



Days of Praise

September ♦ October ♦ November 2025

Days of Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

September • October • November 2025

*“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”
(Psalm 90:2)*

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Introduction to **DAYS OF PRAISE**

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” (Acts 1:1)

Dear Christian friend,

I trust you're enjoying the cooler autumn weather and taking in the vibrant colors of the seasonal leaves. Thank you for meeting together with us in devotional thoughts as we reflect daily throughout this fall quarter on the matchless person and work of the Lord Jesus.

Our text reminds Christians to keep our eyes on Jesus. He's the sole figure of our witness, and all that He did and taught is the subject of our discussion. His words were always to the point and filled the hearts of those listening with something good, ranging from comfort to conviction. May Jesus always be the focus of our deepest affections, and may we often lift high His precious name in our conversations.

It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will use each one of these short devotionals to help you fall deeper in love with Lord Jesus and our good heavenly Father.

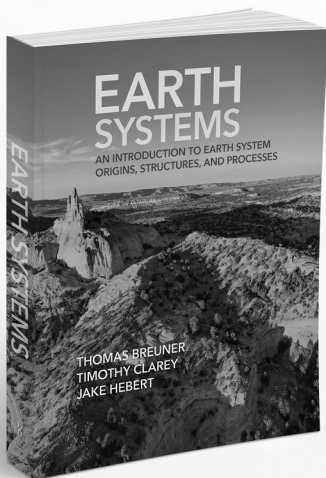
Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

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Monday, September 1

Labor or Service?

“Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work.” (Deuteronomy 5:13)

The term “labor” to many seems to connote drudgery or routine, repetitive, demeaning toil. As used here in the fourth of God’s Ten Commandments, however, the Hebrew word *abad* means rather to “serve” and is so translated 214 times in the King James. Only one other time is it translated “labor,” and that is in the first rendering of the commandments (Exodus 20:9). Thus, the command could well be read: “Six days shalt thou *serve*.”

Furthermore, the word for “work” (Hebrew *melakah*) does not denote servile labor but “deputyship” or “stewardship.” The one whom we are to serve or act as deputy for, of course, is God Himself when we do our work. In the ultimate and very real sense, the Lord is our employer, and we serve Him, not man. Therefore, “whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Colossians 3:23). Every honest occupation, if carried out for the Lord’s sake and to His glory, is “divine service.” And every Christian who holds this perspective on his or her work (be it preaching, bookkeeping, homemaking, or whatever) is in the Christian ministry—for “ministry” simply means “service.”

Note also that God has ordained not a four-day or five-day workweek. “Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work,” He says, thus commemorating the six days in which He worked in the beginning, “for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth” (Exodus 31:17).

One day, Lord willing, we shall hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant:...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21). Then, throughout the ages to come, “his servants shall serve him” (Revelation 22:3) with everlasting joy. HMM

Tuesday, September 2

Pie in the Sky

“And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.” (Revelation 19:9)

Unbelievers sometimes ridicule Bible-believing Christians as being so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use and as waiting for “pie in the sky bye and bye.” This canard is, of course, unjustified because the Lord Jesus has told us, “Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13), and we are also instructed: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Colossians 3:23). A Christian could—and should—do a better job in his particular occupation than he would ever have done as a non-Christian. All honorable occupations come within the scope of God’s primeval dominion mandate (Genesis 1:26-28). “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Nevertheless, there is a great feast day coming bye and bye, and indeed it will be a great blessing to be “called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Presumably those who partake of this wonderful feast will be not only those who constitute His Bride but also others who are called to be guests at His wedding supper. Since the Holy City is also called “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” and since it is inscribed with the names of both the “twelve tribes” of Israel and also of the “twelve apostles” (Revelation 21:9, 12, 14), it is clear that believers from both the pre-Christian and Christian ages will be there. They will all have responded to the Lord’s invitation and have had the right attitude of heart and life toward the will of the Bridegroom (Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13).

Whether some kind of heavenly pie will be served at the supper is doubtful, but it will surely be a time of great blessing. HMM

Wednesday, September 3

Blessed by the Word

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.” (Psalm 119:1)

The Hebrew word *barak* appears over 300 times in the Bible. It basically means to endue or bless with power for success, prosperity, fruitfulness, longevity, and so on. The oft-used Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) closes with “The LORD lift up [turn] his countenance upon [toward] thee, and give thee peace” and is initiated by the greater upon the lesser.

The opening stanza of Psalm 119 identifies the traits of a lifestyle subject to the Word of God and then blesses those who live thus and “seek him with the whole heart” (Psalm 119:2). The unknown psalmist saturates all 22 stanzas with eight key words describing the inspired Scriptures that empower such godly behavior. Six are used in this opening testimony and prayer.

Those who “walk in the law [*torah*] of the LORD” and “keep his testimonies” (*edah*) receive God’s blessing (Psalm 119:1-2). These instructions inscripturated in God’s Word enable us to be “undefiled in the way” and to “do no iniquity” (Psalm 119:3). The apostle Paul noted that apart from the law, he would not know he was sinning (Romans 7:7).

God “hast commanded us to keep [His] precepts [*piquwd*—listings, statutes, laws] diligently....Then shall [we] not be ashamed, when [we] have respect unto all [His] commandments [*mitzvah*—instructions]” (Psalm 119:4-6).

The promise to “praise [Him] with uprightness of heart” (Psalm 119:7) is based on a prayer: “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes [*hoq*—engraved laws]!” (Psalm 119:5). And we can be certain that a righteous life will come when we have “learned [His] righteousness judgments [*mishpat*]” (Psalm 119:7). May our lives be as dedicated to God’s Word as is described in this magnificent song. HMM III

Our Sins

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6)

As Christ hung on the cross, the Jewish leaders felt that He was guilty of blasphemy—a mere man, claiming to be God. In short, they felt that He was dying for His own sins. Their tragic misconceptions were predicted centuries before, as recorded in the treasured Isaiah 53: “We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not...we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (vv. 3-4).

But not so! God did not punish Him for His sins but for ours. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (v. 5). “For the transgression of my people was he stricken” (v. 8).

The penalty for sin has always been death, and even though “he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him” (vv. 9-10). He was the perfect “offering for sin” (v. 10), and “he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (v. 12). Justice has been served! “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many” (v. 11).

Furthermore, through His death, even our griefs have been borne and our sorrows carried (v. 4). In addition to all this, our peace has been gained through His chastisement, and our healing has been accomplished with His stripes (v. 5).

Such considerations can drive us only to the most complete prostration of wonder and amazement. Necessitated because “all we like sheep have gone astray,” God’s justice has been satisfied, because Christ, in love, has taken upon Himself “the iniquity of us all.” As the hymn says, “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” JDM

Friday, September 5

Cleansed by the Word

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” (Psalm 119:9)

Psalm 119:9-16 provides key instructions for those who would seek to please their Creator with a godly life.

“Taking heed” (Hebrew *shamar*—guarding) of God’s Word is the foundation upon which a godly life is built (vv. 10-11). The psalmist sought God with his whole heart and pleaded with God to prevent him from wandering (Hebrew *shagah*—to stray through ignorance). That plea was then turned into a confirmation and an understanding: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (v. 11).

With the assurance of these foundational elements, the psalmist promised the Lord that he would organize his life so that he “will not forget thy word” (v. 16).

Similar to the apostle John’s assurance in his first epistle, the psalmist recognized behaviors that he was already exhibiting. His “lips” had “declared” the judgments of God (v. 13). He knew that he had “rejoiced in the way” (v. 14) of God’s revealed testimonies as much as the ungodly had boasted of gaining wealth. He was no stranger to godly living and loved the way of God, seeking to excel in holiness (1 John 5:3).

The section closes with two “I will” promises, surely based upon his earlier commitment to cleanse his way. The psalmist promised to “meditate in [God’s] precepts, and have respect unto [His] ways” (v. 15). This assumes time, study, and careful thought about the purposes and intent of God’s message. It is not a promise to sit comfortably and “clear one’s mind” of cogent thinking, waiting on some voice to reveal truth. The psalmist can then “delight” in the statutes of the Word (Psalm 119:16; Romans 7:22).

As we seek to know God’s great Word, may His works refresh our hearts and delight our lives. HMM III

Meditation

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” (Joshua 1:8)

This well-known verse contains the first use of the Hebrew verb for meditate (*hagah*) in the Bible and, significantly, it is a command to meditate on the Scriptures. Such meditation is not mere quietness or daydreaming but is thoughtfulness with a purpose—to obey “all that is written therein.”

Meditation for its own sake, without being centered on God’s Word, is often useless or even harmful. Consider the Western proliferation of Eastern meditation cults that lead their devotees into pantheism and occultism. Isaiah 8:19 warns against “wizards that peep, and that mutter [same word as ‘meditate’].” “Why do...the people imagine [same word] a vain thing?” (Psalm 2:1).

The blessed man is the one whose “delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2). That is, only if we are continually guided by the Holy Scriptures will we be happy and successful.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for meditate (*melatao*) is used only twice. Once it is translated “imagine” (Acts 4:25) and is in a quotation of Psalm 2:1, as above. The last time it is used, however, the emphasis reverts back to the context of its first usage, as in our text above. Paul commands us: “Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine....Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” (1 Timothy 4:13, 15). Modern meditationists say that the goal of meditation is to clear our minds of “things,” but God wants us to meditate on “these things”—the life-giving, life-directing doctrines of His Word. HMM

Sunday, September 7

Bounty from the Word

“Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.” (Psalm 119:17)

Materialism is so prevalent that it is sometimes difficult to not associate words like “bounty” or “blessing” with earthly riches. This psalmist wasn’t concerned with physical prosperity but rather that God would reveal to him what his own heart sought—“that I may live, and keep thy word.”

He requested spiritual insight: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (v. 18). Without hint of greed or self-centered aggrandizement, he only longed to understand the “wondrous” insights of the *torah* (law). We lack “bounty” if we neglect studying God’s inerrant Word.

We often forget that we are “stranger[s] in the earth” (v. 19). Once adopted into God’s family (Ephesians 1:5), our citizenship (Philippians 3:20) is transferred from this earth to God’s “city” (Hebrews 11:10). Thus, the psalmist begged for God not to “hide” the commandments from him because his “soul breaketh for the longing” (v. 20) he had, in every season, for the judgments of God’s Word.

He remembered God’s swift justice against the “cursed” (v. 21), who “err” (wander, stray) from the Word, since the “princes” (chiefs, leaders) of the land resisted his effort to obey God (v. 23). Nonetheless, he was determined to demonstrate his “delight” in the “counselors” within God’s testimonies (v. 24).

Many who claim to be evangelicals today boldly scorn those who trust that “every word of God is pure” (Proverbs 30:5). May God keep us from “the fear of man” (Proverbs 29:25) and embolden our resolve to “worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psalm 138:2). HMM III

Great and Precious Promises

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Peter 1:4)

Scripture is full of promises, more than 2,800 in the Old Testament and more than 1,000 in the New. The first of these exceeding great and precious promises was the protevangelium (“first gospel”) of Genesis 3:15. Immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve through the temptation of Satan, God promised the coming Seed of the woman, the Savior: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; [He] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

The first New Testament promise, significantly, is this same primeval promise, now made far more specific: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

The last promise of the Old Testament speaks of a second coming of “Elijah the prophet,” who will “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:5-6). Then, the final promise of the Bible is the wonderful assurance of Christ concerning His glorious second coming: “Surely I come quickly” (Revelation 22:20).

Sandwiched between these great and precious promises are over 3,800 other promises. Some of these are in the form of promised warnings to the sinner but are promises nonetheless. Most promises, however, are to the obedient follower of God, and we know that “he is faithful that promised” (Hebrews 10:23). “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20). HMM

Tuesday, September 9

Pray or Sing

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.” (James 5:13)

Now here we find a plain lesson. It may even apply to every moment in life. When we feel up, then praise the Lord with song! When we feel down, then take the painful issue to the Lord. Though the instruction is simple, doing it daily is challenging. But we are directed to practice it.

James’ admonition to pray lies among many similar pointers. For example, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Yes, this means carrying on a constant conversation with the Lord, from waking to sleeping. Even the psalms we sing are prayers themselves. “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness” (Psalm 107:15)!

One way those without the Holy Spirit handle affliction is with complaining. Even Christians who “are after the flesh [and thus] do mind the things of the flesh” (Romans 8:5) complain as we did when we were “under the elements of the world” (Galatians 4:3). When we instead pray, we do “all things without murmurings and disputings” (Philippians 2:14) and thereby “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

And what a light we shine when we sing aloud to the Lord! Paul wrote we should speak “to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

How can believers find themselves singing and praying more often? Memorize and practice singing a favorite hymn or other worshipful song to the Lord. Sing it when times are good! When times are hard, recognize complaints as a lack of trust in the Father, tell Him the issue, and then trust Him again. BDT

The Imperatives of Redemption

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matthew 16:21)

The little word “must” (Greek *deon*) conveys urgency and necessity and is frequently used in connection with the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He was just a lad, He told His parents in the temple, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49).

But then the first time this key auxiliary verb is found in the New Testament is in the comprehensive prophetic statement of His mission, as given to His disciples in our text. He must go to Jerusalem to suffer, and die, and be raised the third day. As He was moving toward that climactic event, “he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent” (Luke 4:43). Furthermore, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

He had much preaching and much work to do in that brief three-year interim in world history. But then He must die! And why must He die? Because “the scriptures must be fulfilled” (Mark 14:49). “These are the words which I spake unto you... that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). And how must He die? “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). But then, of course, “he must rise again from the dead” (John 20:9).

To what purpose must He be lifted up on the cross to die and then be raised again? Why, because “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). HMM

Thursday, September 11

Understanding the Times

“And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.” (1 Chronicles 12:32)

This chapter lists the numbers of men from each of the tribes of Israel who cast their lot with David in his conflict with King Saul. All these numbers are given except those of Issachar, but of these it was said that all their brethren followed their 200 leaders in turning to David. The reason for their unanimity in this decision was that these leaders “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” It was time to “turn the kingdom” to David, “according to the word of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 12:23). God had given them a Benjamite, Saul, as king for a time, but now David had been anointed, and it was the time to give “the sceptre” to Judah, according to the prophecy of their father, Jacob, given over 600 years before (Genesis 49:10).

How desperately we need leaders today who are spiritual “sons of Issachar,” understanding these times! Christ told the apostles, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons” (Acts 1:7); it was more urgent that they proceed to witness for Him “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8).

Nevertheless, He will return to the earth in some generation, and that generation should be expected (when they see all these things) to “know that it is near, even at the doors” (Matthew 24:33). They will be able to understand the signs, and even though they should never attempt to guess the date, they should “look up...for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28) when they see “these things begin to come to pass.”

The signs are everywhere, yet few of our leaders—even many Christian politicians—seem to understand the real meaning of these times. Christ is “even at the doors!” HMM

Revival Through the Word

“Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.” (Psalm 37:34)

Sometimes the battle takes its toll, we feel like the enemy is winning, and our soul “melteth for heaviness” (v. 28). Many psalms share these intense emotions and seek God’s face for relief and revival. These eight verses in Psalm 119 provide a concise remedy that every Christian needs.

- Openly confess and make supplication: “I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me” (v. 26).
- Request understanding: “Teach me thy statutes. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts” (vv. 26-27).
- Reaffirm personal witness: “So shall I talk of thy wondrous works” (v. 27).
- Boldly request spiritual strength: “Strengthen thou me according unto thy word” (v. 28).
- Request victory over habitual sin: “Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously” (v. 29).
- Consciously declare personal commitment: “I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments I have laid before me” (v. 30).
- Remember past righteous behavior: “I have stuck unto thy testimonies” (v. 31).
- Plea for God’s favor and mercy: “O LORD, put me not to shame” (v. 31).
- Expectantly promise future lifestyle of holiness: “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart” (v. 32).

Personal revival is as sure as the Word of God. But revival assumes our own deep desire to live in accordance with God’s Word. God will “enlarge” (fill, expand) our heart when we seek His face (Psalm 81:10). HMM III

Saturday, September 13

The Writing of God

“And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.” (Exodus 32:16)

In this verse is the first occurrence in the Bible of the word “writing” and, appropriately enough, it is speaking of “the writing of God” rather than the writings of men. The reference, of course, is to the two tables of the law, the Ten Commandments, “written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18) and rewritten on a second set of stone tables to replace the first after they were shattered (Exodus 34:1).

All Scripture is divinely inspired, but the Ten Commandments were divinely inscribed! This testimony of their unique importance is a sobering condemnation of any who ignore them or distort their meaning.

But there is another writing of God—this one recorded in the New Testament, one of even greater personal significance to the Christian: “Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ...written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3). No longer is there an external standard divinely engraved in stone by the finger of God but an internal conviction inscribed in the heart by the Spirit of God! “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them” (Hebrews 10:16).

This remarkable writing of God’s law in our hearts and minds has been accomplished because Christ came not “to destroy, but to fulfill” the law (Matthew 5:17) and “hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). Now, with the law in our hearts, we have become epistles of God, “known and read of all men” (2 Corinthians 3:2), and it is vital that the writing read true and clear through our lives. HMM

Sunday, September 14

Arise, My Soul, Arise

*“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”
(Hebrews 4:16)*

The beautiful old hymn “Arise, My Soul, Arise” was written by the great hymn writer Charles Wesley. Let us use its five verses to focus our thoughts these next five days.

*Arise, my soul, arise; Shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears:
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.*

At first reading, the theme of the song seems unclear until we recognize that the sinner is being enjoined to come to salvation and, by the power of the sacrificial blood shed on his behalf, receive forgiveness and eternal life.

Because “Christ...hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2), “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access” (Romans 5:1-2) to the Father, who alone has the power to forgive our sins. We have no need to fear rejection, for “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

We can arise and “come boldly unto the throne of grace,” where God the Father reigns. We have assurance of access because our “surety of a better testament” (Hebrews 7:22) is “a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” (Hebrews 4:14), “who is [seated] on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Hebrews 8:1). Here He requests the Father’s “mercy, and...grace” on our behalf, for He knows us by our names, which are already “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27) “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 17:8). JDM

Monday, September 15

For Me to Intercede

“Wherefore, he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25)

The second verse of the moving old hymn “Arise, My Soul, Arise” speaks of Christ’s intercessory work on our behalf and the basis on which His prayers are accepted.

*He ever lives above; For me to intercede,
His all-redeeming love, His precious blood to plead.
His blood atoned for all our race
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.*

Christ is our intercessor, pleading with the Father to save us from our sins, for which the penalty has been paid by His “sacrifice...for this he did once, when he offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:27). It is “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19), that pleads for our forgiveness. He does this for us because He “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Revelation 1:5) as we come to God in repentant faith.

Because Jesus was Himself a fully righteous man, He could die on another’s behalf; because He was fully God the Son, His death was sufficient to pay the penalty for the whole human race. “Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). “Thou art worthy...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

Only in this way can we come “to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling” (Hebrews 12:23-24). JDM

Tuesday, September 16

Forgive Him, Oh Forgive

“Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

The third verse of the majestic hymn “Arise, My Soul, Arise” relates how the crucified but risen Intercessor, Christ, pleads with the Father to save a sinner and why His prayers are heard.

*Five bleeding wounds He bears, Received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers; They strongly plead for me.
“Forgive him, oh, forgive,” they cry,
“Nor let that ransomed sinner die.”*

When Jesus was crucified, they “pierced [His] hands and [His] feet” (Psalm 22:16) and “pierced his side” with a spear (John 19:34). After His resurrection, His disciples would view these five wounds (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). It was from these wounds that His blood flowed, “and without shedding of blood [there] is no remission” of sins. “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:22, 28). Our text for today declares that it was His “stripes,” literally “wounds,” that heal us of our deadly sin sickness. His death provides for us life, spiritual health, and righteousness.

If “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16), surely the pleadings of Christ, a perfectly righteous man, are of infinite strength. “Neither pray I for these alone [i.e., His disciples], but for them also which shall believe on me through their word...[that they] be with me where I am” (John 17:20, 24).

As a truly repentant sinner comes in faith to God seeking forgiveness for his sins, Christ pleads, “Forgive him, oh, forgive.” “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). JDM

Wednesday, September 17

His Spirit Answers to the Blood

“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (Romans 8:11)

The fourth verse of “Arise, My Soul, Arise” speaks of God the Father answering the request of God the Son and granting salvation to a repentant sinner, adopting him into His family.

*The Father hears Him pray, His dear Anointed One;
He cannot turn away the presence of His Son.
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.*

As Christ the Messiah hung on Calvary’s tree, God the Father turned away, unable in His holiness to look upon Christ as He bore “the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28). Jesus cried in His agony, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). But once God’s righteous justice was satisfied, the Father turned back and answered Christ’s prayer, even from the horns of the altar, as it were (Psalm 22:21). “I and my Father are one,” Christ had said (John 10:30), and once sin’s penalty was paid, there would be no more separation.

And when a sinner comes to God, claiming the blood of Christ as a full payment for his sins, and Christ Himself prays for the sinner’s full forgiveness and acceptance, the Father cannot turn away, for “he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

In our text, the same Spirit that raised up Christ grants the spiritually dead sinner new life and declares him to be born of God. “Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again [literally, ‘born from above’]” (John 3:7). “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). JDM

Thursday, September 18

Father, Abba, Father

“They are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:14-15)

Charles Wesley’s great hymn “Arise, My Soul, Arise” concludes with a stirring testimony of the joy of salvation.

*My God is reconciled; His pardoning voice I hear.
He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And, “Father, Abba, Father,” cry.*

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). As our text explains, once we have received the spirit of adoption, we are the sons of God—He owns us as His child. This is a “new” thing. We who formerly were estranged from our Creator have been reconciled to Him. “Old things,” such as the bondage to fear, are “passed away.” The close-knit ties are strong, “for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee....I will not fear what men shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Now that He is our Father, we have direct access to Him. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8). As an earthly father desires the best for his children, “how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:11). “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and...we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

This father/child relationship goes deep. The term “Abba, Father” reflects a most sensitive and loving bond, perhaps best rendered “O sweet Daddy.” “We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). JDM

Friday, September 19

Taught by the Word

“Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.” (Psalm 119:33)

Verses 33-40 of Psalm 119 closely parallels a similar passage in Proverbs 2:1-5. Both focus on being taught, gaining understanding, and keeping “the way” of God’s Word.

Certainly worth noting is the manner in which the psalmist asked to “go in the path of thy commandments” (v. 35). In every case, the request is for God’s hand to control the process. There is no indication that the psalmist assumed the capability of finding these truths on his own.

- “Teach me, O LORD” (v. 33).
- “Give me understanding” (v. 34).
- “Make me to go” (v. 35).
- “Incline my heart” (v. 36).
- “Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity” (v. 37).
- “Stablish thy word” (v. 38).
- “Turn away my reproach” (v. 39).
- “Quicken me in thy righteousness” (v. 40).

However, having prayed for God’s intervention and oversight in his life, the psalmist promised to act on the given insight and order his life around “the way” so illumined by God’s instructions. He acknowledged his “delight” and his “longing” in the holy life and character revealed in the Scriptures and, like the Proverbs 2 passage, showed a willingness of the spiritual consciousness of his heart and mind to “understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:5).

May our prayer always be like this: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). HMM III

The Comfortable Church

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” (Revelation 3:17)

This is the heart of Christ’s rebuke of the church at Laodicea, the “lukewarm” church (v. 16) of the last days. This is an evangelical church for its candlestick is still in place (note Revelation 1:20; 2:5), but it has become a neutral church, “neither cold nor hot” (3:15). Its witness was tepid because it became “rich, and increased with goods,” comfortable in a culture that tends to equate material prosperity with success and God’s favor. It may have acquired large and beautiful facilities, developed special programs of many kinds, featured a variety of musicians and other artists, and even gained a measure of political power. Yet, Christ calls it poor and blind and naked!

Not all large churches become like this, of course, but it is always a real danger. The desire for large congregations can easily lead to compromising biblical standards of doctrine and practice. “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion,” the prophet warned (Amos 6:1).

Note that the Lord began His letter to the Laodicean church by identifying Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14). This may suggest that a major reason for the development of such complacency in a large church (or a small church, for that matter) is neglect of these three doctrines—the sufficiency of Christ, the inerrant authority of God’s Word, and the special creation of all things by God.

The letter to this church ends with the sad picture of Christ standing at its door, seeking admission (v. 20). “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (v. 22). HMM

Sunday, September 21

Mercy from the Word

“Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.” (Psalm 119:41)

The Hebrew word *hesed*, used here for “mercy,” has a breadth of meaning. Its basic connotation is “kindness” and is most often used in God’s patient dealing with the nation of Israel through their long, and often rebellious, history. The most frequent contextual use focuses on God’s *withholding* judgment during specific times or events rather than executing the just sentence demanded by disobedience to His laws.

It is in that sense that “salvation” is often connected to mercy. God “rescues” a person or nation from the consequences of foolish or rebellious actions because He is merciful: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

This section of Psalm 119 clearly states that these mercies are according to the Word of God. No event dilutes the holiness of God. No judgment withheld violates the innate nature of the thrice-holy Creator. Mercy may delay judgment for the sinner, and justification through redemption will eliminate judgment for the sinner, but God’s holiness does not abrogate the law. The sentence is carried out—either on the sinner or on the Lord Jesus Christ in the place of the sinner (Proverbs 11:21).

The psalmist thus praised the *basis* for God’s mercies, told of his trust and hope in the Scriptures, and then gave a series of promises to the Lord that marked his own commitment to obedience (vv. 44-48). As the stanza closes, the psalmist promised he would lift up his hands in public praise of the Word and meditate in private as well.

Would all of God’s children emulate the heart of this dear brother from the past. HMM III

Monday, September 22

Redeemed!

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

How glibly we use the terms redeemed, redemption, and ransom. But what do they mean, and more importantly, what did Christ’s act of redemption mean?

Three Greek words and their derivations are used in the New Testament to denote various aspects of this truth. In our text, “redeemed” comes from *lutroo*, which means to set free, buy back, or ransom. Christ’s innocent blood, sacrificed for us, bought us back. “By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12).

Redeemed from what? From slavery to sin. Jesus taught, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). Thankfully, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13). The Greek word here is *exagorazo*, meaning to buy up, to ransom from the market place (i.e., *agora*), which could be called “the slave market of sin.” He ransomed us, redeeming us from the horrors of slavery to sin by His death on the cross.

The final word is *apolutrosis*, “to ransom in full.” He has paid the full penalty! “It is finished” (John 19:30), He said as He died. In Him alone “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Each of us needs to appropriate His plan, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24). JDM

Tuesday, September 23

Hope Through the Word

“Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.” (Psalm 119:49)

The saints of God have always faced something of a two-pronged challenge to their hope. First, those “that will live godly” and love His laws will “suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12) and, secondly, will be troubled by the “prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3). The pressure of the first and the perplexity of the second often test our expectations.

But the Word of God provides “comfort in my affliction” (Psalm 119:50). Jeremiah, often called the “weeping prophet,” found that the “word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” simply because he embraced with unshakeable confidence the fact that he was “called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jeremiah 15:16). When the psalmist asked, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” (Psalm 42:5, 11), his answer—in spite of the troubles of the hour—was his certain knowledge that he “shall yet praise him.”

We may recoil in holy anger when the wicked “forsake thy law” (Psalm 119:53), but we can still live with “songs” in our hearts (Ephesians 5:19), knowing that our great Creator God is working “all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11) and that even the “wrath of man” will eventually bring praise to Him (Psalm 76:10).

Our time is short. We live for about 100 years and brag as though we have lived forever. The Creator reckons the nations as mere “dust of the balance” (Isaiah 40:15). We need to shift our viewpoint from the “temporal” to the “eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18) and rest in the absolute God-given knowledge that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). “This I had,” the psalmist exclaimed, “because I kept thy precepts” (Psalm 119:56). HMM III

Least in the Kingdom

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19)

The Lord Jesus was evidently speaking here not of the differences between saved and unsaved people but rather of degrees of reward in His future kingdom. The criterion for achieving “greatness” in the future life is simply to believe, teach, and obey the complete Word of God in this life, not just the major doctrines and general principles. Those who undermine any part of God’s Word, either in teaching or practice, will be relegated to the “least in the kingdom of heaven.” In the words of the apostle Paul, such a person “shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Thus, no Scripture is unimportant, for “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16). In fact, the verse just previous to our text, providing the basis for the Lord’s warning about breaking even the least commandment, is His remarkable assertion about the verbal inerrancy of Scripture: “For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18).

There are many Christians (especially among intellectuals) who say they believe the Bible but are nevertheless quick to adapt their interpretations of Scripture to the latest speculations of scientists or to current fads of world living. This is insulting to God, who surely can say what He means! “Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4).

If we aspire to greatness in the coming kingdom, then clearly we must believe and teach “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) according to His revealed Word. HMM

Thursday, September 25

Obedience and Righteousness

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19)

Certainly the focal point of all history and the climax of Christ’s earthly ministry was His sacrificial death on the cross. Christ knew from ages past what was in store for Him, and yet He was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

However, as we see in our text, Christ’s obedience included more than His death, for He was perfectly obedient throughout His entire life. Indeed, it is a good thing, for any act of disobedience would have invalidated His sacrificial death. Animal sacrifices in the Old Testament (which prefigured the final sacrifice of Christ) had to be “without blemish” (Leviticus 22:19). But even a perfect animal was not enough (Hebrews 10:4) to satisfy God’s justice and take away sins. “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Christ’s obedience, therefore, consisted not only of His obedience in death but in His entire earthly life: from His incarnation, “I come...to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7), to His childhood, “[Know] ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49), to His healing and teaching ministry among the people, “I must work the works of him that sent me” (John 9:4), to His preparation for death, “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Now, in His obedience, Christ calls us to a life of similar obedience. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). JDM

Guarding the Word

“Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words.” (Psalm 119:57)

Three of the 22 stanzas of Psalm 119 have all eight Hebrew terms used to describe the Word of God. How appropriate it is that the central theme in these verses (vv. 57-64) provides us succinct ways to keep (guard) His Word.

Principally, our “whole heart” must be involved in seeking the “favour” of God (v. 58). The “great commandment” (Matthew 22:38) rests on loving God with “all” of our hearts. If we seek God’s blessing, both during our earthly life and in the eternity to come, we can “trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Such a heart thinks (considers, reckons) about the ways of God and turns (turns back, corrects) its “feet unto [His] testimonies” (Psalm 119:59). The godly life is not an unplanned life. The godly life seeks to understand and obey the words of God’s Word. And the godly life makes “haste” and will not delay in keeping His commandments (Psalm 119:60).

Circumstances may cause temporary difficulties in the life of a godly person (Psalm 119:61), but he will not forget the laws of God. Rather, he will rise at “midnight” (the deepest time of trouble) to give thanks to our Lord “because of thy righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:62).

The one who wants to guard the Word of God is a companion of those who fear God and keep the precepts of the Word (Psalm 119:63). The godly heart sees the mercy of the Lord everywhere and longs for the “Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28) to teach it the eternal statutes of His Word (Psalm 119:64). May “such an heart” (Deuteronomy 5:29) be ours as we seek to serve Him. HMM III

Saturday, September 27

The Discerner

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12)

The Word of God (both the written Word and the living Word, Jesus Christ) is “living and energizing” and is the double-edged sword of the Spirit, piercing into the deepest recesses of body, soul, and spirit. There it “discerns” even the very thoughts and intents of our hearts.

This discernment, however, is more than just understanding or insight. The Greek word for “discerner” is *kritikos* and is used only this one time in the Bible. Our word “critic” is derived from it, and this is an important dimension of its meaning. Its discernment is a critical, judging discernment—one that convicts and corrects as well as understands.

It is paradoxical that people today presume to become critics of the Bible when it should really be the other way around. There are textual critics who sort through the various ancient manuscripts of the Bible, trying to arrive at the original text; there are the “higher critics” who critique vocabularies and concepts, trying to show that the traditional authors did not actually write the books attributed to them; and then there are many other purely destructive critics who criticize the Bible’s miracles, morals, and everything else, hoping thereby to justify their rebellion against the Word.

But the Bible still stands! It stands in judgment on our lives and our subconscious motives. It will have the final word when “the books [are] opened...and the dead [are] judged out of those things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12). It is far better to heed the constructive criticism of the Word now than to hear its condemnation later. HMM

From Forgetting to Shedding

“These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.” (Proverbs 6:16-17)

In both the Old and New Testaments the Lord directs people to “be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16). Scripture provides both His commands and the example of His Son Jesus that we can follow to grow in holiness. But to obey God’s commands we must first know and remember them—to recall in order to act.

In our text, “innocent blood” means the lifeblood of a guiltless person. The first biblical record of a man shedding innocent blood is, of course, Cain killing Abel. God condemned Cain for this violent act against his righteous brother (Genesis 4:10-11; Matthew 23:35). Man’s rebellion continued up to the days of Noah, when “the earth [was] filled with violence” (Genesis 6:13). After the Flood judgment, God underscored the gravity of murder by declaring, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Genesis 9:6).

In Exodus 20:13 and again in Deuteronomy 19:9-10 God explicitly commanded, “Thou shalt not kill.” However, the Israelites “forgot God their savior” and ignored His commands, serving idols and “shed[ding] innocent blood” (Psalm 106:21, 35-38). They rebelled against the prophets calling them to remember and obey God’s instruction (e.g., Isaiah 59:7; Jeremiah 7:6-7). Ultimately, Judas betrayed Jesus into the hands of His enemies, the most egregious example of sin leading to the shedding of innocent blood (Matthew 27:4-5).

May we not be like these people who forgot the Lord and His commands and continued deeper into sin. Instead, may we obey and remember God’s Word: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). DWR

Monday, September 29

Lovers of Self

“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.” (2 Timothy 3:2)

One of the dangerous teachings of the New Age movement that has spilled over into modern evangelicalism is the notion of self-love. Many psychologists—even Christian professional counselors—are attributing society’s ills, especially among young people, to the supposed lack of a positive self-image or self-esteem on the part of those exhibiting antisocial behavior. What they need, we are told, is to learn to love themselves more, to appreciate their own self-worth. The problem with this idea is that it is both unscriptural and unrealistic. People do not hate themselves. The Bible says that “no man ever yet hated his own flesh” (Ephesians 5:29).

Instead of learning to esteem ourselves, the Scripture commands us each to “esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). Even the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, considered himself so unworthy that he called himself the chief of sinners (see 1 Timothy 1:15).

We are told by some Christian leaders that the measure of our great value in the sight of God is the fact that Christ paid such a high price—His own death—to redeem us. But His death is also the measure of our terrible sinfulness. “Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).

In fact, as in our text, the rise of this self-love idea is itself a sign of the last days, when people shall be “lovers of their own selves.” It is the main characteristic of New Age humanism.

Christ died for our sins because He loves us, not because He needs us. We should live for Him in thanksgiving for the “amazing grace, that saved a wretch like me!” HMM

Understanding Through the Word

“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.” (Psalm 119:73)

Understanding the Word of God begins with seeing God as the Creator of all things (Colossians 1:16-17). The beginning of faith rests solidly on belief in the creation (Hebrews 11:3), and even the “everlasting gospel” embraces the conscious worship of the Creator (Revelation 14:6-7). “I am the LORD, and there is none else....Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!” (Isaiah 45:5, 9).

Scholars who distort Scripture to compromise with the atheistic naturalism of evolutionary science wind up “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). May God rebuke them.

The theme of this stanza (Psalm 119:73-80) weaves a series of requests around various examples of need centered around the psalmist’s leadership position. “They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word” (v. 74). “Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies” (v. 79).

Though he recognized that the Lord “afflicted” him in the past (v. 75), the psalmist also expected the Lord to bring him mercies and comfort, for the law of God was his delight (v. 77). We may view this godly leader as “set for the defence of the gospel” (Philippians 1:17) and “ready always to give an answer” (1 Peter 3:15).

In summary, the last verse of this stanza reads, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed” (Psalm 119:80). May our hearts be driven to this level of boldness in our witness while resting in the absolute authority, integrity, and accuracy of the infallible writings of the Creator God for our salvation (2 Timothy 3:16). HMM III

Wednesday, October 1

Sufferings

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21)

Peter’s first epistle, written during a time of bitter persecution, deals with the matter of suffering. Peter reminds us that Christ suffered for us and that it is a privilege to suffer for Him. We are “called” to suffering and should “think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try” us (4:12).

Christ’s suffering was foretold (1:11), as is ours. We see that He had patience, humility, and submission in His sufferings (2:23) in order to bear “our sins in his own body on the tree” (2:24). He suffered unjustly, “the just for the unjust” (3:18), not only in His spirit, but “Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh” (4:1), being witnessed personally by Peter (5:1).

Since we are likewise “called” to suffer, Peter explains that we also will be “suffering wrongfully” (2:19) even “when ye do well” (v. 20). We will “suffer for righteousness’ sake” (3:14) and “for well doing” (v. 17). To avoid being taken by surprise, we are to prepare ourselves to suffer “in the flesh” (4:1), if need be. We will “be reproached for the name of Christ” (4:14) and should “not be ashamed” if we “suffer as a Christian” (4:16). It is much better to suffer in such a way than to have done something evil to deserve it (v. 15).

Suffering while following Christ’s example is “acceptable with God” (2:20), and even makes us “happy” (3:14; 4:14). Through it we can “glorify God on this behalf” (4:16) because it is “according to the will of God” (4:19). There is even a magnificent reward awaiting the sufferer (5:10).

In view of all of this, there is little wonder that Peter says, “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (4:13). JDM

Longing for the Word

“My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?” (Psalm 119:81-82)

Those who “love the LORD” with all their heart, soul, and might (Deuteronomy 6:5) and those who seek the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33) deeply long to “understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:5).

Yet in spite of such longing, the saints of God are often perplexed by the apparent success of the wicked. This psalmist is no exception.

- “When wilt thou comfort me?” (Psalm 119:82).
- “I am become like a bottle in the smoke” (v. 83).
- “When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?” (v. 84).
- “The proud have digged pits for me” (v. 85).
- “They persecute me wrongfully” (v. 86).
- “They had almost consumed me upon the earth” (v. 87).

Among the heartfelt complaints, however, is the continual reliance on the promises and principles of God’s Word. The psalmist promised not to forget the statutes, though he felt invisible to God (v. 83). And though he knew that his days were not guaranteed, he expected God to judge the wicked (v. 84). He knew the “commandments are faithful,” and he promised the Lord that he would not forsake the precepts (vv. 86-87).

The final request should be ours as well: “Quicken me [enliven, revive] after thy lovingkindness” (v. 88). Even though God “hast shewed me great and sore troubles,” the confidence is that God “shalt quicken me again” (Psalm 71:20). On the basis of that assurance, our response should be like this godly man’s: “So shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth” (Psalm 119:88). HMM III

Friday, October 3

Certain Hope

“Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.” (Hebrews 6:18-19)

The noun “hope,” when used in the New Testament, does not imply a wishful attitude but rather a joyous and confident expectation in something promised that will certainly come to pass—in most cases, something good. Note especially the few times it is used with a descriptive adjective.

First, in a stirring benediction, Paul tells us that our good hope comes from both “our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father” (2 Thessalonians 2:16). Furthermore, such hope is given to us along with “everlasting consolation,” or comfort, that shall last forever. The Father and Son have done this “through grace” that brings eternal salvation.

Next, we are taught to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). This blessed hope can be none other than “our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1). He will certainly return, and this return will be glorious.

Furthermore, we have a hope that is actively alive. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). We have been (past tense) born again from the dead just as surely as Christ has been raised from the dead, for His resurrection accomplished it.

Our hope, under grace, is guaranteed by Jesus Christ: “A better hope...by the which we draw nigh unto God” (Hebrews 7:19) than that which was possible under law. In fact, it is a glorious hope (2 Corinthians 3:11-12) by comparison. This kind of hope can be “an anchor of the soul” (our text). JDM

The Bible Stands!

“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.” (Psalm 119:160)

Very few books survive very long. Only a few survive past the first printing, and science books especially get out of date in just a few years.

But one book is eternal! The Bible stands! Even its most ancient chapters are still accurate and up to date. Furthermore, despite all the vicious attacks of both ancient pagans and modern humanists, it will continue to endure. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). Even after everything else dies and all the bombastic tirades of skeptics and secularists are long forgotten, the Word endures. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8).

Note the oft-repeated testimony to this same effect in Psalm 119. In addition to the comprehensive promise of today’s text, this great “psalm of the word” also contains these affirmations: “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven....Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart....The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting....Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever” (Psalm 119:89, 111, 144, 152). Founded forever, inherited forever, settled forever, lasting forever! God is eternal, and His Word was true from the beginning.

People may, in these last days, arrogantly think they can “take away from the words of the book of this prophecy” (Revelation 22:19), but such presumption will only “take away [their] part out of the book of life,” and the Bible will still stand. “The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25). HMM

Sunday, October 5

Lessons from Colossians

“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Colossians 1:2)

Paul’s letter to the church in Colossae is especially instructive to those who would seek a close relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 1 provides a breathtaking summary of the purpose for which we are saved and the eternal changes that take place at salvation: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight” (Colossians 1:21-22).

Chapter 2 provides clear warnings about the spiritual battle that is taking place and precise insights on gaining victory over the world: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7).

Chapter 3 insists that our responsibility is to take advantage of what has been provided by Christ and to live as *Christians*: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

Chapter 4 gives practical instructions for our day-to-day relationships through the lives of the godly people who worked with Paul: “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:5-6). HMM III

Filled with the Knowledge of His Will

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” (Colossians 1:9)

Paul has chosen a particular word, *pleroo*, to describe an action that “fills to the top” so that the knowledge about which he prays has no more space to fill. While speaking to his friends in Rome, Paul said that he was “persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Romans 15:14).

This includes the kind of knowledge (Greek *epignosis*) of God’s will that stresses precise and complete understanding of that will for our lives. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness... that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” These “things” (the knowledge, the precious promises) enable us to escape “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

This magnificent and complete knowledge of His will includes the wisdom (Greek *sophia*) to use the knowledge acquired by experience. It even includes the grace God made to abound “toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (Ephesians 1:8), which, since it comes from God, is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

The wonderful knowledge and wisdom that God has provided for us includes a spiritual understanding (Greek *pneumatikos sunesis*), an ability to put complicated matters together with the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Indeed, “he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (1 Corinthians 2:15). “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things” (2 Timothy 2:7). HMM III

Tuesday, October 7

Fruitful in Every Good Work

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10)

There are many admonitions in Scripture insisting that the child of God maintain a lifestyle that reflects the holy character of the Savior.

The unique phrase “walk worthy” appears only three times in the New Testament: once in our text today; once in Ephesians 4:1, where we are asked to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called”; and once in 1 Thessalonians 2:12, where we are admonished to “walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”

Paul’s admonition to the church at Colossae was to live in such a way that everything would be “all pleasing” to our Lord. The Galatian church was struggling with members who were trying to keep the “old” Jewish law. Paul argued, “Do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). Paul insisted to the Thessalonians, “As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Since we are to “walk worthy,” we are to be “fruitful in every good work.” Indeed, “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

None of this should be a surprise. When God drew us to Himself (John 6:44) and brought the necessary conviction of our sin, Christ’s righteousness, and the judgment to come (John 16:7-8), what was “dead in trespasses and sin” (Ephesians 2:1) had to become a “new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17) “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). That “new man” is then empowered to “walk worthy.” HMM III

Qualified to Inherit

“Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” (Colossians 1:11-12)

Having been “made strong with all strength” through “his glorious power,” we are then enabled to complete the assignment that God has granted to us on Earth.

The power of God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). The same power displayed when God raised Jesus “from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:20) is more often needed on Earth for “patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” The word for “patience” in this text describes a quality of temper that does not easily succumb under suffering. That emphasis is not merely a contextual byproduct. Much of the godly life demands a temperament that opposes cowardice or despondence. We should “glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Romans 5:3-4).

Many of our brothers and sisters in history suffered beyond human endurance, ultimately giving their lives for the kingdom of God. “But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Romans 8:25). Therein lies the longsuffering that does not hastily retaliate after a wrong. This temperament opposes wrath and revenge.

These godly traits, earned and experienced only while on Earth, reveal us to be “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Now, we are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). Later, He will present us “faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24). HMM III

Thursday, October 9

Delivered, Translated, Forgiven

“...who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14)

The central message of the gospel lies in Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection. There is much more, of course, to our salvation. The immediate result is described in the two short verses of our text.

We have been delivered “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). We have been delivered “from unreasonable and wicked men” (2 Thessalonians 3:2) and “from every evil work” and are preserved “unto his heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18). Ultimately, we have been delivered “from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

We have also been “translated” into the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus. We will “not come into condemnation” but have been turned “from death unto life” (John 5:24). Our life prior to salvation was darkness, but we have been made “light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8). No longer are we aliens outside of God’s family, but we have been “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).

Furthermore, all of our sins have been forgiven, and we are “justified freely by his grace” (Romans 3:24). That forgiveness and justification seal us “unto the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). And since this is an eternal transaction brought about by the transcendent Creator, we have been raised “up together, and made [to] sit together in heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6). Already we have the “earnest of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14) and the assurance that we will “obtain a better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35).

In this life we may struggle with human rejection, but we can remember David’s comment: “I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge” (Psalm 71:7). HMM III

Friday, October 10

The Great Physician

“But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” (Matthew 9:12)

It almost goes without saying that a person who is seriously ill would do anything to regain health. But the sad fact is few people really pay attention to their health until they are threatened with its loss.

On the other hand, testimonies without number have been chronicled that relate an individual's refusal to acknowledge the claims of Christ until he or she had been stricken with personal problems or physical illness. “You've got to be on your back before you will look up,” so the saying goes. But what does the Great Physician have to offer the one whose health seems to be strong from an outward perspective?

Instead of being well, however, the Bible says that everyone is born into this world with a dreadful disease in our souls called sin. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), “and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15). The sin disease is most tragic when we do not feel it and do not know we have it. “Because thou sayest, I...have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). Jesus Christ is the only One who can heal us: “Neither is there salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12). And just as He never sent anyone away who came to Him on Earth for physical healing (Matthew 12:15), so “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37) when he comes seeking salvation.

Certainly one of the most important steps in this process of being healed of our sin sickness is recognizing our desperate need for healing. When we say, “Be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee” (Psalm 41:4), He will respond with forgiveness, grace, and healing. JDM

Saturday, October 11

Line upon Line

“The word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.” (Isaiah 28:13)

This familiar passage (repeated mostly from Isaiah 28:10 just before it) is often cited in support of a detailed, verse-by-verse method of Bible study and exposition. However, the context is one of rebuke to the people of Ephraim (that is, the northern kingdom of Israel) in the days of the divided kingdom. Isaiah especially castigates the priests and prophets who should have been teaching God’s Word to the people but who had instead become proud and then drunkards, leaving the people in great ignorance and spiritual confusion.

Therefore, cried Isaiah, “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts” (v. 9). Before they can really grow in the knowledge of God, they must be built up carefully, line upon line, for they are yet carnal babes in spiritual matters.

A very similar rebuke was administered to the early Christians and would be even more appropriate today: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Such an admonition is greatly needed today, when Christian believers subsist almost entirely on spiritual milk—or even worse, on the froth that passes for evangelical literature in most Sunday schools and Christian bookstores today. We need to get back to the strong meat of the Word, lest we “fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.” HMM

The God Who Provides

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Romans 15:13)

God’s provisions for the believer include far more than physical necessities. These are indicated by seven beautiful titles ascribed to Him in the New Testament.

The God of love: First of all, we need love, and “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Then “the fruit of the Spirit is love” in our lives (Galatians 5:22) because He Himself is “the God of love and peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

The God of all grace: God saves us by His grace, and then we need to “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18). This we can do because “the God of all grace...hath called us unto his eternal glory” (1 Peter 5:10).

The God of peace: He satisfies the need for peace of soul in the believer’s life, and He is called “the God of peace” five times in the New Testament (Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philipians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20).

The God of all comfort: Our God is called “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort,” because He “comforteth us in all our tribulation,” thus enabling us also to provide comfort to others “by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

The God of patience: We do “have need of patience” (Hebrews 10:36), and this need also is supplied by “the God of patience and consolation” (Romans 15:5).

The God of glory: It was “the God of glory” who first called Abraham (Acts 7:2), and through the Word we also “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The God of hope: By His Spirit He fills us with joy and peace, with power and abundant hope—blessing us “with all spiritual blessings...in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). HMM

Monday, October 13

Creator of All Things

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” (Colossians 1:16)

The phrase “all things” is used throughout these verses to emphasize that everything has been brought into existence by the “dear Son” (Colossians 1:13, 16-20).

- All things were created through Him and for Him.
- All things consist (stand together) in Him.
- All things will give preeminence to Him.
- All things reside in His fullness.
- All things will be reconciled to Him.

The list of created things in verse 16 is exhaustive: heaven, Earth, visible and invisible things, and the rulers in and of the universe—thrones, dominions, principalities, powers. Jesus Christ is “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21).

The Creator existed before all things and now “approves” all things. Solomon understood this as he spoke of wisdom: “The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was” (Proverbs 8:22-23), just as He chose us “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

When the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to John, He said, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). These grand sweeps of eternity are anchors for our faith. But we must not lose sight that “the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word [the word of the Creator] are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). HMM III

Head of the Church

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18)

The “head” is both “chief” and “source.” When the Lord Jesus had accomplished the work of reconciliation on Earth, God the Father “put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church, of course, is the assembly of the Redeemer, constituted and commissioned to do “the work of the ministry,” operating on Earth under delegated leaders (Ephesians 4:11-12). Even though the human focus is the making of disciples (Matthew 28:19-20), there is a constant gallery of “principalities and powers in heavenly places” who need the display of “the manifold wisdom of God” that is only made “known by the church” (Ephesians 3:10).

Although there is a sense in which all of God’s twice-born are spiritually part of a “body” that is “knit together” by the Holy Spirit (Colossians 2:19), our participation is realized in the localized assemblies throughout the earth. One day the entire church will be completely assembled in heaven, a “general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23).

Therefore, the Head of the Church is preeminent and has all fullness, being the firstborn from the dead. He is “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21). The mission of the Church, commissioned over two millennia ago, embraces an ageless goal. Ultimately, He will “present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27). HMM III

Wednesday, October 15

Hardened or Sprinkled Heart?

“Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” (Romans 11:25)

In Romans 11, Paul explains a marvelous outcome from Israel’s unbelief: many Gentiles would hear the gospel and be saved. The word “blindness” has caught readers’ attention. What does it mean and how does this blindness happen?

The King James Version translates the Greek word *porosis* as “blindness” or “hardness.” It means to grow calloused through stubbornness. The most famous biblical example is surely the pharaoh of Exodus. “When Pharaoh saw that there was respite [from the plague of frogs], he hardened his heart” (Exodus 8:15). He hardened his own heart when he refused to submit to God. Then he did it again! “And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time [after the plague of flies] also” (Exodus 8:32). It is after the fifth and sixth plagues that Scripture says, “The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses [in Exodus 7:3]” (Exodus 9:12).

This historical king provides an example of how one becomes blind to truth, which Romans 1 outlines. At first, “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God” (Romans 1:21). Next, “wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts” (Romans 1:24). In the same way, God gave pharaoh and the pharisees of Jesus’ day up to the hardening of their own hearts. “Because of unbelief they were broken off” (Romans 11:20).

And yet Jesus stands ready to soften the heart, bring spiritual sight to the blind, and rebuild the seared conscience of any who “will hear his voice” and “harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7). Therefore “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Hebrews 10:22). BDT

Confidence in the God of Truth

“My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.” (Psalm 89:34-35)

In Greek, Roman, and more modern false religions, lying and deception are common behaviors among their gods. Not so with the Lord of the Bible! And we are glad of that. What confidence can be built on an unstable foundation? As Proverbs instructs us, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint” (25:19).

Our God is not untrustworthy, prone to deception and wavering, but the God of truth. “God is not a man, that he should lie” (Numbers 23:19). God’s truthfulness is unchangeable: “It was impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18). If we don’t have confidence in God to reliably relay to us the truth, how likely are we to step out in faith in times of doubt? We must fall back on the assurance that the God of the Bible is the God of truth, and we know we can rely on Him “to keep you from falling” (Jude 1:24-25).

God also expects that same truthfulness from those made “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27) who aspire to be His holy children (1 Peter 1:15-16). So we should strive to be of the same mind as God when it comes to the truth. “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour” (Ephesians 4:25).

Our God sets the standard and example of consistent truth-loving and truth-telling for us to follow. This may seem like a tall mountain to climb, but we should not lose heart. God is for us! He is willing and able to help us, for “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts” (Galatians 4:6). DWR

Friday, October 17

Watchful Sobriety

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”
(1 Peter 5:8)

Several words are used in Scripture to imply spiritual watchfulness, and each has a slightly different meaning. Only as we compare and combine these words do we get the full force of the Scripture exhortations to watchfulness.

One such word is the Greek word *agrupneo*, translated “watch.” In Mark 13:33 we read, “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.” The word literally means to be sleepless and comes from two Greek words meaning “to chase” and “sleep.” It implies a purposeful and active state of awareness.

The term more commonly used is *gregoreo*. It is a stronger word meaning to arouse oneself and shake off lethargy, implying activity on the part of one who is fully awake. “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith” (1 Corinthians 16:13), and “continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2). “Watch ye, therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh” (Mark 13:35).

A third word is *nepho*, which literally means to abstain from drink that would produce stupor, as well as sleep, and therefore conveys the additional idea of sobriety. By combining the teaching of these three words, we are instructed not only to keep awake but to keep active and to avoid the intoxication of this world’s seductive pleasures.

In our text, we see that we are not only to be sober (*nepho*) and vigilant (*gregoreo*), but we also see the reason why. Our “adversary the devil” is a vicious opponent. He stalks us both day and night with brutal cunning. We dare not underestimate him by figuratively closing our eyes in sleep or dulling our senses with intoxicants. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober” (1 Peter 1:13). JDM

The Wisdom Mine

“Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?” (Job 28:20)

In one of his monologues, Job compares his search for spiritual understanding to human explorations for metals and precious stones. “There is a vein for the silver,” he said, “and a place for gold....Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone” (vv. 1-2).

These all are easier to find than true wisdom. “It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold” (vv. 16-19).

Neither have animals discovered it: “nor the fierce lion passed by it...it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air” (vv. 8, 21). “The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me” (v. 14).

“But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?” (v. 12). Job is driven to ask where one must go to find and mine the vein of true wisdom.

It is certainly “not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought” (1 Corinthians 2:6). The mine of evolutionary humanism that dominates modern education and scholarship will yield only the fool’s gold of “science falsely so called” (1 Timothy 6:20).

Job found true wisdom only through God, and so must we, for only “God understandeth the way thereof...unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:23, 28). The Lord Jesus Christ is the ever-productive mine “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). HMM

Sunday, October 19

Christ in You

“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

The New Covenant includes a mystery Paul had the privilege of revealing to the Gentiles (Colossians 1:24-29). The history and prophecies of the Old Covenant contained a few hints of God’s plan for the last days, but the focus was centered on the “fulness of time” when the Messiah would come (Galatians 4:4).

Paul seemed thrilled to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8) and to have the responsibility of unveiling “the grace of God which is given me to you-ward” (Ephesians 3:2). More than the obligation, Paul felt a dread judgment if he failed (1 Corinthians 9:16). It follows that we should be clear in our own declaration of this mystery.

Simply put, the mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Obviously, that is the result of salvation. The new message is the completed work and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The promises of the prophets and the long history of Israel tend to obscure the eternal plan of God (Ephesians 3:11)—thus the detailed effort of the New Testament writers to amplify the “whosoever will” aspect of the gospel message.

“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Now it is possible for the whole world to have a personal and eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. HMM III

Full Assurance of Understanding

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” (Colossians 2:2)

There are two key aspects to this message. Our hearts need encouragement by “being knit together.” The result will produce a “full assurance of understanding” and an acknowledgment of the mystery of the triune Godhead.

The comforted hearts are to be “knit together.” The Greek term *sumbibazo* means “to force together, to compact.” Paul uses this term to illustrate the impossibility of teaching God anything. “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Positively, the strength of the church body comes from being “joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (Ephesians 4:16). Those “joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Colossians 2:19).

The result of the encouragement is wonderful: we should attain to the riches of “full assurance.” The Greek term *plerophorias* is only used four times: promising understanding in our text, a full assurance of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:5) and of hope (Hebrews 6:11), and the full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22).

The Greek synonym *plerophoreo* identifies “sure belief” among us (Luke 1:1), being “fully persuaded” of God’s promises (Romans 4:21). We should be “fully persuaded” in our own mind (Romans 14:5) while making “full proof” of our ministry (2 Timothy 4:5). All of this makes our testimony “fully known” in the world (2 Timothy 4:17). Perhaps the goal of “full assurance” is that we “may speak boldly, as [we] ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:20). HMM III

Tuesday, October 21

Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge

*“In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
(Colossians 2:3)*

Paul had just promised Christians that they would be endowed with the “riches of the full assurance of understanding” that would enable them to possess an acknowledgment of the triune Godhead. The ability to understand and the profound awareness of the Trinity is possible because all “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are in Christ—who is in us!

In Colossians 1:9, Paul prays that they “might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,” a sufficient awareness of information that will enable them to have “understanding in all things” (2 Timothy 2:7). Jesus explained to His apostles that His parables were devices to reveal to them “the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand” (Luke 8:10).

This wisdom and knowledge is the “treasure” of the Lord Jesus, not of the world (1 Corinthians 1:17-31), nor is it contained in the intellect of the “natural” man (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). The understanding and acknowledgment that comes through the world’s philosophy out of the reasoning of the unsaved mind is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15).

Thankfully, “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). God’s work is “very good.” When the creation of our new man is executed (Ephesians 4:24), we are given the “mind of Christ”—not His omniscience but the kind of mind that can *now* understand spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 2:16). Truly, we have been made friends with God. Jesus said, “For all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). HMM III

Filling The Earth

“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 9:1).

This was the first command God gave to mankind in the new world after the Flood. Actually, it simply renewed the first command given to Adam and Eve in the primeval world. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28). The Old English word “replenish” means simply “fill,” and the same is true of the Hebrew word (*mala*) from which it is translated. In fact, of its 220 occurrences, the King James translators rendered it “replenish” only seven times. Almost always they translated it as “fill,” or the equivalent.

Thus, God’s first command to men and women was to multiply until the earth was filled. Despite our latter-day concerns about exploding populations, this goal is far from accomplishment today. “Filling,” of course, would imply filling only to the optimum capacity for productive human stewardship of the earth under God.

The pre-Flood earth was filled in only 1,656 years, but it was “filled with violence through them,” and God finally had to “destroy them with the earth” (Genesis 6:13).

In spite of man’s failures, the Lord has given a gracious promise: “And the LORD said,...as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD” (Numbers 14:20-21). This will not be man’s doing, however. When Christ returns in power and great glory as the destroying Stone, then “the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). The new earth will finally be filled with an innumerable multitude of the redeemed (Revelation 7:9), and “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). HMM

Thursday, October 23

Order and Steadfastness

“For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.” (Colossians 2:5)

Apparently, the church at Colossae had a reputation for structure. No doubt godly elders kept vigilance on their behalf. Perhaps they were guided by the clear rules in Proverbs 4:20-26.

- “Incline thine ear unto my sayings.”
- “Keep them in the midst of thine heart.”
- “Keep thy heart with all diligence.”
- “Put away from thee a froward mouth.”
- “Let thine eyes look right on.”
- “Ponder the path of thy feet.”
- “Let all thy ways be established.”

There was an obvious steadfastness to their faith—a “stiffened” and even “obstinate” faith, as the Greek term implies. These believers were not babes in Christ, nor were they easily swayed by “enticing words” (Colossians 2:4). But as important as those attributes were, it was necessary to extend the church atmosphere and function into a lifestyle that each member embraced (Colossians 2:6).

The reader may remember that the disciples were first labeled “Christians” in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The name was meant to be derogatory, but it was given because the lifestyles of Christ’s followers reflected His teachings.

The basis for this identity is “that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7). “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). HMM III

Regeneration

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6)

Perhaps the greatest purpose of Christianity is to take that which is only flesh and see it reborn as spirit—to see spiritual life born where before there was only death. But then, even in the most mature of believers, there remain aspects of the old nature mixed in with—even at war with—the new. In frustration Paul cried, “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me” (Romans 7:21). But each Christian should, through the power of God, be winning that war.

Christ came to regenerate the spiritual side of people. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

Too many Christians still have their spirits buried deeply within the flesh, having “yielded [their] members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity” (Romans 6:19). But Christ came to change all that. “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).

Through faith, “according to his abundant mercy [He] hath begotten us again” (1 Peter 1:3). To “beget” means to reproduce a like kind. Since He has “begotten us,” we should be becoming like Him in attitudes and aims. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). This is the object of Christianity. JDM

Saturday, October 25

Christian Metaphors

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)

Christian believers and their characteristics are described in terms of many colorful metaphors in the Bible. In our text, Christ calls us “my sheep” and has also said, “I am the good shepherd,...and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14-15). If we are truly His sheep, then we will surely follow Him, receiving safety, peace, and nourishment.

He has also said, “Ye are the salt of the earth....Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14). We are therefore expected to bring the salt of preservation and joy to a bland, tasteless, and otherwise decaying world and to bring the light of salvation to a dark, sinful world.

In another beautiful metaphor, the Lord Jesus likens us to fruitful branches: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5).

The apostle Paul compares us variously to soldiers, to athletes, and to farmers: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Timothy 2:3, 5-6).

With regard to our Christian life and witness, Christ said we must be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). The apostle Paul compares us to individual members in a great body (1 Corinthians 12:27). Peter says we, “as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” and also are “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5, 9) to offer up spiritual sacrifices.

There are many other beautiful and meaningful figures of speech in the New Testament, all of which help us to appreciate the richness and fruitfulness of the Christian life. HMM

Rooted and Built Up

“Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:7)

The Christian walk must be “rooted” and “built up” to endure. The word picture goes back to the parable of the sower. “Some [seeds] fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away...the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21).

According to the Lord of the harvest, some will respond “with joy” to the gospel message, but without any root they will not last in either their joy or their Christian testimony—they “fall away” (Luke 8:13). Just what is involved in a “root” that stabilizes and provides nourishment for the seed of the gospel in the human heart?

Fervent love for God’s Word and for the work of the ministry is surely a foundational element—“being rooted and grounded in love, [we] may be able to comprehend...the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (Ephesians 3:17-19).

The root also requires being “stablished in the faith”—all the “counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). These factors should make us to “be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). With good roots, we will “build up,” being affirmed in the faith, increasing in that walk with real thanksgiving. HMM III

Monday, October 27

The Scripture Job Esteemed

“Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.” (Job 23:12)

What was one of the Lord’s earliest commands to man? “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it” (Genesis 2:16-17). But Adam disobeyed this command and, in his shame, tried to hide from the Lord. Job was likely familiar with this narrative, even though he lived centuries before Moses, since he said, “If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom...” (Job 31:33).

So these words would have been among the “words of [God’s] mouth” that Job treasured and held in high regard. He tells his accusers that, unlike Adam, he follows God’s commands closely and has a higher esteem for God’s words than even the physical necessities of life. He valued his spiritual wellbeing and relationship with God over his physical wellbeing, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

How would you rate your esteem of “the commandment of his lips”? King David shared Job’s attitude, saying, “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Psalm 119:6). Indeed, Jesus went 40 days without His “necessary food” before He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to the devil, saying, “It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). May we share their esteem for God’s words. BDT

Complete in Him

“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” (Colossians 2:10)

The Greek term *pleroo* simply means “to fill up.” We are “complete” with the power that “worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Many passages amplify and reiterate this concept. Once we are “born again” (John 3:7), the creation miracle that is the second birth is sufficient for “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). As “newborn babes,” we must “desire the sincere milk of the word that [we] may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). There is no instant maturity to be had, but the resources are innate to the “new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The key to understanding and applying both the authority and the ability of this “complete” resource is “use.” That is, confidence grows as our senses are “exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). All too often we apply the declaration “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17) only to the salvation moment. But that principle is the operative power throughout our lives.

- “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Psalm 111:10).
- “I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts” (Psalm 119:100).
- “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105).

We are “filled up” because “all fulness” dwells in Christ (Colossians 1:19). We have been given “exceeding great and precious promises: that by these [we] might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4). HMM III

Wednesday, October 29

The Circumcision of Christ

“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” (Colossians 2:11)

During the millennia when God was preparing the earth for the coming of the promised Messiah, the sign of relationship was focused on physical purity through the unique nation of Israel, hence the requirement for circumcision, a poignant sign that emphasized the genetic line as well as reinforced the personal commitment.

That dramatic message, amplified throughout the lifetime of Israel in the feasts and liturgical observances, was radically changed when the Messiah came in “the fulness of the time” (Galatians 4:4) to fulfill and complete the promises. Thereafter, the mystery of the grand plan of God was revealed “which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25): “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Corinthians 7:19). Now the message is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

This “circumcision” of Christ is “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:21). This public declaration (not a private ceremony for Jewish families) demonstrates that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). The sign of the new relationship is for all who believe in the completed work of the Messiah. This “circumcision” dramatizes the creation of the “new man” (Romans 6:4) and tells the story of salvation in a way that anyone can both participate in and remember. HMM III

Blotted Out

“...blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” (Colossians 2:14-15)

The old ordinances have been “blotted out” by Christ, having “broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Ephesians 2:14-16).

The Law’s requirements were our “adversary” and had to be eliminated before we could be “circumcised” by Christ (Colossians 2:11). The omnipotent Lord Jesus was the only One who could do this. The principalities (Greek *arche*) and authorities (*exousia*) were disarmed. Jesus Christ has “gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Peter 3:22). He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

There is not much direct information in the Scriptures about the events in the heavens at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion. Bracketed by the agonizing plea of abandonment, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46), and the three hours of darkness (Luke 23:44), there are a few insights that help us grasp the wonder of His victory cry, “It is finished!”

“When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive...he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4:8-9). Whatever took place in those awful hours, all of heaven now knows that Jesus sits “on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Hebrews 10:12-13). HMM III

Friday, October 31

Whom to Pray For

*“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.”
(1 Timothy 2:1)*

Let no one ever say that he has nothing to pray about, or that he doesn't know how to pray in God's will, for it is always in the will of God to pray for other people! This is a great gift that any Christian can give, even if he is penniless or bedridden. There are none so poor as to be unable to afford such a gift, nor can even the wealthiest give a finer gift.

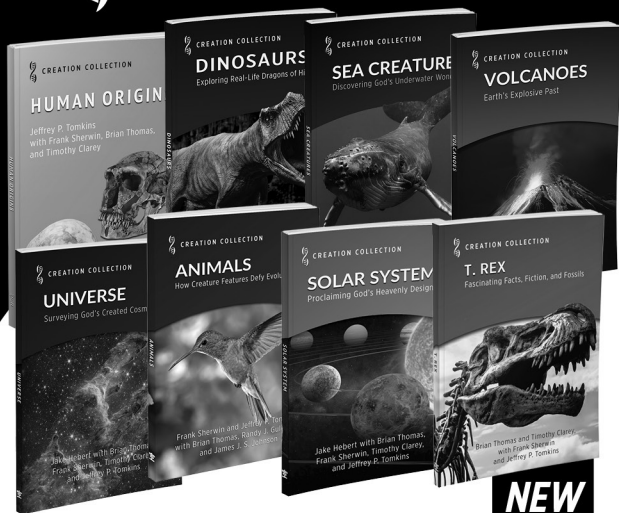
Note just a few of the relevant commandments to believers. First, we are to pray for all fellow Christians: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18). We should also pray for the lost. Jesus commanded, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).

There is a special command to pray for sick disciples. “Pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (James 5:16). We are even told to pray for our enemies. “Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Luke 6:28).

We are told to pray for Christian brethren who “sin a sin which is not unto death” (1 John 5:16), though if the sin has already led to physical death (as in 1 Corinthians 11:30), there is no warrant for further prayer in that case. Finally, we are especially admonished to pray “for kings, and for all that are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:2) and for the ministries of those who proclaim the gospel (Colossians 4:2-4). In short, in the words of our text, we should offer up supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for *all* people everywhere, “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). HMM



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Saturday, November 1

Preaching the Word

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4)

Every believer has been called to preach God’s Word, not just pastors of churches. When Christ gave the Great Commission to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), it was clear that this mission was intended for every Christian and could be accomplished if every believer preaches the gospel!

This was practiced first by the members of the church at Jerusalem. Then, when the believers were “all scattered abroad... except the apostles” (Acts 8:1), these laymen went everywhere preaching the Word. One of the deacons selected to relieve the apostles of the business affairs of the church was Philip, and he “went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5), speaking to great crowds and winning many to Christ. Then shortly afterward, the Lord called him down to Gaza where he met an Ethiopian eunuch, and he “preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). This teaches plainly that one can preach to a large congregation, but he or she can also preach to one person. It is not the size of the congregation but the theme of the message that makes one a preacher of the Word!

Furthermore, it is not only by word of mouth that Christ is preached; Paul says that “the gospel...was preached to every creature [literally, ‘in every creation’] which is under heaven” (Colossians 1:23). “And how shall they hear without a preacher?...But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Romans 10:14, 18). One can preach verbally to a congregation or to an unseen audience through radio or in writing to a reader, and even a godly lifestyle can “preach” effectively (although not specifically) of the saving work of Christ. Even the heavens declare His glory (Psalm 19:1)! Every believer must preach the Word. HMM

Shadowy Things

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” (Colossians 2:16-17)

The closing verses of Colossians 2 contain a litany of holidays and regulations that were plaguing the newly formed New Testament church. Essentially, any other regulatory system is not a God-ordained means to evaluate spiritual purity.

Dietary and man-made holidays can be carried out by a total unbeliever and can be easily faked. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

Paul told the Galatians these things were “weak and beggarly elements” that enslaved them to the observations of “days, and months, and times, and years” (Galatians 4:9-10). Even the Old Testament Law was merely a “shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things” (Hebrews 10:1).

Even more dangerous, however, was the worship of natural, “unseen” things that would plunder the Christian of eternal reward (Colossians 2:18). Worshiping angels (messengers) is simply wrong. Worshiping fleshly intellectualism (the rudiments of the world) leads to error. Worshiping asceticism (voluntary humility) is foolish.

These phrases in Colossians are unique to Scripture. The emphasis seems to be on a natural mysticism—using physical or naturalistic imagery to find spiritual meaning. All of the form and imagery of the flesh and the man-made rules and regulations made “after the commandments and doctrines of men” (Colossians 2:22) do not honor God—they merely satisfy the flesh.

The “joints and bands” of the body (church) bring about a godly increase. “Holding the Head” ministers and nourishes the believer (Colossians 2:19-23). HMM III

Monday, November 3

Risen with Christ

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” (Colossians 3:1)

Christians have been raised with Christ, and the “new man” is effectively positioned with Christ in glory. We have been made alive “together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5) and in the eternal reality of our Creator, who “made us sit together in heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6).

Thus, the command to seek the “above” realities is not merely a theological idea but rather a profound order to embrace the reality of our new empowerment to walk with Christ in a new life (Romans 6:4). Indeed, we have been newly created by the Creator in “righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Therefore, since we are God’s workmanship, it is not possible for God to create His children for any other purpose than “good works” (Ephesians 2:10).

Obviously, our Lord knows that we are still in “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7). That is precisely why He promised to provide all of our earthly needs if we would but “seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33)—including our necessary “patient continuance in well doing” (Romans 2:7). Remember, “God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

The environment of the world constantly opposes the reality of “above.” Even the wisdom of above seems counterintuitive; it is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). Yet we are still expected to seek to live like we are above because “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). HMM III

Focus Your Mind

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:2)

The command of this verse is contained in the Greek word *phroneo*. The noun form has an emphasis on the emotive side of our thoughts. Its use in secular Greek literature favors what we might call our gut reactions or our intuition. Obviously, the verb is recorded in the imperative mode, making the term both intensive and authoritative. It could well be translated “direct your reactions so that they respond to” heavenly matters.

The Lord Jesus rebuked Peter because he did not “savor” the things of God (Matthew 16:23). In many other places, the translators have chosen “mind” as the term’s best rendering (e.g., Philippians 2:2, 5; 3:15-16; 4:2). But in each case, the emphasis appears to be on the way we react to our relationship to God’s Word or to each other.

And in each case, as in our text for today, the emphasis is always for us to focus on the matters of eternity, not on our earthly circumstances. Paul’s great teaching throughout Romans 6, 7, and 8 gives a wonderful comparison and contrast between the flesh and the spirit, concluding in chapter 8 that “they that are after the flesh do *mind* the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Romans 8:5).

Insisting that the believers in the Philippian church follow his own life’s example, Paul agonizes over many among them who walk so “that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who *mind* earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19).

A worldly lifestyle is very dangerous for a believer. Please remember the warning that “whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). HMM III

Wednesday, November 5

Mortify Your Fleshly Members

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (Colossians 3:5)

This command is very important for the believer. It is nothing less than an active execution of passionate, evil deeds born from the lusts of the flesh. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13). The list that follows is unyielding.

- Fornication (*porneia*) includes all deviant and extramarital sex (Leviticus 18:6-23; Romans 1:26-28).
- Uncleanness (*akatharsia*) references that which is “dirty; foul, wanton, or lewd” (Ephesians 4:17-19).
- Inordinate affection (*pathos*) is only used to refer to homosexuality in Scripture (Romans 1:26; 1 Thessalonians 4:5).
- Evil desire (*epithumia*) describes evil cravings (1 Peter 4:3; Jude 1:17-19).
- Covetousness (*pleonexia*) makes greediness an idol (2 Peter 2:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 2:5).

This evil behavior will surely bring the “wrath of God... against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). That judgment will be carried out on such people because of their impenitent hearts that are “treasuring up” the “righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5-6).

The most startling fact of this behavior is that those who willfully participate in it know “the judgment of God” and that “they which commit such things are worthy of death.” Not only does this behavior signify a rebellious heart but also an open desire to “have pleasure in them” (Romans 1:32).

“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6). HMM III

Clean Your Mind

“But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” (Colossians 3:8-9)

Once the intense drives of the fleshly appetites have been done away with, we who have been created after God “in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24) must cleanse the passions of the intellect as well.

We must “place away from” or “throw away” these ideas that are begun in the mind. These notions are sinful and harmful to everyone.

- Anger (*orge*) is an agitation of the soul that produces a violent emotion.
- Wrath (*thumos*), as the word suggests, is intellectual heat, a boiling up that produces a fierce indignation.
- Malice (*kakian*) is the ill will that creates a desire to injure, even eliminating shame at breaking laws.
- Blasphemy (*blasphemia*), one of the few words directly transliterated from the Greek, means any slander or speech that is injurious to another’s good name.
- Filthy communication (*aischrologia*) is any kind of foul speaking or low and obscene speech.
- Lying (*pseudomai*) deliberately gives false information.

We are to put off the old man, that nature and behavior that was bound up in the flesh (Ephesians 4:22), and put on the new man “which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:10).

Our salvation brings with it both a new heart and a new mind. With the one we are able to “mortify” the deeds of the flesh (Colossians 3:5). With the other we are to put on “the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14). HMM III

Friday, November 7

Another Gospel

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” (Galatians 1:6-7)

Some have confessed difficulty with these verses, especially with the words “another gospel: which is not another.” This problem finds resolution in understanding two distinct Greek words that, unfortunately, are both translated as “another” in this passage.

In verse 6 Paul uses the Greek word *heteros*, which implies something of a totally different sort altogether—something diametrically opposed to the one to which it is compared. But in verse 7 he uses the word *allos*, which implies a comparison of two items of the same sort. The thought might be conveyed as follows: “You are removed from the true gospel of the grace of Christ unto a totally different belief system, which is not simply a similar but legitimate expression of the true gospel. Instead, it is quite opposite to the truth.” Paul goes on to teach that this different “gospel” is a perversion of the true gospel. Instead of bringing peace, it troubles the mind.

The primary theme of the entire book of Galatians is salvation by grace through faith in Christ as opposed to salvation by works and the law. “No man is justified by the law in the sight of God....The just shall live by faith” (3:11). This marvelous good news had been denied by many in the Galatian church, but Paul had received the message of grace “by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:12). Any mixture of works with grace constituted a perversion of God’s plan, and any who would teach such perversion warranted strong condemnation from Paul. “If any man preach any other [Greek *para*, meaning contrary] gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (1:9). JDM

Saturday, November 8

This Grace Also

“Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.” (2 Corinthians 8:7)

The “grace” of which Paul was writing in our text is the grace of giving! Many Christians may show diligence and love in their Christian life but are still very reluctant to give sacrificially to the work of the Lord.

Many follow what they consider the “law of tithing” (most Christians don’t even do that!) and consider this to be meritorious. The fact is, however, that giving for the Christian is not a law to be obeyed but a grace to be cultivated.

The motivation cited by Paul for abounding in this grace was not the Old Testament ordinance but the New Testament example in the church at Philippi. Consider, he said, “the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality... beyond their power they were willing of themselves.” And the real secret of their motivation was that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:1-3, 5). An even greater motive for abounding in this grace is the example of Christ: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

This grace of giving is thus displayed when one gives liberally (even in times of affliction and poverty) out of whole-hearted devotion to the Lord and for the spiritual enrichment of those who are spiritually impoverished.

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). HMM

Sunday, November 9

Wrap Yourself in Godliness

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.” (Colossians 3:12-13)

The verb choice in this portion of the command is different from those used earlier. Here the word is *enduo*, which describes “sinking down” into a garment. It is most often used of a robe or seamless cloak that covers the whole body (Mark 1:6; Matthew 27:31; John 19:23).

There are several passages that allude to this total change of behavior—like enveloping oneself in a body-covering cloak.

- “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).
- “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).
- “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).

Perhaps an even more precise picture is what happens to us when we are brought into the resurrected and eternal condition that is “like” the Lord Jesus (1 John 3:2). Then we will “put on incorruption” and “put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

The character traits of God cannot coexist with the “members” of flesh, which must be “mortified” (Colossians 3:5). Neither can godliness control our minds when evil thoughts dominate. They must be put off. Yet, for us to put on the character of God, we must “glue” the character traits identified in today’s text together by charity (love) and let God’s peace rule in our hearts. Even then, the word of Christ must dwell in our lives richly, so much so that whatsoever we do “in word or deed” is done in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:14-17). HMM III

Four Marks of Life Done Well

"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4)

Our Lord Jesus describes in John 17 four summaries of how He stewarded His life before His crucifixion. Each one offers an example for us.

First, He glorified the Father. Do we give God the Father glory, or credit, throughout the day, out loud, and even in our hearts? After all, He made us and loves us.

Second, Jesus finished the work that the Father had given Him to do. One of the main works Jesus did was to love His disciples until the end. He made them the pillars of the church. Praise the Father that He gave His Son that work to do! Praise the Son who finished it so that we could hear the gospel in order to be saved from our sins and so we could have fellowship with other believers! Are we faithfully finishing the work He has given us?

Third, Jesus said, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world" (v. 6). "Manifest" here is translated from *phaneróo*. It means to make visible or real. Jesus made His Father's name visible to His disciples by obeying the Father every moment. Do we manifest His name by submitting our time, talent, and desires to the Father?

Last, "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (v. 8). "Words" here does not necessarily mean Bible verses but words fitly spoken (aloud) for His disciples' growth. For example, "let your speech be always with grace" (Colossians 4:6). May it be said of us who prayerfully glorify the Father, finish His work, manifest His name, and speak His words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). BDT

Tuesday, November 11

The Good Fight

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

The beautiful World War II Memorial in the nation’s capital was dedicated in 2004, honoring the more than 400,000 who gave their lives in that conflict (including this writer’s younger brother). This particular holiday, of course, originally known as Armistice Day, had been established many years before to commemorate the end of World War I and to honor the veterans of that war.

There have been many other wars in our nation’s history and many who have served and many who have died. They all “have fought a good fight” and “kept the faith” of our nation’s commitment to establish “liberty and justice for all” and to maintain this ideal in every generation. They fully merit our honor and heartfelt gratitude.

There is another good fight going on, of course, every day in the life of each believing Christian. The apostle Paul never served as a soldier in any human army, but he was often called on to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3). As a matter of fact, each of us must remember that “unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29).

That suffering may be actual persecution or even injury or death on a battlefield, but it could also be poverty or sickness or some other “messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7) sent to test and alienate us from the Lord. But then we can hear the Lord say, as with Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Whatever comes, may God help us to be able to say in that day, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” HMM

Reconciled

“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight.” (Colossians 1:21-22)

The reconciliation act abolishes one condition and establishes another. We were “aliens...from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Our “understanding [was] darkened” due to our hearts’ blindness (Ephesians 4:18). We were enemies whose “friendship of the world” made us at “enmity with God” (James 4:4).

We are reconciled now. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Indeed, we are also “saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:10-11), and are to be presented as a “chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). Both individually and collectively, we are “being built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5) who will “shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

We can be absolutely sure that once we are reconciled—our alien state abolished and adoption secured—our Lord Jesus remains the “merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17). Reconciliation ensures that the Lord Jesus Himself will “stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11). HMM III

Thursday, November 13

Continue in the Faith

“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” (Colossians 1:23)

In our text, “the faith” insists on a particular body of doctrine that defines the Christian life. For instance, as Paul and Barnabas were returning from their initial missionary effort, they went back to each area “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22).

There are nearly 50 occurrences in the New Testament where “the faith” is used in this way. These references always speak of obedience to specific teachings that embrace the core of the godly lifestyle that represents holiness and the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Thus, one who is “grounded and settled” in the faith will be both knowledgeable and stable in his Christian testimony and ministry.

It is necessary, of course, to build on the foundation of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:11), but only the “gold, silver, precious stones” have any lasting value (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)—hence the requirement in Jude: “It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Furthermore, those who continue in the faith will not be “moved away from the hope of the gospel.” That hope acts as “an anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19) and is the drive that motivates us to maintain a pure lifestyle (1 John 3:3). “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). HMM III

The Sleeper

“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” (Ephesians 5:14)

The message in our text provides an attention-getting warning to those who claim to be Christians but indulge in or even allow the evil practices of Ephesians 5:3-7. A Christian does not, and indeed cannot, live a life of fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, or jesting (vv. 3-4), for no such person “hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God...for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (vv. 5-6). Those who practice such things are “fools” (v. 15).

While we as Christians must always be willing to bring the saving message of God’s grace to the sinner, we must not be “partakers with them” (v. 7) in their sins and indeed must “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (v. 11). Instead, we must “reprove them” (v. 11), pointing out the consequences of their actions and focusing their attention on Christ, who “hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (v. 2) in payment for their penalty. All that must be done is to accept this forgiveness. In doing so, we who are “light in the Lord” (v. 8) will shed light in their darkness, for “all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light” (v. 13).

As children of the light (v. 8), our lives must exhibit the “fruit of the Spirit...goodness and righteousness and truth” (v. 9). We must prove “what is acceptable unto the Lord” (v. 10), “walk[ing] circumspectly,...wise[ly]” (v. 15), “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (v. 16). The sleeper in our text, whether he be an unbeliever or a professing Christian, is asleep—locked in moral insensibility. “Awake, sleeper!” Paul would say, “and accept the God-given remedy for your plight!” JDM

Saturday, November 15

Maker and Owner

“I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me.”
(Jeremiah 27:5)

“The earth, the man and the beast” are the three entities that God is said to have “created” (Hebrew *bara*—note Genesis 1:1, 21, 27) in the Genesis account of creation. However, they are also said in Genesis to have been “made” (Hebrew *asah*—note Genesis 1:25-26; 2:4), and that is the emphasis in our text above. Of course, both aspects were accomplished in the six days of the creation week, after which God “rested from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:3). This statement makes it abundantly plain that the present processes of nature do not “create” (call into existence out of nothing) or “make” (build up into more complex forms) anything, as our modern theistic evolutionists and evangelical uniformitarians allege. God has rested from both of these works, except in occasional miraculous intervention in the present laws and processes of nature.

Because God created and made all things, He also “owns” all things. “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). “Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10). “The LORD hath made all things for himself” (Proverbs 16:4).

Therefore, all that we possess—as individuals or as nations—has simply been entrusted to us as God’s stewards, and “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Without a doubt this accounting will be of our handling of our goods, minds, and opportunities, among other things, for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Let us be thankful, not covetous, and industrious, not slothful, in everything He has entrusted to us. HMM

Drawn to Jesus

“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

Picture the scene. Jesus hangs on a cross between two criminals—all three aware they are dying. One scoffs, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (Luke 23:39). The other thief counters, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly...but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (vv. 40-43). The scoffing thief wanted an earthly miracle—the second sought a heavenly miracle.

Jesus didn't try to convert the second thief but waited for the man to turn to Him. No one explained the gospel to the thief; he was simply drawn to Jesus. The man knew Jesus had committed no crime. He hung there for another reason. Jesus was more than a miracle-working rabbi; He was a king and had a kingdom. And despite the man's great sin, Jesus heard his cry and fully accepted him. The worst thing that had ever happened to the thief became the best thing—a great reversal!

As Jesus hung there dying for countless people, He specifically cared for one particular person at that moment—the thief beside him. We are like him, condemned and dying. May we also be drawn to the Son of God. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

Jesus waits for us to turn to Him as He sits enthroned next to His Father. “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God” (Romans 8:34). Jesus' love draws us to Him. “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4), and He will never reject His children! MJS

Monday, November 17

To Be or Not to Be

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

“To be” verbs, in their various forms and tenses, enjoy wide usage throughout Scripture. Verses employing them, as they relate to us, contain many of the greatest and most precious truths. Consider the following sampling.

Past tense: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God” (v. 10). “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). “You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (Colossians 1:21).

Present tense: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven” (Romans 4:7). “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5). “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). “Beloved, now are we the sons of God” (1 John 3:2). “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him” (Colossians 2:9-10). Note also our text verse.

Future tense: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). “And 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: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads...and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:3-5). JDM

Watch in Prayer

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.” (Colossians 4:2-3)

This strong command is composed of the Greek term *gregoreuo*, meaning “vigilant” or “alert.” A similar emphasis is at the end of the classic passage identifying the armor of God: “Praying *always* with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and *watching* [*agrupneo*, “be awake”] thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

Our watching must also be with a conscious attitude of thanksgiving during “every remembrance” of each other (Philippians 1:3), particularly since the intercessory request should be focused on asking our Lord Jesus to provide an open door (Revelation 3:8). The Lord is indeed the One who opens the door, but the process for obtaining His action is recorded in Luke 11:9-11. We must ask for the gift of the open door, seek to find the door that He is opening, and then knock once we are at the door that He is ready to open for us.

However, as Paul notes, when the Lord opens a “door of utterance,” the spoken Word of God conveys the power of God, and that message and its power will bring the attention of the enemy. “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9).

Any fear that might lurk in our minds should be overridden by the necessity to be spokespeople for this wonderful “mystery of Christ.” There is no “salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). HMM III

Wednesday, November 19

Redeem the Time

“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”
(Colossians 4:5-6)

Time is the most precious resource available to us. Obviously, it becomes available moment by moment, and there is absolutely no way to recapture what has moved into the past. “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

Our lifestyle should be recognizable from the wisdom that comes from the “fear of the LORD” (Psalm 111:10), so much so that our everyday conversation should not be “in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

“Every idle word that men shall speak” will one day be evaluated “in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). It is clear that “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

That is why we are to “redeem the time.” The Greek term is *exagoradzo*, meaning to buy up or to make the most of time “because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16). Our speech must be consciously planned to “answer every man” in such a way that it is “alway with grace, seasoned with salt”—two apparently opposite characteristics.

Our words should be “as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24), “but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it?” (Mark 9:50). It is the combined power that is important; “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). HMM III

Godly Examples

“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.” (Colossians 4:15)

Some Pauline epistles, which included the letter to the church at Colossae, were written during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, approximately from AD 60 to 62. Three cities (Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae) were close together and were near Laodicea. Paul instructs Nymphas to read the Colossians letter to the church at Laodicea.

There is a group labeled “fellow workers” (Colossians 4:11)—Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus. They were the men who ministered to Paul in Rome. There were also friends from the third missionary journey: Epaphras, Demas, Nymphas, and Archippus from the cities around Colossae who kept in close contact and probably supported Paul financially. Luke, the “beloved physician,” apparently joined Paul on the second missionary journey on the trip to Rome (Acts 16—the “we” passages).

Several godly attributes are identified with these men. “Beloved brother” is used to emphasize the intense relationship that Paul had with some of these men. “Faithful minister” (a “deacon”), along with “fellow servant” and “fellow worker,” stresses the service Paul enjoyed with them. “Fellow prisoner” is an obvious identification.

“Labouring fervently” (the Greek word *agonizomai*) is used to speak of Epaphras (Colossians 4:12), who was always praying for the church at Colossae with great zeal. This and other lists such as the sixteenth chapter of Romans give us precious insight into the lives of godly men and women who shared the lives of key leaders and made their ministry more effective.

May it please the Lord Jesus to have us so named in “the books” of eternity (Revelation 20:12). HMM III

Friday, November 21

A Marvelous Thing

“The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.” (John 9:30)

A “marvelous thing” in the Bible is something that generates awe or wonder. Sometimes it refers to a miracle but more often to something very unexpected and remarkable.

But the most marvelous thing of all is that unbelievers still persist in their unbelief. In our text passage the Lord Jesus Christ had just performed one of His most amazing miracles of creation—making perfect eyes for a man blind from birth. As the man testified to the frustrated Pharisees, “Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind” (John 9:32). Yet, these religious intellectuals, so opinionated in their prejudices, refused to believe what they saw and heard. Similarly, “when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things [i.e., ‘marvelous things’] that he did...they were sore displeased” (Matthew 21:15).

There are none so blind as those who refuse to see. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is John 1:10: “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” And, “he came unto his own, and his own received him not” (v. 11). Even when He raised Lazarus from the dead, “the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus” (John 12:10-11).

Modern “intellectuals” are still the same, rejecting the overwhelming testimony of the created complexity in the cosmos to the fact of a personal Creator in favor of an impossible scenario of chance origin. “Herein is a marvelous thing!” Such people “willingly are ignorant” and “without excuse” (2 Peter 3:5; Romans 1:20). HMM

A Resting Place

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (Titus 3:5-6)

Certainly one of the most precious doctrines of all Scripture is that reflected in our text. Our salvation depends not on our own “works of righteousness” but upon His mercy and grace, given us freely through the atoning work of Jesus Christ our Savior.

The grand old hymn “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place” reflects this theme. Let us use its four verses and chorus to focus our study as well as our hearts these next four days.

*My faith has found a resting place, Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead.
I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.*

Nothing we could do (i.e., device) nor anything we or our church could believe (i.e., creed) can provide a resting place for our faith. “For we which have believed [i.e., faith, same Greek word] do enter into rest....For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works” (Hebrews 4:3, 10). The only work that counts for anything is that which the ever-living One accomplished when He died on the cross. “Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes [i.e., wounds] ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). It is not so much our physical health in view here but the healing of our sin-sick souls.

Since “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), there is no more penalty to be paid. Since He rose from the dead, He conquered both sin and its power, and our faith can rest. JDM

Sunday, November 23

Enough for Me

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past.” (Romans 3:24-25)

Jesus has done all that is necessary to bring us into right standing with a holy God, if we but believe and accept His free gift of salvation. Jesus saves! It is enough! “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). The second verse of the hymn “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place” further explains this.

*Enough for me that Jesus saves, This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him, He'll never cast me out.
I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.*

Jesus, who loved us, said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). There is no fear here, for “there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18). Nor should there be any doubt in Him or His intentions, “in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Ephesians 3:12). Furthermore, “being confident...that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

The chorus of the hymn likewise presents a thrilling truth. It paints a picture of a courtroom and the interrogation of a defendant. When asked why one should be forgiven and granted eternal life and entrance into heaven, the argument or defense can be given that Jesus has died, and that is enough. No other answer is needed. The plea has already been entered, and the court's findings are guaranteed, “justified freely by his grace.” JDM

Leaning on the Word

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son....These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:11, 13)

Our salvation does not find its basis in an emotional experience of the heart, although our emotional tendencies are God-given and not to be denied. Indeed, the salvation experience may be sweet and memorable, but all sorts of religions, non-religions, and cults have emotional experiences, like the Mormon’s “burning of the bosom.” Experiences alone are subjective and easily misinterpreted. Our faith should be a faith from the heart, and it should be founded on the written Word of God. The third verse of our hymn, “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place,” presents this timeless truth.

*My heart is leaning on the Word, the written Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior’s name, Salvation thru’ His blood.
I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.*

The Bible, God’s holy Word, is a book about Jesus and how God, through Jesus, deals with man. Much more could have been written: “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). We were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

And this is sufficient! Nothing else needs to be done or said or paid. Christ’s blood is enough. His Word tells us so. JDM

Tuesday, November 25

I Need No Other Argument

“[The Father] hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14)

Each of the four verses of the majestic hymn “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place” repeats the theme that Christ’s blood was shed on our behalf, and it is enough. Nothing else remains to be done. The final verse adds perspective to the other three.

*My great Physician heals the sick, The lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed, For me His life He gave.
I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.*

Christ is certainly “the great physician,” for He “went about all Galilee...healing all manner of sickness” (Matthew 4:23). But His ministry was not only to the physically ill, for as He said, God “hast sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18). His mission was a deeper one, that of healing the sin-sickness of the soul. “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17). “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

As we read in our text, “we have redemption through his blood” and through His blood alone. As a result, we have “forgiveness of sins,” we are “delivered from the power of darkness,” and we are given a home in “the kingdom of his dear Son.”

And there we will join in singing “a new song, saying, Thou art worthy...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9). He has done it all, and He has done it “for me”! JDM

Wednesday, November 26

The Faithful Creator

“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” (1 Peter 4:19)

This is the only verse in the New Testament describing the Creator as faithful. God had a very specific purpose in creating the universe and especially people, and He will surely accomplish that great purpose.

The Scriptures repeatedly stress God’s faithfulness. With respect to the physical universe, “for ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth” (Psalm 119:89-90). As far as His promises to His people are concerned, “know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (Deuteronomy 7:9).

The faithful Creator is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and He rebukes the compromising church of the last days with these majestic words: “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14). Although many professing believers will prove unfaithful to Him, “yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

The triumphant book of Revelation comes directly “from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness” (Revelation 1:5). When He finally returns to Earth in power and glory, His very name shall be “called Faithful and True” (Revelation 19:11). He is both Alpha and Omega, and thus all His “words are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:5). Our salvation is sure, therefore, because “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:24). HMM

Thursday, November 27

The Pilgrims

*“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”
(1 Peter 1:1)*

These “strangers” to whom Peter wrote his two epistles were actually “pilgrims.” He used the same Greek word (*parepidemos*) in 1 Peter 2:11: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts.” The word means a resident foreigner, and its only other New Testament usage is in Hebrews 11:13, speaking of the ancient patriarchs who “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

We give honor today to the American pilgrims, as they called themselves, who left their homelands to better serve God in a foreign land. The pilgrims to whom Peter was writing likewise had been “scattered abroad” for their faith (note Acts 8:4).

For that matter, every born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is really just a pilgrim here on Earth, ambassadors for Christ in a foreign land. “For our conversation is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). That is, we are citizens of heaven (the Greek word translated “conversation” in this verse is *politeuma*, meaning “a community” or “citizenship”) and are here only for a time to serve our Lord until He calls us home.

And while we are here, we may endure many trials and sorrows just as did those Massachusetts pilgrims. But He nevertheless supplies our needs—just as He did for them—and we ought to abound in thanksgiving as they did.

Thus, Christians all over the world have cause for thanksgiving every day. Since we are “enriched in every thing” through our Savior, this “causeth through us thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11), and we should be “abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:7). HMM

Adam's Failure, Christ's Strength

“By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” (Romans 5:18)

When Adam rebelled against God, he experienced many new things—things that have haunted mankind ever since. All of these things were experienced by Christ in an intense way as He redeemed fallen mankind and the cursed creation.

Adam had never seen or experienced death (Genesis 2:17) until he sinned (3:19, 22). Adam and Eve had been naked and unashamed (2:25), but sin distorted everything (3:7, 21). Before sin, Adam and Eve had known only blessing (1:28), but the universal curse followed (3:14-19). They had known joy and fellowship, but then they knew sorrow (3:17) and separation (3:23). They had lived in a garden (2:8), but then the plants brought forth thorns (3:18). Prior to sin they had been given work (2:15), but because of sin they would sweat (3:19) as they toiled. The angel's weapon kept them from returning to Eden (3:24), and outside violence reigned (4:8, 23; 6:13). Childbearing was originally created to be easy but then was accompanied by sorrow (1:28; 3:16).

Likewise, Christ experienced death on the cross (John 19:30), but by His resurrection He conquered death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). He experienced nakedness (John 19:23; Psalm 22:18), the full thrust of the Curse (Galatians 3:13), sorrow (Isaiah 53:3), and separation from God (Matthew 27:46). Cruel thorns were placed on His head (John 19:2), and He sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). The soldier's weapon pierced Him (John 19:34), finally ending a series of violent acts (Luke 22:63; Matthew 27:26, 29-30; Isaiah 52:14; etc.). But through His suffering He overcame the Curse and redeemed His fallen creation. As a result, many children have been brought forth (Hebrews 2:9-10), reborn into a glorious state through His suffering. JDM

Saturday, November 29

Inspired Words

“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.” (Luke 21:33)

The doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, wrongly considered antiquated by many modern neo-evangelicals, is actually essential to the Christian faith. “All scripture [that is every word written down or inscribed] is given by inspiration [literally ‘breathed in’] of God,” not man (2 Timothy 3:16)!

We acknowledge, of course, that problems of transmission and translation exist, but these are relatively trivial in the entire context. We also acknowledge that the process of inspiration may have varied, but the end result is as if the entire Bible had been dictated and transcribed word by word.

This is the way Jesus Christ—the Creator, the Living Word, the Author of Scripture—viewed the Scriptures. “The scripture cannot be broken,” He said (John 10:35). “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken....And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25, 27). The Bible, every word of it, is divinely inspired without error, is infallibly true, and has absolute authority in every area of our lives. The words of Christ, who taught these truths, are forever “settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89) and “shall not pass away” (our text)

It is mortally dangerous, therefore, “unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book” to “add unto these things” as cultists do or to “take away from the words of the book of this prophecy” as liberals do (Revelation 22:18-19). Would it not be much better to say with the psalmist, “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors” (Psalm 119:24)? HMM

Come Forth as Gold

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:7)

These words of Peter are certainly applicable today, but they have always been true. That proper character and testimony are of supreme importance to God was certainly recognized by godly Job in the midst of his heavy trials, for he claimed, “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). The context for this stirring statement of faith proves instructive.

Just as most people do, whether Christian or not, Job appealed to heaven for relief from his troubles (v. 3). Job felt he was suffering unjustly and wanted to state his case before God (v. 4), but more importantly, Job desired to know God’s will in the matter. “I would [i.e., desire to] know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me” (v. 5). He knew God well enough to know that God had a purpose in his suffering, and Job asked for knowledge of that purpose. Job knew God’s goodness, that He would not punish him for his questions, and felt that greater understanding would give him strength to continue. But without God’s revelation, Job knew he was unable to understand or even find God (vv. 8-9). God mercifully and lovingly allows trials to discipline, guide, and develop us. Such trials will, in the end, work to our advantage as impurities are removed, leaving behind only that which is lasting and precious.

The goal of our lives should be to bring “praise and honour and glory” unto our Lord, and if tribulation can best accomplish these goals, so be it! As David said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word” (Psalm 119:67). God knows what is best for us. He knows what He is doing, and we can rest in that fact. JDM

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