are you Jesus?” And could we honestly respond, “No, I’m not Jesus, but I’m trying to be like Him”? Christlike kindness can open the door for a heart-touching testimony.

Be like Jesus, this my song,

In the home and in the throng;

Be like Jesus, all day long!

I would be like Jesus. —Rowe

Nothing is more attractive than being like Jesus.

Copy Me

August 11, 2010

Copy Me

Read: 1 Cor. 10:23–11:1 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 81-83; Romans 11:19-36

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

As we sat at the table one day last week, my oldest son began protesting about his little sister “always” copying him. When she imitates his laugh or eats her French fries before her burger like he does, it annoys him. My wife and I tried to get him to realize that he has an opportunity to influence her by setting a good example.

Unlike my son, Paul invited others to copy his example (1 Cor. 11:1). In this verse, he concluded his discussion from chapter 10 about the Corinthians loving others enough to limit their freedom. He said that when they were invited to a nonbeliever’s home for dinner, they were free to eat what was set before them (v.27). But if their freedom to eat the meat offered to idols caused another believer to question whether or not what they were doing was right, they were to limit their freedom for the good of the “weaker” believer (v.28).

Paul encouraged the people to follow his example in this matter, in the same way he followed Christ’s example. Paul did not seek his own good, but the good of others by imitating Jesus’ example of love, unity, acceptance, and sacrifice.

In the same way, we are to follow Jesus’ example so closely that we can say with confidence to our brothers and sisters, “Copy me as I copy Christ.”

Show me the way, Lord, let my light shine

As an example of good to mankind.

Help them to see the patterns of Thee,

Shining in beauty, lived out in me. —Neuer

Live a life worth imitating by imitating Christ.

Walking Our Faith

November 10, 2004

Walking Our Faith

Read: Romans 2:17-24 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 48-49; Hebrews 7

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? —James 2:22

Often we Christians are urged not just to “talk the talk” but to “walk the talk.” The same advice may be expressed in these words: Don’t let your behavior contradict your professed belief. At other times we are admonished to be sure that life and lip agree. If our conduct doesn’t harmonize with our confession of faith, however, that discrepancy nullifies the testimony of the gospel which we

proclaim.

As far as we can know, Mahatma Gandhi never became a Christian, but he made a statement that we who follow Jesus would do well to ponder. When asked to put his message into one short sentence, he replied, “My life is my message.”

Certainly we should explain the gospel message as clearly as possible. Yet the clearest explanation isn’t going to win hearts for our Lord unless His love is embodied in our lives. To quote the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” And holding himself up as a pattern, he wrote in Philippians 4:9, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Pray, then, that like Paul we may live out our saving faith before the watching world.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me—

All His wonderful passion and purity!

O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,

Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. —Orsborn

The world is watching us—do they see Jesus?

A Lasting Legacy

June 25, 2002

A Lasting Legacy

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 | Bible in a Year: Job 3-4; Acts 7:44-60

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

My middle-aged friend, who was a medical doctor, knew that he was suffering from a disease that would gradually cripple him and eventually kill him. What an emotional struggle he experienced in coming to accept his condition! He had expected to be helping sick children for many years. He had also hoped that he would provide a comfortable life for his family and the best possible education for his children. But how could he do that now? What could he leave as an inheritance to his children?

In my visits with him, my despairing friend would often raise that issue. But he gradually came to believe that the all-important legacy we can leave our families is not a comfortable home and a large income. The greatest legacy is a spiritual one that no amount of money can buy. It’s an example of unwavering trust in God’s love and wisdom. It’s also an example of steadfast endurance, courage, patience, and hope for eternity when all hope in this world is gone. I told him that if he left that legacy for his family, they would bless his memory until they too departed for glory.

Are we laying up a lasting spiritual legacy of priceless value for those we love? —VCG

Faithful parents never carve their name

On marbled columns built for earthly fame;

They build instead a legacy that springs

Out of a life lived for the King of kings. —Gustafson

A life lived for Christ is the best inheritance we can leave our children.

You Are A Role Model

September 3, 1994

You Are A Role Model

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 140-142; 1 Corinthians 14:1-20

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

Charles Barkley, superstar basketball player for the Phoenix Suns, said in a television ad, “I am not a role model.” But, like it or not, he is. Everybody is a role model for somebody else.

As we grow up, we have many role models, people who inspire us—parents, teachers, athletes, political leaders, characters in novels and in the pages of history.

The Bible also gives us many role models. The apostle Paul, for one, is a challenging example of discipleship. In fact, he held himself up as a pattern for all Christians to follow. “Imitate me,” he urged, “just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). He knew, of course, that he could serve as a godly example only if he faithfully followed his Lord.

Paul commended the Thessalonians because they followed him and the Lord (1 Th. 1:6). They became examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, and they were well-known for their faith in God (vv.7-8).

As we copy Paul, who himself was copying the Savior, we in turn become models who are being copied. What is the quality of our spiritual influence? Negative or positive? Remember, it can’t be neutral. No one can rightly say, “I’m not a role model.”

We cannot live our lives alone,

For other lives we touch

Are either strengthened by our own

Or weakened just as much. —Anon.

The best role models model Christ.

Life Shadowing

December 1, 1998

Life Shadowing

Read: Acts 20:17-21,31-38 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 40-41; 2 Peter 3

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

When our daughter Julie was a high school senior, she had the opportunity to “job shadow” for 2 weeks. She went “on the job” to find out firsthand about two professions that had captured her interest. For the first week, she sat in on the classes of a math teacher at another school. For the second week, she shadowed a college basketball coach.

The idea of shadowing is a vital one, because it emphasizes the importance of example. A person who is being shadowed knows he or she is setting an example for the student.

We are all participants in a process that might be called “life shadowing.” If we are parents, our children shadow us all the time, learning how to act as adults. At work, we have fellow employees who notice our reactions to all kinds of situations. In our community, our neighbors observe us and see how Christians live, even when we don’t realize they are watching.

Is our life worthy of shadowing? Does our example lead others in the right direction? Paul said that his life was worth shadowing because he followed Jesus—the ultimate example (1 Cor. 11:1).

If you want to become a worthy example for others, shadow the Savior!

You're teaching a lesson each day that you live;

Your actions are blazing a trail

That others will follow for good or for ill;

You'll help them or cause them to fail. —Bosch

To cast a good shadow, walk in God's light.

Choosing A Good Leader

January 15, 1999

Choosing A Good Leader

Read: Matthew 15:1-20 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 36-38; Matthew 10:21-42

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

I was having coffee at McDonald's when I noticed a man walk in who was holding a white cane. He had his hand on a young boy's shoulder and appeared to have complete trust in his ability to guide him.

Jesus spoke about leaders who couldn't be trusted. He called the religious leaders of His day "hypocrites" and "blind leaders of the blind" (Mt. 15:7-14). The scribes and Pharisees were teaching man-made traditions, not God's commands (vv.3-9).

Today many voices are crying out from radio, TV, and the pulpit: "Follow me! I have the truth." It's a cacophony of confusion that often leads people astray. The apostle John anticipated such a time when he wrote, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God" (1 Jn. 4:l).

How do we "test the spirits"? By asking these questions: Does the teacher's life reflect the life of Christ? Does the teacher proclaim salvation by grace through faith—not by works? Reliable teachers and leaders will always point us to Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6), and not to themselves. Otherwise, they are merely blind leaders of the blind.

Let's choose with great care the leaders we follow.

For Further Study

Read 1 John 2:4; 3:18-19; 4:2-3.

How can we be sure of knowing truth from error?

How does God help us? (4:4).

A good leader knows the way, shows the way, and goes the way.

Remember The Sacrifice

May 31, 2010

Remember The Sacrifice

Read: 1 Cor. 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 13-14; John 12:1-26

Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. —1 Corinthians 11:24

Every Memorial Day, we remember those who have died in the service of their country. In the United States, a place where such remembrances carry a deep and emotional significance is Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, DC. Arlington is a serious place where, due to the passing of aging war veterans and the ongoing conflicts around the world, there are currently about 25 military funerals every day.

This is particularly difficult for The Old Guard—members of the 3rd US Infantry Regiment who serve at Arlington. It is their task to bear the bodies of the fallen and honor their sacrifice. The members of The Old Guard never forget the price of liberty—for they are reminded of it every day.

Believers in Christ have been given the Lord's Supper as a reminder of what our freedom from sin cost the Lord Jesus Christ. As we partake of the bread and the cup, we fulfill His command to "do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24). But in the sober celebration of the sacrifice of Christ there is joy. For we need not leave our remembrances at the Lord's Table. Living our lives for the Savior can show the world that we will never forget the sacrifice He has made for us.

Thank You, Lord, for dying for me

On the cross of Calvary;

Help me always to remember

What You did to set me free. —Sper

Remembering Christ's death for us should cause us to live for Him.

Look at Yourself!

January 9, 1994

Look at Yourself!

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-32 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 23-24; Matthew 7

If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. —1 Corinthians 11:31

State employment officials in Tucson, Arizona, posted an interesting sign over a full-length mirror. Directed to all job hunters, it read, “Would you hire this person?” In another office a mirror and sign posed this question: “Are you ready for a job?”

Self-evaluation was what the apostle Paul called for in 1 Corinthians 11. Believers in Christ need to judge themselves, he said, to avoid being judged by the Lord as unfit for His service. In the Corinthian church, the “appearance problem” was especially serious. Those Christians “looked” awful. They were actually getting drunk and quarreling among themselves while going through the motions of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. So Paul said, in effect, “Look at yourselves. What a mess! If you don’t get your lives straightened out, the Lord will have to do it for you.” Then the apostle added the sobering fact that God had already begun to cleanse the church by sending some of them to an early grave. This is a hard truth, but one the church still needs to hear today.

This warning, however, also carries a message of hope. If we judge ourselves and repent of our sins, we will not be judged by God.

O Lord, return to me Your power

That once by grace I knew;

Forgive the sin that grieved Your heart,

And help me to be true. —Anon.

Self-examination is one test from which no Christian is excused.

Trouble At City Hall

March 20, 2006

Trouble At City Hall

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 4-6; Luke 1:1-20

Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. —1 Corinthians 11:27

Wreckers preparing to tear down a burned-out bakery in Troy, Illinois, accidentally made a big impression on City Hall right next door. A 65-ton crane backed into the government building, creating a huge hole in the front wall. According to a supervisor, the crane operator “was just being careless.”

This accident reminds me of what happened to the church in ancient Corinth. By being self-absorbed and careless with the bread and wine of the Lord’s Table, some church members backed into big trouble. Their failure to honor the sanctity of the ceremony dishonored the memory of Christ’s sacrifice. Many believers paid for their mistake with a loss of health or even their life (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Paul urged the Corinthians to judge themselves so that they wouldn’t be judged (vv.28,31). And he pointed out that even the Lord’s judgment was for their benefit (v.32).

The Lord’s Table will remain an opportunity and a danger until He comes (v.26). By the attitude of our hearts, we will either honor His death or do damage to His name.

Before you celebrate the Lord’s Supper, prayerfully examine yourself. Then, with a heart of gratitude, focus on His sacrifice for you.

I pause, and in fresh honesty confess

The sins I try to hide but Christ can see;

And then, in holy hush I taste the meal

And gratefully recall His death for me. —Gustafson

Only those who take their sin seriously can remember Christ’s cross gratefully.

Look At Yourself!

October 1, 2000

Look At Yourself!

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 11-13; Ephesians 4

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That once by grace I knew;

Forgive the sin that grieved Your heart,

And help me to be true. —Anon.

Self-examination is one test from which no Christian is excused.

A Serious Celebration

October 1, 1995

A Serious Celebration

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 11-13; Ephesians 4

If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. —1 Corinthians 11:31

An exclusive club in New York refused membership to a man because he was Jewish. A minister who belonged to the club denounced this from his pulpit as “morally reprehensible.” Shock waves rippled down the aisles, because many church members belonged to that club. The pastor then added, “Anyone who has in any way—by thought, word, or deed—condoned this action is not welcome to receive Holy Communion until he has worked out his own peace with God.”

The pastor had biblical support for his insistence that no one should come to the Lord’s Table with unconfessed sin. In 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul confronted some church members who needed to recognize their selfish, divisive attitudes and confess them as sin (vv.18,21). He urged them to pause for serious self-examination before participating in the joyous celebration of the complete forgiveness Jesus secured for us by His sacrificial death.

The principle still applies today. Anything that has come between us and our Savior must be identified and confessed before we partake of the Lord’s Supper. The bread and the cup then give fresh meaning to the forgiveness that is assured us by the shed blood of our Savior.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,

Save in the death of Christ, my God;

All the vain things that charm me most—

I sacrifice them to His blood. —Watts

Before you come to the Lord's table, make sure you have a clean heart.

What's Your Motive?

December 12, 1998

What's Your Motive?

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 | Bible in a Year: Hosea 9-11; Revelation 3

In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached. —Philippians 1:18

Burt Gutras is a communications technician who fine-tunes aviation electronic equipment. But his passion is volunteering for the Smith County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (SCARES). He provides indispensable communication when police are searching for missing persons.

Burt's comments reflect his selflessness: "In the case of missing persons—and it happens more often than people realize—we go out hoping that we can find them before something bad happens. Whether you find them yourself is not important. The important thing is that they are found."

Is that our attitude toward lost sinners? Do we pray for other believers who use different methods than ours to rescue the lost? Are we free from feelings of rivalry or jealousy? Or are we so prejudiced in favor of our own rescue team that we would rather have people remain alienated from God than be brought to Him through the efforts of others?

Paul expressed his great concern over the competing factions he saw in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:11-13). He wanted the Corinthians to be united so that the message of the cross of Christ could go out unhindered.

Let's ask the Holy Spirit to give us an unselfish attitude. Our motives should be as pure as our goal.

Like a mighty army moves the church of God;

Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.

We are not divided, all one body we—

One in hope and doctrine, one in charity. —Baring-Gould

He who is not against us is on our side. —Jesus (Luke 9:50)

The Benefits Of Communion

December 1, 2002

The Benefits Of Communion

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 40-41; 2 Peter 3

Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. —1 Corinthians 11:28

The Lord's Supper. Communion. Whatever you call it, there's nothing quite like this solemn and important act of worship.

Oh, it's possible to participate in Communion without even thinking about God. It can become a ritual full of action but empty of meaning. If we let that happen, we miss out on a time of gratitude and fellowship. And we miss the blessing that comes with a serious examination of our spiritual condition (1 Corinthians 11:28).

One Sunday morning, I wasn't very happy with my wife. You don't need to know the details, but it was my fault that we didn't have a newlywed feeling that day. Sue was on duty at the nursing home where she serves so diligently while I took the rest of the family to church. When the Communion elements were distributed, I realized that I needed to apologize to her. My wrong attitude was both hurting her and harming my relationship with the Lord (Matthew 5:23-24). So after church I stopped by the nursing home and asked my wife to forgive me.

Communion, that solemn time of self-examination before God, reminds us of our responsibility to check the attitude of our heart. And it helps us to keep the slate clean. Be sure to experience the benefits of Communion.

I pause, and in fresh honesty confess

The sins I've tried to hide but Christ can see;

And then, in holy hush I taste the meal

And gratefully recall His death for me. —Gustafson

Remembering Christ's death for us should cause us to live for Him.

To Be Clean Is To Be One

December 9, 1998

To Be Clean Is To Be One

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | Bible in a Year: Daniel 11-12; Jude

When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. —1 Corinthians 11:18

In Makhachkala, a city in southern Russia, 14 new believers and some missionaries gathered in a small apartment to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The room was charged with spiritual energy and joy as the people shared in testimonies, songs, and prayers.

Then, being aware of the symbolic meaning of the bread and the cup, they looked at each other and whispered, "With this we are cleansed. With this we are one!" Being reminded again of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for them and the forgiveness they had received, they felt a new sense of their oneness in Christ.

The apostle Paul said that the Corinthian believers were not experiencing this unifying power. Their celebrations of the Lord's Supper were characterized by divisions. People who had brought food were letting those with no food go hungry. Some were even getting drunk! (1 Cor. 11:21). So Paul warned the people and urged them to examine themselves (v.28).

Nothing unites believers more than the forgiveness Jesus provided when He died for our sins. No wonder He instituted a special Supper before He went to the cross. He knew we would need to be reminded often of what He did to make us clean—to make us one.

I pray, O Lord, reveal to me

If I have caused disunity,

For You would have Your children one

In praise and love for Your dear Son. —JDB

Christian unity begins at the cross.

A Time To Remember

June 24, 2007

A Time To Remember

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 | Bible in a Year: Job 1-2; Acts 7:22-43

Do this in remembrance of Me. —1 Corinthians 11:24

A few years ago, members of my family got together at a restaurant to celebrate the 100th birthday of my grandmother, Hazel Dierking.

But Grandma wasn't there. She had already been in heaven for 16 years. Yet we were so grateful for her influence on us that we wanted to celebrate her life. Using her pink cups and saucers, we drank tea together and reminisced about her sweetness, wisdom, and quirky sense of humor. We remembered her.

When more than one of our five senses is involved in an experience, something stirs in our memory. Perhaps Jesus, knowing how prone we are to forget, chose a method that would involve many of our senses to help us remember His sacrifice. It was at a meal—a time of eating and drinking—that Jesus said to His followers, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24).

When we take part in the Lord's Supper, we remember the love and sacrifice of Jesus in a tangible way. Communion is much more than a ritual. Each moment should be experienced just as if you were seated around the table with the disciples as Jesus spoke.

With hearts overflowing with gratitude, we celebrate the Lord's Supper as a time to remember.

Here we gather to remember,

In the breaking of the bread,

Jesus, who for us was broken,

And is now our living head. —Anon.

Remembering Christ's death gives us courage for today and hope for tomorrow.

Handle With Care

October 3, 1999

Handle With Care

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 17-19; Ephesians 5:17-33

Whoever eats … in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. —1 Corinthians 11:27

A man who had lived a godless life was hospitalized and diagnosed as having inoperable cancer. Seeking peace, he asked for a minister to visit him. But the clergyman who came told him that no one really knows what to expect after death. Before he left, the pastor served Communion, but the man remained troubled. That night he spoke to a nurse, who led him to trust Jesus as his Savior. In the days that followed I visited him regularly, and I can testify that he died with great peace.

Observing the Lord's Supper has great significance, but only when coupled with sincere faith in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul warned believers not to forget the deep significance of the bread and cup. If we treat it lightly or as an empty ritual, we do so "in an unworthy manner" and are guilty of sinning against "the body and blood of the Lord" (v.27).

We must remember that Jesus died to make possible our forgiveness, and we must observe the Lord's Supper in faith and with great care. When we do, it leads us into prayerful self-examination, confession, and recommitment. We gain a renewed sense of gratitude for what Christ has done for us.

Whenever we observe Communion, let's take it seriously and remember to handle it with care!

As we partake of the bread and the cup

And focus our thoughts on Christ,

We dare not forget His death on the cross,

And all that He sacrificed. —K. De Haan

Remembering that Jesus died for us reminds us to live for Him.

The Toughest Exam

June 4, 2000

The Toughest Exam

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 21-22; John 14

Let a man examine himself. —1 Corinthians 11:28

Lindsay was busily preparing for the toughest test of her life. She would spend all day taking the examination to see if she qualified as a lawyer. To get ready, Lindsay wrote down every question she could think of, and she didn't rest until she could answer them all. When the day of the exam arrived, she passed it because she had tested herself beforehand.

Paul told the Corinthian Christians something that applies to us as well. In preparation for the Lord's Supper we should examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28). Any sin, any deficiency in love, any spirit of bitterness should be confessed and taken care of before proceeding with Communion. Why? Because ultimately, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are accountable to God.

How do we test ourselves? We can begin by looking at two issues: First, are we expressing and demonstrating our love for God and for others? (Mt. 22:36-40). And second, are we seeking to please God more than anything else? (6:33).

As Lindsay tested herself in order to be prepared for her exam, we too must test ourselves so that we can pass the toughest exam—God’s evaluation of our lives (1 Cor. 11:29-32). Then we can participate in the Lord’s Supper and worship Him with a clear conscience.

I want to bow before You now,

Dear Lord, without chagrin;

So search my heart and soul today,

And make me pure within. —Hess

To know where you stand before God, test yourself by His standards.

Till He Comes

October 4, 1998

Till He Comes

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 20-22; Ephesians 6

Do this in remembrance of Me. —1 Corinthians 11:24

Why did Jesus command His followers to participate in what we call the Lord’s Supper or Communion? Because He wants us to remember His death on the cross and to anticipate His return.

As He broke the bread centuries ago, He said, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:24). And taking the cup, He instructed, “This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (v.25).

The bread reminds us that the Second Person of the Trinity “became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14) so that He could bear our sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). The cup symbolizes the blood He shed “for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28).

We must be careful, therefore, not to partake of the elements “in an unworthy manner” (1 Cor. 11:27). The apostle Paul said that each person should “examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (v.28). When we gather around the Lord’s Table to remember Christ’s sacrifice for us, we should search our hearts and confess our sins to God.

May we who know Jesus Christ as our Savior obey His commands and faithfully observe the Lord’s Supper—”till He comes” (v.26).

Without the bread and sacred cup

I might forget the price

That You, Lord, paid so willingly—

The utmost sacrifice. —Anon.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper should move our hearts to mend our ways.

Remember!

April 15, 2001

Remember!

Read: John 2:13-22 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 27-29; Luke 13:1-22

When He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered … and they believed the Scripture. —John 2:22

The disciples remembered—and then they believed. After the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection, they recalled and finally understood Jesus’ words, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19).

If our faith is to grow, we too need to remember the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus established a memorial of His death, a practice we call the Lord’s Supper, knowing that our faith and hope would be strengthened as we remember what He has done for us. He said, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:24). Every time we meet to drink of the cup and eat the bread, we remember what it cost Him to redeem us.

The true believer does not live in memories only, however, but with hope for the future. We are to partake of the cup and bread “till He comes” (v.26). The One who died for us also rose from the grave. As we think of our loved ones who have died in the faith, we look beyond to the day when the graves will be opened and we will meet them again. We can be sure that because Jesus lives we too shall live.

We may shed tears today in memory of those who have died. But as we recall Christ’s death and resurrection, our faith and hope are renewed. Let’s remember!

We sorrow not as others do,

Whose hopes fade like the flowers;

There is a hope that's born of God,

And such a hope is ours. —McNeil

In life and in death, Christ is our hope.

A Time To Remember

June 24, 2007

A Time To Remember

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 | Bible in a Year: Job 1-2; Acts 7:22-43

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When more than one of our five senses is involved in an experience, something stirs in our memory. Perhaps Jesus, knowing how prone we are to forget, chose a method that would involve many of our senses to help us remember His sacrifice. It was at a meal—a time of eating and drinking—that Jesus said to His followers, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:24).

When we take part in the Lord’s Supper, we remember the love and sacrifice of Jesus in a tangible way. Communion is much more than a ritual. Each moment should be experienced just as if you were seated around the table with the disciples as Jesus spoke.

With hearts overflowing with gratitude, we celebrate the Lord’s Supper as a time to remember.

Here we gather to remember,

In the breaking of the bread,

Jesus, who for us was broken,

And is now our living head. —Anon.

Remembering Christ’s death gives us courage for today and hope for tomorrow.

Celebrating Together

October 3, 2010

Celebrating Together

Read: 1 Cor. 11:23-26 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 17-19; Ephesians 5:17-33

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. —1 Cor. 11:26

Many churches celebrate the first Sunday in October as World Communion Sunday. It is a time to observe the Lord’s Supper with a special awareness of celebrating together with our brothers and sisters in Christ around the globe. On this day, being with a community of believers has become very meaningful to me.

One year, however, I found myself in an airport with a long flight ahead and no opportunity to attend church on that day. Sitting alone, I read the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, along with the passages describing Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Then from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, I pondered the words so often read at communion services: "The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread … " (v.23). With some common elements to represent the bread and the cup, I observed the Lord's death for us, feeling a deep kinship with those followers of Christ in many places who are unable or forbidden to gather with others in worship.

Whatever your location and circumstances today, may you find joy and strength in remembering the Lord's sacrifice on the cross. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (v.26).

When Christians join in blessed fellowship

Commemorating Jesus' sacrifice,

They sense a common bond of unity

Because for every race He paid the price. —Hess

Celebrating Christ together brings strength and joy.

A Memorial

April 11, 2010

A Memorial

Read: 1 Cor. 11:23-30 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 17-18; Luke 11:1-28

As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. —1 Corinthians 11:26

The Taj Mahal in India is a magnificent mausoleum. Built entirely of white marble, it was commissioned by the Emperor Shah Jehan in memory of his wife, who died suddenly. It took 22 years to complete. Millions of tourists visit this memorial annually in order to see this grand structure the emperor ordered to be built in memory of the woman he loved.

Millions of people also throng to Jerusalem to look at another site—a tomb that some say may have been where Jesus was buried. No matter what tomb He lay in, Jesus occupied it for only a few days. It has been empty for 2,000 years.

Jesus doesn't need us to build a memorial to Him. Instead, He gave us the Lord's Supper (communion) as a memorial to remember Him. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and the cup and gave thanks to His Father before offering them to His disciples (Luke 22:14-21). Each time we partake of those elements in church, we are first to examine ourselves and our relationship with God (1 Cor. 11:28). "As often as [we] eat this bread and drink this cup" we are to do so in remembrance of the One we love, till He comes (vv.25-26).

The Lord has given us an enduring memorial to remind us of what He has done for us.

I'll take the bread and cup, dear Lord,

That speak of love sublime,

And give myself afresh to Thee.

My life, my all is Thine! —Anon.

The Lord's Supper—Christ's memorial that He left for us.

Tears Of Gratitude

May 4, 2014

Tears Of Gratitude

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32 | Bible in a Year: 1 Kings 16-18; Luke 22:47-71

You proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. —1 Corinthians 11:26

At a communion service my wife and I attended, the congregation was invited to come forward to receive the bread and cup from

one of the pastors or elders. They told each one personally of Jesus' sacrifice for him or her. It was an especially moving experience during what can often become just routine. After we returned to our seats, I watched as others slowly and quietly filed past. It was striking to see how many had tears in their eyes. For me, and for others I talked with later, they were tears of gratitude.

The reason for tears of gratitude is seen in the reason for the communion table itself. Paul, after instructing the church at Corinth about the meaning of the memorial supper, punctuated his comments with these powerful words: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). With the elements of communion pointing directly to the cross and the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, that service was about so much more than ritual—it was about Christ. His love. His sacrifice. His cross. For us.

How inadequate words are to convey the extraordinary worth of Christ! Sometimes tears of gratitude speak what words can't fully express.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small;

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all. —Watts

The love Christ showed for us on the cross is greater than words could ever express.

This Do In Remembrance

December 7, 2011

This Do In Remembrance

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: Daniel 5-7; 2 John

When [Jesus] had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you." —1 Corinthians 11:24

When a US Navy vessel arrives or departs from the military bases in Pearl Harbor, the crew of that ship lines up in dress uniform. They stand at attention at arm's length on the outer edges of the deck, in salute to the soldiers, sailors, and civilians who died on December 7, 1941. It is a stirring sight, and participants often list it among the most memorable moments of their military career.

Even for spectators on shore, the salute triggers an incredible emotional connection, but especially between the servants of today and the servants of yesterday. It grants nobility to the work of today's sailor, while giving dignity to the sacrifice of those from the past.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29), it was surely with an eye toward creating this same kind of emotional bond. Our participation in the Lord's Table honors His sacrifice while also granting us a connection to Him unlike any other act of remembrance.

Just as the Navy carefully prescribes the way it salutes the fallen, so too Scripture teaches us how to remember Jesus' sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:26-28). These acts of reverence and thanksgiving serve to honor past action while giving purpose to present service.

Action Suggestion:

Read with fresh eyes the detailed instructions Scripture

offers for the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, and

experience anew its power in your spiritual journey.

The Lord's Supper— Christ's memorial that He left for us.

Enjoying His Meal

April 2, 2015

Enjoying His Meal

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: Judges 16-18; Luke 7:1-30

Do this in remembrance of Me. —1 Corinthians 11:24

It’s not about the table, whether it’s square or round. It’s not about the chairs—plastic or wooden. It’s not about the food, although it helps if it has been cooked with love. A good meal is enjoyed when we turn off the TV and our cell phones and concentrate on those we’re with.

I love gathering around the table, enjoying a good chat with friends and family and talking about a multitude of topics. However, instant technology has made it difficult. Sometimes we are more concerned about what others—sometimes miles away—have to say than what the person just across the table is saying.

We have been invited to another meal at the table when we come together in one place to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. It’s not about the church, if it’s big or small. It’s not about the type of bread. It’s about turning off our thoughts from our worries and concerns and focusing on Jesus.

When was the last time we enjoyed being at the Lord’s Table? Do we enjoy His presence, or are we more concerned with what’s going on somewhere else? This is important, “for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

I want to learn, dear Lord, when I sit at Your Table, to concentrate only on Your great love and sacrifice for us. Help me to enjoy the fellowship of others as we remember together what Jesus did for us at Calvary.

Remembering Christ’s death gives us courage for today and hope for tomorrow.

Time For A Checkup

April 3, 2011

Time For A Checkup

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 | Bible in a Year: Judges 19-21; Luke 7:31-50

Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. —1 Corinthians 11:28

Every year I have a physical—that periodic visit to the doctor’s office where I’m poked and prodded, screened and studied. It is something that can be easy to dread, and even to fear. We aren’t sure what the tests will show or what the doctors will say. Still, we know that we need this evaluation to understand our physical well-being and what is needed as we move forward.

The same is true spiritually in the life of the Christ-follower. We need to pause from time to time and reflect on the condition of our hearts and lives.

One place for an important self-study is at the Lord’s Table. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some of whom were eating in an unworthy manner: “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). In the remembrance of Christ’s death for us, there can be a sobering clarity of thought and understanding, for as we consider the price Jesus paid for us, it is the best time to consider the condition of our heart and our relationships. Then, with honest understanding of our spiritual well-being, we can turn to Him for the grace we need to move forward in His name. Is it time for your checkup?

Search me, O God, my heart discern;

Try me, my inmost thoughts to learn.

Help me to keep from sin, I pray,

Guarding my mind throughout this day. —Anon.

Self-examination is one test from which no Christian is excused.

The Power Of Ritual

October 1, 2014

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 11-13; Ephesians 4

Do this in remembrance of Me. —1 Corinthians 11:24

When I was growing up, one of the rules in our house was that we weren’t allowed to go to bed angry (Eph. 4:26). All our fights and disagreements had to be resolved. The companion to that rule was this bedtime ritual: Mom and Dad would say to my brother and me, “Good night. I love you.” And we would respond, “Good night. I love you too.”

The value of this family ritual has recently been impressed on me. As my mother lay in a hospice bed dying of lung cancer, she became less and less responsive. But each night when I left her bedside I would say, “I love you, Mom.” And though she could say little else, she would respond, “I love you too.” Growing up I had no idea what a gift this ritual would be to me so many years later.

Time and repetition can rob our rituals of meaning. But some are important reminders of vital spiritual truths. First-century believers misused the practice of the Lord’s Supper, but the apostle Paul didn’t tell them to stop celebrating it. Instead he told them, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Rather than give up the ritual, perhaps we need to restore the meaning.

Lord, when we observe the Lord’s Supper, help

us avoid the trap of letting our observance

grow routine. May we always be moved with

gratitude for the wonderful gift of ritual.

Any ritual can lose meaning, but that does not make the ritual meaningless.

Seeing Ourselves

November 28, 2015

Seeing Ourselves

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 33–34; 1 Peter 5

Everyone ought to examine themselves. 1 Corinthians 11:28

Long ago, before the invention of mirrors or polished surfaces, people rarely saw themselves. Puddles of water, streams, and rivers were one of the few ways they could see their own reflection. But mirrors changed that. And the invention of cameras took fascination with our looks to a whole new level. We now have lasting images of ourselves from any given time throughout our entire life. This is good for making scrapbooks and keeping family histories, but it can be detrimental to our spiritual well-being. The fun of seeing ourselves on camera can keep us focused on outward appearance and leave us with little interest in examining our inner selves.

Self-examination is crucial for a healthy spiritual life. God wants us to see ourselves so that we can be spared the consequences of sinful choices. This is so important that Scripture says we are not to participate in the Lord’s Supper without first examining ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28). The point of this self-examination is not only to make things right with God but also to make sure we are right with one another. The Lord’s Supper is a remembrance of Christ’s body, and we can’t celebrate it properly if we’re not living in harmony with other believers.

Confessing our sin promotes unity with others & a healthy relationship with God.

Seeing and confessing our sin promotes unity with others and a healthy relationship with God.

Dear Lord, help me to be more concerned with the reflection of my heart than with my physical reflection. Change me through the power of Your Spirit.

When we look into the mirror of God’s Word, we see ourselves more clearly.

1 Corinthians 12

1 CORINTHIANS 12:5

Champion figure skater Paul Wylie is a cum laude Harvard graduate and a born-again Christian. His mother always wanted him to be a minister, but he has decided to study law He believes he does not possess the gifts required to pastoral ministry. But he insists —and rightly so—that whether he's performing on the ice or reading in the library of Harvard Law School, he can serve his Savior Jesus Christ.

"I think that every Christian is called to be a minister in his place of work," he says, "So I try to be a minister wherever I am. When

people come up to me and ask questions, I tell them the truth."

Whether we are figure skaters, law students, homemakers, mechanics, nurses, bankers, or have some other job, we can serve Jesus Christ. The New Testament doesn't assign the task of ministry only to those who are officially recognized as pastors. First Corinthians 12 indicates that every believer is spiritually equipped for some kind of service (v7). —V C. Grounds.

No MATTER HOW SMALL IT MAY SEEM, YOUR WORK FOR CHRIST HAS GREAT VALUE.

1 Corinthians 12:1–11

Today in the Word

In his 2006 book, The Blind Side, Michael Lewis examines the hidden heroes of football. For example, the virtually unknown players at the left tackle position are some of the highest paid players on the team. It's their job to defend the blind side of the quarterback. The offense depends on their strength and agility. The left tackle doesn't get the acclaim the quarterback does, but he's arguably just as important.

To carry the team analogy further, the church is made up of all kinds of players: quarterbacks, running backs, offensive linemen, and kickers. Just as Paul teaches here in the first verses of chapter 12, the community of believers is a wide assortment of people whose gifts and service are equally as diverse. In the Corinthian church, there is clear confusion on the matter of spiritual gifts, and Paul dedicates the next three chapters of his letter to answering questions the Corinthians have posed to him on the subject.

The Corinthians have some fundamental misconceptions about spiritual gifts, which Paul must address. They had elevated certain gifts above others, most notably the gift of tongues (cf. 1 Corinthians 14). And no doubt those with the gift of tongues were boasting of some spiritual privilege and position. Perhaps they had even come to doubt that all members of the community were indwelt by the Spirit and endowed with gifts from Him.

From the beginning, Paul wants to establish why and by whom the gifts are given. Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit, and everyone who confesses the lordship of Christ has the Spirit. Nothing more is required to demonstrate the indwelling of the Spirit—no spectacular or miraculous manifestation. Every believer has a spiritual gift, and the gifts differ in expression. The list, which Paul gives in our reading, is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, it's to confirm the point that spiritual gifts are diverse! And the purpose for spiritual gifts is that their exercise would enhance the common good, not simply to feel important or good about ourselves.

Apply the Word

Each believer has been given an ability from God to help others and to proclaim the lordship of Jesus Christ. Not all will preach or teach, but everyone has the capacity for influencing the lives of others for good and for reflecting the glorious body of Jesus Christ. Are you exercising your gift to help the church and bring glory to God? Or do you doubt that you are one of the "gifted" Christians? Numerous inventories for discovering your spiritual gift exist, but a good place to start is by asking trusted Christian friends what gifts they observe in your life.

1 Corinthians 12:12–31

Today in the Word

The church in Haiti was not destroyed when the buildings collapsed in the January 12 earthquake. Gersan Valcin, pastor of a church in Port–au–Prince, was visiting one of his church members when a destitute woman approached whose shoes had fallen apart. The church member took off her own shoes—the only pair she owned—and gave them to the woman, who still had many miles to travel.

Here is a picture of the kind of actions and attitudes to which Paul calls the Corinthians in verse 26 of our reading today. As the church of God, we must compassionately identify with those among us who hurt. Moreover, when members of our body are honored, we celebrate together. This isn't mere sympathy or polite applause. With the kind of a radical unity in the body of Christ that Paul has been urging, we actually feel for one another. As followers of Jesus, we become like Him and take on each other's pain and celebration in an incarnational way. In Christ, our stories and our lives really matter to others.

We can see what Paul is doing as he answers the questions the Corinthians have posed to him on the subject of spiritual gifts. He's using his answer as an occasion to retrace some of his themes of the letter. We must remember that the fundamental problem the Corinthian church faced was its disunity. The disunity has expressed itself in multiple ways: believers had taken one another to court, the community had divided over the issue of whether one can eat meat sacrificed to idols, factions developed between sexual immorality and sexual asceticism, and the Lord's Supper had become another occasion of the rich shaming the poor. Spiritual gifts were another arena where the Corinthians had despised one another.

Paul teaches that every member of the body is indispensable. We cannot do without what might seem to be the weakest of our

members. As infinitely complex and beautiful as the human body, the diversity of the church is there by God's creative design.

Apply the Word

Seminary president in Port–au–Prince, Jean Dorlus, spoke of the cooperation between Americans and Haitians in the relief and rebuilding efforts in the wake of the earthquake. For all the praise he offered, he also noted, "Oh, Americans—they would be almost perfect people except for one thing: if they would listen!" His words challenge us to remember that as the body of Christ, in order to function in a healthy way, we've got to listen to one another. Real listening is the prerequisite for real compassion and unity.

1 Corinthians 12:7

A well-known coach was once asked, "How much does college football contribute to the national physical-fitness picture?"

"Nothing," the coach replied abruptly.

"Why not?" the startled interviewer asked.

"Well," said the coach, "the way I see it, you have 22 men down on the field desperately needing a rest and 40,000 people in the stands, desperately needing some exercise."

A similar situation exists in many churches today. When you compare the members who actively participate, you often find a rather pathetic situation. It's not unusual to have a small group of diligent Christian workers struggling "down on the field" while others in the congregation are acting like spectators, "sitting on the sidelines, eating hot dogs and popcorn."

God's strategy for the accomplishment of His program is not like a sports event. It does not call for the job to be done only by the "professionals." In the game of life, all believers have their own positions and spiritual gifts that they must exercise "for the profit of all" (1 Cor. 12:7).

My friend, if you've been sitting in the stands, you're badly needed down on the field! -MRD II

God calls into action today
All those who are children of light;
Whatever our hand finds to do,
Let's do it with all of our might. - Hess

Christians should be on the frontlines, not the sidelines.

1 Corinthians 12:12ff

Sir Michael Costa was conducting a rehearsal in which the orchestra was joined by a great chorus. About halfway through the session, with trumpets blaring, drums rolling, and violins singing their rich melody, the piccolo player muttered to himself, "What good am I doing? I might just as well not be playing. Nobody can hear me anyway." So he kept the instrument to his mouth, but he made no sound. Within moments, the conductor cried, "Stop! Stop! Where's the piccolo?" It was missed by the ear of the most important person of all.

1 Corinthians 12:12ff

A talented, young concert pianist was drafted in WWI and sent to the front line. In a fierce battle he was badly wounded in his right arm. The doctors decided that unless they amputated that arm, which they did, the soldier would die. Although this was devastating to the musician, he was determined not to let it destroy his future. After recovering, he went from composer to composer, asking for compositions for the left hand only. No one was willing to help until he visited Maurice Ravel, the brilliant French composer of Bolero. He responded to the young man's need and wrote the moving Concerto in D Major for Left Hand. Audiences everywhere were stirred by the pianist's rendition of this beautiful music.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31

But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased (1 Corinthians 12:18).

The name of the extinct dodo bird has long been used to speak of someone who is foolish, stupid, and worthless. Larger than a turkey, this ash-gray bird had a fat and lumpy fifty-pound body and a ridiculous tuft of curly feathers for a tail. Its stubby wings sported no more than three or four black feathers. It had a hooked beak, large legs, and heavy feet. The dodo lived in obscurity on three islands in the Indian Ocean until settlers came along and wiped out the defenseless creatures. These ugly birds seemed destined for ridicule. Their discoverer wrote of them in his journal, "We called these birds walghvogels [disgusting birds] for the reason that the more and longer they are cooked, the less soft and more unpalatable their flesh becomes."

But then came a surprising discovery. In 1977 scientists learned that the beautiful calvaria tree, which grows on the dodo's native island, depended on the bird for its survival. The tree's seeds had such thick hulls that they could sprout only after being run through the rigors of the dodo's digestive system. Just in the nick of time, some turkeys were imported to take the dodo's place and perpetuate the thirteen dying calvaria trees that remained.

In the church, as in nature, the Lord doesn't make worthless things. Every one of us is an important part of the body. Some of us might not look like much, but God has placed us "just as He pleased." Each has a purpose, and in Christ that purpose is eternal. —M.R.DeHaan II

Those who appear small in our sight
are often giants in God's sight.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:18

A sea captain and his chief engineer were at odds about whose job was the most vital on their ship. They decided that the best wav to settle the question would be to exchange positions. The captain «vent below deck to run the engine room, and the chief engineer climbed to the bridge and grabbed the wheel.

Several hours later the captain appeared on deck, his clothes covered with oil and grease. "Chief," he yelled up to the bridge as he swung a wrench in hand, "come down here. I can't make 'er go!" "I know," yelled the chagrined chief engineer, "I've run 'er aground!"

The effectiveness of the Christian church is dependent on the cooperation of its members as each one does what God has equipped him or her to do best. Then, serving under the lordship of Christ, they will labor together in harmony What task has God given you in His program? Stick to it. It's a job He intends just for you. —Paul R VanGorder

THE CHRISTIAN WHO PULLS ON THE OARS HAS NO TIME TO ROCK THE BOAT.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:20

What does the word Yankee mean to you? Robert W Mayer, in a Wall Street Journal article, writes, "To people in other parts of the world it simply means someone from the United States; to people in the United States it means someone from north of the Mason-Dixon Line; to us Northerners it means someone from New England; to New Englanders it means someone from Vermont; to Vermonters it means someone from the Green Mountains."

The term Christian has taken on a wide range of meaning too. Some have even equated being a Christian with being an American. That's far too wide! But we who believe in Jesus Christ often make the definition too narrow. We describe as "real Christians" only those men and women who believe and worship exactly as we do.

Certainly sound doctrine is vital! There is no room for disagreement over the fundamentals of the faith. But a "real Christian" is anyone who relies on God's grace and puts his trust in Christ alone as his only hope of salvation. —HWR

DON'T REJECT ANYONE WHOM GOD HAS ACCEPTED.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:22

A visitor was being shown around a leper colony in India. At noon a gong sounded for the midday meal. People came from all parts of the compound to the dining hall. All at once peals of laughter filled the air. Two young men, one riding on the other's back, were pretending to be a horse and a rider and were having loads of fun.

As the visitor watched, he saw that the man who carried his friend was blind, and the man on his back was lame. The one who could not see used his feet; the one who could not walk used his eyes. Together they helped each other, and they found great joy in doing it.

Imagine a church like that—each member using his or her strength to make up for another's weakness. We need each other. —D. J. DeHaan.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS INSIGNIFICANT SERVICE FOR CHRIST.

1 Corinthians 12:22

From an experience of her childhood, Mrs. Floyd Crook recalls, “I came home from school one day crying because I had been given only a small part in the children’s program, while my playmate got the leading role. After drying my tears, my mother took off her watch and put it in my hand. “What do you see?” she asked. “A gold case, a face, and two hands.” I replied. Opening the back, she repeated the question. I told her I saw many tiny wheels. “This watch would be useless,” she said, “without every part—even the

ones you can hardly see.”

1 Corinthians 12:22-26

On February 29, 1964, about 150 Christians were gathered for a service in the house of Aleksandr Gushcin in Barnaul, Siberia. All at once, five swearing, half-intoxicated officers broke into the meeting and ordered them to disperse. Instinctively they huddled closer together, forming a human barrier between the uniformed men and their pastor. Angry and frustrated, the officers forced some of the Christians out into the cold night and herded them into a waiting truck. Just then the pastor shouted, “Wait! If you are going to take some of us, you must take us all. We’re one family. What happens to one will happen to all!” Of course, the police vehicle was too small for everyone, so the whole group marched behind it until another truck was sent. The ordeal ended at the Region Executive Committee building with all 150 members singing praises to the Lord. The solidarity of these believers was so bewildering to the authorities that they released them a short time later.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:26

During a rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, Toscanini, the famed maestro, offered some constructive criticism to a featured soloist.. She was too proud to accept his help, however, and expressed her resentment by exclaiming in anger, "I am the star of this performance!" Toscanini responded wisely and firmly. "Madame," he said, "in this performance there are no stars."

Even though each Christian has his own unique traits and his own individual duties, taken together we comprise one body. We can make no advances with only solo work. All of us, from the greatest to the humblest, should work together in harmony and devotion. The Lord isn't looking for soloists to be stars; He needs workers who are willing to be servants. God's work calls for teamwork! —R W DeHaan

EVERY MEMBER OF A CHURCH CARING

MEANS EVERY MEMBER SHARING.

Use Your Gift!

September 15, 1996

Use Your Gift!

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 22-24; 2 Corinthians 8

Do not neglect the gift that is in you. —1 Timothy 4:14

God never gives a person a task without also providing him with what’s necessary to perform the responsibility.

W. W. Dawley, referring to this truth, says, “God gave Moses a rod, David a sling, Samson the jawbone of a donkey, Shamgar an oxgoad, Esther the beauty of person, Deborah the talent for poetry, Dorcas a needle, and Apollos an eloquent tongue—and to each the ability to use that gift. In so doing, every one of them did most effective works for the Lord.”

Our heavenly Father has given at least one spiritual gift to each of us as believers, and He provides all we need to carry out our individual responsibilities (1 Cor. 12:6-7). We are all essential in the body of Christ (vv.14-27). Acknowledging these truths is not only a source of comfort and encouragement, but it is also a sobering reality, for it places before us an important obligation. God’s gifts to us must not be squandered! They must be fully used, because someday “each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12).

What has the Lord given you? Are you using your spiritual gift for His glory and the blessing of others? Don’t waste your gift! Use it!

Lord God, I humbly ask of You

The strength to do Your will;

I give to You my talents now

Your purpose to fulfill. —Bierema

God's call to a task includes His strength to complete it.

Blended Together

February 1, 2015

Blended Together

Read: Ephesians 4:5-16 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 27-28; Matthew 21:1-22

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. —Ephesians 2:10

My wife, Janet, bought me a new Dreadnought D-35 guitar for my 65th birthday. Originally developed in the early 1900s, the Dreadnought style is larger than most guitars designed during that time, and it's known for its bold and loud tone. It was named after the large World War I British battleship the HMS Dreadnought. The back of the D-35 is unique. Because of the shortage of wide pieces of high quality rosewood, the craftsmen innovatively fit three smaller pieces of wood together, which resulted in a richer tone.

God's workmanship is a lot like that innovative guitar design. Jesus takes fragments and blends them together to bring Him praise. He recruited tax collectors, Jewish revolutionaries, fishermen, and others to be His followers. And down through the centuries Christ continues to call out people from varied walks of life. The apostle Paul tells us, "He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love" (Eph. 4:16 nlt).

In the Master's hand many kinds of people are fit together and are being built into something with great potential for praise to God and service for others.

Thank You, Lord, that you have placed us

in Your family—that You are using us

individually and together to bring You

honor. Help us to live in Your power.

We can accomplish more together than we can alone.

Don't Just Sit There

September 21, 1997

Don't Just Sit There

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Ecclesiastes 7-9; 2 Corinthians 13

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. —1 Corinthians 12:7

A well-known coach was once asked, "How much does college football contribute to the national physical-fitness picture?"

"Nothing," the coach replied abruptly.

"Why not?" the startled interviewer asked.

"Well," said the coach, "the way I see it, you have 22 men down on the field desperately needing a rest and 40,000 people in the stands desperately needing some exercise."

A similar situation exists in many churches today. When you compare the members who merely attend with those who actively participate, you often find a rather pathetic situation. It's not unusual to have a small group of diligent Christian workers struggling "down on the field" while others in the congregation are acting like spectators, "sitting on the sidelines, eating hot dogs and popcorn."

God's strategy for the accomplishment of His program is not like a sports event. It does not call for the job to be done only by the "professionals." In the game of life, all believers have their own positions and spiritual gifts that they must exercise "for the profit of all" (1 Cor. 12:7).

My friend, if you've been sitting in the stands, you're badly needed down on the field!

God calls into action today

All those who are children of light;

Whatever our hand finds to do,

Let's do it with all of our might. —Hess

Christians should be on the frontlines, not the sidelines.

We’re A Community

April 17, 2015

We’re A Community

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 1-2; Luke 14:1-24

[The Lord] gave some … for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. —Ephesians 4:11-12

A pastor’s wife was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. That put the family in a difficult, stressful situation. The pastor wondered how he was going to be able to take good care of her while he still had responsibilities for his church family. But he needn’t have worried because church members stepped up and volunteered to assist him with meals and some of her care.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about the purpose for which the Lord gave them their spiritual gifts. Before he listed the diversity of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, he reminded them that “a spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other” (v.7 nlt). God does not give His spiritual gifts for our own selfish use but to serve others, and in so doing, we serve Him.

We are all given different gifts to be used at different times and in different ways. But they are all to be used in love for the “edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Wherever God has placed us, we can use what He has gifted us to do as we see the need, remembering that we are all part of the church—the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13-14).

Thank You, Father, for the wonderful gifts You have given Your church. Help me to understand how You have gifted me to encourage other believers, and to spread the message of Your love to the world.

Use your gifts to exercise care for others.

Be Like A Bee

July 22, 1998

Be Like A Bee

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-18 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 31-32; Acts 23:16-35

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. —1 Corinthians 12:18

The honeybee has one of the most highly developed social structures in the animal kingdom. At the heart of the hive, which may house as many as 80,000 bees, is the queen. Without her, the colony has no future. But the 80,000 don’t just sit around watching their queen. Each bee has a specialized duty to fulfill.

The forager bees encounter the perils of the outside world to collect food. The guard bees protect the hive entrance from intruders. The undertakers are responsible for removing dead bodies from the hive. The water collectors bring in moisture to regulate humidity. The plasterers make a kind of cement to repair the hive. And the fanners station themselves at the entrance and fan the scent outward to signal the location of the colony to lost or disoriented bees. The scout bees keep the hive alerted to opportunities and dangers of the outside world. The variety and specialization of the worker bees seem endless.

In a similar way, the Lord has given special gifts and tasks to all the people in His church. No one has been called merely to sit around. Everyone can do something. The work of the church will not get done unless all of us do what God has called us to do.

Christ builds His church and makes it strong

By using you and me,

And if we all will do our part

The world His love will see. —Sper

The church works best when we see ourselves as participants, not spectators.

You Don’t Need a Pulpit

April 12, 1994

You Don’t Need a Pulpit

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-25 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 19-21; Luke 11:29-54

There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. —1 Corinthians 12:5

Champion figure skater Paul Wylie is a cum laude Harvard graduate and a born-again Christian. His mother always wanted him to be a minister, but he has decided to study law. He believes he does not possess the gifts required for pastoral ministry. But he insists—and rightly so—that whether he’s performing on the ice or reading in the library of Harvard Law School, he can serve his Savior Jesus Christ.

“I think that every Christian is called to be a minister in his place of work,” he says. “So I try to be a minister wherever I am. When people come up to me and ask questions, I tell them the truth.”

Whether we are figure skaters, law students, homemakers, mechanics, nurses, bankers, or have some other job, we can serve Jesus Christ. The New Testament doesn’t assign the task of ministry only to those who are officially recognized as pastors. First Corinthians 12 indicates that every believer is spiritually equipped for some kind of service (v.7).

We don’t have to stand behind a pulpit to function as ministers for our Savior. The task of ministering and the privilege of serving have been assigned to everyone who has been born again.

I want, in this short life of mine,

As much as can be pressed

Of service true for God and man—

Help me to be my best! —Simpson

No matter how small it may seem, your work for Christ has great value.

The Bible Guy

July 16, 2008

The Bible Guy

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 16-17; Acts 20:1-16

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. —Romans 12:6

When the youth group in Rich’s church needed Bibles for study, he went on a search for more than 70 copies. He got what they needed, but he never stopped collecting and distributing Bibles.

People and businesses donate money; others give him new and used Bibles to share. The motto on the side of the van he uses for this ministry explains his simple desire: “Need a Bible? Ask me for one.” Rich is an ordinary guy, a heating and plumbing technician, who carries on this ministry in his spare time. His nickname around his church is “the Bible guy.”

Do you ever wish you could have a special ministry like Rich’s? The Lord has given each of us at least one spiritual gift to use for His kingdom purposes. The apostle Paul lists several in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, and some are mentioned in 1 Peter 4:9-11.

If you don’t know what gifts you have, volunteer for a ministry in your church that interests you, or meet a need you learn about. Then ask yourself if you saw God work through you and if you had joy as you served. Ask fellow believers if they think you’re gifted in that area. And ask the Lord to help you determine where you fit in His plans.

The Lord wants to use you too.

Help us, Lord, to work together

With the gifts that You bestow;

Give us unity of purpose

As we serve You here below. —Sper

Christians who bury their gifts make a grave mistake.

Bicycle Riders

April 6, 2002

Bicycle Riders

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 4-6; Luke 9:1-17

We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. —1 Corinthians 3:9

I remember the first time I tried to ride a bicycle. I thought I would never learn!

I pulled the bike alongside the porch and then jumped on and began pedaling, only to end up bumping smack into a maple tree. I had been so intent on pedaling that I forgot to steer. So I tried a second time and concentrated on steering but forgot to pedal, and of course I fell over. I had to learn to use my feet to pump the pedals and my hands to steer at the same time. It was a lesson on what it means to work together.

A bicycle built for two or more people is a different sort of challenge. The trick to riding one of these is for the people in back to concentrate on pedaling while the person in front does the steering. All can ride, all must help in pedaling, but only one can steer.

So it is in the church. There are some things all must do, while there are other things that only certain ones are entrusted to do. How sad that so many want to steer and so few want to pedal!

Have you found a place of service in your church? Don't try to do a task that belongs to someone else. Ask God to help you find the job He's gifted you to do (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10), then do it faithfully. —M. R. De Haan, M.D.

Use now what God has given you,

Count not its worth as small;

God does not ask of you great things,

Just faithfulness—that's all! —Bosch

It is better to be faithful than to be out in front.

The Gifted Church

September 2, 2001

The Gifted Church

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 137-139; 1 Corinthians 13

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. —1 Corinthians 12:7

Are you using your gift? According to 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, the Holy Spirit gives every follower of Christ at least one spiritual gift. These God-given abilities are bestowed so that the church can function effectively and grow strong.

We are to use our gifts—whether teaching, encouraging, or helping others—all in service to Christ. When we don't, His church suffers, its ministry is incomplete, and its outreach and effectiveness are crippled.

I know of a church where this happened. Just before the fall programs were to begin, several people resigned or took a leave of absence from their ministries. A couple of key families experienced job transfers and moved away. A longtime, faithful worker suffered a heart attack; two others were undergoing cancer treatment. The Sunday school superintendent asked to be relieved of his responsibility, and the nursery chairman resigned.

This church had many gifted and capable members. They were informed of the needs and asked to pray about filling the empty positions. But very few responded, and several key roles remained unfilled. The church's ministry suffered.

In Christ you're gifted. So use your gift for Him.

All Christians have been gifted

By grace from God above,

Equipped to build and strengthen

The church in faith and love. —Fitzhugh

A church can become a graveyard if its members bury their gifts.

What Good Is A Rubber Tree?

October 5, 2005

What Good Is A Rubber Tree?

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 23-25; Philippians 1

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. —1 Corinthians 12:4-5

On one of his voyages to the New World, Christopher Columbus came across a remarkable tree. It had round fruit that bounced like a ball. Its Indian name was caoutchouc—"the weeping wood."

The tree was given that name because it emitted a sap that looked like the tree's tears. Eventually, inventors discovered that the sap could be harvested and allowed to harden into an eraser that rubbed out pencil lead—hence the name "rubber."

In the 1830s it was found that rubber could withstand very cold temperatures when sulfur was added to it. This led the way to a huge demand for rubber when the automobile was invented. Later it was discovered that the sap could be used to make latex surgical gloves. The rubber tree had multiple uses that needed only to be discovered.

Likewise, when we consider the spiritual gifts taught in the Bible, we may find that we have more than one. If we try out new avenues of ministry, we may find that we have abilities previously unknown to us.

Whatever your spiritual gifts may be, they come to you from the Lord (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). What new ministry should you try out? You may discover a spiritual gift you never knew you had.

Lord, please give me the willingness to explore the

spiritual gifts You have planted within me.

Give me the desire to use them in ways

that would please You and help Your people. Amen.

Discover your spiritual gifts by using the talents God has given.

We Need One Another

December 6, 1998

We Need One Another

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 | Bible in a Year: Daniel 3-4; 1 John 5

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. —1 Corinthians 12:7

The Peterson ranch in Wyoming is framed by mile after mile of fencing. Not only is the entire spread fenced in, Clyde Peterson has it subdivided with barbed-wire so he can move the cattle from section to section. A single grazing spot may be bordered by as many as 600 fenceposts. Each cedar post is important. If one is knocked down, the entire herd can escape over the fallen section.

The same principle holds true in other areas of life. If one machine breaks down, the whole assembly line grinds to a halt. If one screw drops out of a carburetor, the car runs erratically. If a single microchip fails, an entire computer system may malfunction.

A local church is no different. Every worker is vital: the Sunday school teacher, the organist, the sound-system operator, the nursery worker, the greeter. If one slacks off, the entire effort suffers.

Are you feeling unimportant—as if you're just one more fencepost in a long row? Does it seem that what you're doing is hardly worth the effort? Remember what the apostle Paul wrote: No matter what your capacity, if you are working for the Lord, it is "for the profit of all" (1 Cor. 12:7).

As one single fencepost is crucial to the rancher, you too are important to God—and to the rest of us!

We need each other as we serve the Lord,

With all the workers equal to their tasks,

No matter if the jobs are large or small,

For faithfulness is all the Savior asks. —Hess

Even the smallest work done for Christ has great value.

You Don’t Need a Pulpit

April 12, 1994

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I want, in this short life of mine,

As much as can be pressed

Of service true for God and man—

Help me to be my best! —Simpson

No matter how small it may seem, your work for Christ has great value.

The Right People

June 25, 2010

The Right People

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:7-18 | Bible in a Year: Job 3-4; Acts 7:44-60

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. —1 Corinthians 12:18

The film Miracle tells the true story of the 1980 US Olympic ice hockey team as it marches to an improbable gold medal. At the outset of the story, coach Herb Brooks is shown selecting the players for his team. When he gives assistant coach Craig Patrick a list of names he has chosen, Craig says in surprise, “You’re missing some of the best players.” Brooks responds, “I’m not looking for the best players, Craig—just the right ones.”

Brooks knew that individual talent would take the team only so far. A willingness to fit into his style of selfless play would be far more important than talent. Clearly, team success, not individual glory, was the priority.

The biblical call to service has a similar emphasis. In God’s purposes, each believer does his or her part, but the results are team-oriented. After explaining the wide differences in the spiritual gifts of believers, Paul says, “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Cor. 12:7). When we use the skills God gives us, His purposes are accomplished, and He gets the glory. In God’s service, it’s not about being the best, the most talented, or the most gifted. It’s about being the right people—the ones God “set … in the body” (v.18)—joining together to serve the same team.

Christ builds His church with different stones

And makes each one secure;

All shapes and sizes fit in place

To make His church endure. —Anon.

There are no unimportant people in the body of Christ.

Gifted To Serve

February 17, 2013

Gifted To Serve

Read: Romans 12:3-13 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 21-22; Matthew 28

There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. —1 Corinthians 12:6

It occurred to me one day that my right foot does all the pedal work when I'm driving my automatic transmission car. It alone works the accelerator and the brake. The left foot is idle. What happens if I decide that to be equitable, my left foot ought to replace my right foot half the time when I am driving? If you have never done so, please don't try it!

If we don't require such equality of the members of our own body, why is it that we sometimes expect it of people in the church? That seems to be an issue that the first-century church at Rome faced. Some were thinking more highly of themselves than they ought (Rom. 12:3) just because they were doing some things others were not doing. But Paul reminds us that "all members do not have the same function" (v.4). We've been gifted according to God's grace (v.6). He gave us those gifts to serve others, not ourselves (vv.6-13). Our service is to be marked by diligence and fervor, for we are serving the Lord, not man (v.11).

So, let's not look over our shoulders to see what others are doing or not doing. Look at how God may be able to use you in His kingdom today. He has gifted you just as He has pleased (v.3).

Lord, lead me today as You see best. Use the gifts You

have given me to encourage others on their journey.

Help me not to compare myself with others

but to be content with who You have made me to be.

We can't all play the same part in God's band of service, but we should all play in harmony.

Refusing Help

September 1, 2007

Refusing Help

Read: 2 Kings 5:9-14 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 135-136; 1 Corinthians 12

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. —1 Corinthians 12:7

In 1869, John Roebling dreamed of building a massive bridge over the East River from Brooklyn to Manhattan. Unfortunately, at the outset of the project, his foot was crushed in an accident. In the recovery process, Roebling insisted he knew best and took charge of his own medical care. After refusing help, he began to show signs of tetanus. Before long, Roebling's jaw had locked into a permanent smile. Seizures and dementia plagued him until his death weeks later.

The Bible records a story about an independent person who balked at the help offered him. Naaman, a great warrior of Syria, suffered from leprosy. He sought out the prophet Elisha for healing but had preconceived ideas about how the healing should take place. So when Elisha sent his messenger to tell him to dip in the Jordan River seven times, Naaman was enraged. But Naaman's own servants gave wise advice: "If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?" (2 Kings 5:13). And so Naaman followed the prophet's simple instructions, and his leprosy was cured.

God gives us gifts to aid each other (1 Cor. 12:7). But self-sufficiency shuts the door on much-needed help. Let's be open to the helping hand He provides.

The Lord extends His gracious hand

To those in desperate need,

He lifts them up, He helps them stand

Through caring saints and loving deed. —D. De Haan

The first step in getting help is humility.

In Tune With Christ

July 23, 1999

In Tune With Christ

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 33-34; Acts 24

Indeed there are many members, yet one body. —1 Corinthians 12:20

In his book The Pursuit of God, A. W. Tozer wrote, “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned not to each other but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become unity-conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

Although Tozer’s comments were written with worship in mind, they reveal the secret of Christian unity. The more we center our thoughts on Christ, the more we will be drawn to one another as His followers and the more our differences will fade into insignificance.

We can have honest disagreements and still have unity, especially if we make it our priority to be in fellowship with Christ. The apostle John wrote, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 1:3).

Do you sense unity with other believers? Are you “in tune” with Christ?

Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love!

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above. —Fawcett

To have harmony with other believers, we must be in tune with Christ.

It Takes Teamwork!

August 7, 2002

It Takes Teamwork!

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-25 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 72-73; Romans 9:1-15

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you." —1 Corinthians 12:21

During a rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, the renowned conductor Arturo Toscanini offered some constructive criticism to the featured soloist. She was too proud to accept his help, however, and expressed her resentment by exclaiming in anger, “I am the star of this performance!” Toscanini responded wisely and firmly, “Madame, in this performance there are no stars.”

The maestro had made a strong point. The soloists, the members of the chorus, and the orchestra all had to work together in harmony or there could be no beautiful music.

This is also true of the church. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he likened the parts of our physical body to individuals in the church, the body of Christ. All of us as believers have our own unique traits and individual duties, but taken together we comprise

one body. We must therefore recognize how much we need one another. Paul wrote, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (12:21).

The Lord isn’t looking for soloists who want to be stars; He’s looking for workers who are willing to be servants. God’s work takes teamwork! —RWD

Thinking It Over

What are your motives for serving in the church?

How do you respond when your work goes unnoticed?

How does your attitude need to change?

Teamwork divides the effort and multiplies the effect.

Real Christians

April 22, 1995

Real Christians

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 14-15; Luke 17:1-19

There are many members, yet one body. —1 Corinthians 12:20

What does the word Yankee mean to you? Robert W. Mayer, in a Wall Street Journal article, writes, “To people in other parts of the world it simply means someone from the United States; to people in the United States it means someone from north of the Mason-Dixon Line; to us Northerners it means someone from New England; to New Englanders it means someone from Vermont; to Vermonters it means someone from the Green Mountains.”

The term Christian has taken on a wide range of meaning too. Some have even equated being a Christian with being an American. That’s far too wide! But we who believe in Jesus Christ often make the definition too narrow. We describe as “real Christians” only those men and women who believe and worship exactly as we do.

Certainly sound doctrine is vital! There is no room for disagreement over the fundamentals of the faith. But a “real Christian” is anyone who relies on God’s grace and puts his trust in Christ alone as his only hope of salvation.

Believers share an enormous common ground with each other because they belong to an uncommon Christ. Don’t reject real Christians—brothers and sisters who have accepted Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

Since God receives repentant souls

Who've trusted in His Son,

We too must love and welcome them

Because in Christ we're one. —Hess

Don't reject anyone whom God has accepted.

Age Is Not a Factor

September 1, 2015

Age Is Not a Factor

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 135–136; 1 Corinthians 12

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. 1 Corinthians 12:26

After owning and working at his dental lab for 50 years, Dave Bowman planned to retire and take it easy. Diabetes and heart surgery confirmed his decision. But when he heard about a group of young refugees from Sudan who needed help, he made a life-changing decision. He agreed to sponsor five of them.

As Dave learned more about these young Sudanese men, he discovered that they had never been to a doctor or a dentist. Then one day in church someone mentioned the verse, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). He couldn’t get the

verse out of his mind. Sudanese Christians were suffering because they needed medical care, and Dave sensed that God was telling him to do something about it. But what?

Despite his age and bad health, Dave began exploring the possibility of building a medical center in Sudan. Little by little, God brought together the people and the resources, and in 2008 Memorial Christian Hospital opened its doors to patients. Since then, hundreds of sick and injured people have been treated there.

Memorial Christian Hospital stands as a reminder that God cares when people suffer. And often He works through people like us to share His care—even when we think our work is done.

Do you see a need that God may be calling you to meet? Pray and ask Him to help you step out in faith.

Share your response to this question on facebook.com/ourdailybread or odb.org

God cares when people suffer.

Sharing Space

March 25, 2012

Sharing Space

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 9-12

Those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. —1 Corinthians 12:22

The number of people who run a business out of their homes is in the millions. But some have found that working alone can be a little too lonely. To give these lonely ones a community, “co-working” spaces have been designed. Large facilities are rented out where people working by themselves can share space with others. They have their own work area but can exchange ideas with fellow independent workers. It’s for those who feel they can work better together than they do alone.

Sometimes Christians think they work better alone. But we are meant to work together with others in the church. Every Christian has been placed into “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27). And the Lord desires that we take part in fellowship with a local community of believers—using our spiritual gifts and working together in His service.

Yet for various reasons, some aren’t able to join in. Because of health issues, they may be shut in at home or may not know how to fit in at church. Yet they are a needed part of the body (vv.22-25). That’s when others can meet their need for togetherness. Let’s do our part so that others may feel they’re an integral part of the community of faith. We work better together than alone.

Thinking It Over

What can you do to help others feel a part of your church

community? Visit, pray with them, read Scripture together,

drop a note, or invite them to join you in serving others.

Fellowship builds us up and binds us together.

A Piece Of The Puzzle

November 13, 2013

A Piece Of The Puzzle

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Lamentations 1-2; Hebrews 10:1-18

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. —1 Corinthians 12:18

At her birthday celebration, the honored guest turned the tables by giving everyone at the party a gift. Kriste gave each of us a personal note expressing what we mean to her, along with encouraging words about the person God made us to be. Enclosed with every note was one piece of a jigsaw puzzle as a reminder that each of us is unique and important in God’s plan.

That experience helped me to read 1 Corinthians 12 with new eyes. Paul compared the church—the body of Christ—to a human body. Just as our physical bodies have hands, feet, eyes, and ears, all are part of a unified body. No follower of Christ can claim independence from the body, nor can one part tell another that it is not needed (vv.12-17). “God has set the members, each one of

them, in the body just as He pleased" (v.18).

It's easy to feel less important than others whose gifts are different and perhaps more visible than ours. The Lord, however, wants us to see ourselves as He does—uniquely created and highly valued by Him.

You are one piece of a picture that is not complete without you. God has gifted you to be an important part of the body of Christ to bring Him honor.

Lord, help me not to compare myself with others

in Your family. May I seek instead to be the person

You've made me to be, and help me to use what

You've given me to bless others today.

Your life is God's gift to you; make it your gift to God.

Let's Stick Together

June 27, 2013

Let's Stick Together

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Job 8-10; Acts 8:26-40

For in fact the body is not one member but many. —1 Corinthians 12:14

Most regions of the world are familiar with the amazing phenomenon of snow. Snowflakes are beautiful, uniquely crafted ice crystals. Individual snowflakes are fragile, and they quickly melt if they land on your hand. Yet, en masse they create a force to be reckoned with. They can shut down major cities while creating beautiful landscapes of snow-laden trees whose pictures decorate calendars and become the subject of artwork. They provide pleasure on the ski slopes and joy for children as they make snowmen and ammunition for snowball fights. All because they stick together.

So it is with those of us who follow Christ. Each of us has been uniquely gifted with the capacity to make a contribution to the work of Christ. We were never intended to live in isolation but to work together to become a great force for God and the advance of His cause. As Paul reminds us, the body of Christ "is not one member but many" (1 Cor. 12:14). All of us are to use our gifts to serve one another so that together we can make a significant difference in our world.

Put your giftedness to work, joyfully cooperate with the giftedness of those around you, and let the wind of the Spirit use you for His glory!

Lord, teach us to use our strengths in cooperation with

the strengths of others. Help us to serve as one so that

we might know the joy of the power of our togetherness

for Your name's sake and the advance of Your kingdom.

We can accomplish more together than we can alone.

Foot-And-Mouth Disease

March 11, 2001

Foot-And-Mouth Disease

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 14-16; Mark 12:28-44

We dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. —2 Corinthians 10:12

Foot-and-mouth disease is highly contagious among cloven-hoofed animals. Blisters form around the mouth, and the feet become extremely painful. The animals will not eat or drink, and they lose weight rapidly. Fortunately, preventive measures have made this infection virtually nonexistent in the US today.

A spiritual kind of foot-and-mouth disease continues in epidemic proportions in the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, believers are likened

to the members of a body. This kind of foot-and-mouth disease breaks out when those who belong to the body of Christ, the church, begin comparing themselves among themselves (v.12). A “foot” may become dissatisfied with its inability to express itself like the “mouth.” And the “mouth” may feel inadequate because it can’t move about and bear the weight of the body. Such Christians lose their spiritual appetite and become ineffective in serving the Lord.

God’s children have been sovereignly designed and placed in the body of Christ for specific purposes. Each of us is vital to the well-being of the whole. And when we fulfill our role, there will be harmony, and our Savior will receive the glory. Let’s put an end to foot-and-mouth disease in the church.

Christ gives each member of His church

His special gifts to use;

He sovereignly distributes them—

We do not pick and choose. —Sper

For a healthier church, exercise your spiritual gifts.

No Body But Ours

October 15, 2000

No Body But Ours

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 45-46; 1 Thessalonians 3

We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. —Ephesians 5:30

In Acts 10:38, Peter described our Lord as “Jesus of Nazareth, … who went about doing good.” Those acts of service and kindness were expressed through His earthly body. Since ascending to heaven, Christ no longer has a body on earth except ours. In other words, He has no hands, legs, or feet on earth except for the members of His body, the church. So we must never underestimate the importance of being the body of Christ on earth, not only spiritually but also physically.

There’s a story of a little child who was put to bed in a dark room. She was fearful of being left alone, so her mother brought her a doll. This didn’t satisfy her and she begged her mother to stay. The mother reminded her that she had the doll and God, and needn’t be afraid. Soon the child began crying. When the mother returned to her side, she sobbed, “Oh, Mommy, I want someone with skin on!”

We’re all like that child at times. In our loneliness and suffering, Christ doesn’t condemn us for wanting “someone with skin on” to be with us and to care for us.

Therefore He sends us out to be His body to one another and to the world, and to go about doing good. Remember this: Right now Jesus has no body on earth but ours!

The love of Christ has freed us,

Has lifted us from shame;

Now we His path should follow,

And reach out in His name. —DCE

God works through us to meet the needs of those around us.

Church Membership

March 12, 2000

Church Membership

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 17-19; Mark 13:1-20

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. —1 Corinthians 12:27

Church membership has never gotten anyone into heaven. But this doesn’t mean it’s unimportant to be committed to a local church. I once said in a group, “I think every believer should join a church,” to which a Christian couple replied, “But we are not joiners.”

Such a response is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. True, the Bible doesn't command believers to "join" a church, because they are already members of the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). But the Bible does instruct Christians to be actively involved in a local group of believers. This includes identifying with Christ and His people through baptism, the Lord's Supper, exercising one's spiritual gifts, studying God's Word, fellowshiping, praying together, and being accountable to one other (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor. 11:26; Heb. 10:24-25; 13:7,17; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Each local church is the body of Christ in miniature. Thus, the church is more than an organization; it is a living organism, manifesting Christ to the world (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

Commitment to and active fellowship in a local church is biblical. Christ willingly identified with us by bearing our sin in His own body. Shouldn't we be willing to identify with His body by uniting with a local group of His people?

The church, a living body, containing all the parts—

It lives, it moves, it functions, and touches many hearts;

When each part is committed to do the Savior's will,

His members are united, His purpose they fulfill. —Fitzhugh

The church is a living body and must have working parts.

Spare Change?

August 24, 2003

Spare Change?

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 116-118; 1 Corinthians 7:1-19

God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it. —1 Corinthians 12:24

A Washington, DC, couple invited friends to bring their loose change to a party to benefit a charity fund. From what people had at home in boxes, cookie jars, plastic bags, and a few old socks, they brought coins totaling more than $1,500.

Few individuals have more than $30 in change around the house, but Americans together have an estimated $7.7 billion in loose change just lying around. And researchers say that's typical of people in many other countries of the world.

To me, it's a wonderful illustration of the collective wealth and worth of the family of all believers in Jesus Christ. The Bible often refers to the church as "the body of Christ" and says that "all the members of that one body, being many, are one body" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Every person, therefore, is essential and valuable as part of the whole. By ourselves, we may sometimes feel insignificant, unneeded, and of little value, like so much spare change. But as individual parts that make up the whole, each of us is needed (vv.15-22).

All people are unique individuals, but as Christians we are also indispensable parts of the body of Christ, and of greater value than we can ever know.

Help us, Lord, to work together

With the gifts that You bestow;

Give us unity of purpose

As we serve You here below. —Sper

There are no unimportant members in the body of Christ.

Meet The Tates

August 18, 2004

Meet The Tates

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 100-102; 1 Corinthians 1

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." —1 Corinthians 12:21

Teamwork is essential in business and industry. To underscore this point, Co-op Magazine included this item: “You’ve heard of the corny Tate family. They pervade every organization. There is Dick Tate, who wants to run everything. Ro Tate tries to change everything. Agi Tate stirs up trouble whenever possible, and Irri Tate always lends him a hand.

“Whenever new ideas are suggested, Hesi Tate and Vegi Tate pour cold water on them. Imi Tate tries to mimic everyone, Devas Tate loves to be disruptive, and Poten Tate wants to be a big shot. But it’s Facili Tate, Cogi Tate, and Medi Tate who always save the day and get everyone pulling together.”

A one-man show doesn’t get very far. But nowhere is this truth brought to a higher and more powerful fulfillment than in the body of Christ. The Scriptures teach that by God’s design all who are in Christ have been made dependent on one another. We may think we can go it on our own, but we can’t. We can’t fulfill our high calling as members of the body of Christ until we begin to realize that we all have a vital part to play. We are family. We need one another.

Lord, help us to overcome our stubborn pride. Teach us to cooperate—for our sake and for Yours.

If great and small work side by side

When it comes time to lend a hand,

And if they turn their backs on pride,

Christ's servant-heart they'll understand. —Branon

Coming together is a start; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

It Takes Two

February 4, 1996

It Takes Two

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 34-35; Matthew 22:23-46

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. —1 Corinthians 12:18

While visiting Christian workers in the country of Romania, Charlie VanderMeer from Children’s Bible Hour went to an orphanage where people with physical and mental disabilities live together.

Misha, a young man of 24, broadcasts music and Christian programs into the orphanage buildings. Although he is paralyzed below the waist, he gets around just fine. A friend, who has Down’s syndrome and cannot hear or speak, carries him on his shoulders.

Charlie could tell by the smile on the face of the man who carries Misha that this is his mission in life. According to a worker, when Misha had to be gone for a few weeks, his friend didn’t know what to do.

What a picture of members of the body of Christ relying on one another! Each of us is a little like Misha. We are partially equipped to do the work of the Lord, but we need the “legs” of our fellow believers to carry us along.

This example of Misha and his friend reminds us that none of us can do the entire job alone. God designed us to rely on each other as we serve Him. So look for ways you can help others, and learn to appreciate how much you can do together.

We all depend upon the strength

We draw from one another,

For we're connected by the love

That comes from God our Father. —Sper

Teamwork divides the effort and multiplies the effect.

How The Body Works

September 3, 1995

How The Body Works

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 140-142; 1 Corinthians 14:1-20

God composed the body … that the members should have the same care for one another. —1 Corinthians 12:24-25

They were thousands of miles from home when an auto accident put both of them in the hospital. The husband was released within a few days, but the wife was in critical condition with serious head injuries.

Far from his home, his children, and his church, this man could have felt stranded and abandoned while his wife lay in a coma in the hospital. But he didn't. Members of a local church heard about his plight and came to the rescue. "We will be your church family while you are here," they assured him.

Soon people from the church were visiting the couple, providing the husband with transportation, and advising them about doctors.

The only bond between this couple and these people was their shared faith in Jesus Christ. Yet that was enough. And it enabled them to reach out in love to a couple whose lives had been suddenly disrupted. That's how the body of believers is supposed to work!

We tend to favor people in our own church over those in another, somehow considering their needs less important because they don't worship with us. But all Christians are members of Christ's body and should be treated as such. Let's always be ready to help in the time of need.

Reach out in Jesus' name

With hands of love and care

To those who are in need

And caught in life's despair. —Sper

What concerns the child of God concerns the family Of God.

Lend An Ear

March 31, 2003

Lend An Ear

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Judges 11-12; Luke 6:1-26

The members should have the same care for one another. —1 Corinthians 12:25

Someone needs to talk to you today. Are you willing to listen? It may be a deep confession of failure, an expression of faith, an old joke, or a comment about the weather, but it needs to be said. The person may be a child or a senior citizen. Are you ready to lend an ear?

For 10 years, Mary Ridgway, a busy college administrator and educator, has regularly visited Mary Jacobs in an assisted living center. Ridgway began by receiving 50 hours of training to be a caregiver. She wondered if she could learn to step away from her tendencies to fix problems and to fill silent moments with words. Today, Mary Ridgway considers listening an expression of her service to Christ. Mary Jacobs thanks God every night for her faithful friend who cares enough to hear what she has to say.

The Bible calls us as Christians to "care for one another" (1 Corinthians 12:25) by using the gifts God has given each of us by His grace. One of the ways we can care for and serve each other is to listen.

Listening is not the job of a talented few but the privilege and responsibility of us all. Someone needs to tell you something today. Are you ready and willing, for Jesus' sake, to lend an ear?

A caring heart, a listening ear,

A thoughtful word, a gentle tear

Will help to lift the heavy load

Of weary souls along life's road. —D. De Haan

A big part of loving is listening.

Broken Toes, Broken World

September 25, 1996

Broken Toes, Broken World

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Song of Solomon 6-8; Galatians 4

You are the body of Christ, and members individually. —1 Corinthians 12:27

Twice in my life I've broken one of my little toes by colliding with furniture. Ouch! For days I limped painfully, my body protecting its tiny injured member. My body was doing exactly what it was designed to do. It supported and sympathized with the part of me that was hurting. Gradually my toe healed, resuming its thankless task.

Although I'll never again take my toes for granted, I sometimes take for granted certain members of the church. Paul taught that the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27), not merely like the body of Christ. Each member has God-given abilities to support and sympathize with other members.

If Christ's church is to function the way God designed it, there are three things we dare not do: (1) Refuse to fellowship with others. (2) Let fear and lack of love cause us to withhold our gifts from others. (3) Disregard or oppose the gifts of others through pride and envy.

Instead, we need to be actively using our spiritual gifts to the benefit of fellow members of Christ's body. Only when we experience both the giving and receiving of Christ's healing love for broken members will we be ready to reach out to a broken world.

We're all dependent on the strength

We draw from one another,

For we're connected by the love

That comes from God our Father. —Sper

A healthy church is the best witness to a hurting world.

"I Hurt For You"

September 6, 1994

"I Hurt For You"

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 148-150; 1 Corinthians 15:29-58

If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. —1 Corinthians 12:26

When my sons were young, one of them stubbed his toe and grimaced with pain. Seeing him trying bravely to bear the agony of those moments, I said, "Son, I'm truly sorry. My toe hurts for you."

Lifting his head, he looked at me and responded, "Dad, your toe doesn't really hurt, does it?"

No, I didn't sense any physical pangs, yet I did share his suffering. I even wished his ache could somehow be transferred to my body.

The apostle Paul said that all believers in Christ are part of "one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). And if one part suffers, "all the members suffer with it" (v.26).

Are you grieved when a brother in Christ is in trouble? Does it bother you when a believer stumbles into sin and is brought under the chastening hand of the Lord? Do you experience sorrow of heart when a child of God is passing through the deep waters of affliction and trial? If not, ask the Lord right now to help you become the kind of person who can share the heartache of others and sympathize with them.

Yes, to every Christian we meet who is in some kind of distress, we should be ready to say from our hearts, "I hurt for you."

The hurting ones need sympathy,

They need to know we're there;

A quiet word, a tender touch

Assures them that we care. —DJD

Empathy is your pain in my heart.

No Nobodies

February 29, 2004

No Nobodies

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 20-22; Mark 7:1-13

Those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. —1 Corinthians 12:22

A visitor was being shown around a leper colony in India. At noon a gong sounded for the midday meal. People came from all parts of the compound to the dining hall. All at once peals of laughter filled the air. Two young men, one riding on the other's back, were pretending to be a horse and a rider and were having loads of fun.

As the visitor watched, he was told that the man who carried his friend was blind, and the man being carried was lame. The one who couldn't see used his feet; the one who couldn't walk used his eyes. Together they helped each other, and they found great joy in doing it.

Imagine a church like that—each member using his or her strength to make up for another's weakness. That's what should be happening in every congregation of believers. Paul likened spiritual gifts to various parts of the human body. Eyes see. Ears hear. Hands work. Feet move the body forward. All are essential. And when each fulfills its function, the whole body benefits.

All of us have weaknesses, but we also have strengths. We are all different, but God has given each of us at least one gift to use for the good of the church. We need one another. In Christ's body there are no nobodies.

God can take a lowly vessel,

Shape it with His mighty hand,

Fill it with a matchless treasure,

Make it serve a purpose grand. —Bosch

There is no such thing as insignificant service for Christ.

Eye-Hand Coordination

October 22, 1996

Eye-Hand Coordination

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:14-22 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 65-66; 1 Timothy 2

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. —1 Corinthians 12:18

Airline pilot Alan Cockrell said it wasn't a noble ideal that caused him to roll up his sleeves and help a ground crew clean the interior of his 737 one night in Nashville. He needed a ride home and one of the crew offered to take him. The sooner they finished, the sooner he'd get home.

As the pilot helped clean the overhead bins, wipe down the tray tables, and fold the seatbelts, he gained a new appreciation for the people whose role in the airline was much different from his.

There's a lesson here for us as Christians. The Bible describes our relationship to other believers as interdependent members of one body. God has built into His church an essential "eye-hand coordination." "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor. 12:21). Each believer is necessary and worthy of honor and appreciation by the others because "God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (v.18).

We can improve the appreciation level in the body of believers by taking note of the contribution others make. And that will make for a kind of eye-hand coordination we can all benefit from.

Putting It Into Practice

Is there a church worker or teacher who might

appreciate a note or word of thanks from you?

What needs to be done in your church? Can you help?

Instead of putting others in their place, try putting yourself in their place.

You’re Necessary

January 18, 2013

You’re Necessary

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 | Bible in a Year: Genesis 43-45; Matthew 12:24-50

But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it. —1 Corinthians 12:24

The story has been told about a conductor who was rehearsing his orchestra. The organ was giving a beautiful melody, the drums were thundering, the trumpets were blaring, and the violins were singing beautifully. But the conductor noticed something missing—the piccolo. The piccolo player had gotten distracted and hoped his instrument wouldn’t be missed. The conductor reminded him: “Each one of us is necessary.”

This was essentially the same message Paul communicated to the Corinthian believers in his first letter to them (12:4-7). Every Christian plays an important role in the body of Christ. Paul gave a list of gifts of the Spirit and compared their use to the functioning of the various parts of the human body for the good of the whole (vv.8-10). The Corinthian believers may have had different cultural backgrounds, gifts, and personalities, but they were filled with the same Spirit and belonged to the same body of Christ. Paul made special mention of the parts of the body that were weak and obscure, and taught that all believers play a necessary and significant role. No one part was more necessary than any other.

Remember, Jesus has given you a significant part to play and will use you to build up His people.

The church, a living body, containing all the parts—

It lives, it moves, it functions, and touches many hearts;

When each part is committed to do the Savior’s will,

His members are united, His purpose they fulfill. —Fitzhugh

As a member of the body of Christ, you are a necessary part of the whole.

The Wooden Rule

October 16, 2011

The Wooden Rule

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 47-49; 1 Thessalonians 4

The body is not one member but many. —1 Corinthians 12:14

Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden had an interesting rule for his teams. Whenever a player scored, he was to acknowledge the person on the team who had assisted. When he was coaching high school, one of his players asked, “Coach, won’t that take up too much time?” Wooden replied, “I’m not asking you to run over there and give him a big hug. A nod will do.”

To achieve victory on the basketball court, Wooden saw the importance of teaching his players that they were a team—not “just a bunch of independent operators.” Each person contributed to the success of everyone else.

That reminds me of the way the body of Christ should work. According to 1 Corinthians 12:19-20, each of us is a separate part of one body. “If they were all one member, where would the body be? But … there are many members, yet one body.” Is the success of a pastor, a Bible study, or a church program based solely on one person’s accomplishments? How many people contribute to the smooth operation of a church, a Christian organization, a family?

Coach Wooden's rule and 1 Corinthians 12 are both rooted in the principle of seeing our need for one another. Let's use our gifts within the body of Christ to build up, strengthen, and help to carry out God's purposes (vv.1-11).

All Christians have been gifted

By grace from God above,

Equipped to build and strengthen

The church in faith and love. —Fitzhugh

There are no unimportant people in the body of Christ.

Zebras and Wildebeests

December 12, 2010

Zebras and Wildebeests

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 | Bible in a Year: Hosea 9-11; Revelation 3

There should be no schism in the body, but … the members should have the same care for one another. —1 Corinthians 12:25

After our plane landed on the gravel airstrip, Jay and I climbed out and entered the world of Masai Mara in Kenya. A Masai tribesman named Sammy met us and loaded our baggage into a Land Rover. Then we headed toward the camp where we would spend the next 2 days.

Stopping so we could watch the zebras and wildebeests migrating from Masai Mara to Serengeti, Sammy explained that the two massive herds travel together because the zebras have good eyesight but a poor sense of smell, and the wildebeests have bad eyesight but a good sense of smell. By traveling together, both are less vulnerable to predators. This was our first lesson from God's revelation in creation, which Kenya has in abundance.

Just as God makes animals with different strengths and weaknesses, He makes people the same way. God made us to be dependent not only on Him but also on one another. The apostle Paul elaborated on this idea in his letter to the church in Corinth. As members of the body of Christ, we all have different gifts and abilities (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

The church is healthy only when we work together, look out for each other, and use our strengths to benefit one another.

Help us, Lord, to work together

With the gifts that You bestow;

Give us unity of purpose

As we serve You here below. —Sper

We can go a lot further together than we can alone.

The Mighty Toe

May 13, 2011

The Mighty Toe

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 17-18; John 3:19-36

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? —1 Corinthians 12:15

Recently, I heard of a sport that challenges my imagination—I can't comprehend why anyone would play it. It's called "Toe Wrestling." Every year, people from across the globe gather in England for the world championships. Competitors sit on the ground facing each other and then lock the big toe of the other's bare foot. The object is to pin the opponent's foot in a manner similar to the way an arm wrestler pins a competitor's wrist. It sounds strange to me.

In a way, this unusual competition gives honor to a part of the body that's largely ignored—until we drop something on it. Our toes and feet are vital parts of our anatomy, yet we pay little attention to them unless they hurt.

Perhaps that's why Paul used the foot to remind us that there are no unimportant parts in the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:15,

he said, “If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body?” The only correct answer: “Of course it’s part of the body.”

Paul wants us to realize that each person in the body of Christ is important. Even if you think of yourself as the most overlooked and ignored member of the body of Christ, you have value. And you can honor God like a true champion by using your unique skills for God’s glory.

God builds His church with different stones,

He makes each one belong;

All shapes and sizes fit in place

To make the structure strong. —Sper

The Lord uses small tools to perform large tasks.

Unused Muscles

October 7, 2008

Unused Muscles

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:14-27 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 28-29; Philippians 3

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. —1 Corinthians 12:7

My wife recently visited a physiotherapist to seek relief for her neck and shoulder pain. When the problem did not go away after several visits, she asked why. She was told that her pain was because of some “lazy neck muscles.”

Apparently, the neck muscles that were supposed to hold her head upright were not doing their job. As a result, her shoulder muscles had to take over the function of holding up her head. This caused unnaturally stiffened shoulder muscles. The solution? Exercises were prescribed to train her neck muscles to do what they were designed to do.

In a way, her problem depicts what happens in the body of Christ. God has given each believer gifts that are to be exercised for the common good of the church (1 Cor. 12:7). But when some don’t pull their weight, others far less gifted in those areas must pitch in. Although the body of Christ continues to function, it is not functioning at its best. There are some overworked Christians around!

God wants us to use our spiritual gifts to benefit others in the church. When we work together, we keep the body strong. What has God gifted you to do so that you can help relieve the strain the church is suffering?

All Christians have been gifted

By grace from God above,

Equipped to build and strengthen

The church in faith and love. —Fitzhugh

Teamwork divides the effort and multiplies the effect.

Keep The Organ Playing

March 6, 2005

Keep The Organ Playing

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:20-26 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 1-2; Mark 10:1-31

Those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. —1 Corinthians 12:22

Many years ago an accomplished organist was giving a concert. (In those days someone had to pump large bellows backstage to provide air for the pipes.) After each song, the audience applauded heartily. Before his final number, the organist stood and said, “I shall now play … ” and he announced the title. He sat down and adjusted his music. With feet poised over the pedals and hands over the keys, he began with a mighty chord. But the organ remained silent. Just then a voice was heard from backstage: “Say ‘We’!”

In the Lord’s work, there is plenty of room for personal achievement. Our abilities are God-given, and the Holy Spirit helps us to excel

in what we do best. But a self-sufficient spirit that overlooks the contributions of others can ruin it all. No Christians have ever climbed the ladder of success alone. With them were mothers, fathers, friends, a husband, a wife, or children who prayed, sacrificed, and did what they could to help.

Aware of our deep indebtedness to others, we should be grateful for their vital role in the Lord's work in and through us. A note of sincere thanks, a word of honest recognition, or a thoughtful deed of love will help to "keep the organ playing."

Two Christians working for the Lord

Should keep this goal in mind:

Give praise for what the other does—

To your success be blind. —Branon

It's amazing what can be accomplished when you don't care who gets the credit.

What Type Are You?

December 4, 2002

What Type Are You?

Read: 1 John 4:11-21 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 47-48; 1 John 3

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. —1 John 4:11

There are two types of people in the world," someone once said, "those who come into a room and say, 'Here I am!' and those who come in and say, 'Ah, there you are!'"

How different are those two approaches! One says, "Look at me! I need attention"; the other says, "Tell me about yourself." One says, "I'm important"; the other says, "You are important." One says, "The world revolves around me"; the other says, "I'm here to serve you."

Wouldn't it be great to be known as that second kind of person—someone others love to have around? Someone who displays the love of Christ openly and unashamedly?

The New Testament gives us some practical suggestions about becoming the kind of person who demonstrates Christ's love. We are told to give preference to one another (Romans 12:10), edify one another (Romans 14:19), care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25), serve one another (Galatians 5:13), bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), forgive one another (Colossians 3:13), comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and pray for one another (James 5:16).

There should be only one kind of Christian: the "love one another" kind. What type are you?

Lord, teach us the secret of loving,

The love You are asking today;

Then help us to love one another;

For this we most earnestly pray. —Anon.

People with a heart for God have a heart for people.

Family Therapy

July 9, 2006

Family Therapy

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:26-31 | Bible in a Year: Job 38-40; Acts 16:1-21

If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. —1 Corinthians 12:26

Dr. Paul Brand, a medical missionary in India, observed an unusual phenomenon with several of his patients. When they were recovering from surgery in his hospital, some family members would bring hot meals to them. At night a relative would sleep on the floor under the bed of the recovering patient. When patients awoke in pain, their loved ones would gently massage them until they

went back to sleep.

At first Dr. Brand thought this was inappropriate and unsanitary. Over time, however, he began to notice that the patients receiving this loving care from family needed less pain medication. They were being soothed by people who loved them. This “family therapy” brought the warmth and care of home into an unfamiliar place.

We can learn from this example of love and care for our family. Those who belong to Christ are part of a spiritual family and need to be aware of the hurts of other members. The apostle Paul said, “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). This principle requires that we find practical ways of soothing hurts. Do you know a Christian brother or sister who needs “family therapy” from you?

A caring heart, a listening ear,

A thoughtful word, a gentle tear

Will help to lift the heavy load

Of weary souls along life’s road. —D. De Haan

To ease another’s burden, help carry it.

The Church Indestructible

October 17, 2003

The Church Indestructible

Read: Matthew 16:13-20 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 50-52; 1 Thessalonians 5

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. —Matthew 16:18

The chief executive of a large and successful chain of stores made a striking statement about the future of his company. He said that a hundred years from now it would be either greatly changed or nonexistent.

The same can be said about every human organization. Leaders come and go, consumer desires change, manufacturing methods evolve. As a result, companies either change or they don’t survive.

According to Jesus, this will never happen to His church. Some individual churches may go out of existence, but the “gates of Hades” will never prevail against the church that Jesus is building. When He referred to “My church” (Matthew 16:18), He had in mind all believers—past, present, and future. Paul called this vast group the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

The moment we trust in Jesus, we become members of His body, the church. And when Jesus used the phrase “the gates of Hades,” He was referring to death, for Hades is the abode of the dead. One by one believers die and pass through those “gates,” but this neither changes nor diminishes the church. They simply join those who are already victors in the “heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Praise God, the church is indestructible!

Christ is made the sure foundation,

Christ the head and cornerstone;

Chosen of the Lord and precious,

Binding all the church in one. —Neale

The Church, rooted by God, can never be uprooted by man.

1 Corinthians 13

1 Corinthians 13

TRACY Morrow, who goes by the name of Ice-T, delights in his role as a controversial rap singer whose lyrics are blasphemous and obscene. Yet, inspired by a truce between two violent gangs in Los Angeles, the Crips and the Bloods, he wrote a surprisingly

sentimental song, "Gotta Lotta Love."

Orphaned when young and brought up by relatives who considered him a burden, Ice-T never experienced loving care. "I first found the word love in a gang," he told an interviewer. "I learned how to love in a gang, not in a family atmosphere."

No matter how little or how warped was the love we knew in childhood, it is never too late to learn how to love. We may catch a glimpse of love through an individual or a group (even a gang!), but to learn the full meaning of love we need to find it in Christ. "By this we know love, because [Jesus] laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16). The death of Jesus expresses the heights and depths of love.

The only way to learn how to love is to find out what it means to be loved by God.—Vernon Grounds

1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Today in the Word

William Wilberforce, one of the more well–known members of the Clapham Sect, worked tirelessly in Parliament to abolish the British slave trade. But it was Hannah More, a lesser known member, who wrote this on the subject of notable Christian service: “We are apt to mistake our vocation by looking out of the way for occasions to exercise rare and great virtues, and by stepping over the ordinary ones that lie directly in the road before us.”

This notion is at the heart of Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 13. What matters most isn’t always our greatest achievements, spiritual or otherwise. When considered in the light of what will endure, all of the spiritual gifts, whether tongues or knowledge (which the Corinthians esteemed) or prophecy (which Paul valued), have secondary importance. What matters most is that we’ve acted for love and in love. Love will be the final criterion for our spiritual lives. And love is what will distinguish the Christian life and community.

We must remember that Paul wasn’t waxing eloquent on the theme of love for the purposes of poetry. 1 Corinthians 13, before it became a common passage to be used in weddings, was included in a letter to a church whose sins of pride and arrogance, whose misuse and misunderstanding of spiritual gifts, and whose socioeconomic differences had become sources of division. Paul hasn’t pushed the pause button on his main themes of his letter, but in this chapter, he gives feet to the character of love. It is the force that he knows can unify the Corinthian community.

When the Corinthians decide to love, the factional infighting and envious quarreling in the community will end (cf. 1:11, 3:3). When the Corinthians begin to love, the exercise of spiritual gifts will build up, rather than divide, the community. When the Corinthians consider controversial questions of Christian faith and practice, and when love governs that discussion, the unity of thought and mind to which Paul first called them will be realized (1:10).

Apply the Word

Love can heal what pride has injured. It can bind up the places where we’ve been wounded and where trust has eroded. In a commentary on 1 Corinthians, one New Testament scholar says, “Love requires the formation of character.” He means to highlight that what Paul has described in this chapter isn’t necessarily how we feel love for others but how we show love. To love is to need a radical inner transformation. To love is to depend on Christ, whose example defines for us what love is (1 John 3:16).

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2

A third-grade science teacher asked one of her students to describe salt. "Well, urn, it's … ," he started, then stopped. He tried again. "Salt is, you know, it's … " Finally he said, "Salt is what makes French fries taste bad when you don't sprinkle it on." Many foods are like that—incomplete without a key ingredient. Imagine pizza without cheese, strudel without apples, a banana split without bananas.

The Christian life also has an essential element: love. Paul emphasized its value as he wrote his letter to the Corinthians. Right in the middle of a section about spiritual gifts, he paused to say that even if we have gifts of service, speech, and self-sacrifice but don't have love, we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Doctrinal purity is important. Faith is a magnificent quality, as is obedient service to the Lord. But without love, we're about as bland as French fries without salt. —D. C. Egner.

As CHRIST'S LOVE GROWS IN US, HIS LOVE FLOWS THROUGH US.

1 Corinthians 13:2; Genesis 29:1-14

If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. - 1 Corinthians 13:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some people wouldn't notice any difference between the coral snake, the scarlet kingsnake, and the Mexican milk snake. All three have stripes of reddish orange, yellow, and black. But apart from appearance, the coral snake bears one important difference—a potentially lethal neurotoxin. Of course, most people want nothing to do with any snakes, regardless of their venom or lack thereof. But for snake enthusiasts (or natural predators), failure to recognize the difference can be fatal.

Jacob and Rachel's love story had a beginning that resembled Isaac and Rebekah's. It may have appeared that similar criteria were used in the search. Just as Abraham had commissioned his servant to do, Jacob also left Canaan, and he returned to the land where his mother had been found. And like Abraham's servant, Jacob found a bride among family at yet another source for water—and he was received with joy by Laban (v. 13; cf. 24:50). As his father had done, Jacob felt love at first sight immediately after meeting Rachel. But the circumstances surrounding Jacob's search were nothing close to the scenario that transpired when his mother had been handpicked by God.

Abraham sought a wife who would strengthen Isaac's allegiance to God. That very wife, Rebekah, sent her son back to that land out of cowardly, deceptive motives (27:41-46). Isaac stayed as a nomad in Canaan, the land of the covenant, to avoid being ensnared by the family wealth Abraham had left behind. Jacob, however, left the Promised Land and became bound to the service of Laban.

On the surface, today's reading might look like our study on Isaac and Rebekah. The subtle but crucial difference was the self-serving attitude that drove Jacob to find his bride. There was jubilation and courtesy and romance. But there wasn't a drop of professed interest in what would bring God glory. The motions may have resembled a proper search for a wife, but Jacob's heart was not inclined toward the Lord. That difference would prove to be toxic.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Mimicking the behavior of a follower of Christ doesn't change a person's spiritual state. We can do things that look like love, but if our motives are selfish—or if we ignore God's direction in our lives—our actions are empty. If you have been harboring hostility toward others or subtly disobeying His commandment to love while presenting a superficially sweet exterior, ask God to change your heart today. Ask His Spirit to create in you a wellspring of genuine love for others.

1 Corinthians 13

God’s Love Through Me

Love never fails. —1 Corinthians 13:8

During a devotional session at a conference, our leader asked us to read aloud 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, and substitute the word “Jesus” for “love.” It seemed so natural to say, “Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade Himself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek His own … Jesus never fails.”

Then our leader said, “Read the passage aloud and say your name instead of Jesus.” We laughed nervously at the suggestion. “I want you to begin now,” the leader said. Quietly, haltingly I said the words that felt so untrue: “David does not seek his own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. David never fails.”

The exercise caused me to ask, “How am I hindering God from expressing His love through me?” Do I think that other expressions of faith are more important? Paul declared that from God’s perspective, eloquent speech, deep spiritual understanding, lavish generosity, and self-sacrifice are worthless when not accompanied by love (vv.1-3).

God longs to express His great heart of love for others through us. Will we allow Him to do it?

To love our neighbors as ourselves

Is not an easy thing to do;

So Lord, please show us how to love

As we attempt to follow You. —Sper

Living like Christ is loving like God.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:3

A small South American fish called "four eyes" knows how to make the best of two worlds. His secret is his large bulging eyes. The

Creator designed them so that he can see above the water and below it at the same time. The fish does this by cruising along through the water with the upper half of his eyes above the surface. This top half has an air lens, and the bottom half has a water lens. Together, the two lenses outfit "four eyes" with a set of natural bifocals, allowing him to see both the upper world and the underworld.

In a sense, Christians must be like this little tropical fish. We should look up longingly into the idealism of heaven while looking down lovingly into the realism of earth. The heavenward look is to reflect a hunger and thirst for truth and righteousness, while the earthly look shows our compassion and love for the lost and suffering. Who is in a better position to know the best of both worlds than Christians? We have received both truth and love. — M. R. DeHaan. II

KEEP GOD'S TRUTH IN YOUR HEAD AND HIS LOVE IN YOUR HEART.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4

A YOUNG boy went to the lingerie department of a store to purchase a gift for his mother. Bashfully he whispered to the clerk that he wanted to buy a slip for his mom, but he didn't know her size.

The woman explained that it would help if he could describe her. Was she thin, fat, short, tall, or what?

"Well," replied the youngster, "she's just about perfect."

So the clerk sent him home with a medium size slip.

A few days later the mother came to the store to exchange the gift for a considerably larger size. The little fellow had seen her through the eyes of love, which always see beyond physical appearances.

The kindness of love refuses to focus on faults or shortcomings. This doesn't mean that it is blind to weakness and sin. But it sees beyond them, accepting people as they are, looking at their best qualities, and wanting their good.

We need to examine our response to others in the light of 1 Corinthians 13. If negative attitudes quickly surface, if glaring character defects always loom up before us, we need to work at seeing others through eyes of love.—D J DeHaan

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-5

I saw a news documentary that exposed a manufacturer who sold inferior repair parts to airplane companies, putting profit above human life. The program also told about a factory that was getting away with pouring pollutants into a stream. The attitude of company officials seemed to be, If it doesn't hurt me and my family, why should I care?

A man told me he had buried some old barrels of used oil on his farm. He chuckled and said,

"You and I will be dead long before this stuff seeps into the water table."

King Hezekiah did many good things for his country, but near the end of his life he developed a self-centered attitude. After the king unwisely made a treaty with the Babylonians, the prophet Isaiah said that Hezekiah's descendants would be conquered and forced into slavery. Instead of showing remorse, the king expressed relief because this disaster would not occur in his life-time. He was thinking only of himself.

This me-only mentality influences every one of us. Self-centeredness even infects our prayers. That's why we must rely constantly on the power of the Holy Spirit to displace self-centeredness with Christ's love.—H V Lugt

1Co13:13 (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT--LOVE!

LET US lay the emphasis on the word fruit, as contrasted with the works of the law. In work there is effort, strain, the sweat of the brow, and straining of the muscles; but fruit comes easily and naturally by the overflow of the sap rising from the root to bough and bud'. So our Christian life should be the exuberance of the heart in which Christ dwells. The Apostle Paul prayed that Christ might dwell in the heart of his converts, that they might be rooted and grounded in love. It is only when the Holy Spirit fills us to the overflow that we shall abound in love to all men.

We must distinguish between love and the emotion of love. The former is always possible, though not always and immediately the latter. Our Lord repeating the ancient words of the Pentateuch, taught us that we may love God with our mind and strength, as well as with our hearts. We all know that the mind and strength are governed not by our emotions, but by our wills. We can love, therefore, by determining to put our thought and energies at the service of another for the sake of God; and we shall find our emotions kindle into a sacred glow of conscious affection.

In the chapter from which our text is taken, St. Paul distinguishes between the Gifts of the Church and Love. After passing them in review he comes to the conclusion that all of them, without Love as their heart and inspiration, are worth nothing.

The greatest word in the world is the unfathomable phrase, "God is Love." You can no more define the essence of love than you can define the essence of God, but you can describe its effects and fruits. I give Dr. Weymouth's translation: "Love is patient and kind, knows neither envy nor jealousy; is not forward and self-assertive, nor boastful and conceited. She does not behave unbecomingly, nor seek to aggrandize herself, nor blaze out in passionate anger, nor brood over wrongs. She finds no pleasure in injustice done to others, but joyfully sides with the truth. She knows how to be silent; she is full of trust, full of hope, full of patient endurance."

We ought to take each of these clauses, and ponder whether our lives are realizing these high ideals. God send us a baptism of such love!

PRAYER - O Lord, my love is like some feebly glimmering spark; I would that it were as a hot flame. Kindle it by the breath of Thy Holy Spirit, till Thy love constraineth me. AMEN.

The Other Side Of Thank You

November 21, 2007

The Other Side Of Thank You

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 16-17; James 3

[Love] does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil. —1 Corinthians 13:5

A baby gift came to a young couple who were new parents. They were grateful for the present, so the mom picked up a thank-you card, wrote a nice note, and got it ready to send.

Somehow it got buried in an avalanche of paperwork and was never mailed—and the thank-you was forgotten. The gift-givers waited, but no acknowledgment came.

A rift developed as one family thought the thank-you had been given, while the other thought the lack of a thank-you was a snub. This inadvertent failure to send a card left the gift-giver feeling slighted, unappreciated, and neglected.

Among the most important words we can speak are the two words, “Thank you.” And while it is vital to be grateful, there’s another side of thank you. If we bestow a gift on another, we should do so out of a motive that doesn’t expect anything, even a thank-you, in return. True love gives with no expectations.

Love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4, “suffers long and is kind” and is never self-seeking. Love keeps no record of wrongs—even if someone forgets to thank us for a kindness. The other side of thank you is a pure heart that reflects God’s perfect love for us.

I want the love that always sweetly bears

Whate’er my Father’s hand may choose to send;

I want the love that patiently endures

The wrongs that come from enemy or friend. —Anon.

True love has no strings attached.

You Missed the Chance

October 27, 2015

You Missed the Chance

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 12–14; 2 Timothy 1

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2

I heard the saddest words today. Two believers in Christ were discussing an issue about which they had differing opinions. The older of the two seemed smug as he wielded Scripture like a weapon, chopping away at the things he saw as wrong in the other’s life.

The younger man just seemed weary of the lecture, weary of the other person, and discouraged.

As the exchange drew to a close, the older man commented on the other's apparent disinterest. "You used to be eager," he started, and then abruptly quit. "I don't know what it is you want."

Don't miss your chance to show the world Jesus' #love.

"You missed the chance to love me," the young man said. "In all the time you've known me, what has seemed to matter most to you is pointing out what you think is wrong about me. What do I want? I want to see Jesus—in you and through you."

Had this been said to me, I thought, I would have been devastated. In that moment I knew the Holy Spirit was telling me there had been people I had missed the chance to love. And I knew there were people who couldn't see Jesus in me either.

The apostle Paul tells us that love must be the underlying motive in anything we do; in everything we do (1 Cor. 13:1-4). Let's not miss the next chance to show love.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you today who it is you've missed the chance to love. Then ask Him to give you another opportunity. Start your conversation with these words: "I'm sorry … "

Love beats lectures every time.

Love Comes First

October 10, 2015

Love Comes First

Read: 1 John 4:7-19 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 34–36; Colossians 2

We love [God] because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19

One evening my friend showed me one of the three decorative plaques that would be part of a wall arrangement in her living room. "See, I've already got Love," she said, holding up the plaque with the word written on it. "Faith and Hope are on order."

So Love comes first, I thought. Faith and Hope soon follow!

Love did come first. In fact, it originated with God. First John 4:19 reminds us that "We love [God] because he first loved us." God's love, described in 1 Corinthians 13 (known as the "love chapter"), explains a characteristic of real love when it says, "Love never fails" (v. 8).

Faith and hope are essential to the believer. It is only because we are justified by faith that "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). And hope is described in Hebrews 6 as "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (v. 19).

One day we will have no need of faith and hope. Faith will become sight and our hope will be realized when we see our Savior face to face. But love is eternal, for love is of God and God is love (1 John 4:7-8). "Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love"—it's first and last (1 Cor. 13:13).

Thank You, Lord, for Your faithful love and for the love of family and friends. Please help me find ways to show Your love to others today.

We love because God first loved us.

Love Never Fails

June 21, 2006

Love Never Fails

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Esther 3-5; Acts 5:22-42

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

Poet Archibald MacLeish says that "love, like light, grows dearer towards the dark." This is what he calls the "late, last wisdom of the afternoon." The same is true of our love for one another; it can indeed grow dearer as we age. I have seen it myself in two elderly friends.

Married for over 50 years, they are still very much in love. One is dying of pancreatic cancer; the other is dying of Parkinson's

disease. Last week I saw Barbara lean over Claude's bed, kiss him, and whisper, "I love you." Claude replied, "You're beautiful."

I thought of couples who have given up on their marriages, who are unwilling to endure through better or worse, sickness or health, poverty or wealth, and I am saddened for them. They will miss the kind of love my friends enjoy in their latter years.

I have watched Claude and Barbara over the years, and I know that deep faith in God, lifelong commitment, loyalty, and self-denying love are the dominant themes of their marriage. They have taught me that true love never gives up, it "never fails." Theirs is the "late, last wisdom of the afternoon," and it will continue to the end. May we express that same unfailing love to those who love us.

Lord, teach us the secret of loving,

The love You are asking today;

Then help us to love one another—

For this we most earnestly pray. —Anon.

Don't put off until tomorrow the loving words you can say today.

Loving Our Grown-Up Children

June 10, 2008

Loving Our Grown-Up Children

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 34-36; John 19:1-22

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

Comedian Henny Youngman used to say, "I've got two wonderful children—and two out of five isn't bad."

When children reach adulthood, most parents have an opinion about how their offspring have "turned out." Some are proud of everything their kids have done, while other parents express misgivings or disappointment about the choices their children have made. How can we continue a positive parenting role after the birds have left our nest?

In 1 Corinthians 13, often called "the love chapter" of the Bible, Paul writes that the greatest gifts of speaking, understanding, and sacrificial service are worthless without love (vv.1-3). Love itself is the foundation of winsome behavior, and its influence never ends. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (vv.4-8).

When our children no longer seek our advice, they still value our love. In every stage of parenting, it's not only what we say but what we do that counts.

May God in mercy grant to us

A home where Christ holds sway,

Where peace and joy from heaven above

Abide from day to day. —Crane

A parent's love never ends.

The Greatest Race

August 8, 2008

The Greatest Race

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 74-76; Romans 9:16-33

Love never fails. —1 Corinthians 13:8

As the Olympic Games open in Beijing, my thoughts go back to Eric Liddell, a former champion immortalized for his surprising gold medal victory in the 400 meters during the 1924 Games in Paris. A year after his triumph, Liddell went to China, where he spent the last 20 years of his life as a missionary teacher and rural pastor. There he ran the greatest race of his life against opponents we all

know—difficult circumstances, war, uncertainty, and disease.

Crowded into a Japanese internment camp with 1,500 other people, Eric lived out the words he had paraphrased from 1 Corinthians 13:6-8— “Love is never glad when others go wrong. Love finds no pleasure in injustice, but rejoices in the truth. Love is always slow to expose, it knows how to be silent. Love is always eager to believe the best about a person. Love is full of hope, full of patient endurance; love never fails.”

Eric served the others in camp, whether carrying water for the elderly or refereeing games for the teens. When he died of a brain tumor in February 1945, one internee described him as a man “who lived better than he preached.”

In life’s most difficult race, Eric Liddell crossed the finish line victorious through love.

O for a love that knows no end,

A love that is strong and pure,

Reaching afar to both foe and friend,

So deep it will always endure. —R. De Haan

Love enables us to walk fearlessly, to run confidently, and to live victoriously.

How To Help Those Who Hurt

October 20, 2009

How To Help Those Who Hurt

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 59-61; 2 Thessalonians 3

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

When I have asked suffering people, “Who helped you?” not one person has mentioned a PhD from a prestigious seminary or a famous philosopher. All of us have the same capacity to help those who hurt.

No one can package or bottle the “appropriate” response to suffering. If you go to the sufferers themselves, some will recall a friend who cheerily helped distract them from their illness. Others think such an approach insulting. Some want honest, straightforward talk; others find such discussion unbearably depressing.

There is no magic cure for a person in pain. Mainly, such a person needs love, for love instinctively detects what is needed. Jean Vanier, who founded the L’Arche movement for the developmentally disabled, says: “Wounded people who have been broken by suffering and sickness ask for only one thing: a heart that loves and commits itself to them, a heart full of hope for them.”

Such a love may be painful for us. But real love, the apostle Paul reminds us, “Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7).

As is so often His pattern, God uses very ordinary people to bring about His healing. Those who suffer don’t need our knowledge and wisdom, they need our love.

O brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother!

Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there;

To worship rightly is to love each other,

Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer. —Whittier

They do not truly love who do not show their love. —Shakespeare

There Is Love

February 14, 1998

There Is Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 15-16; Matthew 27:1-26

The greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

Last Valentine’s Day, I traded e-mail with a friend who is approaching 30 and has no serious love relationship in sight. He’s talented, fun, handsome, and a committed Christian. But so far, everything on his romantic horizon has turned out to be a mirage.

Several months earlier, he had been very enthusiastic about a young woman with whom he was corresponding. Two weeks before they were to meet for the first time, she was killed by a drunk driver. My friend made the trip to meet her family, experience their pain, and deal with his own sense of loss.

Today, many people will feel the absence of love as keenly as others celebrate its presence. In a world where love means so much, is there a word from the Lord for everyone, with or without a sweetheart?

First Corinthians 13 focuses not on being loved by another person, but on having love. This love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (v.7). How is this possible? It’s God’s love that “has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5).

Today and tomorrow, far beyond the cards and flowers, from God’s heart to ours, there is love!

On this the day when we express

Undying love and faithfulness,

Let's not forget that God above

Gave us His Son in perfect love. —Hess

The more we understand God's love for us, the more love we'll show to others.

Concrete Love

July 28, 1998

Concrete Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 46-48; Acts 28

Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. —1 Cor. 13:3

The story is told of a child psychologist who spent many hours constructing a new driveway at his home. Just after he smoothed the surface of the freshly poured concrete, his small children chased a ball across the driveway, leaving deep footprints. The man yelled after them with a torrent of angry words. His shocked wife said, “You’re a psychologist who’s supposed to love children.” The fuming man shouted, “I love children in the abstract, not in the concrete!”

I chuckled at the alleged incident and groaned at the play on words, but the story rang true for me. While I agree in principle with the concept of self-giving love, I find myself failing to express it to the people I live and work with each day.

First Corinthians 13 describes Christian love in terms of its tangible expression: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil” (vv.4-5).

As a theory, love isn’t worth much; as a practice, it is the world’s greatest treasure. When footprints are in the driveway, people discover whether our love exists in the abstract or in the concrete.

Follow with reverent steps the great example

Of Him whose holy work was doing good;

So shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,

Each loving life a psalm of gratitude. —Whittier

Love is an active verb.

How Can We Love?

May 17, 2002

How Can We Love?

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 1-3; John 5:25-47

Love never fails. —1 Corinthians 13:8

First Corinthians 13 is often read at weddings. Yet even optimistic newlyweds will eventually fail to love. The only individual who perfectly fulfills this “love chapter” is Jesus Christ.

Pastor F. B. Meyer (1847-1929) wrote, “Jesus sits for His portrait in these glowing sentences, and every clause is true of Him. Substitute His name for ‘love’ throughout the chapter, and see whether it is not an exact likeness.”

Let’s try that. “[Jesus] suffers long and is kind; [Jesus] does not envy; [Jesus] … does not behave rudely, does not seek [His] own, … does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [Jesus] never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Yes, Jesus is the perfect example of love. Yet Paul wrote to describe how we are meant to love others. He knew, though, that we need more than to read about Christ’s example of love; we need to experience His love by receiving Him into our lives as Lord and Savior. If we have done that, Paul declared, “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5). Only then will we be able to love others as Jesus does, by allowing Him to love them through us. —JEY

More like the Master

I would live and grow,

More of His love

To others I would show. —Gabriel

To know love, open your heart to Jesus. To show love, open your heart to others.

Love Is For Losers?

July 14, 2009

Love Is For Losers?

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 10-12; Acts 19:1-20

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

You can learn a lot about a person by what his or her T-shirt says. Recently, one of these messages caught my attention as I walked through a local shopping mall. A young woman wore a bright red T-shirt that said, “Love Is for Losers.” Maybe she thought it was clever or provocative, even funny. Or perhaps she had been hurt by a relationship and had pulled away from others rather than risk being hurt again. Either way, the T-shirt got me thinking.

Is love for losers? The fact is, when we love, we take risks. People could very well hurt us, disappoint us, or even leave us. Love can lead to loss.

The Bible, though, challenges us to higher ground in loving others. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes what it means to live out God’s kind of love. The person who exercises godly love doesn’t do so for personal benefit or gain but rather “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (13:7). Why? Because godly love endures beyond life’s hurts by pulling us relentlessly toward the never-diminishing care of the Father.

So, perhaps love is for losers—for it is in times of loss and disappointment that we need God the most. Even in our struggles, we know that “love never fails.”

Unfailing is God’s matchless love,

So kind, so pure, so true;

And those who draw upon that love

Show love in what they do. —D. De Haan

God’s love never fails.

Helping Love Grow

April 17, 2010

Helping Love Grow

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 1-2; Luke 14:1-24

[Love] does not seek its own. —1 Corinthians 13

A young man told his father, “Dad, I’m going to get married.”

“How do you know you’re ready to get married, Ron?” asked the father. “Are you in love?”

“I sure am!” he replied.

The father then asked, “Ron, how do you know you’re in love?”

“Last night as I was kissing my girlfriend goodnight, her dog bit me and I didn’t feel the pain until I got home!”

Ron has got that loving feeling, but he has a lot of growing to do. Vernon Grounds, a former writer for Our Daily Bread, who has been married for more than 70 years, shares these points about how to grow in love:

Ponder God’s love in Christ. Take time to reflect on how He gave His life for you. Read about Him in the Gospels, and thank Him.

Pray for the love of God. Ask Him to give you an understanding of His love and to teach you how to live that out in your relationships with your spouse and others (1 Cor. 13).

Practice the love of God. Give of yourself. A newlywed told me he thinks love is practical. He said, “My responsibility is to make life easier for my spouse.” The other, tougher side of love is to challenge each other to act in godly ways.

Love will grow when we ponder love, pray for love, and practice love.

This is my prayer, kind Father,

So direct me from above

That I may live a life for You

And reflect my Savior’s love. —Messenger

As Christ’s love grows in us, His love flows from us.

Remembering To Forget

December 8, 1998

Remembering To Forget

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Daniel 8-10; 3 John

[Love] thinks no evil. —1 Corinthians 13:5

When people hurt us and then apologize, we may say that we forgive them. But like a dog that won’t give up its bone, we may let our mind continue to chew on past insults.

In 1 Corinthians 13:5, Paul declared that love “thinks no evil.” He was using an accountant’s term that described the recording of figures in a book. Love does the opposite—it does not keep a record of wrongs. Instead, love forgives and refuses to keep it on the books.

If you want to remember something, you go over it again and again. The child reviews his spelling words; the actress rehearses her lines; you review people’s names that you want to remember. But love deliberately and consciously lets go of past hurts and gives them to God.

It was said of one religious leader, “He never forgot slights done to him, which was his fundamental weakness. He might bury the hatchet for a time, but he gave the impression of always marking the spot.”

In contrast, when Methodist minister William Sangster was addressing Christmas cards, a friend noticed one name and remarked, “Don’t you remember how he slighted you?” Sangster responded, “Oh yes, I remember, but I have remembered to forget.” Let’s

follow his example.

Lord, help me be kind and forgiving—

Your loving forgiveness You've shown

To me for the sins I've committed;

Lord, grant me a love like Your own. —Anon.

Remember to forgive—then remember to forget.

The Cry for Love

February 14, 1994

The Cry for Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 15-16; Matthew 27:1-26

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God. —1 John 4:7

A father sat at his desk poring over his monthly bills when his young son rushed in and announced, “Dad, because this is your birthday and you’re 55 years old, I’m going to give you 55 kisses, one for each year!” When the boy started making good on his word, the father exclaimed, “Oh, Andrew, don’t do it now; I’m too busy!”

The youngster immediately fell silent as tears welled up in his big blue eyes. Apologetically the father said, “You can finish later.” The boy said nothing but quietly walked away, disappointment written all over his face. That evening the father said, “Come and finish the kisses now, Andrew.” But the boy didn’t respond.

A short time after this incident the boy drowned. His heartbroken father wrote, “If only I could tell him how much I regret my thoughtless words, and could be assured that he knows how much my heart is aching.”

Love is a two-way street. Any loving act must be warmly accepted or it will be taken as rejection and can leave a scar. If we are too busy to give and receive love, we are too busy. Nothing is more important than responding with love to the cry for love from those who are near and precious to us.

Lord, teach us the secret of loving,

The love You are asking today;

Then help us to love one another—

For this we most earnestly pray. —Anon.

Nothing is more costly than loving—except not loving.

Learning How To Love

June 30, 1994

Learning How To Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Job 17-19; Acts 10:1-23

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. —John 13:34

Tracy Morrow, who goes by the name of Ice-T, delights in his role as a controversial rap singer whose lyrics are blasphemous and obscene. Yet, inspired by a truce between two violent gangs in Los Angeles, the Crips and the Bloods, he wrote a surprisingly sentimental song, “Gotta Lotta Love.”

Orphaned when young, and brought up by relatives who considered him a burden, Ice-T never experienced loving care. “I first found the word love in a gang,” he told an interviewer. “I learned how to love in a gang, not in a family atmosphere.”

No matter how little or how warped the love we may have known in childhood, it is never too late for any of us to learn how to love. In God’s sovereignty we may catch a glimpse of love through some individual or a support group (even a gang!). But to learn the full meaning and reality of true love, we need to look at Calvary’s cross. “By this we know love, because [Jesus] laid down His life for

us” (1 John 3:16). The death of Jesus, in all of its sacrificial unselfishness, discloses the heights and depths of love.

We will know better how to show love when we think of how much Christ loves us, and when we trust Him as our Savior and Lord.

Unfailing is Christ’s matchless love,

So kind, so pure, so true;

And those who come to know that love

Show love in all they do. —DJD

We know how to love when we know how Christ loved us.

No Record Of Wrongs

December 3, 1996

No Record Of Wrongs

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 45-46; 1 John 2

[Love] does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil. —1 Corinthians 13:5

A couple living in rural Kiowa, Colorado, has called the noise hotline for the new Denver International Airport more than 1,400 times to complain about jets passing over their home. They have informed airport officials that they won’t quit calling until the flight path is changed.

If we estimate 1 minute for each conversation, 1,400 phone calls add up to more than 23 hours of complaints! I won’t second-guess the validity of their gripe against the airport, but their tactic made me wonder about the way I handle conflict. Do I repeatedly point out every mistake people make without thinking what it does to them and to me? Or is it my practice to overlook the offenses of others?

First Corinthians 13:5 gives us a guide for dealing with problems in our relationships. It all hinges on love. Love is not easily provoked to anger. It “thinks no evil” by refusing to keep a record of wrongs. Anger puts every offense on an endless playback loop, but love turns off the switch.

At work, at home, at church, we need to ask the Lord to give us the courage to abandon the playback button and make frequent use of erase. Let’s show His love by keeping no record of wrongs.

Love is an attitude, love is a prayer,

For someone in sorrow, a heart in despair;

Love is goodwill for the gain of another,

Love suffers long with the fault of a brother. —Anon.

When someone mistreats you, do what comes supernaturally—love him.

The Essential Ingredient

March 4, 1995

The Essential Ingredient

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 31-33; Mark 9:1-29

Though I have all faith … but have not love, I am nothing. —1 Corinthians 13:2

A third-grade science teacher asked one of her students to describe salt. “Well, um, it’s … ,” he started, then stopped. He tried again. “Salt is, you know, it’s … ” Finally he said, “Salt is what makes French fries taste bad when you don’t sprinkle it on.” Many foods are like that—incomplete without a key ingredient. Imagine pizza without cheese, strudel without apples, a banana split without bananas.

The Christian life also has an essential element: love. Paul emphasized its value as he wrote his letter to the Corinthians. Right in the middle of a section about spiritual gifts, he paused to say that even if we have gifts of service, speech, and self-sacrifice but

don’t have love, we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3). We’ve missed the “more excellent way” (12:31). A follower of Jesus should love his family, his friends, his fellow believers, those who don’t know Christ, and even his enemies (Lk. 6:27-31). A true Christian is known by his love.

Doctrinal purity is important. Faith is a magnificent quality, as are actions of obedient service to the Lord. But without love, we’re about as bland as French fries without salt.

Ask God to help you grow in love until it flows from your heart to others. That’s the essential ingredient.

Lord, grant me a loving heart,

A will to give and share,

A whispered prayer upon my lips

To show I really care. —Brandt

As Christ's love grows in us, His love flows through us.

Love's Check List

February 11, 2005

Love's Check List

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 11-12; Matthew 26:1-25

Love suffers long and is kind. —1 Corinthians 13:4

A woman named Nancy uses verses from 1 Corinthians 13 to help her cope with the frustrations of a busy family life. She calls verses 4 to 7 “Love’s Check List” and refers to it when anger wells up within her.

Nancy gave an example of how she uses her check list. She was running errands one morning before she and her family were to leave on vacation. Her husband Bill was at home caring for the children and getting things ready for an early afternoon departure. When she arrived home after stopping at the grocery store, her mother’s house, the post office, the bank, and the hospital to visit a friend, she found that all he had accomplished the entire morning was to wash and polish his car—which they weren’t even taking on the trip!

Nancy was angry and said some harsh things to Bill. Within a few minutes the words of Love’s Check List came to mind: “Love suffers long and is kind.” She prayed, then she apologized to her husband for her angry outburst. He said he was sorry too, and they left that afternoon for their vacation—just a little late.

Next time you say angry, bitter things, remember Love’s Check List in 1 Corinthians 13. Better yet, consider it before you say them.

Lord, fill our hearts with Christlike love,

With goodness, kindness, care,

Lest bitter thoughts and hurtful words

Will find a welcome there. —D. De Haan

Bitter feelings can be sweetened when we take them to the Lord in prayer.

Love Believes All Things

September 26, 2009

Love Believes All Things

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 1-2; Galatians 5

[Love] believes all things, hopes all things. —1 Corinthians 13:7

It was 40 years ago or more that I observed a friend of mine showing great affection for someone I considered unworthy of love. I thought my friend was being taken in, and I was afraid he would be disillusioned and saddened in the end.

When I expressed my concern, he replied, “When I stand before my Lord, I hope He’ll say of me that I’ve loved too many, rather than

too few." I've never forgotten his words.

Paul insists that "[love] believes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Love "believes" in people. It can see the potential in them. It believes that God can take the most unattractive and unworthy individual and turn that person into a masterpiece of beauty and grace. If love errs, it must err in the way of trustfulness and hopefulness.

Certainly, we must be aware of danger when we see it coming, and become "as wise as serpents" (Matt. 10:16). Tough love may be the best response to irresponsible and foolish people, but we can be too guarded, too wary and distrustful.

It doesn't do us any real harm to be hoodwinked and defrauded (Matt. 5:38-48). It's better to believe in someone and have your heart broken than to have no heart at all. British poet Alfred Tennyson wrote, "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." I agree.

Lord, help us to believe in people

And all that in them You can do,

So we can say we've loved too many,

Rather than too few. —Sper

Love looks beyond what people are to what they can become.

How To Help Those Who Hurt

October 20, 2009

How To Help Those Who Hurt

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 59-61; 2 Thessalonians 3

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

When I have asked suffering people, "Who helped you?" not one person has mentioned a PhD from a prestigious seminary or a famous philosopher. All of us have the same capacity to help those who hurt.

No one can package or bottle the "appropriate" response to suffering. If you go to the sufferers themselves, some will recall a friend who cheerily helped distract them from their illness. Others think such an approach insulting. Some want honest, straightforward talk; others find such discussion unbearably depressing.

There is no magic cure for a person in pain. Mainly, such a person needs love, for love instinctively detects what is needed. Jean Vanier, who founded the L'Arche movement for the developmentally disabled, says: "Wounded people who have been broken by suffering and sickness ask for only one thing: a heart that loves and commits itself to them, a heart full of hope for them."

Such a love may be painful for us. But real love, the apostle Paul reminds us, "Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).

As is so often His pattern, God uses very ordinary people to bring about His healing. Those who suffer don't need our knowledge and wisdom, they need our love.

O brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother!

Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there;

To worship rightly is to love each other,

Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer. —Whittier

They do not truly love who do not show their love. —Shakespeare

Real Love

November 26, 2013

Real Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 27-29; 1 Peter 3

[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. —1 Corinthians 13:7-8

A few years ago, my friend's mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Since then, Beth has been forced to make tough decisions about her mom's care, and her heart has often been broken as she watched her vibrant and fun-loving mom slowly slipping away. In the process, my friend has learned that real love is not always easy or convenient.

After her mom was hospitalized for a couple of days last year, Beth wrote these words to some of her friends: "As backwards as it may seem, I'm very thankful for the journey I am on with my mom. Behind the memory loss, confusion, and utter helplessness is a beautiful person who loves life and is at complete peace. I am learning so much about what real love is, and even though I probably wouldn't have asked for this journey and the tears and heartache that go with it, I wouldn't trade it for anything."

The Bible reminds us that love is patient and kind. It is not self-seeking or easily angered. It "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Real love originated with our Father, who gave us the gift of His Son. As we seek to show His love to others, we can follow the example of Christ, who laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16-18).

Real love is helping others for Jesus' sake even if they can never return the favor.

Enduring Love

February 13, 2009

Enduring Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 14; Matthew 26:51-75

[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. —1 Corinthians 13:7

Like many people, I enjoy the Google homepage artwork that appears on special days and holidays. Last Valentine's Day, the artistic logo showed an older couple—a man with a cane and a white-haired woman—walking hand in hand as the woman held two heart-shaped balloons. It was a beautiful reminder that while our culture glorifies youthful romance, true love has many stages during our journey through life.

Paul's great essay in 1 Corinthians 13 celebrates the depth and tenacity of the love that carries us beyond self-interest and mere affection. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (vv.4-8).

Brian Wren has captured this reality in his moving hymn, "When Love Is Found":

When love is tried as loved ones change,

Hold still to hope though all seems strange,

Till ease returns, and love grows wise

Through listening ears and opened eyes.

© Hope Publishing Co.

When our commitments are tested in the fires of life, no matter what difficulties we face, may God grant us a greater experience of His enduring love and the grace to demonstrate it each day.

God's love is a fabric that never fades, no matter how often it is washed in the waters of adversity.

Changing Your World

November 13, 2000

Changing Your World

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-7 | Bible in a Year: Lamentations 1-2; Hebrews 10:1-18

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. —Galatians 2:20

A young woman lived in a home where she was very unhappy. She often complained to her friends and told them how difficult it was

for her to stay there. She blamed her parents and the other members of her family for her discontent and threatened to move out as soon as she could afford to be on her own.

One day, though, her face was graced with a happy smile. Gone was her usual glum expression. Her eyes were sparkling. There was a spring in her step.

When a friend noticed the difference, she exclaimed, “Things must have improved at home. I’m so glad!” “No,” the young woman responded, “I’m the one who’s different!”

That young woman’s outlook was brighter and her relationships with others were transformed. It wasn’t because her circumstances had improved, but because she had experienced a change in her heart.

When we are confronted with irritating situations and we begin to feel sorry for ourselves, we should ask these questions: Is the trouble really with others? Or could it be me? As we ask the Lord to fill us with His perfect love, it’s amazing how life begins to look better. Letting God change us is the best way to change our world.

Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine;

Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.

Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride;

I now surrender, Lord—in me abide. —Orr

When you stop changing, you stop growing.

The Greatest Thing In The World

February 14, 2006

The Greatest Thing In The World

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 15-16; Matthew 27:1-26

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

Well-known scientist and writer Henry Drummond (1857–1897) conducted a geological survey of South Africa and wrote what was then the definitive work on tropical Africa. But he is best remembered for his book about love, The Greatest Thing In The World.

Drummond wrote, “As memory scans the past, above and beyond all the transitory pleasures of life, there leap forward those supreme hours when you have been enabled to do unnoticed kindnesses to those round about you, things too trifling to speak about … And these seem to be the things which alone of all one’s life abide.”

Paul warned that impressive gifts and spectacular deeds may be little more than empty noise (1 Corinthians 13:1). Our best efforts—if bereft of love—ring hollow. “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, … but have not love, it profits me nothing” (v.3). The smallest loving act can hold eternal significance.

No matter our age or status in life, we all can strive to love others as God loves them. We may accomplish great things in our life—gain fame and fortune—but the greatest thing is to love. For of all that we have done, or ever will do, only love endures. We depart, but love abides.

We love because He first loved us,

He gave so we can give;

We love because He first touched us,

He died so we can live. —Sper

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

When To Speak Up

September 25, 1995

When To Speak Up

Read: Ephesians 5:22-33 | Bible in a Year: Song of Solomon 6-8; Galatians 4

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up. —1 Corinthians 13:4

Good communication is essential for a happy marriage. Poet Ogden Nash seems to have hit on a formula to help us remember how to communicate effectively. Nash, in his witty style, wrote:

If you want your marriage to sizzle

With love in the loving cup,

Whenever you're wrong, admit it;

Whenever you're right, shut up!

There's some immensely helpful truth in that four-liner—truth that is supported by Scripture.

Let's look at the two major points. First, if we are wrong we need to admit it. Not only marriage, but all relationships benefit from this kind of honesty (Prov. 12:22). Protecting ourselves when we're wrong makes resolution impossible.

On the other hand, we can be equally hard to live with if we insist that we're always right—and afraid to let our spouse know that we are fallible. According to 1 Corinthians 13:4, "[Love] does not parade itself, is not puffed up." No one likes to be around someone who always seems to be patting himself on the back.

Two simple guidelines for a marriage that pleases God: Admit wrong and keep quiet about being right. It's a good way to keep the relationship strong.

Button up your lip securely

'Gainst the words that bring a tear,

But be swift with words of comfort,

Words of praise, and words of cheer. —Loucks

Let your speech be better than silence; otherwise be silent.

The Other Side Of Thank You

November 21, 2007

The Other Side Of Thank You

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 16-17; James 3

[Love] does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil. —1 Corinthians 13:5

A baby gift came to a young couple who were new parents. They were grateful for the present, so the mom picked up a thank-you card, wrote a nice note, and got it ready to send.

Somehow it got buried in an avalanche of paperwork and was never mailed—and the thank-you was forgotten. The gift-givers waited, but no acknowledgment came.

A rift developed as one family thought the thank-you had been given, while the other thought the lack of a thank-you was a snub. This inadvertent failure to send a card left the gift-giver feeling slighted, unappreciated, and neglected.

Among the most important words we can speak are the two words, "Thank you." And while it is vital to be grateful, there's another side of thank you. If we bestow a gift on another, we should do so out of a motive that doesn't expect anything, even a thank-you, in return. True love gives with no expectations.

Love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4, "suffers long and is kind" and is never self-seeking. Love keeps no record of wrongs—even if someone forgets to thank us for a kindness. The other side of thank you is a pure heart that reflects God's perfect love for us.

I want the love that always sweetly bears

Whate'er my Father's hand may choose to send;

I want the love that patiently endures

The wrongs that come from enemy or friend. —Anon.

True love has no strings attached.

Bellyaching And Its Cure

August 14, 2005

Bellyaching And Its Cure

Read: Matthew 20:1-16 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 89-90; Romans 14

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up. —1 Corinthians 13:4

A mentally impaired man always shook hands with his pastor after each service. But he often made critical comments like these: “You preach too long.” “Your sermons are boring.” “You talk about yourself too much.” Distressed, the pastor mentioned this to a deacon, who replied, “Oh, don’t worry about him. All he does is parrot what he hears others say.”

Grumbling is an all-too-common sin among Christians, and some are chronic complainers. They are skilled at finding something wrong with anyone who is actively trying to serve the Lord. And undoubtedly all of us have done some bellyaching.

The best cure for this sinful habit is Christian love—something easy to talk about but difficult to practice. First, we must consciously desire God’s best for everyone. This love “suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; … love does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). Then, as we depend on the Lord, we must put these attitudes into practice.

The next time you feel like finding fault with someone, resist that impulse and look for a way to do good to that person (Galatians 6:10). Do this diligently, and in time you will be cured of your bellyaching.

I would not criticize the one who works,

The one who listens to God's Word and heeds;

But I would criticize myself, dear Lord,

Confess to You my faithless words and deeds. —Hess

Don't find a fault—find a remedy.

Selfless Love

May 29, 1998

Selfless Love

Read: Mark 14:32-42 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 7-9; John 11:1-29

Love suffers long and is kind; love … does not seek its own. —1 Corinthians 13:4-5

I don’t like to fish. So I was less than enthusiastic when my son Dan, about 12 at the time, asked me to take him fishing. We woke up early and got out on the lake just before dawn. Dan was excited, but when 10 long minutes passed without a bite I was already bored. So I rearranged a few life preservers, got comfortable, and promptly fell asleep. A little while later we returned home, even though the morning was still young. Needless to say, Dan was disappointed—and I felt guilty!

Peter, James, and John disappointed Jesus when they fell asleep instead of exerting themselves to pray with Him in His hour of great soul agony. Although He showed that He understood their weariness after a long, emotionally draining day, His grief is clearly evident in His words, “Are you still sleeping and resting?” (Mk. 14:41).

By our thoughtlessness and selfishness we often wound family members and close friends. I know a man who hurt his wife deeply when he went hunting with some buddies instead of staying home to comfort her after a miscarriage.

Let’s avoid wounding those we love. Always keep in mind Paul’s words, “Love suffers long and is kind; love … does not seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

Our selfish ways can make us blind

So we won't see another's needs;

But when God's love is in our hearts,

We'll act with kind and selfless deeds. —Sper

A selfish heart loves for what it can get; a Christlike heart loves for what it can give.

Too Helpful?

April 7, 2012

Too Helpful?

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 4-6

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me. —Psalm 139:23-24

Is it possible to be too helpful? Can our helpfulness actually make life more difficult for others? Yes, if we're being bothersome, intrusive, smothering, manipulative, or controlling. If the help we are giving is driven only by our own anxiety, we may be just trying to help ourselves.

How then can we know if our heart and acts of service are truly symbolic of God's unconditional love? How can we love from pure motives? (Prov. 16:2; 21:2; 1 Cor. 4:5).

In prayer we can ask God to show us any way we are hurting or hindering others (Ps. 139:23-24). We can ask God to help us show love that "suffers long and is kind; … is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

Our efforts to help others, especially those we love the most, will never be completely free from anxiety. But we can, by God's grace, begin to love freely with no strings attached, as God Himself loves. The test, of course, and the measure of our progress, is the way we react when our "helpfulness" is unrecognized or goes unrewarded (see Luke 14:12-14).

Lord, help us to love with pure motives and for the good of others. Help us to love unconditionally, expecting nothing in return.

Please help me, Lord, in all I do

To act and think with motives true;

And by Your love reveal to me

Those sins that only You can see. —D. De Haan

In our desire to help, let's love with pure motives.

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In our desire to help, let’s love with pure motives.

Rudeness On The Rise

February 14, 1999

Rudeness On The Rise

Read: 1 John 4:7-21 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 15-16; Matthew 27:1-26

Love … does not behave rudely. —1 Corinthians 13:4-5

The director of the national Commission on Civic Renewal has said, “There is an overwhelming consensus among the American people that basic norms of good conduct have deteriorated in this country.” Some observers have concluded that disrespect has become an epidemic.

Have you noticed it where you live? On the highway? At sporting events? During public performances? Have we forgotten how to walk in the shoes of others, considering their rights and needs? Have we become brazenly “in your face” at the expense of being compassionately “in your place”?

First Corinthians 13 includes a quality of biblical love that is often overlooked. It “does not behave rudely” (v.5). This verse expands on the idea and says that love “does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil.” As one paraphrase puts it, “Love doesn’t force itself on others, isn’t always ‘me first,’ doesn’t fly off the handle, doesn’t keep score of the sins of others.”

We often think of love’s lofty, eternal, spiritual qualities and forget that the love God puts deep within us shows courtesy and consideration toward everyone we meet.

At a time when rudeness is on the rise, we need to begin an epidemic of love.

Christ's love is not puffed up, unkind;

It gladly will the broken bind;

It envies not, is patient still,

Delights to do the Father's will. —Stahl

The oil of courtesy takes the friction out of life.

God’s Love Through Me

December 17, 2010

God’s Love Through Me

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Amos 7-9; Revelation 8

Love never fails. —1 Corinthians 13:8

During a devotional session at a conference, our leader asked us to read aloud 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, and substitute the word “Jesus” for “love.” It seemed so natural to say, “Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade Himself,

is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek His own … Jesus never fails."

Then our leader said, "Read the passage aloud and say your name instead of Jesus." We laughed nervously at the suggestion. "I want you to begin now," the leader said. Quietly, haltingly I said the words that felt so untrue: "David does not seek his own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. David never fails."

The exercise caused me to ask, "How am I hindering God from expressing His love through me?" Do I think that other expressions of faith are more important? Paul declared that from God's perspective, eloquent speech, deep spiritual understanding, lavish generosity, and self-sacrifice are worthless when not accompanied by love (vv.1-3).

God longs to express His great heart of love for others through us. Will we allow Him to do it?

To love our neighbors as ourselves

Is not an easy thing to do;

So Lord, please show us how to love

As we attempt to follow You. —Sper

Living like Christ is loving like God.

Love Goes Beyond Liking

November 25, 2005

Love Goes Beyond Liking

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 24-26; 1 Peter 2

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. —Deuteronomy 6:5

From childhood on, we are urged to show love, whether it's for parents or pets or friends, and especially for Jesus. But what is love?

We think of love as an emotion, a tender feeling, a positive reaction. So when Scripture commands us to love God and our neighbor, we may be confused about the meaning of love (Matthew 22:37-40).

Feelings simply cannot be commanded. A mother can order her child to love spinach, but she can't compel him to react positively when faced with a helping of that green vegetable.

So love must be more than an emotion. An old translation of our Lord's command may help us to understand love as an action that we choose: "Thou shalt love … " It's choosing to be patient, kind, selfless, and humble (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). We can love others even though we may not like them, because it's a matter of making a choice.

Yes, we can respond obediently to what our Savior directs us to do. He knows, though, that we are not capable of doing this on our own. That's why He's given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to a life of loving obedience. With His help, we can learn to love those we don't like. Who knows? We may even begin to like them.

O Lord, how often selfishness

Will raise its ugly head,

So help us, Lord, to conquer it

And show Your love instead. —D. De Haan

Loving others requires a heart of obedience to God.

Learning To Love

April 27, 2014

Learning To Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 | Bible in a Year: 1 Kings 1-2; Luke 19:28-48

Love suffers long and is kind. —1 Corinthians 13:4

When Hans Egede went to Greenland as a missionary in 1721, he didn't know the Inuit language. His temperament was often overbearing, and he struggled to be kind to the people.

In 1733, a smallpox epidemic swept through Greenland, wiping out almost two-thirds of the Inuit people—and claiming Egede's wife as well. This shared suffering melted Egede's harsh demeanor, and he began to tirelessly labor to care for the people physically and spiritually. Because his life now better represented the stories he told them of God's love, the Inuits could at last grasp His desire to love them too. Even in suffering, their hearts turned to God.

Perhaps you are like the Inuits in this story, and you are unable to see God in the people around you. Or perhaps you are like Hans Egede, who struggled to express love in a way that taught people about God. Knowing we are weak and needy people, God showed us what love is like. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins (John 3:16). That's how much God loves you and me.

Jesus is the perfect example of the love that is described in 1 Corinthians 13. As we look to Him, we learn that we are loved and we learn how to love in turn.

Jesus, let me find in You a sense that I am

loved. And may my heart not grow cold and

cluttered by anger and wounds from the past so

that others can see Your reflection in me.

May I never be the barrier that blocks one's view of God.

Beware Of A Judgmental Spirit!

October 17, 2005

Beware Of A Judgmental Spirit!

Read: Matthew 7:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 50-52; 1 Thessalonians 5

Judge not, that you be not judged. —Matthew 7:1

A young married man began going to a pornography store. When his parents learned of this, they gently and tactfully confronted him, but made no accusations. The son responded with anger and said that he saw no harm in what he was doing. He accused his parents of being judgmental. With broken hearts they had to stand by and watch him as he left his wife and family, lost his job, and eventually ruined his life.

Many people today would say that his parents had no right to imply that he was doing wrong. They may even quote Jesus' words: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1).

But the Bible makes it clear that we are responsible to humbly confront fellow believers when we see them caught in sin (Galatians 6:1-2). These parents were lovingly doing just that.

Jesus wasn't saying we shouldn't confront sin. He was saying we must be very careful in making judgments. Paul wrote that love thinks no evil (1 Corinthians 13:5). We must give others the benefit of the doubt, recognizing our own limitations. And we must reject any feeling of spiritual superiority, lest we also fall into sin.

Confronting someone is a serious responsibility. Exercise it carefully, and always beware of judging.

Your Word instructs us not to judge;

So, Lord, we humbly pray,

"Restrain our lips when we would speak

The things we should not say." —D. De Haan

Judge yourself before you judge another.

There Is Love

February 14, 2007

There Is Love

Read: 1 John 4:7-11 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 15-16; Matthew 27:1-26

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

Some time ago, I traded e-mail with a friend who was approaching 30 and had no serious love relationship in sight. He's talented, fun, handsome, and a committed Christian. But so far, everything on his romantic horizon has turned out to be a mirage.

Several months earlier, he had been very enthusiastic about a young woman with whom he was corresponding. Two weeks before they were to meet for the first time, she was killed by a drunk driver. My friend made the trip to meet her family, experience their pain, and deal with his own sense of loss.

Today, many people will feel the absence of love as keenly as others celebrate its presence. In a world where love means so much, is there a word from the Lord for everyone, with or without a sweetheart?

First John 4 focuses not on being loved by another person, but on God's love for us and our love for one another (vv.7-11). According to 1 Corinthians 13:7, this love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." How is this possible? Because God's love "has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5).

Long after the cards and flowers are forgotten, there is love from God's heart to ours!

On this the day when we express

Undying love and faithfulness,

Let's not forget that God above

Gave us His Son in perfect love. —Hess

The more we understand God's love for us, the more love we'll show to others.

The Benefit Of The Doubt

May 11, 2011

The Benefit Of The Doubt

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 13-14; John 2

[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. —1 Corinthians 13:7

In 1860, Thomas Inman recommended that his fellow doctors not prescribe a medicine for a cure if they weren't sure it would work. They were to give the patient "the benefit of our doubts." This phrase is also a legal term meaning that if a jury has conflicting evidence that makes the jurors doubtful, they are to give the verdict of "not guilty."

Perhaps as Christians, we can learn from and apply this medical and legal phrase to our relationships. Better yet, we can learn from the Bible about giving the benefit of the doubt to others. First Corinthians 13:7 says that love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Leon Morris, in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, says this about the phrase "believes all things": "To see the best in others … This does not mean that love is gullible, but that it does not think the worst (as is the way of the world). It retains its faith. Love is not deceived … but it is always ready to give the benefit of the doubt."

When we hear something negative about others or we're suspicious about the motive for their actions, let's stop before we judge their intentions as wrong or bad. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt.

Thinking It Over

To learn more about the love described

in 1 Corinthians 13, read What Is Real Love?

at www.discoveryseries.org/q0714

Love gives others the benefit of the doubt.

Childish Or Childlike?

June 8, 1998

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 30-31; John 18:1-18

When I became a man, I put away childish things. —1 Corinthians 13:11

When teaching adults, Jesus talked about childlike faith (Lk. 18:15-17). In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul spoke of childish thinking.

In an article for Good News magazine, Duffy Robbins contrasts childish faith and childlike faith:

Childish Faith

Good Christians don't have pain and disappointments.

God wants to make us happy.

God always answers prayers.

Faith will help us to always understand what God is doing.

Good Christians are always strong.

Childlike Faith

God uses our pain and disappointment to make us better Christians.

God wants to make us holy.

Sometimes He answers with "No" or "Wait."

Faith will help us to stand under God's sovereignty even when we don't have a clue about what God is doing.

Our strength is in admitting our weakness.

Here is the heart of the matter: Childish faith is self-centered and demanding. It expects God to shield us from all difficulties and to make life comfortable for us. In contrast, childlike faith focuses on God. It trusts Him to use even difficulties for our good and His glory.

What kind of faith is yours?

God, give me the faith of a little child,

Who trusts so implicitly,

Who simply and gladly believes Thy Word

And never would question Thee. —Showerman

Childlike faith focuses on our heavenly Father, not on our fear.

Pretend

April 19, 2008

Pretend

Read: John 17:6-19 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 6-8; Luke 15:1-10

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child … but when I became a man, I put away childish things. —1 Corinthians 13:11

Our 4-year-old grandson loves to play pretend games with grand-ma. He comes over to our home once a week, and Ma-Ma (that's what he calls her) takes him to the supermarket, to the botanical gardens to feed fish and turtles, and to ride the underground train—all without leaving our home! He guards this game of pretend so jealously as something between Ma-Ma and him that one day when we rode the real train, he asked, "Why are there other people in our train?"

Pretending is normal for a young child. But some carry the habit of pretending into adulthood when they attend church. What they do

in church has no bearing on what they do the rest of the week. On Sunday they praise God heartily, but on Monday they become different people. What they express in worship is not seen in their behavior.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knows that we can fall into this trap easily. That is why in His prayer to His Father, He said, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15).

God has placed us here to make a difference in our world. As He protects us from falling for the wiles of the evil one, He wants us to live by the same consistent standards in every aspect of our lives—not just on Sunday.

Consistency! How much we need

To walk a measured pace,

To live the life of which we speak,

Until we see His face. —Anon.

Some people have heaven on their tongues but the world in their hearts.

Impaired Vision

December 29, 2006

Impaired Vision

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 | Bible in a Year: Zechariah 9-12; Revelation 20

Now we see in a mirror, dimly. —1 Corinthians 13:12

When I was a child, I had to wear glasses. Interestingly, my vision improved, and from high school until age 40 I didn’t need them. Prior to that landmark age, my vision was better than 20/20. Now, because of the natural degeneration of the eyes, I wear bifocals. Without glasses, my vision is impaired.

About our “spiritual vision” the apostle Paul said, “Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). The word dimly (enigma in Greek) implies that our current spiritual perceptions in our earthly state are impaired, at best.

In the ancient world, they didn’t have the clear glass mirrors we have today. Instead, mirrors were made of polished metal and provided a reflection that was dim and distorted. What was seen in a mirror was only an imperfect representation of what would be clear if it could be seen directly.

If you have questions about what God is doing in your life, continue to trust Him and to seek clarity through prayer and His Word.

For now, our understanding is limited (1 Cor. 13:9). Our current spiritual vision is impaired, but in eternity we will see clearly. We will see Jesus “face to face.”

We now see Jesus in the Bible, but then, face to face.

What Will We Do In Heaven?

December 30, 2003

What Will We Do In Heaven?

Read: Revelation 22:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Zechariah 13-14; Revelation 21

His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. —Revelation 22:3-4

I’m sometimes asked what we’ll do in heaven. Will we sit on clouds and strum celestial harps? Will we flit about on gossamer wings? In his vision, John the apostle saw three future heavenly activities.

The first one is serving (Revelation 22:3). Perhaps we’ll explore an unknown corner of the universe, or, as C. S. Lewis suggests, govern a distant star. Whatever that service may entail, there will be no sense of inadequacy, no weakness, no weariness. In heaven we’ll have minds and bodies equal to the task to which we’re assigned.

The second activity is seeing: We “shall see His face” (v.4). “Now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12), but in heaven we shall see our Savior face to face, and we “shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). This is what Revelation 22:4 means when it says, “His name shall be on their foreheads.” The name of God represents His perfect character, so to bear His name means to be like Him. In

heaven we will never again struggle with sin but will reflect the beauty of His holiness forever.

Finally, there is reigning. We shall serve our King by ruling and reigning with Him “forever and ever” (v.5).

What will we do in heaven? We’ll serve God, see our Savior, and reign with Him forever. We’ll be busy!

In heaven we'll see our Savior

And like Him we will be;

We'll praise Him and we'll serve Him

For all eternity! —Fitzhugh

Those who love and serve God on earth will feel at home in heaven.

Love Never Fails

June 21, 2006

Love Never Fails

Read: 1 Corinthians 13 | Bible in a Year: Esther 3-5; Acts 5:22-42

Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. —1 Corinthians 13:13

Poet Archibald MacLeish says that “love, like light, grows dearer towards the dark.” This is what he calls the “late, last wisdom of the afternoon.” The same is true of our love for one another; it can indeed grow dearer as we age. I have seen it myself in two elderly friends.

Married for over 50 years, they are still very much in love. One is dying of pancreatic cancer; the other is dying of Parkinson’s disease. Last week I saw Barbara lean over Claude’s bed, kiss him, and whisper, “I love you.” Claude replied, “You’re beautiful.”

I thought of couples who have given up on their marriages, who are unwilling to endure through better or worse, sickness or health, poverty or wealth, and I am saddened for them. They will miss the kind of love my friends enjoy in their latter years.

I have watched Claude and Barbara over the years, and I know that deep faith in God, lifelong commitment, loyalty, and self-denying love are the dominant themes of their marriage. They have taught me that true love never gives up, it “never fails.” Theirs is the “late, last wisdom of the afternoon,” and it will continue to the end. May we express that same unfailing love to those who love us.

Lord, teach us the secret of loving,

The love You are asking today;

Then help us to love one another—

For this we most earnestly pray. —Anon.

Don’t put off until tomorrow the loving words you can say today.

1 Corinthians 14

1 Corinthians 14:1–25

Today in the Word

In 2010, Chinese authorities undertook a massive campaign to correct thousands of signs in English. A sign that should read, “Caution! Floor is slippery!” instead declared, “Slip and fall down carefully!” “No Smorking!” signs abounded to ban cigarette smoking in certain areas. Instead of “Keep off the grass!” a sign exhorted: “Please don’t disturb me. I am sleeping and will feel pain.” American companies trying to market their products in Chinese haven’t always fared any better. KFC’s “finger–lickin’ good” slogan was translated as “eat your fingers off.” And the original attempt to translate Coca–Cola into Chinese was rendered, “Bite the wax tadpole.”

Cultural miscommunication between speakers of different languages is how Paul describes what was happening in the church of

Corinth. The Corinthians were speaking in tongues in their public worship gatherings, but as their speech was unintelligible to one another, it did not benefit the community. Because of the overemphasis on tongues (and what might have been a neglect of gifts like prophecy), their worship gatherings hummed with a noise like a hack with a clarinet to his lips or the muffled bugle call on the battlefront. They don't promote the encouragement and instruction of the believers.

Paul is not sidelining the gift of tongues. He is not faulting the Corinthians for having the gift or even wanting it. He speaks in tongues and recognizes the value of tongues for one's personal edification. But he is reminding them of the purpose of spiritual gifts and how they are to function in the public worship assembly. The Corinthians should never use their gifts, especially not tongues, to inflate their own self–importance or to draw more attention to themselves during corporate worship.

Spiritual gifts are given for the common good, and when the community gathers, priority should be given to the gift of prophecy (and presumably, other gifts, such as knowledge and teaching, v. 6). The exercise of spiritual gifts should always have the intent to build up the church.

Apply the Word

Paul's teaching to the Corinthians challenges us in a relevant way today. How eager are we to have spiritual gifts and use them? The implication is that our gifts are not static. It isn't as if the spiritual gifts we receive when we're first converted are the only gifts we'll ever have. The text invites us to consider prayerfully asking God to endow us with spiritual gifts. With faith and a desire to build up the church, we must seek God and trust Him to use us in the body of Christ as His servants.

1 Corinthians 14:26–40

Today in the Word

With social networking sites and the ubiquity of Internet access, churches and pastors are exploring how to use these technologies to reach their communities. Craig Groeschel, senior pastor of LifeChurch.tv, a cyber church, admits, "We were blown away at how people could actually worship along [online]. The whole family will gather around the computer, and they'll sing and worship together. Instead of trying to get people to come to a church, we feel like we can take a church to them."

Would Paul endorse replacing the physical gathering of the body of believers with a virtual church experience from one's smart phone? From our study of 1 Corinthians, the answer is arguably "no." Of course the Corinthians weren't tempted to do church via iPhone, but they did struggle to understand our corporate identity as the people of God. We haven't always understood why it is that the church exists and why it is that we gather each week for worship. The Corinthians treated the worship gathering as a place to showcase their spiritual gifts. We often look for the feel–good experience of church. Both attitudes fail to see that God meant for us to seek not to be strengthened, but to strengthen when we gather.

Paul's summary comments are offered in today's reading. The believers should gather together to hear from God's Word and to speak to God through prayer and praise. They are called to be expectant and eager to witness the spontaneous movement of the Spirit of God for the purpose of the common good. While there's freedom in the gatherings (it's unlikely that they had bulletins outlining exactly what would be said and when), nevertheless, there are restrictions put in place. These restrictions, such as forbidding more than one person from talking at a time or requiring interpretation for a person speaking in tongues, do not restrain the Spirit but promote order.

Apply the Word

What is your attitude toward Sunday gatherings at your church? Do you hope for inspirational music and a message with rhetorical flourish? Do you intend to socialize with your friends? None of these things are inherently wrong, but they can distract us from more important things. How are you serving others in the church? Are you eager to join with believers to praise God? Spend time today in prayer for your church service tomorrow, that the members will be unified in using their gifts together to worship the Lord and build up one another.

1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15:1-10

A FEW years before John Newton died, a friend was having breakfast with him. Their custom was to read from the Bible after the meal.

That day the selection was from 1 Corinthians 15. When the words "by the grace of God I am what I am" were read, Newton was

silent for several minutes. Then he said,

"I am not what I ought to be. How imperfect and deficient I am! I am not what I wish to be, although I abhor that which is evil and would cleave to what is good. I am not what I hope to be, but soon I shall put off mortality, and with it all sin… Though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor yet what I hope to be, I can truly say I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan. I can heartily join with the apostle and acknowledge that by the grace of God I am what I am!"

Newton's words apply to every Christian. Because of God's goodness, we are spared much bad that we deserve and are given much good that we do not deserve. Every good thing comes from His hand.

Humble gratitude ought to characterize our lives. Even though none of us is what we want to be, each of us is becoming what God wants us to be.—Paul R VanGorder

1 Corinthians 15:1–34

Today in the Word

For the sake of the gospel, missionaries like John and Betty Stam and Nate Saint gave their lives to share Jesus with people who had not heard of Him. For the sake of the gospel, D. L. Moody gave up a lucrative business career to reach the urban poor and marginalized with the message of salvation. For the sake of the gospel, thousands of unheralded Christians have ministered in prisons, taught Sunday school to unruly children, adopted orphans, given up vacations in order to participate in mission trips, or worked to free people from the bonds of slavery.

What is this gospel, that could compel people to action like this? As Paul nears the end of his letter, he returns to what is the fundamental issue at hand, the very theme with which he began: the gospel. In chapter 15, Paul defines what the gospel is and what its implications are for the Corinthians and indeed, for all believers.

In verses 3 through 5, Paul is citing what may be one of the earliest of Christian creeds. It announces that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and then raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the cataclysmic events of history. They have fulfilled the story God began with the nation of Israel, which He has carefully recorded in the Scriptures. The gospel is both an Old and New Testament story of God’s person and work with His people.

The gospel isn’t just a story rooted in past events. The gospel provides an expectant hope for what is to come. Jesus, having died for our sins and been raised, now lives to destroy the enemies of God. God’s kingdom will finally and fully come through Jesus at the end of time. Our bodily resurrection is a witness to this future redemption of the world.

Because of the salvation secured by Christ and verified through the resurrection, we are compelled to act. As we share the news about Jesus with others, we are participating in God’s promise to renew all creation.

Apply the Word

Some people like to force a divide between doctrine and doing—and then emphasize whichever element they prefer as most important. But theology and practical ministry can’t be split apart; they inform each other. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is full of the connections between sound theology and life together in the church. The ability to know God and the ability to serve others are both rooted in the truth and power of the gospel, the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:35–58

Today in the Word

In his book, A Grace Disguised, Gerald Sittser describes his journey of grief. In one tragic car accident, he lost his wife, his mother, and his youngest daughter. The book offers no easy answers about the problem of suffering. As hopeful as the book is, it’s also honest about loss. Sittser admits, “We recover from broken limbs, not amputations.” Through the pain, Sittser holds onto the hope of the gospel: “The Easter story tells us that the last chapter of the human story is not death but life.”

Sittser’s book offers a thoroughly Christian view of death, the only view that makes sense of the hope of resurrection. In order to fully appreciate the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of believers (a doctrine the Corinthian believers had failed to understand), we’ve got to face the reality of death in all of its horror. Death is our bitter enemy. It robs, and it destroys. It is the cruel weapon of Satan himself, whose every ambition it is to plunder the goodness of God’s creation and destroy life.

It’s the resurrection of our bodies and the redemption of all creation, which shouts the joyful chorus that Christ has won! He has defeated Satan! War, disease, starvation, decay—the fiercest weapons of the enemy will be destroyed on the day when Jesus returns to earth, and all believers are given new bodies, spiritual bodies.

Whereas the philosophers in the time of the Corinthians conceived of enlightened spirituality as the state of the soul escaping the body, the Christian doctrine of resurrection affirms the goodness of the body. In the resurrection, our souls don't escape to heaven in a disembodied form. We will put on a new body of a different sort: imperishable, immortal, strong, and glorious.

The doctrine of resurrection fuels our energy for obeying and serving Christ in this life. Because of the resurrection of Christ and the promise of the resurrection of our own bodies, we do not believe or hope in vain.

Apply the Word

Perhaps you've recently had someone close to you die, and you've struggled with the anger you've felt as a result. Maybe even your anger has been directed toward God. This passage of 1 Corinthians 15 tells us it's perfectly appropriate to be angry about death. It is not God's good plan for His creation! But death is not the final word; it will once and for all be destroyed. The resurrection of Christ guarantees it. If you are comforting a friend who's grieving the death of a loved one, comfort them with the hope of the resurrection!

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10

A shepherd who had been given a position of great honor by one of Scotland's kings would often go alone to a certain room in the palace. The king became suspicious and thought he was plotting a conspiracy So he asked to look inside this secret room. There, to his surprise, he found only a chair, a shepherd's crook, and an old plaid scarf. "What does this mean?" asked the king. The nobleman answered, "I was a humble shepherd when your Majesty promoted me. I come to this room to look at the crook and the plaid. They remind me of what I was—and that I am nothing but what the grace of the king has made me."

All of us who trust Jesus should take the backward look often. It will fill us with praise that God should send His Son to die for us. Like that shepherd, we can say "I am nothing but what the grace of the King has made me." —D. J. DeHaan.

GOD'S GRACE MAKES NEW CREATURES OUT OF THE BEST AND THE WORST OF SINNERS.

1 Corinthians 15:17

In the early part of this century, a group of lawyers met in England to discuss the biblical accounts of Jesus' resurrection. They wanted to see if enough information was available to make a case that would hold up in a court of law. They concluded that Christ's resurrection was one of the most well-established facts of history!

In his book Countdown, G. B. Hardy offers thought-provoking questions about the resurrection: "There are but two essential requirements: (1) Has anyone cheated death and proved it? (2) Is it available to me? Here is the complete record: Confucius' tomb—occupied. Buddha's tomb occupied. Muhammad's tomb occupied. Jesus' tomb—empty! Argue as you will, there is no point in following a loser.'

Historical evidence and countless changed lives testify that the resurrection of Jesus is a fact, not a fable! Have you put your hope in the risen Christ? —D. C. Egner.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS A FACTOR IN SALVATION BECAUSE IT IS A FACT OF HISTORY.

1 Corinthians 15:19

THE BIG DIFFERENCE

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. 1 Corinthians 15:19

As I left a funeral home one day after a memorial service for a dear saint of God, one of the directors of the mortuary re-marked, "You know, there's a big difference between the funerals of those who are Christians and those who are unsaved!" I have never forgotten his words. What a testimony to the reality of the Christian faith! Here was a man who had witnessed hundreds of funerals and had been impressed by the striking difference between the behavior of true believers in a time of bereavement and those who had no faith. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that the unsaved should not sorrow like worldly individuals who have "no hope." The reason for Paul's admonition is found in the following verses, where the apostle describes the day when "… the Lord himself shall descend from heaven … and the dead in Christ shall rise first … [and] we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air … " (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

Let it be remembered, however, that even believers grieve when death separates them from their loved ones. After all, when human ties are broken, it does hurt and tears are bound to be shed. But notice Paul does not say that we do not sorrow at all. Rather he declares that we "… sorrow not, even as others who have not hope!" The grief is lessened and the heart-ache softened in the realization that those who died in Christ go into the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, and the day is coming when with glorified, resurrected bodies all believers shall in one great, glad, grand reunion rise to meet the Lord in the air. No wonder Paul concludes

this passage by saying, "Where-fore, comfort one another with these words!"

Those who are looking for that blessed hope find courage and comfort in the upward look. The thought of Christ's soon return and reunion with loved ones makes a big difference!

0 how sweet it will be on that wonderful day,

So free from all sorrow and pain;

With songs on our lips and with harps in our hands

To meet one another again! —E. H. Gates, alt.

UNION with Christ here, means REUNION with loved onesover There! —G.W.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20

Conrad Adenauer, former chancellor of West Germany, once told evangelist Billy Graham, "If Jesus Christ is alive, then there is hope for the world. If not, I don't see the slightest glimmer of hope on the horizon." Then he added, "I believe Christ's resurrection to be one of the best-attested facts of history"

Christ's resurrection and ours go together. Establish one, and the other is sure.

When Socrates lay dying, his friends asked, "Shall we live again?" He could only say, "I hope so." In contrast, the night before Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded, he wrote in his Bible, "From this earth, this grave, this dust, my God shall raise me up."

We who trust Christ don't have to say, "I hope so." Jesus' resurrection gives us a sure hope for our coming resurrection. —D J DeHaan

CHRIST'S EMPTY TOMB GIVES US FULL ASSURANCE OF HEAVEN.

1Corinthians 15:22 (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

THE PROMISE OF RESURRECTION

DEATH IS the precursor of life, and we cannot truly reach Easter unless we first descend into the grave. Blessed are they who descend thither in hope; their soul shall not be left in the land of shadow, nor will God permit His holy ones to see corruption. God will revive them, and they shall live. On the third day our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, and this is the foundation-hope for the world.

"Come, let us return unto the Lord." There is always resurrection, hope, and joy for those who repent of their sins. True repentance is a humble return to God; and as we draw nigh to Him, He meets us with healing and salvation. The result of His coming is like the dawn, or as the spring-rains. Light and joy, fertility and beauty are the immediate response of the soul to His advent.

Do you find yourself in the dark grave of circumstances? Be of good cheer. One of God's angels is on his way to roll away the stone. Though our Lord was crucified, yet on the third day God raised Him up, and He lives and reigns at the right hand of God; and we also may live with Him, by the same power, not in the other world only, but in this. God will raise you up, and you shall live in His sight. The best is yet to be!

"Let us follow on to know the Lord." We may always count on Him. If there is any variation in our relations with Him, it is on our side, not on His. Just as surely as we return to Him, we shall find Him coming to meet and greet and receive us with a glad welcome. When the prodigal was a great way off, his father saw him, and ran to meet him! Is there any doubt about our reception? No, there cannot be! God our Father is always waiting for us. In Him there is no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning. As certainly as we count on the day-spring may we count on God. Let your soul move towards Him out of the grave of doubt and despair, and on the third day--the Day of Resurrection, He will be revealed.

PRAYER

May our self-life be crucified with Christ, that His life may be manifest in us; and out of the grave may there spring a more complete resemblance to our Risen Saviour, so that all may see in us daily evidence of the Resurrection of our Lord. AMEN.

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 Colossians 2:13-15;

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus … who for the joy set before him endured the cross … and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Try to imagine first-century Rome, as you finally catch a glimpse of the victorious Roman general, wearing a purple toga with gold palm leaves sewn on it and a crown on his head, standing triumphantly in a great chariot. He's holding an eagle scepter as a symbol of the god Jupiter. Behind him follow his own troops, dressed in white, and behind them, the conquered leaders and enemies, naked, humiliated, and in chains. Once the procession winds through Rome, these pitiful captives will be sent to either a huge slave auction or a public execution.

A Roman triumph is the powerful image that Paul draws on to explain the significance of Christ's work on the cross. In verse 13, Paul says that we were made alive in Christ when we were raised with Him through faith. He also makes it clear that our being made alive was due to the forgiveness of our sins. Now he'll develop this more.

The “written code” in verse 14 has been understood in various ways, but it seems most likely that it refers to some type of written debt, or I.O.U. Paul seems to identify this with the obligations outlined under Mosaic law. Paul is not saying that the law is bad, but that its ability to convict individuals of failure to live up to those obligations, or debt, has been graciously canceled. This is how Paul explains forgiveness of sins—a cancellation of our debt before God through Jesus' death on the cross.

But Paul goes further in showing how we've been made alive. Formerly, we were held captive both by our sins and by spiritual powers and authorities (v. 15). This verse shows us what was actually happening on the cross. Although Satan and his forces thought they were victorious, God actually disarmed their power and vanquished them for all creation to see. Not even a Roman triumph could ever come close to this decisive victory.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today we see another reason that Jesus has all power and authority: His victory on the cross. Yet Jesus' rightful claim to lordship is frequently challenged. Some deny that anyone has absolute control over anything, or even that anyone should. Others say that we're the masters of our own lives.

The lordship of Christ is not popular today, but it's essential for us to know that He has conquered the very things that seek to conquer us.

1 Corinthians 15:26, 55

THE DESTRUCTION OF DEATH

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. 0 death, where is thy sting? 1 Corinthians 15:26, 55

During the last several weeks I have been receiving telephone calls from a girl who says she is sixteen years old and claims that the doctors have told her she has less than six months to live. She refuses to identify herself, informing me that she used to go to Sunday school but "didn't care about it very much and quit." The thought of dying gives her an eerie feeling; yet she has thus far rejected the Gospel, bitterly blaming God for her illness. I pray that I may be able to lead her to Christ.

Everything non-Christian thinkers have written about death is mere speculation, but the Gospel gives hope and certainty be-cause it is based upon things that really happened. The Lord Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for sin and took away death's sting. He rose from the grave to destroy its power. Though Paul still called it man's "last enemy," he assured us that we shall be victorious over it. True, the process of dying is neither pleasant to observe nor easy to contemplate. In fact, most of us shed tears when a loved one dies because death tears apart tender earthly ties. Yet death is a vanquished foe! Christ took its sting away when He paid the price for sin, and destroyed its power when He rose from the grave. It cannot truly harm the believer. Actually, it becomes a friend for one who knows the Lord Jesus. It can only close our eyes, kiss away our breath, and usher us into the presence of Christ. While its "shadow" is there, its sting is gone and its power is defeated. If you believe this, you are blessed indeed!

"Asleep in Jesus," 0 how sweet
To be for such a slumber meet!
With holy confidence to sing
That death hath lost its venomed sting! — Macay

Death for the Christian is not bane but blessing, not tragedy but triumph!—G.W.

1Corinthians 15:45 (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk).

JESUS, THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

ARE YOU, my friend, in the first Adam or the second? It is a vital question, and it would well repay you to put aside all else in order

to give a considered answer to this question. You ask for the fundamental difference between the first Adam and the second. The Apostle states it clearly in this chapter from which our text is taken. The contrast between the two is the soul-life of the first and the Spirit-life of the second. This is the distinction which Jesus made at the beginning of His ministry, and it pervades the New Testament. The sphere of Christianity is the realm of the spirit. Its object is to lift man from the soul-level to the spirit-level.

The soul is the centre of our personality. It is you, or I, or any other person! From it we look on two worlds. To the Matterial world we are related by the organs of touch, sight, smell, taste and hearing. To the eternal world we are related by the organs of the spirit, which are probably identical with the lower. We have the option of descending by the spiral staircase downward to Matterialism, or of ascending upward to fellowship with God. Alas, that too often we descend to the lure of the savoury pottage, instead of climbing the ladder which reaches to Heaven.

It is clear that we must die to the self-life, to the promptings, suggestions and solicitations of the ego, which is entrenched in the soul. Self is the root of our alienation from the Life of God. All the evils of fallen angels and man have their birth in the pride of self. On the other hand, all the blessedness of the heavenly life is within our reach, when the self-life is nailed to the Cross of Jesus.

How is this self-life to be brought to death? Only by our identification with the Cross on which Jesus died. We were nailed there in the purpose of God, and we must accept that position and extract its help by a living faith. It was by the Eternal Spirit that Jesus offered Himself unto God, and it is by that same Spirit that we, too, may say: "I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." There must be an exchange of lives, from the self-life to the life of the Crucified and Ascended Saviour, communicated by the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER - Behold, O Lord, I am Thy servant, prepared for all things; for I desire not to live unto myself, but unto Thee; and Oh, that I could do it worthily and perfectly! AMEN.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. - 1 Corinthians 15:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the classic movie It's a Wonderful Life, set during the Great Depression, George Bailey (played by James Stewart) gets a chance to see what life in his small town would be like if he had never been born. George steps in and helps the residents of Bedford Falls when the greedy banker, Mr. Potter, refuses to do so. When the situation seems hopeless, George believes that the world would be better without him. That's when an angel shows George just what that would have been like. In the process, George realizes how thankful he is for what he actually does have in life, especially for his family.

Many people consider this film to be one of the best ever made. It's certainly teaches valuable lessons about having the right perspective and being grateful. At the same time, to truly have the right view on life, we need to ask another question altogether. What would life be like if Christ had not been actually, literally, physically raised from the dead?

This was apparently the question that the Corinthians were grappling with. Although Greeks, including those in Corinth, had some ideas about the immortality of the soul, the concept of bodily resurrection was new and difficult to grasp. Throughout 1 Corinthians 15, Paul outlines the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and the supreme importance of this truth for faith. In the process, he presents and refutes several objections that were evidently being raised among the Corinthians.

Although the events surrounding the Second Coming are partly a “mystery” (v. 51), Paul makes it clear that believers will be raised bodily when Christ returns. Those who have already died and those who do not “sleep” will be changed instantaneously at the sound of the trumpet. The power of sin and the sting of death will be ended forever. This is the eternal victory won by Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you ever thought about what life would be like if there were no resurrection? Perhaps you've been a believer for a while and haven't considered this question recently. Or maybe you've just become a Christian and can easily remember your thinking prior to the certainty of your being raised from the dead. Reread today's passage, and even all of 1 Corinthians 15, and consider what life would be like if there were no resurrection. Then join with Paul in giving thanks to God for our victory in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

One day an assistant of the famous chemist Michael Faraday accidentally knocked a little silver cup into a beaker of very strong acid. In almost no time the silver object disappeared. The great chemist was summoned. He quickly put a certain chemical into the jar, and in a moment every particle of silver came together at the bottom. Removing the s0.0hapeless mass, he sent it to a silversmith, who recreated a cup that shone as bright as ever.

What Michael Faraday did in his laboratory is but a small picture of what our mighty God will do on resurrection day for all His saints. He will miraculously restore the bodies of all who have died in Christ. This is the mystery the apostle Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 15. He said that when Christ returns, the living saints will be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and the dead will be raised with incorruptible bodies. The apostle wrote, ".then shall be brought to pass the saying., Death is swallowed up in victory." I like to think that Paul imagined hearing the triumphant voices of the saints on that great day. Those who do not die will be instantly changed, and will exclaim, "O death, where is thy sting?" Those who rise from the tomb in resurrection bodies will shout, :"O grave, where is thy victory?" What a marvelous picture of triumph! How the saints will radiate the glory of the Lord on resurrection day as they are changed into His perfect likeness!

In an age of doubt and skepticism, let us affirm with joyous confidence the words of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the resurrection of the body!" - H. G. Bosch

1 Corinthians 15:55-58

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" - 1 Corinthians 15:55

TODAY IN THE WORD

For just under $200,000, an Arizona foundation will arrange for a person's remains to be preserved by cryonics, a chemically treated freezing process, immediately after death. The funds are also designated to pay for the revitalizing procedure, which will commence as soon as three scientific advances have been discovered: a cure for whatever caused the person's death, a way to stop the aging process for all mankind, and an antidote for the poison used to preserve the body.

The company has only been in operation since 1972, but had the procedure been available in Paul's day, he probably wouldn't have wasted his money. Since the sting of death is sin and the power of death is the law (v. 56), Paul knew that no scientist could ever produce the remedy for either.

Throughout chapter 15, Paul discusses the reality of the resurrection of Christ and, through Him, the assurance of the resurrection of all who believe in His name. Today's reading delivers the powerful conclusion to his argument in this chapter. Quoting the prophet Hosea, Paul pronounces death powerless (v. 55).

From what we've studied so far in Ecclesiastes, death has been shown as the great equalizer that conquers all men, rendering their labor on earth meaningless. But Paul claims triumphantly in verse 57 that through Jesus Christ, God gives us victory over death. We see in verse 58 that the promise of escaping death should dramatically alter our approach to life.

The assurance of life after death shouldn't just make us feel better, it should make us live better, too! But when Paul talks about giving ourselves to "the work of the Lord," what exactly does he mean? Paul used a similar phrase earlier when discussing his work as an apostle. He said to the believers in Corinth, "Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?" (9:1). Throughout chapter 9, he makes it clear that his main task was simply to preach the gospel.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Even if you have a job that isn't directly related to preaching the gospel, you can still give yourself "fully to the work of the Lord." Paul did

1 Corinthians 15:56

Death's Defeat - A small frail girl sat playing in her room when she heard a noise of a thing that could bring her almost instant death. For you see, she had been stung by a bee at and early age and had almost died. Since that day she had been very sickly and the doctors said that another attack could mean her death. At the sound of the bee's buzz a wave of distress came over her and she began to sob and call out for help. Hearing the sound of his child's cry, the little girl's father came rushing into the room to discover what the matter was.

After quickly looking about the room he found the cause of her trouble and with a quick movement he snatched it out of the air and held it in his hand. A moment or two later he released the insect back into the air.

With and audible gasp his daughter looked questioningly up at her father and asked him why he would release it again since it could mean her death if it should sting her.

> Don't be afraid my child. he said while opening his hand See here in my hand. Here is the stinger that could harm you. I have taken the sting for you and now it cannot hurt you and the bee itself will soon die.

We all suffer under the curse of sin like the little girl from the first sting and the next sting from death would mean our ultimate

demise. But we have a savior that came to our rescue and took the sting for us and we no longer have to fear death. Though it buzz over us and land on us it can do no harm and one day death itself will die.

1 Corinthians 15:55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

1 Corinthians 15:56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

What an expression—"the sting of death"! And according to our text, it is sin. But Jesus removed the sting by dying on the cross and paying the price for our sins.

While walking in the field one day with my two young sons, a bee from one of my hives made a beeline for the elder boy and stung him just above the eye. He quickly brushed it away and threw himself in the grass, kicking and screaming for help. The bee went straight for the younger son and began buzzing around his head. The next thing I knew he too was lying in the grass, yelling at the top of his lungs. But I picked him up and told him to stop crying. "That bee is harmless," I assured him. "It can't hurt you. It has lost its sting." I took the frightened lad over to his elder brother, showed him the little black stinger in his brow, and said, "The bee can still scare you, but it is powerless to hurt you. Your brother took the sting away by being stung." Then I explained 1 Corinthians 15:56 by telling them that the sting of death is sin. But our Elder Brother the Lord Jesus hung on the cross and took the sting out of death by dying in our place. Since the law demands satisfaction only once, death is powerless to hurt us if we accept the work of Christ in our behalf. The unbeliever is filled with fear because he must face God with his sin. But for us, death's sting is gone; it was left in Jesus. Death may still buzz around and scare us at time, but it can no longer harm us. A good verse for you to memorize Romans 4:8. -- M R DeHaan

1 Corinthians 15:55 (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

VICTORY OVER DEATH

IN THIS marvellous chapter, Isaiah sings a Song of Hope, as he sees the return of the Hebrew people from captivity, and the overthrow of their foes. The Apostle Paul takes up this thought in 1 Cor. 15. He shows that death is the penalty of sin, and it is by the demands of the law that sin is stirred to activity. But Christ has satisfied and met the claims of the law, and gives power by which we are enabled to obey it; therefore the strength of sin is broken, and the sting of death is gone.

The Christian need not dread to die. For him there is no uncertainty about the future. There is no fear of what may come after death, for the condemnation of the law has been met and borne. We may apostroPhilse death in these exultant words. The viper has been deprived of its fangs! the prison-house cannot hold its inMattes! Bunyan describes Satan as exhorting Captain Sepulchre to be sure to hold Christ, but the injunction was useless. No bars or bolts, no seal or sentry would suffice.

Notice that we are to "Put on" incorruption and immortality (1Co15:53-54). It is as though the new body will be put on over the old, and as this takes place, all the elements of the old body will be swallowed up and absorbed. when the Holy Spirit completes his work in our souls, there will be no trace of the old rags left in the shining robes in which we shall be arrayed as we go forth to meet the welcome of our Lord. Death to those who believe in Christ is now only a Home-going; the falling asleep to open the eyes in the City of God; the loosening of the anchor, to float down stream in the full tide. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

PRAYER - O God, whensoever Thy ways in nature or in the soul are hard to be understood, then may our quiet confidence, our patient trust, our loving faith in Thee be great, and as children knowing that they are loved, cared for, guarded, kept, may we with a quiet mind at all times put our trust in the unseen God. So may we face life without fear, and death without fainting. AMEN.

1 Corinthians 15:58

Newspaper copy editor Robert Manry piloted the smallest ship ever to sail the Atlantic Ocean. The trip aboard the Tinherbelle was long and difficult. He dared not sleep in the shipping lanes. The rudder broke several times. He was washed overboard often, saved only by the rope he had tied to himself and to his 13-foot vessel. Finally, after 78 days, Manry approached Falmouth, England. He thought only of tying up to some dock, finding a hotel room, and getting some sleep. But an enthusiastic crowd had other ideas. A fleet of about 300 small boats came out to greet him, all blowing their horns in salute. Forty thousand well-wishers lined the docks, cheering him on. What a welcome he received!

Something like that awaits faithful Christians who have weathered life's storms and remained true to the Savior. When these believers finally reach heaven's shore, they will be given an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom where they will come into the presence of Christ Himself. —D. C. E.

GAINING HEAVEN MORE THAN COMPENSATES FOR THE LOSSES OF EARTH.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

An article in Workstyle magazine emphasized the importance of getting ready for a trip beforehand. It gave guidelines on carrying the right amount of clothing, selecting the kind you will need, and being prepared for variations in weather. It gave specific directions for packing a suitcase by rolling garments into "logs," folding sweaters a certain way, and properly packing shirts or dresses. The article suggested that a person who is going on a journey should spend quality time in preparation. If he does, he'll be ready to go.

There are some parallels in the Christian's preparation for the journey to heaven, It would be unwise, for example, to wait until the hour of departure to start thinking about the journey We must get ready now. We need to spend quality time preparing for the day we meet the Lord. We can best do this by investing our life in doing God's will, Concluding his instruction on the resurrection, the apostle Paul advised believers to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). As we do, we will be packing for heaven. —D. C. E.

HEAVEN IS A PREPARED PLACE FOR A PREPARED PEOPLE

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

A PREACHER who was growing weary in the ministry had a dream. He saw himself pounding away at a huge chunk of granite with a pickax. It was his job to break it into small pieces. But as hard as he tried, he couldn't chip off even a tiny piece. At last, tired and disappointed, he decided to give up.

Just then a stranger appeared and said, "Weren't you given orders to do that work? Your duty is to give it your best regardless of what happens." The minister, with renewed determination, grabbed the pickax, lifted it high in the air, and gave the granite a crushing blow. It broke into a thousand pieces.

The dream helped the preacher realize the importance of not giving up. Perhaps the next "blow" will be the one that makes a life-and-death difference in someone's spiritual life.

The Lord wants us to keep working at our God-given task no matter how difficult it might be. Even when success seems remote or impossible, we are to remain steadfast, assured that there will be an ample reward for those who persevere.

It is easy to grow tired in our service for the Lord. We may even become so discouraged that we're tempted to quit. At such times, it is good to remember God's promise spoken by the apostle Paul: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).—R W DeHaan

Rescued

January 31, 2013

Rescued

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 20-25 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 25-26; Matthew 20:17-34

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. —Acts 16:31

Manuel Gonzalez was the first rescue worker to reach the 33 miners trapped for 69 days in a Chilean mine explosion in 2010. At great risk to his own life, he went underground more than 2,000 feet to bring the trapped men back to the surface. The world watched in amazement as one by one each miner was rescued and transported to freedom.

The Bible tells us of an even more amazing rescue. Because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, all of mankind is trapped in sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:6,19; Rom. 5:12). Unable to break free, everyone faces certain death—physically and eternally. But God has provided a Rescuer—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Everyone who accepts the free gift of salvation offered through His death and resurrection is freed from sin’s grip and its resulting death penalty (Rom. 5:8-11; 10:9-11; Eph. 2:1-10).

Jesus Christ is the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). He was the first to be raised from the dead, never to die again. Likewise, all will be given life who put their faith in Christ (Rom. 8:11).

Are you still trapped in your sins? Accept Jesus’ gift of salvation and enjoy the freedom of life in Christ and eternity with Him (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13).

Thinking It Over

What keeps you from calling out to God for spiritual rescue? Do you fear that you are too bad for God’s grace? Read and think about Romans 3:23-26.

Through His cross, Jesus rescues and redeems.

It's Not Man-Made

February 5, 2000

It's Not Man-Made

Read: Galatians 1:6-12 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 36-38; Matthew 23:1-22

The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. —Galatians 1:1

A popular British magazine printed an article a few years ago titled “Create Your Own Personal Religion.” The author wrote, “I just cannot understand how people can devote themselves to a single religion and expect it to answer all their prayers and cater to all their needs. I do not doubt that Jesus was the Son of God, but I think there were also many other sons—and daughters—of God.” She concluded, “I’ve become a sort of theological magpie, taking bits from different religions which happen to suit my needs.”

In the early church, the Galatian Christians knew the true gospel, but false teachers perverted it by claiming that a person must keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. The apostle Paul said that such a claim was a man-made, false gospel. He sought to remedy its detrimental effect on believers by defending the authority of the true gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). And what is the true gospel? Paul made it clear in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. He said it is the truth that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again.

You cannot create your own way of salvation. Make sure you’ve put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6).

There aren't many ways into heaven;

The Bible says there's only one:

Confessing Christ Jesus as Savior,

Believing in God's only Son. —Sper

Christ's sacrifice was what God desired and what our sin required.

He Paid The Toll

September 23, 1996

He Paid The Toll

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Song of Solomon 1-3; Galatians 2

Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. —Romans 5:9

My daughter Ann and her family were about to cross the Mackinac Bridge into Michigan’s Upper Peninsula when a wild storm hit. High winds forced authorities to close the world’s longest suspension bridge. When it finally opened, a long string of cars crossed over.

Ann and her family drove up to the booth to pay the toll, but the attendant said, “You don’t need to pay. The guy in front of you paid your toll for you.” As they watched the taillights of the minivan in front of them disappear, they knew they had no chance to thank the generous driver.

This reminded me of the enormous price that was required for our entrance into heaven—a price we could never pay. But as that driver ahead paid the toll for my daughter, so One has paid the price for our safe entrance into heaven. Jesus paid the full “toll.” He shed His blood on the cross to satisfy the demands of a holy God (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Christ redeemed us by His death, and now by faith we can be freed of the penalty of our sin and be allowed to enter heaven.

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, accept the payment He made for you on the cross. There is no other way to be reconciled to God.

Our salvation is free because Christ paid an enormous price.

Empty Proof

August 8, 1997

Empty Proof

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 74-76; Romans 9:16-33

He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. —1 Corinthians 15:4

In the days after the French Revolution, a man tried to start a new religion that he believed was superior to Christianity. But he was disappointed at his lack of success. He revealed his frustration to a clergyman and asked what he could do.

The clergyman replied that it was no easy task to begin a new religion—so difficult that he had nothing to suggest. But after a moment's reflection, he said, "There's one plan that you might want to consider. Why don't you get yourself crucified and rise again the third day?"

The firm foundation of the Christian faith is an empty tomb. The New Testament declares that the death of Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. But how can anyone know for sure that Christ's crucifixion was acceptable to God? It doesn't matter much what we think of the death of Jesus; what matters is what God thinks about it.

God's approval of Christ's sacrifice is proven by the resurrection. It stands as God's signed receipt that He is completely satisfied. Without the resurrection, Christianity has nothing much to offer the world. But the fact that Christ died and then rose from the grave "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

When Jesus Christ was crucified,

He paid sin's penalty;

His rising from the grave revealed

His death's sufficiency. —Sper

The resurrection is the Father's "amen" to the Son's "it is finished."

Still New

December 26, 2007

Still New

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Haggai 1-2; Revelation 17

I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you. —1 Corinthians 15:1

Did you ever notice how quickly things get old or outdated?

I thought about this the other day as I taught my class at a Christian college. They're on the cutting edge by providing a laptop computer for each student. It wasn't too long ago when it was innovative for a college to have computers for students in the library. Then it was cutting edge to provide them for dorm rooms. But someday even personal laptops will become obsolete as well.

Everything man creates will eventually go out of date. Everything gets old. Everything, that is, but the gospel. The gospel is over 2,000 years old. And though there have been a lot of updated Bible translations, the gospel is still as relevant today as it was when it was written.

The gospel is this: Jesus Christ came to earth, lived a perfect life, gave up His life by being sacrificed on a cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb, and was raised from the dead 3 days later (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Because He took our punishment for sin on Himself, He can forgive our sins and make us children of God if we put our faith and trust in Him (Acts 13:38-39).

Let the greatest story ever told make you brand-new—forever. It's the story that never grows old.

O cleansing Word, O precious Word,

Thy promises are true;

They are the "Amen" in my life;

Thy truths are ever new. —Anon.

The gospel never grows old.

Not A Myth

July 29, 2012

Not A Myth

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 7-9

After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:6

I'm fascinated with history, so I eagerly watched a television special on England's great King Arthur. A theme surfaced as each historian acknowledged that there were no eyewitness accounts nor historical evidence to support the story of King Arthur, his knights, and their Round Table. Repeatedly, the story was referred to as "legend" or "mythology." It appears that the story is merely a legend woven together over centuries from fragments of other stories.

The good news of the gospel, however, is not rooted in mythology or legend but in verified fact, and it's the greatest story ever told. Paul wrote that the most important event in human history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ—is supported by actual eyewitnesses. While listing disciples who had seen the risen Christ, Paul punctuated the list of eyewitnesses by writing, "After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:6). At the time of Paul's writing, many of those witnesses were still alive and available for questioning.

The resurrection of Christ is not a myth. It is the factual pivot-point of history.

Up from the grave He arose,

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;

He arose a Victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever with His saints to reign. —Lowry

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best attested fact of ancient history. —Arnold

Proof Positive

April 3, 1994

Proof Positive

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Judges 19-21; Luke 7:31-50

Jesus our Lord … was raised because of our justification. —Romans 4:24-25

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most well-established events in history. Paul cited as irrefutable evidence the more than 500 eyewitnesses who saw Jesus after He arose, most of whom were still alive when the apostle wrote to the Corinthians.

Just as certain is the fact that Christ's sacrifice on the cross of Calvary fully paid the penalty for the sin of all mankind, so that everyone who trusts Him as Savior receives forgiveness. And it is Christ's resurrection that guarantees this. If just one sin had been unatoned for, Jesus would not have come out of the tomb.

In his book The Resurrection of Jesus the Christ, Fred John Meldau underscores the significance of Jesus' resurrection by describing Israel's annual Day of Atonement ritual. Meldau writes, "If [the High Priest] offered correctly, he came forth in due time; but … if he failed to offer correctly, he died there behind the veil. In like manner, the coming forth of Jesus the Christ, in His resurrection, after His atonement for our sins on the cross, shows that His offering was accepted. The empty tomb is God's 'Amen' to Christ's 'It is finished.'"

When Christ emerged from the tomb, our sin was completely paid for. His resurrection was proof positive!

Jesus rose, and proved His power

By that rising glorious;

From the mighty grasp of death

He came forth victorious. —Anon.

Christ's empty tomb guarantees our full salvation.

Our Image Problem

October 6, 1994

Our Image Problem

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 26-27; Philippians 2

By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. —1 Corinthians 15:10

People who clearly understand their own strengths and weaknesses are better able to accept themselves as they are and accomplish more in life. They can identify with the person who said, “I’m only someone, but I am someone. I can’t do everything, but I can do something.”

The apostle Paul recognized his liabilities, but he took his God-given assets and used them for eternal profit. His self-acceptance was based on God’s acceptance of him in Christ. God’s grace enabled him to affirm his apostleship while living with the painful memory of persecuting the church (1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:13-15).

Paul didn’t have a bad self-image when he called himself the “least of the apostles,” nor was it false humility that prompted him to say he was “not worthy to be called an apostle” (1 Cor. 15:9). Neither was it undue pride when he affirmed that he “labored more abundantly” than all of the other apostles (v.10). He was simply recognizing his human frailties while extolling the effectiveness of God’s grace. He knew he was able to serve God because he had been forgiven.

Trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord and being honest with ourselves will enable us to say, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” That’s a mature kind of self-acceptance.

We all have faults uniquely ours,

Those flaws that cause self-blame,

But God accepts us as we are,

And we must do the same. —DJD

Our value is not in what we do for God but in what Christ has done for us.

Would Or Did?

November 30, 2010

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 37-39; 2 Peter 2

Christ died for our sins … , was buried, and … rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. —1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Not many years ago, we watched as the “WWJD” craze swept through the Christian community. The bracelet-emblazoned theme “What Would Jesus Do?” was a valuable reminder to many people that we should consider the heart and mind of Jesus when making choices. As we seek to live in a way that honors the Savior, it is appropriate to measure our attitudes and decisions against the example our Lord set for us.

Recently, however, I was in a church where I saw a slightly different message. This church’s sign read, “WDJD—What Did Jesus Do?” That is indeed the more important question, because our salvation depends on it. Paramount among the remarkable deeds of the Son of God are the events described in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

What did Jesus do? He took the suffering and guilt for our wrongdoing and paid our penalty. He died and conquered death so we could live. And the fact is, we will never be able to fully consider what Jesus would do until we have embraced what He did do for us on the cross.

To follow Christ in all we do

Can be a worthy goal

If first we’ve put our trust in Him

To save our sinful soul. —Sper

We are saved not by what we do but by trusting what Christ has done.

Resurrection And Life

April 25, 2011

Resurrection And Life

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 21-22; Luke 18:24-43

I am the resurrection and the life. —John 11:25

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life”! It’s one thing to make such a bold assertion; it’s another to back it up—and back it up Jesus did by rising from the dead.

“If you believe that the Son of God died and rose again,” writes George MacDonald, “your whole future is full of the dawn of eternal morning, coming up beyond the hills of life, and full of such hope as the highest imagination for the poet has not a glimmer yet.”

The Son of God died and rose again, and His resurrection is the guarantee that God will bring us up and out of the ground: A thinking, feeling, remembering, recognizable person will live forever.

Living forever means living out the thought of eternity that God has placed in our hearts; meeting again one’s believing loved ones lost through separating death; living in a world without sorrow; seeing our Lord who loves us and gave everything to unite us to Him forever.

But I see another meaning. Since we have this life and the next, we don’t have to “have it all” now. We can live in broken and ruined bodies for a time; we can endure poverty and hardship for a while; we can face loneliness, heartache, and pain for a season. Why? There is a second birth—life in heaven forever.

Yes, Christ the Lord is risen,

Has come forth from the grave;

He breaks the chains of death for you

And now has power to save. —Woodruff

The resurrection is the foundation of our faith.

The Love Of God

April 25, 1996

The Love Of God

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-13 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 21-22; Luke 18:24-43

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. —John 3:16

This is divine love: Jesus loved not only His friends but also His enemies—the God-hating, Christ-murdering world.

Jesus said in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” That is as high as human love can go, to die for your friends and your own loved ones. I am willing to die for my wife or my children, but to be willing to give my son to die that my worst enemy might live would require divine love.

The Bible states, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:8-10).

Wonder of wonders! While we were His enemies and thirsting for the blood of His sinless Son, God loved us so much that He gave His Son, whom He loved above all else, to die on the cross that we might be saved. We cannot understand it, but thank God we can believe it. And when we do, we find the peace that nothing else can bring.

O the love that drew salvation's plan!

O the grace that brought it down to man!

O the mighty gulf that God did span

At Calvary! —Newell

It will take all eternity to measure the love of God.

Fact, Not Fable

March 27, 2005

Fact, Not Fable

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-19 | Bible in a Year: Judges 1-3; Luke 4:1-30

If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! —1 Corinthians 15:17

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Without it we have no hope for this life nor the life to come. That's why it is important to recognize that our belief in Christ's resurrection is not based on a religious feeling or unfounded rumor, but on historical fact with solid evidence to support it.

A century ago, a group of lawyers met in England to discuss the biblical accounts of Jesus' resurrection. They wanted to see if enough information was available to make a case that would hold up in a court of law. They concluded that Christ's resurrection was one of the most well-established facts of history.

In his book Countdown, G. B. Hardy offers some thought-provoking questions about the resurrection: "There are but two essential requirements: (1) Has anyone cheated death and proved it? (2) Is it available to me?" Hardy goes on to declare that only the tomb of Jesus is empty. And because Jesus conquered sin and death, we who put our faith in Him will share in His resurrection.

"If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile," Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:17. Historical evidence and countless changed lives testify that the resurrection of Jesus is a fact. Have you put your hope in the risen Christ?

Yes, Christ the Lord is risen,

Has come forth from the grave;

He breaks the chains of death for you

And now has power to save. —Woodruff

Christ's resurrection is more than a fact of history—it's the proof of our salvation.

King Of Our Lives

March 25, 2005

King Of Our Lives

Read: John 19:16-22 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 19-21; Luke 2:25-52

I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. —1 Corinthians 15:3

More than 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate commanded that a placard be placed on the cross that read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Perhaps Pilate sought to induce fear among the people and discourage them from crowning their own king.

King of the Jews. Was it an original thought at the time? Perhaps it had been introduced when the wise men asked, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2). They had sought the fulfillment of this promise: "For unto us a Child is born … ; the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). They believed Jesus was this Child.

Later, when Christ was crucified, some jeered, "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40). They wanted to see if Jesus really was King. But Jesus did not come down. The true meaning of the cross is that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3). He who paid the penalty of our sins has made God's forgiveness possible.

Those who accept God's forgiveness and ask Jesus Christ to be their Savior and Lord can have only one appropriate response—to serve Him. He is King of our lives.

King of my life I crown Thee now—

Thine shall the glory be;

Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow,

Lead me to Calvary. —Hussey

Jesus is King of our lives, so we must serve Him all of our lives.

A Dead Man Cannot Save

August 11, 1996

A Dead Man Cannot Save

Read: Acts 2:22-36 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 81-83; Romans 11:19-36

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and … rose again the third day. —1 Corinthians 15:3-4

A young boy stood outside an art store looking intently at a painting of Jesus on the cross. A man approached and asked, “Do you know who that is?”

The boy answered, “Yes, sir, that is Jesus the Savior who died on the cross to save me. Those people around Him are the soldiers who killed Him. And that woman who is crying was His mother.”

The man patted the boy on the head and walked away. He had not gone far when he felt a tug on his sleeve. The same little fellow he had spoken to moments before said, “Please, sir, I forgot to tell you something else. Jesus is not on that cross anymore. He is alive because He rose again. He is in heaven today.”

That youngster knew the living Savior who died and rose and lives today. He knew the truth of the gospel.

The climax of the gospel is the resurrection. Every sermon preached by the apostles included the news that Jesus is not dead. Today, no matter how eloquent a sermon may be, it is not the gospel if it leaves Jesus on the cross or in the tomb. A dead man can save no one.

Do you personally know and boldly proclaim the living Savior?

I will sing of my Redeemer

And His heavenly love for me;

He from death to life has brought me,

Son of God, with Him to be. —Bliss

The good news is not that Jesus lived and died, but that He died and lives.

An Instructed Faith

May 6, 2000

An Instructed Faith

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3 | Bible in a Year: 1 Kings 21-22; Luke 23:26-56

Christ died for our sins … , He was buried, and … He rose again the third day. —1 Corinthians 15:3-4

When I witness to people about Christ, I often hear this response: “I’m all right, I have a strong faith.” But our discussions soon reveal that all they have is faith in faith. Genuine saving faith, though, is based on the truth of God’s Word.

Billy Graham made this clear during an interview on a TV talk show. He said he eagerly anticipates death because he expects to be with Jesus. He went on to explain that his confidence rests on what the Bible says about Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection. The interviewer, an agnostic who admits his fear of death, respectfully said, “You’re not afraid because you know something I don’t know.”

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3 reveals the need for a God-instructed faith. It depicts the unpleasant side of life: injustice everywhere and the inevitability of death (3:16,18-21). It expresses that nonbelievers, seeing no reason for hope, must conclude that nonexistence is

better than life (3:22-4:3). But it also shows the believer's confidence that God will ultimately make all things right (3:17).

A Bible-instructed faith focuses on Christ—His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Only that kind of faith can bring salvation and comfort. And it gives us confidence that we will spend eternity in heaven.

The godless ponder death with fear—

For what's ahead they cannot see;

But those who put their faith in Christ

Look forward to eternity. —Sper

To put your fears to rest, put your faith in Christ.

The Cross Speaks

March 25, 2004

The Cross Speaks

Read: Acts 2:22-39 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 19-21; Luke 2:25-52

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and … rose again the third day. —1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Crosses decorate church steeples and designate burial places. Sometimes they mark the spot where people died in highway accidents. And they are often worn as jewelry.

Crosses remind people of Jesus Christ. I was made aware of this when a businessman, seeing a small gold cross on the lapel of my jacket, asked me, "Why are you a believer in Christ?" I was glad for the opportunity to share my faith with him.

Jesus died on the cross for us, but we don't worship a dead Savior. Our Lord's body was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb, and then on the third day He emerged in a glorified body.

The cross speaks to us of the total picture—our Lord's atoning death to pay the price for our sins, as well as His glorious resurrection to deliver us from the power of death.

If it were not for what Christ did on the cross, we would all stand guilty before God and hopeless in the face of death. But through faith in Him, we receive the forgiveness of all our sins and the assurance that death cannot hold us.

Have you looked at the cross and placed your trust in the One who died there? It's the only sure and perfect remedy for guilt and fear.

The cross of Christ—the crossroads to heaven or hell.

The Real Deal

August 31, 2013

The Real Deal

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-21 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 132-134; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

[Christ] rose again the third day … [and] was seen by over five hundred brethren. —1 Corinthians 15:4-6

Sometimes cleaning out Grandpa's attic pays off. For an Ohio man, it paid off in the discovery of a more than 100-year-old set of mint-condition baseball cards. Appraisers placed the cards' value at $3 million.

One key to the high value of those cards was the fact that they were well-preserved. But beyond that, the true worth of the cards rested in the fact that they were authentic. If they had been fakes or counterfeits—no matter how good they looked—they wouldn't have been worth the cardboard they were printed on.

The apostle Paul had something similar to say about Christianity. He said that our faith would be completely worthless and counterfeit if Jesus' resurrection were not the real deal. It took bravery and confidence in God's plan for Paul to say, "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty" (1 Cor. 15:14) and "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (v.17).

The Christian faith rests on the authenticity of this story: Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead. Praise God for the clear evidence of Jesus' death and resurrection (vv.3-8). It's the real deal, and we can stake our eternity and our total dependence on God on its truth.

Lord, we're eternally thankful for the truth

confirmed in Your Word and in our hearts that

You died and rose again for us. We love You, Lord,

and lift our voices in praise!

God is the only true God.

Responsibility

February 13, 1995

Responsibility

Read: Acts: 26:1-23 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 14; Matthew 26:51-75

I am … not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. —1 Corinthians 15:9

When God confronted Adam for eating from the forbidden tree, Adam blamed Eve (Gen. 3:12). Ever since then, people have tried to avoid taking responsibility for their actions by shifting the blame to others or to circumstances beyond their control.

Today the art of blaming others has reached new levels. In a television interview a high-ranking government official said that pro-life advocates are ultimately responsible for the 1.6 million abortions that occur annually in the United States. He argued that if those who oppose abortion would simply volunteer to take the babies into their homes, mothers wouldn't have to abort them.

If you follow this line of reasoning, the woman who chooses to have an abortion because a baby would inconvenience her life is not responsible for the death of her child. The unwritten rule seems to be: "Never blame offenders for their wrongs. Those responsible are the people who want to punish them for their crimes." How contrary to the Scriptures, which teach that God holds each of us accountable for what we do!

The apostle Paul showed us how we should respond. He admitted the awfulness of his sin, and he recognized how gracious God had been to him (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

Thank You, Lord, for giving us a mind and the ability to choose between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Help us to accept responsibility and seek Your forgiveness when we make the wrong choices.

If you make an excuse for sin, your sin will not be excused.

The Resurrection

April 12, 1997

The Resurrection

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 19-21; Luke 11:29-54

[Jesus] was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. —Romans 4:25

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the keystone of the arch of salvation. Remove it and the whole structure of the plan of salvation crumbles in the dust.

The good news of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), and that He rose again (v.4). The resurrection of Christ is the proof that His death atoned for sin.

The wages of one single sin is death. One sin brought the curse of death upon all mankind (Rom. 5:12-15). If Jesus had paid for all the sins of mankind except one, He could not have risen, for one sin would have been enough to keep Him in the tomb.

When Jesus arose, it was proof that He had completely met redemption's price. When He cried, "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30), the work was fully done. God was satisfied and then proved the completeness of the work by raising Christ from the dead.

This victory should not only be commemorated on a special day each year but on the first day of every week—even every day! Because Christ did not remain in the tomb but conquered death by rising again, we can live in the joy of the full salvation provided by a risen, living, coming Redeemer.

What has that empty sepulcher to say to you and me?

It tells us that the Savior's death has set His people free;

He died, our sins upon Him laid;

He rose, because the debt was paid. —Reich

The resurrection assures what Calvary secures.

Saving Ourselves

January 24, 2007

Saving Ourselves

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 9-11; Matthew 15:21-39

If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. —2 Timothy 2:11

Inside, music was playing. Outside, leaves were falling. Catching a gust of wind, one of the last leaves of autumn blew briefly upward as I heard the phrase, “He is risen!” By the end of the song, however, the leaf had reached the ground. Gravity had overcome the breeze.

Later, I overheard three middle-aged women discussing diets, exercise, face-lifts, and other age-defying efforts. Like the leaf, they were trying to keep gravity from pulling them toward the inevitable.

Their conversation reminds me of the good works people do to try to save themselves from spiritual death. But just as leaves cannot keep from falling and people cannot keep from aging, no one can work hard enough to avoid the consequences of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23).

At the crucifixion, mockers challenged Jesus to save Himself. Instead, He put His life into the hands of God, and God gave back to Him not only His own life but ours as well. To receive salvation, we too must simply put our lives into the hands of God, for if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, He will give life to us as well (Rom. 8:11).

The forces of sin outside cannot defeat the life of Christ inside.

Thank You, Jesus, for Your willingness

to surrender to Your Father’s will.

For if You had chosen to save Yourself,

You could not have saved me. Amen.

Salvation isn’t turning over a new leaf; it’s receiving a new life.

Fear Or Faith?

October 28, 1998

Fear Or Faith?

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 15-17; 2 Timothy 2

Jesus Christ … has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. —2 Timothy 1:10

You may have never heard the name of Sir Isaiah Berlin. When he died in 1997, Arthur Schlesinger eulogized him in Newsweek as “very likely the most sparkling man of the 20th century.” Born in Latvia, Berlin eventually became an Oxford professor and was noted for his extraordinary academic achievements. He was admired by people from every level of society.

Ironically, in that same issue of Newsweek Sir Isaiah was quoted as saying, “I’m afraid of dying, for it could be painful. But I find death a nuisance. I object to it … I’m terribly curious. I’d like to live forever.”

In candidly expressing his feelings about death, that famous thinker admitted he was no different from ordinary people. All his learning could not free him from our common abhorrence. Like all of us, he was held in bondage by the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

Simple faith in Jesus Christ can do for us what great learning cannot. When we believe in Him and His death-conquering resurrection, the dread of death vanishes. We can be certain about heaven because our Savior guarantees us eternal life (Jn. 11:25-26). Because He lives, we who trust in Him will live forever in the joy and glory of His fellowship! (Jn. 14:19).

So when my latest breath

Shall rend the veil in twain,

By death I shall escape from death

And life eternal gain. —Montgomery

Only the fear of God can remove the fear of death.

A Sure Hope

April 11, 2004

A Sure Hope

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 17-18; Luke 11:1-28

Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:20

Konrad Adenauer, former chancellor of West Germany, said, “If Jesus Christ is alive, then there is hope for the world. If not, I don’t see the slightest glimmer of hope on the horizon.” Then he added, “I believe Christ’s resurrection to be one of the best-attested facts of history.”

Christ’s resurrection and ours go together. So reasoned the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. And if Christ didn’t rise from the grave, what’s left? Empty preaching (v.14), false witnesses (v.15), a futile faith (v.17), unforgiven sins (v.17), no life after death (v.18), and hopelessness (v.19).

But Christ did rise from the grave. Paul asserted the proof for the resurrection in verses 1 through 11, listing many credible witnesses who saw the risen Lord: Peter (v.5), 500 people (v.6), all the apostles (v.7), and Paul himself (v.8).

When the Greek philosopher Socrates lay dying, his friends asked, “Shall we live again?” He could only say, “I hope so.” In contrast, the night before author and explorer Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded, he wrote in his Bible, “From this earth, this grave, this dust, my God shall raise me up.”

If we trust in Christ as our Savior, we won’t say, “I hope so” about our own resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection gives us a sure hope.

Rejoice in glorious hope!

Our Lord the Judge shall come

And take His servants up

To their eternal home. —Wesley

Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our own.

Where Will Death Lead?

November 26, 2005

Where Will Death Lead?

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-26 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 27-29; 1 Peter 3

The sting of death is sin … But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 15:56-57

In AD 410, the Germanic barbarians known as the Goths sacked the city of Rome. During the invasion, many Christians were put to death in hideous and cruel ways.

In the midst of this tragedy, the great theologian Augustine (354-430) wrote his classic The City of God. His reflections, now nearly 16 centuries old, are still fresh today.

Augustine wrote, “The end of life puts the longest life on a par with the shortest … Death becomes evil only by the retribution which follows it. They, then, who are destined to die need not inquire about what death they are to die, but into what place death will usher them.”

For those who trust Jesus Christ, death is not a sheriff dragging us off to court, but a servant ushering us into the presence of a loving Lord. The apostle Paul understood this. He looked at life and death from Christ’s perspective. Since he knew where death would take him, he could boldly declare, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Every Christian can have that same courage. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, we who place our faith in Him can look at death not as a period but a comma that precedes a glorious eternity with our Lord.

We never have seen, nor heard, nor imagined

The wonderful future the Lord has prepared

For those who will love and trust and receive Him—

This glorious truth He has plainly declared. —Hess

Death is not a period—it's only a comma.

Faith Rooted In History

February 17, 1997

Faith Rooted In History

Read: John 20:19-29 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 21-22; Matthew 28

If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. —1 Corinthians 15:17

Oliver Stone produced a movie about former US President John F. Kennedy. He fudged on the facts and then defended his actions by saying that what was really important was the story’s “mythic sense”—or his interpretation of the facts. Historical accuracy didn’t matter.

Some religious leaders of the first century apparently used a similar tactic in recounting the resurrection of Jesus. Influenced by pagan religions that minimized the reality of the physical world, they claimed that Jesus rose in a spiritual sense, not bodily.

To the apostle Paul, this idea was heresy. He wrote to the Corinthians about the importance of accurate historical evidence. He reminded them that Jesus had appeared to Peter, to the other apostles, to James, and to more than 500 others at the same time (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Most of those eyewitnesses were still alive and could testify that Jesus’ resurrection body was as real as the one He had before He died, though it possessed new powers.

Historical accuracy is crucial to the truthfulness of the Christian faith. The literal bodily resurrection supports Jesus’ deity, the sufficiency of His atoning death, and the hope of eternal life. Faith in Jesus is a faith in the Truth, the Truth that is rooted in history.

Our history is marked by the filling of books

With what we have thought, said, and done;

But one book, the Bible, reveals the true way—

It tells of the Savior, God's Son. —JDB

To know Christ is to know the truth.

Living For Eternity

October 18, 1996

Living For Eternity

Read: 2 Timothy 4:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 53-55; 2 Thessalonians 1

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. —1 Corinthians 15:19

In a letter to his brother, agnostic Robert G. Ingersoll reflected on his life. He wrote, “I feel that we have passed the crown of the hill, and that the milestones are getting nearer and nearer each other, and now and then I catch glimpses of the great wall where the road ends. A little while ago, I pressed forward; now I hold back. In youth we woo the future and clasp her like a bride; in age we denounce her as a fair and beautiful liar and wonder at the ease with which we were duped. Pursuing that which eludes, gazing at that which fades, hoping for the impossible, regretting that which is, fearing that which must be, and with [nothing] worth having save the bliss of love. And in the red heart of this white flower there is this pang: ‘It cannot last.’”

Compare those depressing words with the statement of Paul, who looked to the close of life with confidence because he knew Christ: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Do you know Jesus as your Savior? Are you living for Him? Then you can anticipate a glorious future!

God leads us in the path of righteousness

For His name's sake, and as we walk that way

We know it leads at last to heaven above,

To which our souls will rise one glorious day. —Hess

What we go after here determines where we go hereafter.

The Triumph Of Hope

April 17, 1995

The Triumph Of Hope

Read: Job 14:1-22 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 1-2; Luke 14:1-24

Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:20

A little over a month before he died, the famous atheist Jean-Paul Sartre declared that he so strongly resisted feelings of despair that he would say to himself, “I know I shall die in hope.” Then, in profound sadness, he would add, “But hope needs a foundation.”

The patriarch Job had a foundation—his faith in God. When he was suffering and feeling that death would come soon, he experienced mixed feelings—dread, despair, and hope. There were times when it seemed as if God was his enemy. Yet he kept believing that the Lord does right and loves His people. In the end, hope triumphed over despair!

During the past 45 years, I have ministered to the spiritual needs of scores of dying people. I’ve observed that many genuine believers experience the same mixture of feelings Job had. They dread dying. Death is an unwelcome intruder to those who must face it in youth or during their prime years. Yet even in these situations, those who live close to Christ receive grace to die in hope.

We who believe in Jesus base our hope on one of history’s best documented events—His resurrection. Moreover, when we “trust and obey,” our confidence in Him grows, and hope triumphs over dread and despair.

The Christian's hope is in the Lord,

He rests secure in His sure word;

And when he's tempted to despair,

He'll choose to trust God's love and care. —DJD

To live without god means to die without hope.

Empty Explanations

March 31, 1997

Empty Explanations

Read: Matthew 27:62-28:15 | Bible in a Year: Judges 11-12; Luke 6:1-26

Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:20

No element in the Easter story is more troubling to unbelievers than the report that the followers of Jesus found the tomb empty that Sunday morning.

Some simply deny it, saying that the women and others went to the wrong tomb. Others think that Jesus was not quite dead when He was buried, and somehow He revived and got out of the tomb—even though the Roman soldiers had declared Him dead (Jn. 19:33), an eyewitness saw blood and water flow from the pierced body (v.34), and His body had been wrapped tightly with strips of linen containing 100 pounds of spices (v.39).

In the first century, even Christ's enemies agreed that He had died and the tomb was empty. They bribed the guards to say that the disciples stole His body (Mt. 28:11-15).

Jesus rose from the grave in a real body, and that means everything to us. When a Christian friend or loved one dies, we can be confident that we will meet again. The body may turn to dust, but God will not forget it. It will be transformed into a body perfectly designed for heaven (1 Cor. 15:35-50). This is not wishful thinking. It is an expectation based on solid evidence.

Thank You, Lord, for the empty tomb of Jesus.

Crown Him the Lord of life,

Who triumphed o'er the grave,

Who rose victorious to the strife

For those He came to save. —Thring

The empty tomb is the foundation of our faith.

The Transaction

June 3, 2006

The Transaction

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10 | Bible in a Year: 2 Chronicles 19-20; John 13:21-38

Now is the day of salvation. —2 Corinthians 6:2

Can more than half of the US adult population be wrong? A survey by the Barna Research Group recently revealed that 54 percent say that people who are generally good and do enough good things for others will earn a place in heaven. That is just one of many methods people suggest as ways to merit entrance into God's eternal kingdom.

Let's think about what has to happen for a person to get to heaven, and why the "good works" idea falls short.

First, we must recognize that we are all born spiritually dead. In Ephesians 2:1, we are taught that we "were dead in trespasses and sins." The spiritual aspect of our existence was dead on arrival when we were physically born into this world. That soul, however, can be made alive. Paul described it like this: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

To be made alive, a transaction must take place. Something specific has to happen to turn what was dead into something alive. It is not triggered by good works but happens only when, by faith, you accept God's gift of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2; Ephesians 2:8).

Is your soul alive today? If not, make the transaction and accept God's wonderful gift.

Choose now, just now; your soul's at stake;

What will your answer be?

'Tis life or death; the choice you make

Is for eternity. —Anon.

Life's biggest decision is what you do with Jesus.

Your Flight Is Confirmed

July 31, 2013

Your Flight Is Confirmed

Read: Romans 3:21-26 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 54-56; Romans 3

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. —1 Corinthians 15:22

A heavy thunderstorm delayed our flight to Frankfurt, causing us to miss our connecting flight. We were told that we had been confirmed on another flight the next evening. But when we arrived at the gate, we were told that we were on standby. The flight was full.

When I learned this, I wondered if this was mere miscommunication or if this was how they dealt with missed flights. If passengers had been told up front that they were only on standby, they would have been unhappy. Perhaps they saved the truth until later.

Thankfully, God doesn't work that way. He clearly tells us everything we need to know to get to heaven. The Bible declares that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). God gave us the full picture of our sin nature from Genesis 3 so that He could give us His full and complete solution.

God's solution in Romans 3:24 is that we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." God sent His own sinless Son to die for our sins. His sacrifice on the cross provided us forgiveness. All we need to do is receive that free gift through faith. I'm so glad God told us the truth up front! He hasn't left us to find our own way.

Thank You, Almighty God, that You don't hide the

truth from us. You showed us how completely sin

has affected our lives in order to reinforce just

how much Jesus Christ has delivered us from.

Christ's work makes us safe; God's Word makes us sure.

Sunrise Hope

March 31, 2001

Sunrise Hope

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 | Bible in a Year: Judges 11-12; Luke 6:1-26

Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. —Mark 16:2

Think of what it would be like if we went to bed some night knowing that the sun would not rise again the next morning. Think of the coldness, the unending darkness, the inescapable fingers of death that would gradually move across the earth. Plants would wither, flowers would wilt, trees would die, and all of life would perish for lack of sunlight.

But praise God, the sun does rise every day. Its warm, life-giving light floods the earth. The "death" of a sunset each day is followed by the "resurrection" of a sunrise the next day—and our hope is renewed. Every morning the rays of the sun remind us that the long night of sin and darkness will give way to eternal day in heaven.

Even more sure than the rising of the morning sun is the certainty of our resurrection in Jesus Christ. The dark night of death came upon Him, and His lifeless body was laid in the tomb. But He arose! And in His resurrection is the promise of our own resurrection to life. The apostle Paul declared, "Even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

The next time you see the sun rise and watch its rays brighten the morning sky, let hope fill your heart. It is a reminder of your own sure resurrection!

Rejoice in glorious hope!

Our Lord the Judge shall come

And take His servants up

To their eternal home. —Wesley

Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our own.

The Death Of Death

October 25, 2001

The Death Of Death

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 6-8; 1 Timothy 5

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. —1 Corinthians 15:26

When I was about 8 years old, I tried to deny the reality of death. It happened at my grandmother's funeral. Seeing her lifeless body in the casket, I recall thinking, If that should ever happen to me, I'll just get up and walk away.

I am now almost 70, and I look at death differently. I've officiated at many funerals. I've said farewell to both of my parents, all of my aunts and uncles, and many friends. I can no longer deny the harsh reality of death. It rips apart life's closest bonds, leaves hearts broken, ushers in loneliness, and opens floodgates of tears. Using pleasant-sounding words and calling funeral services "celebrations" do not change that.

There is a greater reality, though, that can give us the will to go on living with hope. Jesus Christ broke the power of death. He did "get up and walk away" from the grave. And one day this "last enemy," as Paul called it, will be destroyed forever (1 Corinthians 15:26). He said it like this: "'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv.54-57).

Praise God! The death of death is sure!

Oh, death of Christ—the death of fear!

The death of condemnation!

Oh, life! His gift to trusting souls—

Eternal, free salvation! —F. Hess

Because of Christ's empty tomb, we can be full of hope.

Ants And Elephant Seals

January 28, 2005

Ants And Elephant Seals

Read: Proverbs 6:6-11 | Bible in a Year: Exodus 19-20; Matthew 18:21-35

Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. —1 Corinthians 15:34

Elephant seals spend most of their lives sleeping. Science News magazine reports, "Male elephant seals measure 16 feet from trunk-like nose to flipper, and they weigh about 3 tons. Occasionally, a seal will use a front flipper—incredibly tiny for such a massive creature—to scratch itself or flip sun-shielding sand on its body." Otherwise these huge animals are basically motionless.

The article goes on to state that because they don't eat while on land during the breeding season, they sleep most of the time. Besides scratching, dirt-flipping, or rolling over, these ponderous animals seldom move.

By contrast, the little ant seems tireless as it goes about its industrious work of storing up food for the colony. The writer of Proverbs commends the diligence of the ant, citing her active ways as a model for people who would live wisely.

There's a spiritual lesson here. Christians who pattern their service after the ant get things done for the Lord. But others, like the elephant seal, scarcely move. They seem to be barely alive spiritually, as if they are conserving their energy for some huge effort later on. But the time to get busy for Christ is now, even though our talents may seem insignificant.

Imitate the ant, not the elephant seal.

Lord Christ, we humbly ask

Of Thee the power and will

With fear and meekness every task

Of duty to fulfill. —Montgomery

Many Christians do nothing, but no Christian has nothing to do.

What Cancer Can't Do

March 4, 2001

What Cancer Can't Do

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 31-33; Mark 9:1-29

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 15:57

One of the most dreaded sentences a patient can hear is, “You have cancer.” These words bring a chill to the heart. Although great progress is being made in treating this disease, recovery can be long and painful, and many people do not survive.

An enthusiastic believer in Christ, Dan Richardson, lost his battle with cancer. But his life demonstrated that even though the physical body may be destroyed by disease, the spirit can remain triumphant. This poem was distributed at his memorial service:

Cancer is so limited …

It cannot cripple love,

It cannot shatter hope,

It cannot corrode faith,

It cannot eat away peace,

It cannot destroy confidence,

It cannot kill friendship,

It cannot shut out memories,

It cannot silence courage,

It cannot invade the soul,

It cannot reduce eternal life,

It cannot quench the Spirit,

It cannot lessen the power of the resurrection.

If an incurable disease has invaded your life, refuse to let it touch your spirit. Your body can be severely afflicted, and you may have a great struggle. But if you keep trusting God’s love, your spirit will remain strong.

Our greatest enemy is not disease, but despair.

Lifelong But Temporary

November 4, 1996

Lifelong But Temporary

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 32-33; Hebrews 1

The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. —1 Corinthians 15:42-43

When Paul Schneider was 2 years old, a medical specialist said that he would never walk or have understandable speech because of brain damage that occurred at birth.

Paul proved the experts wrong. He not only learned to walk, but he also earned a college degree and spoke to audiences more than 300 times.

Closest to Paul’s heart, though, was his love for Christ, the One who saved him from his sins and gave him the courage to persevere against enormous odds. And it was his hope in Christ that inspired the phrase he used to describe his cerebral palsy: “Lifelong but temporary.”

Paul Schneider’s outlook was rooted in 1 Corinthians 15. Because Jesus conquered sin and death and rose from the grave, He promises a new “spiritual body” to all who trust Him. This body will be free from all the imperfections of our current existence. It will be a transformed body, having abilities beyond anything we now know (Phil. 3:21).

In 1995 Paul Schneider entered the presence of Christ, finally free from his cerebral palsy. All Christians have the promise of receiving a new body at the resurrection. We may have a lifelong limitation that is physical, mental, emotional, or all three, but it is still only temporary.

Can we think it pleases His loving heart

To cause us a moment's pain?

Ah, no! But He sees, through the present cross,

The bliss of eternal gain. —Ingler

Heaven—no pain, all gain.

Dirty Windows

June 20, 1995

Dirty Windows

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 | Bible in a Year: Esther 1-2; Acts 5:1-21

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. —1 Thessalonians 4:14

The Shepherd’s Home in Wisconsin has a problem with dirty windows. Although many of its residents are severely disabled, they love Jesus and understand that He has promised to return someday and give them new bodies. “Every day,” said the superintendent, “some of them go to the windows and press their noses against the glass, looking for Him.”

The expectation of those precious people is genuine. Their irreversible mental and physical limitations fuel their longing for the day when they will be perfectly whole and free.

The Holy Spirit enables us to keep alive that same hope. And it is a sure hope because it rests on two events, one past and one future—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20), and the reality that He will return to this earth someday (1 Th. 4:13-18). Paul united both truths in today’s key verse (v.14).

When the going gets tough, we must resist the temptation to give up on life, or to find morbid pleasure in complaining. Instead, we must stay obedient to the Lord, renounce sin, and keep our eyes on the future (1 Cor. 15:33-34). Then we can rejoice in the certainty that in the world to come our painful trials will be no more.

Let’s keep looking for Christ’s return.

One day at death or Christ's return

We'll shed this earthly life of care;

And we who've known and loved the Lord

Will in His perfect likeness share. —DJD

The greatest joy on earth is the clear prospect of heaven.

Frozen Heads

February 25, 1994

Frozen Heads

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 12-14; Mark 5:21-43

[Christ] will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body. —Philippians 3:21

A newspaper article told about a California mathematician with a life-threatening brain tumor who wants to have his head quick-frozen while he is still alive. The process is known as cryonic suspension. The man believes that scientists will discover a way to cure his tumor and attach his head to a healthy body. He is quoted as saying, “Everyone should be immortal. I am dying and want to continue to live.”

We can’t fault that man for wanting to live forever in a healthy body. But we seriously question his method of fulfilling his desire. First, he has no assurance that this expensive procedure will work. Second, even if it did, its benefits would be only temporary. His new body and old head would die eventually.

There is a way, however, to secure all the benefits that he desires. It is to receive Jesus as his Savior. When Christ returns to this earth, everyone who has trusted in Him will get a new body that will last forever and never be subjected to disease or death. According to the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

With a new, glorified body guaranteed to those in Christ, who would want a “frozen head”?

He is coming! I shall know Him,

Jesus, my beloved Lord!

Changed forever to His likeness—

Oh, what joy this will afford! —Dimmock

Because Christ arose with a new body, we are guaranteed a new body.

Raised In Glory

February 13, 2007

Raised In Glory

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:42-49 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 14; Matthew 26:51-75

The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. —1 Corinthians 15:42

Years ago, I heard a story about a man looking for flowers for spring planting. At the greenhouse he came across a golden chrysanthemum, bursting with blooms. To his surprise, it was hidden in a corner and growing in an old, dented rusty bucket.

“If this were my flower,” he said to himself, “I would place it in a beautiful pot and display it proudly! Why is it confined in this old bucket and hidden away in this concealed place?”

When he remarked to the owner about the flower, she explained, “Oh, I started the plant in that old bucket until it blossomed. But it’s just for a short time. Soon I’ll transplant it to my garden.”

The man laughed, and imagined such a scene in heaven. “There’s a beautiful one,” God will say, “the product of My lovingkindness and grace. Now it’s confined in a broken body and in obscurity, but soon, in My garden, how tall and lovely this soul will stand!”

So we may now be “planted” in bent and battered containers for a short time while our Lord beautifies our souls. But, “as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Cor. 15:49). Then He will display His handiwork and our loveliness for all to see. This is our assurance and delight.

In bodies that will ne’er grow old,

We’ll reign with Him through years untold;

O precious thought: We all shall be

With Christ through all eternity. —Watson

While God is preparing a place for us, He is preparing us for that place.

New Bodies

November 17, 2007

New Bodies

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:42-49 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 5-7; Hebrews 12

Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. —Hebrews 12:2

In 1728, a young Ben Franklin composed his own tombstone epitaph:

The body of B. Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents worn out, and stript of its lettering and gilding, lies here, food for worms. Yet the work shall not be lost; for it will as he believ'd appear once more, in a new & more beautiful edition, corrected and amended by the Author.

In this epitaph, the wry wit of Franklin, the colonial Renaissance man, rings true to the biblical view of resurrection. The bodies we now possess are prone to aging, physical decline, and ultimately death. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ holds within it the promise of a new supernatural body raised in glory. The apostle Paul tells us, "The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power" (1 Cor. 15:42-43).

As life takes its course in the aging process, we have the hope of a new body that will far outshine the original. Despite our aches and pains, our destiny belongs safely in the hands of "Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

New bodies will be ours someday

According to God's grand design,

Forever with the Lord to reign—

Praise God for the promise divine! —Hess

In the twinkling of an eye … we shall be changed. —The Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:52)

The Planting

September 6, 2007

The Planting

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:42-53 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 148-150; 1 Corinthians 15:29-58

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. —1 Corinthians 15:51

An 8-year-old boy, who was learning in school about the way plants grow, was intrigued when told how a tiny seed that germinates in the ground could later burst through the soil as a plant.

During that same time, he and his family attended the funeral of a family member. At the service, the pastor talked about the final resurrection of our bodies.

Several days later as the family traveled past the cemetery, the boy remarked, "That's where they plant people." Seeds planted in the ground and bodies buried at death had connected in his young mind.

The apostle Paul used this same illustration of planting seed to describe death, burial, and resurrection to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 15). He said that even though the body of the believer in Christ is buried in the ground, it will one day be raised to new life (v.42). Our natural body is weak, but our spiritual body will be free from sickness, decline, and death (vv.43-44). Our new body will be glorified, endowed with power, and like Jesus' resurrection body.

We look forward to that day when the trumpet sounds, the dead in Christ are raised, and "we shall be changed" (v.52). As we anticipate that day, let's spread the good news of our victory over death through Jesus (vv.56-57).

Our Savior's life for us was given

That we might one day bloom in heaven,

Our mortal bodies changed to be

Like His through all eternity! —Spicer

Christ’s resurrection guarantees our own.

The Butterfly

April 13, 2002

The Butterfly

Read: John 5:25-29 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 22-24; Luke 12:1-31

It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. —1 Corinthians 15:43

Outside my study window a beautiful monarch butterfly rested on a flower blossom. It fanned its wings slowly with exquisite grace. That stately monarch was once a repulsive green worm, feeding on milkweed leaves. Then it built a coffin for itself and hung from a twig. In time it emerged, transformed into a beautiful creature—that butterfly outside my study window.

The life cycle of the butterfly occurs in four stages: the egg, the larva, the chrysalis, and the adult. It begins with an egg—the seed of the butterfly, which hatches into an ugly worm. But that is not its destiny. The worm must “die” to give birth to the butterfly.

I see in the caterpillar a picture of sinful human beings who need the transformation of a spiritual new birth (John 3:3). The butterfly, released from its tomb in the chrysalis, illustrates the transformation that will occur when Jesus returns and changes our earthly bodies into glorious bodies fit for life in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

So, the next time you see a butterfly, remember the change that Christ made in you when you put your faith in Him—then look forward with joy to the day of resurrection when your transformation will be complete! —M. R. De Haan, M.D.

When through the portals of Glory I've passed,

I shall be changed to His image at last;

I shall be like Him in beauty to shine,

Ever to live in His presence divine. —Brooks

Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our own.

The Adam Legacy

July 17, 2004

The Adam Legacy

Read: Romans 5:12-21 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 18-19; Acts 20:17-38

By one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous. —Romans 5:19

Our new grandson Jackson had fine features, soft blemish-free skin, and ten tiny fingers and toes on two little hands and feet. How could any proud Grampa not see him as a“perfect”baby? He certainly was a miracle of divine formation (Psalm 139:13-14).

The apostle Paul gave us a broader view of such“perfect”little infants when he wrote,“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin … Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam”(Romans 5:12-14). In other words, every child is born with a tendency to sin. But that’s not Paul’s final word. He also wrote about Jesus, the“last Adam,”who became a“life-giving spirit”(1 Corinthians 15:45).

Long after man’s first sin, a baby was born who was God incarnate (John 1:14). God made Christ,“ who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we trust Jesus as our Savior, the Holy Spirit creates within us a new desire to do what is pleasing to God. The flesh still has its pull, but the pull of the Spirit is stronger.

In the“first Adam”we’re all sinners. But let’s concentrate on who we are in the“last Adam.”

One with Adam are we all,

One with Adam in his fall;

But another Adam came—

Fallen sinners to reclaim. —D. De Haan

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away. —2 Corinthians 5:17

The Upside Of Dying

May 23, 2004

The Upside Of Dying

Read: John 17:20-26 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 19-21; John 8:1-27

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory. —John 17:24

A Sunday school teacher asked some 5-year-olds a series of questions to help them realize that trusting in Jesus is the only way to get to heaven. He asked, “If I sell everything I have and give the money to the church, would that get me into heaven?” “No,” they answered. “How about if I keep everything clean in and around the church?” Another “No.” “If I love my family, am kind to animals, and give candy to every child I meet, will that get me to heaven?” Another unanimous “No!” Then he asked, “What will get me into heaven?” A little boy shouted, “You have to be dead!”

This was hardly the answer the teacher expected, but the youngster was right. The Bible tells us that we all must leave our flesh-and-blood bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50-52). Unless we are alive when Jesus returns, we all must die before entering His presence.

British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon captured this truth in a sermon titled “Why They Leave Us.” He pointed out that Jesus’ prayer in John 17:24 is answered every time a Christian dies. The person leaves his body and enters the presence of his Savior, where he beholds His glory. What a comfort for the believer! It reveals the upside of dying. Is that your confidence?

The death of people whom we love

Brings sorrow and deep pain;

But if our loved ones know the Lord,

Our loss becomes their gain. —Sper

When Christians die, they have just begun to live.

When The End Is A Beginning

February 21, 1995

When The End Is A Beginning

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 | Bible in a Year: Numbers 1-3; Mark 3

Jesus Christ … has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. —2 Timothy 1:10

Our faith in Jesus Christ ought to make a difference in the way we live—and in the way we die.

God wants us to live with zest and happiness. Indeed, Jesus said He came to offer us abundant life (Jn. 10:10). Paul too affirmed that God “gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).

Yet we can’t escape the fact that our days on earth are numbered. So it is wise to think about our inevitable appointment with death (Heb. 9:27).

Is our attitude toward our departure from this world like that of famous scientist Marie Curie, who with her husband Pierre discovered radium? When he was accidentally killed, she lamented, “It is the end of everything, everything, everything!”

Our attitude should be radically different. Because of our trust in the death-conquering Savior, we can say as a young German theologian did the night before the Nazis hanged him in 1945, “For me, this is the beginning.”

For the believer, death is the end of all pain, loneliness, and sorrow, the end of whatever has made this life less than abundant, and the beginning of unimaginable blessing (Rev. 21:1-6). That prospect enables us to exclaim, “O Death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

To Him I trust my soul, my dust,

When flesh and spirit sever;

The Christ we sing has plucked the sting

Away from death forever. —Anon.

Christ is the difference between hope and hopelessness.

In His Presence

November 26, 2003

In His Presence

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 27-29; 1 Peter 3

Death is swallowed up in victory. —1 Corinthians 15:54

As the congregation around me sang the final verse of “Amazing Grace,” I couldn’t sing. I found myself instead wiping tears from my eyes as I stared at John Newton’s words, “When we’ve been there 10,000 years, … we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun.”

At that moment I wasn’t interested in 10,000 years in heaven. All I could think of was that my 17-year-old daughter was already there. Melissa, who just a few months earlier had been looking forward to her senior year of high school, was in heaven. She was already experiencing an eternity that we can only talk and sing about.

When Melissa was killed in a car accident in the spring of 2002, heaven took on new meaning for our family. Because our bright, beautiful teen had trusted Jesus Christ as her Savior, we knew she was there. As Paul said, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). To us, heaven became even more real. We knew that as we talked with God, we were talking to Someone who had our Melissa in His presence.

The reality of heaven is one of the Bible’s most glorious truths. It’s a real place where our loved ones live in the presence of our great God, forever serving Him and singing His praises—all because of His amazing grace!

When we've been there ten thousand years,

Bright shining as the sun,

We've no less days to sing God's praise

Than when we'd first begun. —Newton

Christians never say goodbye to each other for the last time.

A New Edition

September 30, 1994

A New Edition

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 9-10; Ephesians 3

The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. —1 Corinthians 15:52

Is death the absolute end of human existence? Not according to Ben Franklin. While scholars differ as to what he believed, there is no dispute that he believed firmly in the resurrection of the body. This epitaph he composed for himself:

The body of

B. Franklin, printer,

(like the cover of an old book,

its contents torn out and

stripped of its lettering and gilding)

lies here, food for worms.

But the work shall not be lost;

for it will (as he believed)

appear once more,

in a new and more elegant edition,

revised and corrected

by the Author.

Franklin's epitaph is a picturesque restatement of Paul's affirmation in Philippians 3:20-21 that the risen Lord will transform our corruptible bodies, making them like His own glorious body.

What a comfort this truth is when someone we love dies in the Lord! What a comfort it is for ourselves as we move on moment by moment toward death! But this comfort can be ours only if we believe the good news of the atoning death of Christ on the cross with its victorious sequel of the empty tomb.

Soar we now where Christ has led,

Following our exalted Head;

Made like Him, like Him we rise—

Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. —Wesley

The resurrection assures what Calvary secures.

Waiting on Death Row

August 11, 1995

Waiting on Death Row

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 81-83; Romans 11:19-36

"Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting?" —1 Corinthians 15:54-55

Rusty Woomer was waiting on death row just 11 days before his execution when he received a visit from Chuck Colson. He was not afraid to die, but he told Mr. Colson that a sense of fear came over him when he thought about meeting God.

He was not worried about being punished for his sins, because he was confident that Christ had forgiven him. But he was awed at the thought of meeting the One who possesses a power, a radiance, a purity, and a love beyond anything we can imagine.

Rusty Woomer lived his final days knowing the precise date of his death and exactly how it would occur. Chuck Colson commented that even though few of us know when and how we will die, we are all on death row. Unless Jesus comes, even the most devoted Christian will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. This is a solemn thought.

When we contemplate what God is like, we tremble at the thought of meeting Him. Yet we can also rejoice. Because Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again, death is defeated. It can't hurt us.

Rusty's testimony as he faced death is thrilling. He died rejoicing. So can we.

What awe engulfs our sinful soul

To contemplate God's purity!

We could not bear such holy love

Were not Christ's death our surety. —DJD

Those who fear God need not fear death.

The End?

October 18, 2013

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 53-55; 2 Thessalonians 1

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 15:57

Everything in this world eventually comes to an end, which at times can be disheartening. It's the feeling you get when you read a book that's so good you don't want it to end. Or when you watch a movie that you wish would go on a little while longer.

But all things—good and bad—do come to "The End." In fact, life ultimately does come to the end—sometimes sooner than we expect. All of us who have stood by the casket of a loved one know the painful emptiness of a heart that wishes it wasn't over yet.

Thankfully, Jesus steps into the fray of terminal disappointments, and, through His death and resurrection, He interjects hope for us. In Him "the end" is a prelude to a death-free eternity, and words like "it's over" are replaced by a joy-filled "forever." Since our bodies are not an eternal reality, Paul assures us that "we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51) and reminds us that because of Christ's conquering work we can confidently say, "O Death, … where is your victory?" (v.55).

So let not your heart be troubled. Our sorrow is real, but we can be filled with gratitude because God "gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.57).

Lord, keep our eyes and hearts fixed not on the

temporary joys or disappointments but on the victorious

realities of eternity. Thank You for Your death and

resurrection that guarantee our forever future.

In Christ, the end is only the beginning.

For Whom The Bell Tolls

September 9, 2005

For Whom The Bell Tolls

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-56 | Bible in a Year: Proverbs 6-7; 2 Corinthians 2

Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? —1 Corinthians 15:54-55

In 17th-century England, church bells tolled out the news of what was taking place in a parish. They announced not only religious services but also weddings and funerals.

So when John Donne, author and dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, lay desperately sick with the plague that was killing people in London by the thousands, he could hear the bells announce death after death. Writing down his thoughts in the devotional diary that became a classic, Donne urged his readers, "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee."

How true! The book of Hebrews teaches that we will all face death one day: "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (9:27).

But if we are believers in the gospel, news of death does not need to arouse dread. We know, as Paul joyfully assured us, that by His resurrection Jesus has broken the power of death and "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). Death has been "swallowed up in victory" by the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54). Its sting is gone (v.55).

When the bell tolls for the Christian, it announces the good news of Jesus' victory over death.

Christ's resurrection is cause for our celebration.

Keep Talking About Jesus

August 1, 2003

Keep Talking About Jesus

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 57-59; Romans 4

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." —John 11:25

Pastor Eloy Pacheco said at a funeral for a believer that Jesus is the only lasting source of comfort. Afterward a woman came up to him and said, "You preachers are all alike. All you talk about is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!"

“That’s true,” he replied kindly. “What comfort do you have to offer the grieving family?”

She was speechless for a few moments, and then she said, “You’re right. At least you have Jesus.”

Sooner or later someone dear to us will die, and we’ll want to be comforted. A hug, a kind deed, shared tears, and the presence of a friend may ease sorrow’s pain just a bit. But these gestures won’t answer our most urgent questions: What’s beyond the grave? Where is the person now? Will we be reunited in heaven? How can I have the assurance of eternal life?

For the answers to those questions, we must look to Jesus Christ. He is the One who defeated sin and death by dying on the cross for us and rising from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:1-28,57). Because He lives, all who put their faith in Him will live forever with Him (John 11:25).

When a believer in Christ dies, we who are left behind can find comfort and confidence in Him. So let’s keep talking about Jesus.

We have hope, for Christ has risen,

Death was conquered by God's Son;

May we gently share that message

With some hurting, grieving one. —D. De Haan

In life and in death, our only hope is Jesus.

Pain No More

July 21, 2011

Pain No More

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 29-30; Acts 23:1-15

O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? —1 Corinthians 15:55

For a good portion of my life, I shared the perspective of those who rail against God for allowing pain. I could find no way to rationalize a world as toxic as this one.

As I visited people whose pain far exceeded my own, though, I was surprised by its effects. Suffering seemed as likely to reinforce faith as to sow doubt.

My anger about pain has melted mostly for one reason: I have come to know God. He has given me joy and love and happiness and goodness. It leaves me with faith in a Person, a faith so solid that no amount of suffering can erode it.

Where is God when it hurts? He has been there from the beginning. He designed a pain system that, in the midst of a fallen world, bears His stamp. He transforms pain, using it to teach and strengthen us if we allow it to turn us toward Him.

He has hurt and bled and cried and suffered. He has dignified for all time those who suffer, by sharing their pain. But one day He will gather the armies of heaven and will unleash them against the enemies of God. The world will see one last terrifying moment of suffering before the full victory is ushered in. Then God will create for us a new, incredible world. And pain will be no more (Rev. 19:11–22:6).

He left His Father’s throne above,

So free, so infinite His grace!

Emptied Himself of all but love,

And bled for Adam’s helpless race. —Wesley

Pain will either turn us against God or draw us to Him.

Scared To Death

December 4, 2006

Scared To Death

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 | Bible in a Year: Ezekiel 47-48; 1 John 3

Our Savior Jesus Christ … abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. —2 Timothy 1:10

The opening line of a country song, “Sarabeth is scared to death … ,” leads the listener into the fearful heart of a teenage girl who is diagnosed with cancer. The lyrics of “Skin (Sarabeth)” expose the struggles she faces, not only with the disease and its treatment but also with the obvious evidence of her struggle—the loss of her hair (hence, the title). It is a touching song of triumph in the midst of tragedy, as Sarabeth deals with the understandable life-and-death fears that cancer brings.

The specter of death is faced by every human being. Yet, whether we face that reality with fear or with confidence is not dependent on having a good outlook or a positive attitude. The way we face death depends completely on whether or not we have a personal relationship with Jesus, who gave Himself to die so that death itself could be abolished.

Paul wrote to Timothy that our Savior was the One who “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). The result is that even in the most disturbing times of life, we never need to be scared to death.

We can live confidently and filled with hope, because Jesus conquered death.

Your love, O God, would spare no pain

To conquer death and win;

You sent Your only Son to die

To rescue us from sin. —M. Gustafson

Because Christ is alive, we need not fear death.

A Mystery Solved

March 7, 1996

A Mystery Solved

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 3-4; Mark 10:32-52

If a man dies, shall he live again? —Job 14:14

What happens to us when we die? That mystery has intrigued people down through the ages.

Some researchers are cautiously suggesting that they may be close to an answer. They are checking into reports from individuals who claim to have undergone near-death experiences that took them beyond time and space. Some analysts think that further research will eventually solve the mystery of death.

Must we anxiously await their verdict? By no means! God has already revealed in the Bible what happens after death.

If we have trusted God’s Son Jesus Christ as our Savior, we know we will be “present with the Lord” when we die (2 Cor. 5:8). Paul said that because Christ died for our sins and rose from the grave, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). But those who reject Christ will have to face God’s fierce judgment and an eternity in hell (Rev. 20:11-15).

Anyone looking for clues about what happens to us when we die would be wise to research the Bible. It gives us God’s answer to the most pressing question of the ages. Christ’s empty tomb assures us that it is a mystery already solved.

He lives, and grants me daily breath;

He lives, and I shall conquer death;

He lives, my future to prepare;

He lives to bring me safely there. —Medley

Because Christ lives, death is not tragedy but triumph.

Not In Vain

August 14, 2001

Not In Vain

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 89-90; Romans 14

Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. —1 Corinthians 15:58

In September of 2000, I attended the 100th-anniversary celebration of a small Bible college in Ohio. When the school began in 1900 with a handful of students and very little money, few observers thought it would last. A year after the doors opened, the founder died during a typhoid epidemic, and the school's prospects appeared dim.

A century later, some people wondered if the founder would have been surprised to find the school thriving. Whether or not he thought the institution would last for 100 years, everyone attending the celebration agreed that he expected the results to last forever. He knew that his work for God was of eternal value.

That's an assurance you and I can share as we live for the Lord. At the conclusion of a stirring passage on immortality and our victory in Christ over death, Paul concluded by saying, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Because our labor for Christ is never worthless or futile, we can find encouragement to keep honoring and serving Him in all that we do. J. B. Phillips summed it up well when he said, "Nothing you do for Him is ever lost or ever wasted."

Service done in Jesus' name

Lasts for all eternity,

For God's Spirit does the work,

Using folks like you and me. —D. De Haan

Work done for God endures long after the worker dies.

Dying To Live

May 8, 2003

Dying To Live

Read: Luke 9:18-26 | Bible in a Year: 2 Kings 4-6; Luke 24:36-53

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. —Luke 9:23

The cross in Roman times was designed for death. It had no other use. So what did Jesus mean when He said that anyone who wants to follow Him must "take up his cross daily"? (Luke 9:23). He wasn't saying that we must all be crucified. The "cross" to which He was referring is the act of putting to death our own heart's desires and quietly submitting to God's will.

Such dying is denying our need for larger homes, more compliant children, more accommodating mates. It's putting up with misunderstanding, embarrassment, and loss of esteem. It's accepting our unchangeable circumstances. Missionary and poet Amy Carmichael, who knew much about pain and suffering, wrote, "In acceptance lieth peace."

Jesus said we must take up our cross daily. We are to rise each morning and cheerfully, bravely shoulder our load, because there is something else that is "daily." It is the continuous, sufficient grace of the One whose strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), and who will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He promises that through our dying He will make us more alive than ever before (1 Corinthians 15:53-57).

Are you dying to live?

Day by day, to fight the battle,

Day by day, Thy will to do,

Day by day, the cross to carry,

Seeking only to be true. —Fisher

In acceptance we find peace

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In acceptance we find peace

Three Certainties

November 7, 2006

Three Certainties

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 | Bible in a Year: Jeremiah 40-42; Hebrews 4

O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? —1 Corinthians 15:55

As I waited outside the Intensive Care Unit for changes in the condition of a loved one, I was reminded that death affects all of us: old and young, male and female, rich and poor.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, the apostle Paul comforted those who mourned the death of their loved ones. He told them that excessive grief resulted from being uninformed. Weeping for our loss is good, but we need not weep like those who have no hope. Instead, we must rely on three certainties of death.

The first certainty is that the soul does not die. The souls of departed believers are with the Lord (v.14). They have retired from this problematic world, and they “sleep in Jesus.”

Second, Jesus will come for every believer. Whether a Christian is alive on earth or asleep in death, Jesus will return for all His children (vv.16-17).

Third, there will be a joyous reunion. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (v.17).

Knowing these certainties brings comfort to believers when their friends and loved ones depart. Although we are separated from them for a while, we will meet again in the presence of our Lord.

When facing death’s shadow, remember the Light;

The shadows bring fear, and the dark shrouds our eyes;

But if we will turn to face Jesus the Light,

The shadows will fade as He brightens our skies. —Lee

Sunset in one land is sunrise in another.

“Dead Is Dead”

April 11, 2007

“Dead Is Dead”

Read: Hebrews 9:24-28 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 17-18; Luke 11:1-28

O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? —1 Corinthians 15:55

Do you ever think about your inevitable death? Or are you like the influential theater tycoon Bernard Jacobs, who said, “Of all the things in the world I think least about, it’s what happens after you die. Dead is dead.”

Is that what happens when we exhale our last breath and our brain cells stop functioning? When our life has come to an end, are we totally extinguished like a flame of a candle plunged into water? That’s a common belief. But it isn’t what the Bible teaches. Hebrews 9:27 declares that it is appointed for us “to die once, but after this the judgment.”

If we have received Jesus as Savior from our sins, we need not fear facing Him. We will enter into blessed fellowship with God for all eternity, for we will be “absent from the body and … present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

Jesus taught His disciples, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

Jesus’ message in the Word of God gives hope when we face our own death or the death of someone we love. He promises that we will enter our heavenly home and be with Him forever. We can count on His word.

“I go to prepare a place for you …

That where I am there you may be,”

Our death is not the end of life—

Beyond, with Christ, eternity! —Hess

Jesus’ resurrection spelled the death of Death.

What Will Happen?

March 13, 2003

What Will Happen?

Read: 2 Timothy 4:1-8 | Bible in a Year: Deuteronomy 20-22; Mark 13:21-37

There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord … will give to me. —2 Timothy 4:8

In his book Spirit Life, Stuart Briscoe writes, “When I moved to the United States, I was impressed with the number of total strangers who visited my home to wish me well … They all sold insurance!

“One day my visitor was talking about the necessity to be prudent in the preparation for all possibilities. ‘If something should happen to you, Mr. Briscoe—’ he started to say, but I interrupted with, ‘Please don’t say that. It upsets me.’ … He looked totally bewildered and said, ‘I don’t understand what I said to upset you.’ ‘Then I’ll tell you,’ I replied. ‘It upsets me that you talk about [life’s] only certainty as if it’s a possibility. Death isn’t a possibility, it’s a certainty. You don’t say “if,” you say “when,” whenever death is the subject.’ Then I added, ‘By the way, when something happens to you, what will really happen?’”

The apostle Paul was very open about his death (2 Timothy 4:6). He knew that its sting had been removed because Christ paid sin’s penalty on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Death would give way to victory (v.54); he would fully experience Christ’s righteousness; and he would be with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). Jesus gives that same confidence to all who trust Him as Savior and

Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read1 Corinthians 15:35-58.

Find out more about life after death inWhere Do We Go From Here?

Only if we are ready to die are we ready to live.

The Sting

April 11, 1997

The Sting

Read: Romans 5:12-21 | Bible in a Year: 1 Samuel 17-18; Luke 11:1-28

The sting of death is sin … But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 15:56-57

Years ago, while I was walking in the field with my two young boys, a bee stung the elder of the two just above his eye. He quickly brushed it away and threw himself in the grass, kicking and screaming. No sooner had the bee been brushed away when it went straight for the younger son and began buzzing around his head. He tried to hide in the tall grass and began screaming for help. I picked him up and told him not to worry—the bee had lost its stinger.

This particular bee can sting only once. It leaves its stinger in the victim and becomes harmless. So I took my younger son over to his older brother and showed him the little black stinger in his brother's brow. I told him, "The bee can still buzz and scare you, but it is powerless to hurt you. Your brother took the sting away."

In 1 Corinthians 15:56, the apostle Paul said that the sting of death is sin. But Jesus took the sting for us by dying in our place on the cross. Death is now powerless to hurt us because Jesus took its sting.

Death may "buzz around" and scare us, but it cannot hurt us anymore. We need not fear God's judgment. All death can do is open the door to Glory.

I have life in Jesus' name,

For He took my guilt and shame;

Gone the sting of death and sin,

Only peace now reigns within. —Hess

Death may alarm us, but it cannot harm us.

The Defeat Of Death

October 16, 2009

The Defeat Of Death

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 47-49; 1 Thessalonians 4

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 15:57

Christian faith ought to make a difference in how we live from day to day. But the final test of our trust in the gospel is how we react in the face of death. When we attend a memorial service for a departed friend who loved the Lord Jesus, we gather to honor a believer whose stalwart trust has richly blessed the lives of those who knew him. The words spoken are more an expression of praise to God than a tribute to an admired fellow pilgrim. The service is a God-glorifying testimony to our Savior's victory over death and the grave (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

How different from the funeral service of Charles Bradlaugh, a belligerent British atheist. Writer Arthur Porritt recalls: "No prayer was said at the grave. Indeed, not a single word was uttered. The remains, placed in a light coffin, were lowered into the earth in a quite unceremonious fashion as if carrion were being hustled out of sight… I came away heart-frozen. It only then dawned on me that loss of faith in the continuity of human personality after death gives death an appalling victory."

Christians, however, believe in a face-to-face fellowship with our Lord after death and the eventual resurrection of our bodies (1 Cor.

15:42-55; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). Does your faith rejoice in victory over death?

From earth's wide bounds and ocean's farthest coast,

Through gates of pearl stream in the countless host,

Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost— Alleluia! Alleluia! —How

Because Christ is alive, we too shall live.

Christ Our Champion

March 19, 1995

Christ Our Champion

Read: 1 Samuel 17:31-50 | Bible in a Year: Joshua 1-3; Mark 16

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 15:57

If ever anyone needed a champion, the Israelites did. As their army camped in the Valley of Elah, they were held at bay and embarrassed daily by the tauntings of the Philistine strongman Goliath.

David, the young shepherd son of Jesse, had brought provisions for his brothers in the army. When he heard Goliath mocking the Israelites, he was furious and asked for permission to go out and fight him. David was confident that the God who had delivered him from the lion and the bear (1 Sam. 17:34-37) would give him victory over the giant—and He did.

David's conquest reminds us of Jesus Christ's victory. We were hopelessly enslaved by sin and needed a champion. Then God sent His Son Jesus to deliver us. He came to earth as a man, faced all our human trials (Heb. 2:14-15), and went to battle on our behalf. In His death and resurrection, Jesus won complete victory over sin and death (1 Cor. 15:54-57). What's more, His triumph guarantees us victory in our daily walk with God.

But we can't expect success in our own strength. We must rely on the Holy Spirit's power and guidance. Then, as we walk with God in faith, we can more fully appreciate the victory our Champion has brought us.

I will praise my dear Redeemer,

His triumphant power I'll tell,

How the victory He giveth

Over sin and death and hell. —Bliss

No matter what giants we face, we can win by God's grace.

Behind The Building

July 16, 2009

Behind The Building

Read: 1 Peter 4:8-11 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 16-17; Acts 20:1-16

Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. —1 Corinthians 15:58

Where we were working was hot, dirty, and it smelled bad. We had traveled thousands of miles to do some work projects, and on this day we were painting the back of a classroom building at a school for the deaf. The only people who would ever see this part of the building would be the guy who cut the grass and any unfortunate person who would have to work on the septic pit.

Yet, as the young adults diligently painted away, one of the girls, Melissa, put it in perspective by saying, "Nobody will ever come back here to see this, but God will see it. So let's make it look nice." And so we did.

Sometimes we sit at our desk and think no one sees our work. Or we stand at a line assembling item after endless item. Perhaps we take care of crying babies in the church nursery. Or we live the best Christian life we can—without anyone noticing.

Often our work is "behind the building." But if that is what God has called us to do, we need to work with all our heart. As part of our

calling to love others deeply (1 Peter 4:8), offer hospitality (v.9), and use our gifts to serve others (v.10), our task is to work with God's strength to bring praise and glory to God, not ourselves. The important thing is that God likes what He sees.

Though others may not observe us

And see how we serve God today,

Our job as servants of Jesus

Is to please Him in every way. —Branon

No service for Christ goes unnoticed by Him.

Driven By Gratitude

April 23, 2008

Driven By Gratitude

Read: Acts 20:22-24 | Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 16-18; Luke 17:20-37

Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. —1 Corinthians 15:58

What's the greatest novel ever written? Many readers would vote for Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace, which, depending on the edition, can run well over 1,000 pages. Even after his novel was finished, Tolstoy continued to write—often until he was on the brink of exhaustion, unable to sleep, and on the verge of a breakdown.

One day a friend asked him why he kept writing and driving himself to the edge of exhaustion. He reminded Tolstoy that he was a wealthy Russian count with servants at his beck and call, and that he had a secure future.

Tolstoy explained that he kept writing because he was the slave of an inner compulsion and had a consuming desire deep within his bones. He felt that he had to keep writing or else he would go mad.

The apostle Paul experienced a similar compulsion, except that his drive was God-motivated. As he explained to his friends in Corinth, "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14). His was a burning passion, an emotional fire, a spiritual force that made him share the good news of Jesus and His death and resurrection.

Such dedicated zeal has characterized many of our Lord's followers throughout the years. May a spark of that fire burn in our own hearts.

Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,

In every part with praise,

That my whole being may proclaim

Thy being and Thy ways. —Bonar

The good news is too good to keep to yourself.

Never A Quitter

June 25, 2004

Never A Quitter

Read: Galatians 6:6-10 | Bible in a Year: Job 3-4; Acts 7:44-60

Be steadfast … in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain. —1 Corinthians 15:58

A preacher who was growing weary in the ministry had a dream. He saw himself pounding away at a huge chunk of granite with a pick-axe. It was his job to break it into small pieces. But hard as he tried, he couldn't chip off even a tiny piece. At last, tired and disappointed, he decided to give up.

Just then a stranger appeared and said, "Weren't you given orders to do that work? Your duty is to give your best regardless of what happens." The preacher, with a renewed determination, lifted the pick-axe high in the air and gave the granite a crushing blow. It

broke into a thousand pieces. He had almost quit—one blow too soon.

The Lord wants us to keep working at our God-given task no matter how difficult it might be. Even when success seems remote or impossible, we are to remain steadfast, assured that there will be an ample reward for those who persevere.

Have you grown tired in your service for God? Have you become so discouraged that you're tempted to "throw in the towel"? Remember that preacher's dream. Better still, remember God's promise spoken by Paul: "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

The service that we give to Christ,

If steadfast we will be,

Is sure to reap a rich reward

That someday we will see. —Sper

Failure is not defeat unless you stop trying.

Stand Firm

July 10, 2013

Stand Firm

Read: Colossians 1:19-27 | Bible in a Year: Job 41-42; Acts 16:22-40

Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. —1 Corinthians 15:58

As our final project for a high school earth science class, a friend and I built a stream table. With extensive help from my father, we built a long plywood box with a hinge in the middle. Then we lined it with plastic and filled it with sand. At one end we attached a hose. At the other end was a drainage hole. After assembling all of it, we raised one end of the stream table, turned on the water, and watched as it created a path directly to the hole at the other end. The next part of the experiment was to place a rock in the stream and watch how it changed the path of the water.

This project taught me as much about life as it did about science. I learned that I can't change the direction things are going if I'm on the bank of the river. I have to step into the stream of life and stand there to divert the flow. That's what Jesus did. The Bible refers to salvation as a rock (2 Sam. 22:47; Ps. 62:2,6-7), and the apostle Paul clarifies that Christ is that Rock (1 Cor. 10:4). God placed Jesus in the stream of history to change its course.

When we remain steadfast in Christ, abounding in the work of the Lord, God uses us to change the course of history through acts of obedience that turn others to Him.

Be sure to put your feet in the right place, then stand firm. —Abraham Lincoln

1 Corinthians 16

1 Corinthians 16:1–24

Today in the Word

John Adams and his wife, Abigail Adams, wrote over 1,100 letters to each other during the period of their courtship and John's political career. Their correspondence is rich with the details of the turbulent times leading up to the Revolutionary War and the infancy of the American democracy. Their letters have provided historians with information about the political happenings of the day as well as the ordinary routines and concerns of the American family at that time.

A letter is a fascinating window into the world of someone else. Paul's letter to the Corinthians provides such a window. Reading the Corinthians' mail, we start to understand what it must have been like to belong to this newly converted Gentile community. There was still confusion about the fundamental truths of the gospel. They continued to puzzle over questions of Christian life and practice. The pagan philosophies of their day held sway over their moral and spiritual imaginations. We know now why Paul several times compared them to immature children!

For all their abundance of spiritual gifts and direct contact with Paul, we have blessings today that the Corinthians didn't. For instance, the Scriptures were still being written in their generation, and their teaching was sporadic at best, relying upon correspondence with Paul (1 Corinthians may have been the second of a three–letter exchange) and the frequency of his visits (infrequent, we infer from chapter 16). Before we judge this church too harshly and revel in our own superiority, we should note that we continue to struggle with some of the same issues in the 21st century.

Paul ends the letter like he started it. After all the time spent to correct and rebuke them, he now affirms his confidence in them. God's grace in their lives will prevail, despite their many serious problems. He returns to the theme of love in chapter 16. He urges the Corinthians to do all that they do in love and to express that love in tangible ways to one another. He affirms his love for them in an intensely personal way, writing the words in his own hand.

Apply the Word

First Corinthians 16 may seem like a laundry list of last–minute afterthoughts from Paul. He discusses travel plans. He arranges for the collection of an offering promised beforehand for the poor in Jerusalem. He affirms the ministry of Timothy and Stephanas. But one important conclusion we draw from this chapter is the attention to the interconnectedness of the church throughout Asia: from Ephesus, to Jerusalem, to Galatia, and to Corinth, they were all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. "There is one body … and one Lord" (Eph. 4:4, 5).

1 Corinthians 16:13-18

IN America's Cup yacht has a crew of sixteen people, including the navigator, the helmsman, and the mast men. But the boat could not compete without the relentless work of the five "grinders"—the men who turn the heavy cranks that control the sails.

A grinder described his role this way in a USA Today article:

"A grinder at the America's Cup level is similar to a tight end in football. We need strength to provide the physical energy to power the boat around the race course. Essentially, our job is to turn the handles to raise and lower the sails and jibe/tack the sails from one side of the boat to the other."

In the work of Christ, the jobs that get noticed have to do with determining strategy and steering the course. But unless there are a lot of grinders—people willing to work behind the scenes—His work cannot go forward.

The people in the household of Stephanas were the grinders of the early church. We know little about what they did, but Paul commended their diligent work for the cause of Christ.

Our faithful and diligent service is more important than we realize. We impede Christ's work when we refuse to do our part. —DC E

1 CORINTHIANS 16:15

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In the work of Christ, many jobs get noticed. Some have to do with determining strategy, others with steering the course. But unless there are a lot of grinders—those men and women who are willing to work faithfully at the unglamorous roles—His work cannot go forward. So if you are a grinder, keep at it! Your faithfulness is far more important than you realize. Our Captain is depending on you! —D. C. E.

THE WORLD CROWNS SUCCESS; GOD CROWNS FAITHFULNESS.

Thoughts Of Heaven

February 10, 2003

Thoughts Of Heaven

Read: Revelation 21:1-5 | Bible in a Year: Leviticus 8-10; Matthew 25:31-46

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. —Revelation 21:3

Cartoonists often depict those who have gone to heaven as white-robed, ghostly forms floating among the clouds or sitting on golden stairs playing harps. What a far cry from the picture we find in the Bible!

In 1 Corinthians 15, we read that our resurrection bodies, although not subject to death, will be real and tangible—not mere apparitions. And Revelation 21:1-5 tells us that God will bring about “a new heaven and a new earth.” He will bring down “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22), and set it upon the new earth as the “New Jerusalem.” It is described as having streets, walls, gates, and even a river and trees (Revelation 22:1-5).

Life in that city will be wonderful, free from all the debilitating effects of sin. There will be no more death, sorrow, mourning, and pain, for God will make “all things new.” But best of all, He Himself will come to live among us, making possible a new level of intimacy with Him.

It’s difficult to envision such an existence, but what an exciting prospect! It is all possible because of what Jesus did when He died for us on the cross. This should motivate us to worship Him, live godly lives, and tell others how they too can be assured of a glorious future.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

ReadOur Eternal HomeandWhere Do We Go From Here?

The more we love Jesus the more we'll long for heaven.

Strength Of A Man

June 16, 2013

Strength Of A Man

Read: 1 Corinthians 16:9-13 | Bible in a Year: Nehemiah 4-6; Acts 2:22-47

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. —1 Corinthians 16:13

Some years ago I found myself in an elevator with a couple of men. It was late at night, and we all looked weary. The elevator came to a stop, and a larger-than-life cowboy ambled in, wearing a battered hat, an old, stained sheepskin coat, and rundown logger boots. He looked us up and down, met our eyes, and growled, “Good evening, men.” All of us straightened up and squared our shoulders. We were trying to live up to the name.

On this day, which is given over to honoring guys, let’s talk about living up to the name man. We try to be strong and macho, but often it’s just a façade. For all our effort, we realize we don’t measure up. Underneath the bravado we harbor a host of fears, insecurities, and shortcomings. Much of our manliness is pure bluff.

Paul was man enough to admit it: “We also are weak,” he said (2 Cor. 13:4). That’s not pious chatter; it’s a humbling fact. Yet in what seems to be a contradiction, Paul insisted that we are to be “men of courage” (1 Cor. 16:13 niv).

How can we be the strong person that God meant for us to be? Only by putting ourselves in God’s hands and asking Him to make us that way through His power and enablement.

Come, Lord, and give me courage,

Thy conquering Spirit give;

Make me an overcomer—

In power within me live. —Anon.

True strength is the power of God in the soul.

Thanks!

July 8, 1996

Read: 1 Corinthians 16:15-21 | Bible in a Year: Job 36-37; Acts 15:22-41

They have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. —1 Corinthians 16:15

As long as we have had our family cabin on Piatt Lake in Michigan's beautiful Upper Peninsula, Lyle Hopper has been caretaker for our Christian association of property owners. Now Lyle is nearing retirement, and I was thinking about the years of work he and his wife Pauline have given the lake community.

Because we don't have a phone in our cabin, Lyle or Pauline has driven to our cabin numerous times to give us or our guests telephone messages. Some were urgent—news of illness or emergencies back home requiring immediate attention. The Hoppers have always done this graciously, refusing any kind of compensation.

When something broke and I needed a part, Lyle always seemed to have one somewhere. If I needed advice on how to fix something, Lyle always had time to explain it to me.

While reading 1 Corinthians 16 recently, I was reminded of Lyle and Pauline. The apostle Paul expressed thanks to those in the household of Stephanus who had "devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (v.15).

Are there faithful servants of God in your life who have been a refreshment to your spirit? Be sure to acknowledge them (v.18). Thanks, Lyle and Pauline.

Lord, help us to appreciate

The work that others do,

The service given from their hearts,

Their sacrifice for You. —Sper

Those who serve deserve our thanks.