



Days of Praise

March ♦ April ♦ May 2022

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

March • April • May 2022

*“O LORD, how manifold are thy works!
in wisdom hast thou made them all:
the earth is full of thy riches.”
(Psalm 104:24)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“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)

Dear Christian friend,

What a privilege it is to bear the name of Christ and be called one of His own dearly beloved friends! The text above is a wonderful theme verse for the spring quarter’s devotions. It richly expresses the hope and expectations for this totally new life that was given to those of us who stand by faith in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus and put no confidence in our own merit.

We also see our complete dependence on Jesus, who lives in us as we make our journey through this world to our new home. Who awaits us there? The One who loves each one of us so much that He gave Himself for us.

Thank you for setting aside time each day to meet with us in devotional thoughts about our perfect Creator and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that the Holy Spirit will use these short Bible studies to help you fall deeper in love with Lord Jesus and with our good heavenly Father.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

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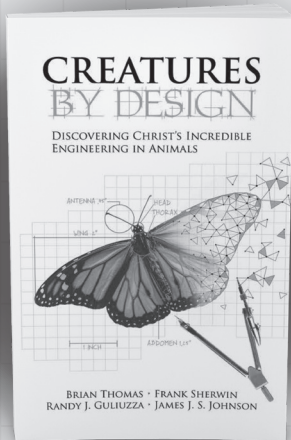
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Tuesday, March 1

Bearing the Cross

“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27)

Bearing one’s cross means something quite different from bearing the ordinary burdens and troubles of life. These are common to all men, but the privilege of taking up and carrying the cross is the unique responsibility and privilege only of Christians, for it identifies them in a distinctive way with Christ.

The cross speaks of death by crucifixion, not just troubles, and not even any other type of death—only the death of the cross. There are at least five other references in the gospels challenging each true Christian to take up his cross and, like Christ, carry it to the place of execution (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23).

That is, the Christian is to be willing, like his Lord, to give his life, if need be, for the sake of the salvation of the lost. This is not a one-time act of dedication but a daily walk. “If any man will come after me,” Jesus said, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

There have been many Christian martyrs, of course, who have actually been slain—some even crucified—for the sake of Christ and the gospel. For most, however, bearing the cross means dying to self and one’s personal desires in order to live unreservedly for the Lord and His mission.

The apostle Paul expressed it perfectly when he said, “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.” Therefore, we should be able to say with Paul, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 2:20; 6:14). HMM

Wednesday, March 2

Power in the Ark

“And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.” (1 Samuel 5:3)

The Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant, where God met with His people, and set it up in the temple of their god, Dagon. The first night, Dagon fell down before the Ark; the second night, he fell down broken in pieces. On the next day, a great plague fell on the people of Ashdod, and forthwith they sent the Ark away!

Just as Dagon fell before the Ark, which was a type of Christ, so the priests and soldiers who came to take Jesus away “went backward, and fell to the ground” in His presence (John 18:6). Similarly, just as the temple of Dagon could hold the Ark no longer than three days, and the whale could only hold God’s prophet Jonah for three days, so the grave could not hold Jesus longer than three days.

The Ark also exhibited its great power both to bless and to curse. It brought death to the Philistines who desecrated it, and even to the Israelites at Beth-shemesh when they foolishly looked into the Ark (1 Samuel 6:19). However, it evidently brought blessing to the house of the Levite Abinadab, where it stayed for 20 years (1 Samuel 7:1-2), and later to the house of Obed-edom (2 Samuel 6:11).

The same is true of the Lord Jesus Christ and of all who are “in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10). The presence of Christ was a blessing to many, but others “besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear” (Luke 8:37). “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). HMM

Thursday, March 3

Exhorting One Another

“But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”
(Hebrews 3:13)

The fascinating word rendered “exhort” (Greek *para-kaleo*) in our text verse, elsewhere translated “comfort,” “beseech,” etc., literally means “call alongside.”

For example, note 2 Corinthians 1:4: “[God] comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Also look at Paul’s appeal to Philemon: “I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds” (Philemon 1:10). Such words as “desire,” “entreat,” and “pray” are also used.

The unusual importance of the word is pointed up by the fact that its noun form (*parakletos*) is used as one of the titles of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26).

Thus, a Christian who is “called alongside” to comfort a sorrowing friend, to beseech a person to do right, or to exhort him to useful action all in the name of Christ, is in effect performing the same type of service on the human level that the Holy Spirit Himself performs on the divine level. Further, our text would inform us that this type of service—whether done in the context of exhorting or comforting or beseeching—is designed specifically to prevent the one to whom he is “called alongside” from being “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” And since this is a moment-by-moment danger to the unwary, the ministry of exhortation (or comforting or entreating, as the need may be) is one that must be performed “daily, while it is called To day.” HMM

Friday, March 4

A Time to Die

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)

In the first eight verses of Ecclesiastes 3 there is a remarkable listing of 28 “times” arranged in 14 pairs of opposites (e.g., “a time to be born and a time to die”). Every timed event is planned by God and has a “purpose” (v. 1), and everything is “beautiful” in God’s time for it (v. 11).

Although it is beyond our finite comprehension, it is still bound to be true that the infinite, omnipotent God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11). Even when in our time we may not understand how a particular event can be purposeful or beautiful, we can have faith that if it occurs in God’s time for it, it is (Romans 8:28).

The time of our birth is, of course, not under our control, but we can certainly have a part in determining the occurrence of all the other 13 “times,” even the time of death. With the exception of those still living at the time of Christ’s return, each of us will eventually die. God has appointed a time for each individual, and it is wrong for him or her to shorten that time (by suicide or careless living, which can never be part of His will for any of us).

We should say with David, “My times are in thy hand” (Psalm 31:15), and seek to live in ways pleasing to Him as long as He allows us to live. We should pray that, when our time is finished, He will enable us to die in a manner that will be “beautiful in his time” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Not one of us knows when that ordained “time to die” may be for us, so we must seek daily to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5).

HMM

Saturday, March 5

The Unmuzzled Ox

*“Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.”
(Deuteronomy 25:4)*

This Mosaic regulation would seem rather insignificant except that it is quoted twice in the New Testament. “For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?” (1 Corinthians 9:9-10). Yes, but that is not the main purpose behind this law. “Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.” This application is drawn in verse 14: “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” That is, supporting financially those who devote full time to God’s work is not “charitable giving” but compensation for services, with the pay to be provided by those who receive the benefit of their labors.

This is even more clear in the second reference: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Timothy 5:17-18), the latter part quoting words of Christ (Luke 10:7). Incidentally, note that both New Testament and Old Testament Scriptures are considered divinely inspired and authoritative on any subject with which they deal.

The subject here is just compensation for those who devote their time, training, and abilities to the work of the Word, under the call and leading of God, as recognized by the people of God. This seemingly insignificant principle, if faithfully obeyed, would greatly enlarge the effectiveness and outreach of the Christian witness in the world. HMM

Sunday, March 6

He Shall Never See Death

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.” (John 8:51)

This passage has been difficult for commentators. Most would interpret it to mean that a Christian will not experience spiritual death. While it is true that a Christian, one who has been born twice (the second birth being a spiritual birth), will not experience spiritual death, in this passage Jesus seems to be talking about physical death. This is evidenced by the fact that the Jewish skeptics around Christ called Him a heretic for saying it, since it was obvious that Abraham and the other prophets had died physically. Christ did not correct them by clarifying His words to mean spiritual death. Despite the fact that the grave is full of those who physically died while believing in Christ, He teaches that His followers will “never see death.”

Actually, the Greek is very emphatic here. The combination of words could be literally translated “He shall absolutely not see [physical] death, never.” Perhaps Christ is teaching that a believer will never see real death, since, to such a one, death is in reality only “sleep.”

But perhaps the key to understanding this teaching might be in the word “see.” What does this mean? Several Greek words are translated by the English word “see,” but this one merits special study. It implies a look that is more than indifferent, but one of pondering, intensely interested, preoccupied, and fully acquainted with its object.

A Christian, therefore, will not “see” death with such interest, for his attention will not be on death’s terrors but upon the One who Himself bore all that death had to offer yet conquered it forever. A Christian can look even at his own approaching death calmly, with passive interest, for it holds little influence over him. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). JDM

Monday, March 7

The Measure of Better

“Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.” (Proverbs 15:16-17)

There are many such comparisons as those in our text that have been incorporated in the book of Proverbs. We tend to think in financial terms, but the true measure of “worth” has nothing to do with money. In fact, one could almost develop an inverse law to the effect that the more money one has, the less happiness and contentment he enjoys. Note the frequency of such “equations” in Proverbs.

“Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right” (16:8). “Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife” (17:1). “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (16:19). “Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich” (28:6).

That which is better, therefore, is to be found “with the fear of the LORD,” “where love is,” “with righteousness,” and “quietness therewith.” It is better when one is “of an humble spirit,” who “walketh in his uprightness.”

This is a lesson that the many affluent Christian men and women of our prosperous nation urgently need to learn today. Note Paul’s counsel to young Timothy. Speaking of men who are “destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness,” he warns, “From such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:5-6). Then comes a very sobering commentary: “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts,...and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:9-10). HMM

Sifted

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31-32)

In the evening before His betrayal, capture, torture, and trial, Christ turned to Simon with these final words, encouraging him to remain strong. Of course, Peter boldly proclaimed that he would never deny Christ, but Christ knew better (vv. 33-34).

Actually, our text is quite forceful. Christ claimed that Satan has “begged earnestly” (literal translation of “desired”), not just for Peter, but for all the disciples, as seen in the plural pronoun “you,” to “sift you as wheat.” Satan knew (as he still knows) that the fall of Christian leaders causes many others to fall, and if all of the disciples could be made to abandon the faith, the gospel could not be spread.

Christ turned specifically to Peter as the generally recognized spokesman for the disciples, and even though He knew Peter would fall, Christ informed him that he had been prayed for, that his “faith fail not.” Indeed, Peter did turn around once he saw the risen Lord and became a leader in the fledgling church in Jerusalem, as well as a missionary. Through the witness of Peter and those he strengthened, the gospel has come to us.

Satan’s desire to sift those who would spread the gospel and lead others has not abated. He knows the destruction it causes in the lives of those influenced by the one who falls. The “ripple effect” may last for years, and many weaker brothers and sisters may never recover. But take heart! The One who prayed for Peter “ever liveth to make intercession for [us]” (Hebrews 7:25; see also John 17:6-26). Just as God answered Christ’s intercessory prayer for Peter, so He will answer Christ’s intercessory prayer for us. JDM

Wednesday, March 9

Wisdom and Prudence

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” (Matthew 11:25)

The attributes of wisdom and prudence are prized very highly by the world and its leaders, but worldly wisdom and pragmatic prudence are incapable in themselves of comprehending the spiritual concepts in the plan of God. The Lord Jesus, in fact, considered this very truth a cause for thanksgiving! One does not need either education or wisdom to appropriate the true wisdom of God, for even a young child (in fact, only one who becomes like a child) is able to understand true wisdom. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

The fact that most of the world’s scholars reject the Word of God is not surprising because God promised this would be the case! “It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent,” for “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Corinthians 1:19, 21). Genuine wisdom and prudence are found only through the revealed Word of God. There, however, “he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (Ephesians 1:8). God desires that our “faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God....But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:5, 7-8). The abounding wisdom and prudence of God are hidden from the wise and prudent of the world, but are life and joy to all who come with the believing trust of little children. HMM

Thursday, March 10

The Way of Cain

“Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.” (Proverbs 25:14)

Cain initially was a religious man, evidently proud of his achievements as a “tiller of the ground” that God had “cursed” (Genesis 4:2; 3:17). He assumed that God would be much impressed with the beautiful basket of his “fruit of the ground” that he presented as an “offering unto the LORD.” Cain became bitterly angry when God “had not respect” to Cain and his offering (Genesis 4:3-5).

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,” shedding the blood of an innocent lamb in substitution for his own sin and guilt before God, “by which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Hebrews 11:4). Since “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17), Abel was merely obeying God’s Word, but Cain, proud and self-righteous in attitude, was presuming to offer up his own merits in payment for the privilege of coming to God.

This was a “false gift,” however, with no meritorious value at all before God, “like clouds and wind without rain.” The apostle Jude warns against any such presumption, especially now that we can freely come to God through His own perfect “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “Woe unto them!” says Jude, “for they have gone in the way of Cain...clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 1:11-12). This severe indictment was lodged against all who, like Cain, are superficially religious but who, by their self-righteous resentment against God, are “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4). We must not boast of our gifts to God, but only of His gift to us. HMM

Friday, March 11

A First-Century Hymn

“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

It has been noted that our text for the day is in poetic language and form. It probably consists of an early hymn that Timothy and the other readers of this epistle knew. It consists of a series of “if...then” statements, each an important conditional promise, two with negative connotations and two with positive.

“If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.” Elsewhere we read, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13).

“If we suffer [literally, ‘endure’], we shall also reign with him.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

“If we deny him, he also will deny us.” Christ said, “But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33).

“If we believe not [literally, are unfaithful], yet he abideth faithful.” His promises are sure whether they be warnings of judgment or promises of blessing. God promised Joshua: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage” (Joshua 1:5-6).

Our text begins with the statement “It is a faithful saying,” and ends with “he cannot deny himself.” We can be sure that He will live up to His end of the bargain. His very nature demands it. JDM

Saturday, March 12

In the Spirit

“For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” (Ephesians 2:18)

We cannot see or hear the Holy Spirit, but He is very real and is, in fact, the very life of each true Christian. It is only through Him that we have access in prayer to the Father, as our text points out. Christ in His resurrection body is seated at the right hand of the Father in the distant heavens, but the Holy Spirit has His temple in our very bodies.

He not only hears each spoken prayer, but also each thought of our hearts. From the moment we receive Christ, we live in the Spirit; He is always with us, to guide our steps, to bear witness with our spirits that we belong to God, to illumine our understanding, and, when needed, to convict and chasten when we get out of His will.

Therefore, “if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). When we yield to some worldly temptation, it is because we have ignored this admonition, for the promise is “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). The very presence of the Holy Spirit assures our eternal salvation, so how can we ignore His holy constraints on our behavior? “Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). We speak of worshiping God in church, or home, or elsewhere, but if we really worship Him, we must “worship God in the spirit” (Philippians 3:3), for we have access to the Father, and the Son, only in the Spirit.

When we pray, we must be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18). “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His....For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:9, 14). HMM

Sunday, March 13

Lean Not

“For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.” (Isaiah 3:1)

Isaiah lived and wrote during a time of spiritual poverty in the nations of Judah and Israel, as well as national decline. He foresaw and foretold in graphic detail the coming captivities of both nations, but was particularly concerned with the state and future of his homeland, Judah, and his hometown, Jerusalem.

The first several chapters of his book consist of a strong denunciation of the practices of the people of Judah. The nation was literally disintegrating due to rampant sin. In preparation for the coming national and ultimate judgments, Isaiah warned against personal pride and reliance on human resources. “The loftiness of man shall be...made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day” (2:17).

In our text, the words “stay” and “staff” are the masculine and feminine forms of the same word, both derived from the word meaning “support,” translated “stay of bread.” Thus, Isaiah uses this idiom and the next several verses to teach that God will remove any semblance of support for this sinful people, whether mighty man, soldier, judge, prophet, seer, elder, captain, artist, orator, or mature ruler (3:2-4), for the purpose of humbling them, “the people shall be oppressed,... every one by his neighbour” (v. 5), and demonstrating that the Lord, Jehovah Himself, could be their only real stay or staff. “In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious” (4:2).

The word “stay” is elsewhere translated “lean,” “rely,” or “rest.” “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). JDM

Monday, March 14

Stir Up

“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.” (2 Peter 1:13)

It is apparently rather easy, in this day of football games, rock concerts, and race riots, to get the emotions of a crowd all stirred up. The stirring of emotions can be either good or bad, of course, depending on the cause.

In our text, the apostle Peter says we need to be stirred up by our memories—that is, our remembrances of His “great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” For “he that lacketh these things,” said Peter, “hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” and urgently needs “to have these things always in remembrance” (vv. 4, 9, 15).

Something else needs to be stirred up, said Paul to Timothy. “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God” (2 Timothy 1:6). Each believer has received certain gifts from God, but these need to be stirred up and used both boldly and wisely for Christ.

Finally, Peter says that the purpose in writing both his epistles was to “stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Peter 3:1-2). This was written especially for “the last days” (v. 3), indicating that they should stir up, not their emotions, but their minds! To meet the critical needs of the last days, they should have their minds full of the Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments. These Scriptures should even be memorized, if possible, so they can be called up “by way of remembrance” whenever needed. The Holy Scriptures are simple enough to be received by a child, yet they can stir up our minds with their heights and depths, and will stir our hearts as well. HMM

Tuesday, March 15

A Bondslave and a Freeman

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.” (Romans 1:1)

Paul identified himself as a “servant [literally ‘bondslave’] of Jesus Christ” as he began several of his epistles; and it is significant that he began the epistle to the Romans in the same fashion. The parallel phrase “bondslave of the emperor” was commonly used in governmental and commercial circles of the day, and the readers in Rome would fully understand the meaning of the new term.

The emperor of Rome not only was to be obeyed as a human slave owner and king, he also was to be worshiped as a god. Paul boldly proclaimed himself to be the bondslave of a different slave owner, the subject of a different King, and the worshiper of a different God.

Paul knew and expected to convince his readers that this new doctrine he was preaching would quickly replace the imperialism of Rome, and he fully realized that this challenge would quickly be recognized and fought by Rome. Paul himself, not many years hence, would stand before the emperor Nero, not as an imperial bondslave, but a bondslave of the King of kings.

Long before Nero’s executioner freed Paul from the limitations of his physical body, Paul had been made a “freeman of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:22). The common title of the day “freedman of the emperor” designated a bondslave of the emperor who had been elevated by the emperor to a higher position.

Paul had been, and all believers have been, ransomed out of the slave market of sin by Christ’s blood and have been set free from the guilt, power, and penalty of that sin. Our willing response should be to permanently place ourselves into enslavement to our Redeemer, making us simultaneously both bondslaves and freedmen of the King. JDM

David's Army

“David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.” (1 Samuel 22:1-2)

As David was fleeing for his life from King Saul, a rather pitiful and unpromising company began following him, and they became the nucleus of what would soon be his army. Others joined them, and David trained them, “for at that time day by day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God” (1 Chronicles 12:22). Soon they were no longer discontented misfits but a remarkable array of “mighty men” (v. 21). One group, for example, was said to be “men of war fit for the battle,...whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains” (1 Chronicles 12:8).

In many remarkable ways David was a type of Christ, his life foreshadowing the experiences of the greater “son of David” who would come a thousand years later. In such a parallel, his army is a type of the earthly “host of God,” the great company of those who have chosen to follow Christ, each of whom has been called to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3).

The followers of Christ were once also in distress, for the “base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen” (1 Corinthians 1:28). He is now “the captain of their salvation” (Hebrews 2:10), urging that each one should strive to “please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4). When He is finally ready to take the Kingdom, these will be with Him in His triumphant return and eternal reign (Revelation 19:14; 22:5). HMM

Thursday, March 17

He Who Made the Stars

“Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name.” (Amos 5:8)

This striking exhortation is inserted in the midst of a prophetic rebuke by God of His people Israel. They were rapidly drifting into pagan idolatry, and Amos was trying to call them back.

His exhortation, given almost 2,800 years ago, is more needed today than it ever was before. Modern pagan scientists have developed elaborate but absurdly impossible theories about the chance origin of the universe from nothing, and the evolution of stars, planets, and people from primordial hydrogen. But the mighty cosmos and its galaxies of stars—even the very constellations, such as Orion and the Pleiades (the “seven stars”), as well as the solar system—were made. All of these had to be made by an omniscient, omnipotent Creator, who certainly had a glorious purpose for it all.

Similarly, the global evidences that waters once covered all the earth’s mountains (i.e., marine fossils and water-laid sediments at their summits) cannot possibly be explained—as evolutionary geologists try to do—by slow processes acting over eons of time. God, the Creator, had to call massive volumes of water forth from their original reservoirs and pour them out on the earth in His Flood judgment on a rebellious world.

All of these witness to the fact of creation and judgment, not to impotent “gods” personifying natural forces. Men urgently need to seek the true God of creation and salvation before judgment falls again, for “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). HMM

Friday, March 18

The Flesh of a Little Child

“Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” (2 Kings 5:14)

The familiar story of Naaman the Syrian was cited by the Lord Jesus as an example of God’s concern for people of all nations: “Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus [Elisha] the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27). It is also a striking picture of salvation.

Naaman was a great and highly acclaimed general but nevertheless was stricken with an incurable and loathsome disease. Similarly, any natural man, no matter how powerful, is afflicted with the lethal disease of sin. Before this proud official could be cured of his leprosy, he had to humble himself in several ways. First, he had to accept the advice of a slave girl from an enemy nation; then journey to that nation and its prophet, whose God his own nation had repudiated; travel still farther at the word of the prophet (who would not even come out to meet him); and, finally, immerse himself seven times in the despised river Jordan. Though he resented being so humiliated, his condition was hopeless otherwise, so he finally did all these things, and God marvelously healed him!

The leprous flesh became as the flesh of a little child again, but first he had to manifest the obedient faith of a little child. The same principle is true for every lost sinner. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). Jesus said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3-4). HMM

Saturday, March 19

The Terror of the Lord

“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” (2 Corinthians 5:11)

The use of the English word “terror” in this verse as a translation of the Greek *phobos* (from which we get our word “phobia”) indicates that the frequent Old Testament phrase “fear of the LORD” means much more than implied in the modern euphemism “reverential trust.” The only other New Testament use of this phrase is in Acts 9:31: “Then had the churches rest...and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

These two passages seem to be informing us that when a church is “walking in the terror of the Lord,” its members will be seeking every means whereby to “persuade men” to come to Christ, and therefore its numbers will increase.

This impassioned persuasion of the lost is motivated by knowledge that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). That is, we know that the Lord Jesus, who died for lost sinners and has commissioned us to tell them of His great salvation, will be highly displeased if we don’t do so, or if our testimony is compromised by our selfish lives. At His judgment seat, “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is....If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:13, 15).

The terror of the Lord, when we appear before Him in that day, is not the only motive for witnessing, of course. “The love of Christ constraineth us,” and when our testimony is received (our motives being “manifest unto God” and even to the “consciences” of those to whom we witness), then the glorious result is “a new creature” in Christ! (2 Corinthians 5:14, 17). HMM

Sunday, March 20

Statement of Christ's Purpose

"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15)

Schools, businesses, and institutions are all well-advised to develop and live by a "statement of purpose" if they are to be successful, evaluating each activity by its effectiveness in fulfilling that purpose.

As Christians, we should also have a well-defined purpose. Each individual's specific purpose will vary somewhat, depending on that person's giftedness, background, and circumstances; but since Christ is our example, each Christian's statement of purpose should reflect His priorities and values.

In many ways, Mark's gospel provides the most vivid and explicit insight into the work of Jesus, and in this book we see Jesus often repeating His statement of purpose. "Jesus came... preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying... repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus Christ had come with the specific purpose of saving the lost, and everything He did pointed to that end. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (2:17).

Christ not only preached to sinners, but He trained and sent out His followers to see that His mission was effectively carried out, even after He was gone. "And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth....And they went out, and preached that men should repent" (6:7, 12). Regarding His approaching death, He explained: "The Son of man came...to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45). As He left them, He commanded, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (16:15).

Our priorities should be the same as His. If everything we do points toward this end, His mission will thereby be accomplished. "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (8:35). JDM

Monday, March 21

By Any Means

“And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.” (Acts 27:12)

This seemingly insignificant phrase “by any means” (Greek *ei pos*) is actually used to express the urgency of attaining some object sought, along with the means for its attainment. It occurs just four times in the New Testament, and it is interesting that these four occurrences seem to follow a significant order.

The first of them is in our text above and expresses a search for physical comfort, as the mariners, transporting Paul to Rome, sought by any means to find a convenient place to spend the winter.

The second expresses Paul’s search for spiritual ministry. When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he told them of his constant prayers: “Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established” (Romans 1:10-11).

Thirdly, there was his search for conversion of others. “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them” (Romans 11:13-14).

Finally, and most importantly, there was Paul’s (and, Lord willing, may it be ours also!) search for a Christ-centered life. “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). HMM

Tuesday, March 22

The Word of the King

“Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?” (Ecclesiastes 8:4)

Perhaps the archetype of absolute monarchs was Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar, of whom the prophet Daniel could say, “Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory” (Daniel 2:37). The word of this and every true king was with power, the king being answerable to no man but himself, for his authority came from God. “For there is no power but of God” (Romans 13:1). Many kings have had to learn this truth the hard way, however, for they have found that God could remove them as quickly as He had ordained them when they abused that power.

But there is one King who will never fall; one “who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings;...to whom be honour and power everlasting” (1 Timothy 6:15-16). The Lord Jesus Christ has asserted, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18), and one day all creatures in heaven and Earth will acknowledge: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things” (Revelation 4:11). In that day all “the kingdoms of this world [shall] become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

This one, who is King of all kings, is also the One who is “called The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13). The word of this King is of such power that He could speak the mighty cosmos into existence. His word could calm a violent storm and call Lazarus back from death.

“The word of God is quick, and powerful” (Hebrews 4:12), and “his word was with power” (Luke 4:32). Therefore, “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” (2 Corinthians 1:20). HMM

Wednesday, March 23

The Mystery of Darkness

“And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 22:5)

The Bible reveals that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), and also that, in the ages to come, there will be no more darkness. God promises twice that there shall be “no night there” (Revelation 21:25; 22:5) in the very last references to night in the Bible.

Why, then, is there darkness, and where did it come from? God gives the answer: “I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness” (Isaiah 45:6-7). Light was always in and with God, but the darkness had to be created! And it has a purpose, serving as a contrast to the light.

Men and women were created to love and have fellowship with their Creator, not as robots but in freedom. Darkness thus served as the choice that could be made against God and the light, for those so minded. Satan and his hosts of fallen angels and wicked spirits have become “the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Ephesians 6:12). The tragedy is that ever since Adam, men have “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19), and so have been practicing “the works of darkness” (Romans 13:12), and deserving nothing but “the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 1:13).

But our Creator has become our Redeemer. He “hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9), paying the great price for our redemption on the cross. The Father “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13); we are now free to enter into the eternal fellowship with God that He had planned before the world began. We should “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11). HMM

God's Son in the Old Testament

"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." (Psalm 2:7)

There are many today (especially Muslims, Jews, and Christian "liberals") who are monotheists, believing in one supreme God but rejecting the deity of Christ. They argue that the doctrine that Jesus was the unique Son of God was invented by the early Christians and that the God of the Old Testament had no Son. Orthodox Jews in particular emphasize Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD."

The fact is, however, that there are a number of Old Testament verses that do speak of God's only begotten Son. Note the following brief summary.

First, there is God's great promise to David: "I will set up thy seed after thee,...I will be his father, and he shall be my son....thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:12, 14, 16).

Consider also the rhetorical questions of Agur. "Who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (Proverbs 30:4).

Then there are the two famous prophecies of Isaiah, quoted so frequently at Christmastime. "Behold, a [literally 'the'] virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [meaning 'God with us']" (Isaiah 7:14). "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Perhaps the most explicit verse in this connection is our text. "The LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son" (Psalm 2:7). Then this marvelous Messianic psalm concludes with this exhortation: "Kiss the Son,...Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psalm 2:12). HMM

Friday, March 25

His Word Is with Power

“And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.” (Luke 4:32)

God’s words, whether spoken by Jesus or written in Scripture, are indeed full of power, and it is noteworthy how many and varied are the physical analogies used to characterize and emphasize its power.

For example, consider Jeremiah 23:29. “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” The fire analogy is also stressed in Jeremiah 20:9, when the prophet became weary of the negative reaction against his preaching: “Then I said, I will not...speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”

God’s Word is also called a sharp sword wielded by the Holy Spirit. As part of the Christian’s spiritual armor, we are exhorted to take “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). “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 discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Even more significantly, perhaps, it is compared to light, for light energy is really the most basic of all forms of energy, or power. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path.” “The entrance of thy words giveth light” (Psalm 119:105, 130). The first spoken words of Christ our Creator were “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3).

But no earthly form of power can compare to the power in the words of the One who is Himself the living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is actually “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). HMM

Saturday, March 26

The New Heavens and New Earth

*“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.”
(Isaiah 65:17)*

There is a glorious future awaiting the redeemed. Although God’s primeval creation of the heavens and the earth is eternal (note Psalm 148:6, etc.), these are now groaning in pain under the effects of sin and the curse. When the Lord returns, they will be “delivered from the bondage of corruption into... glorious liberty” (Romans 8:21), and God will make them all new again, with all the scars of sin and death burned away by His refining fires (2 Peter 3:10).

There are four explicit references in the Bible to these “renewed” heavens and Earth. In addition to our text, which assures us that they will be so wonderful that this present earth and its heavens will soon be forgotten, there is the great promise of Isaiah 66:22: “For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.” Thus, that heavens and Earth will remain eternally, and so will all who dwell there, with their true spiritual children. Note also that both God’s “creation” and “making” powers will be applied to the new heavens and new earth, just as they were to the first (Genesis 2:3).

The third and fourth references are in the New Testament. “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). Not only will no sin be present there, neither will the results of sin and the curse. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away;...And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:1, 4). HMM

Sunday, March 27

God's Grace Is Sufficient

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9a)

How many times have we been in dire situations and then looked back later and realized that we miraculously got through only by God's grace? Leading up to this Scripture, Paul spoke of some unspecified continuing affliction God was allowing him to endure to humble him. Paul requested three times to have the affliction removed and then gave this direct message from the Lord Jesus in response to his repeated requests.

To the Greek reader of this passage, the thing that would have immediately jumped out from this section of the epistle is the contrast in verbal tenses. Paul's request was recorded in the simple past tense (aorist), indicating an action that is completed rather than ongoing. In contrast, Christ's message that starts with “he said” is derived from the Greek verb *ereō* in the perfect tense, which indicates an initial action with continuing application and ongoing effect.

Another important point in this ongoing application is that the verbs for “is sufficient” (*arkeō*) and “made perfect” (*teleioō*) are in what is known by grammarians as timeless or durative present tenses. In other words, Christ's grace and strength are a present and active truth in every moment of the believer's life!

Thus, Paul could then say, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9b-11). JPT

God of All Grace

“The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:10-11)

This passage lists another name for God in the New Testament—the God of all grace. Peter ends with amen, indicating that this is a prayer in which Peter is calling upon the God of all grace to “perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle” the suffering believers.

Not only do we desperately need God’s grace in the trials of life, but our faith journey also began in grace. Indeed, Ephesians 2:1-3 describes the terrible and hopeless state of Paul’s readers before their salvation. As unregenerate sinners, they were not only spiritually dead in their sin but enslaved to the ways of Satan according to the sinful desires of the flesh and the mind, being ultimately destined for God’s wrath.

Then God’s grace-alone remedy is given in Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” And this amazing grace is not just for our original deliverance and the sustaining work of salvation, but for all eternity. “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7).

Thanks be to the God of all grace, “for thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee,” and “thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psalm 86:5, 15). JPT

Tuesday, March 29

The Lord Our God Is One

“I and my Father are one.” (John 10:30)

In this short but profound verse, Jesus claims deity and oneness with God the Father. The Jews who had encircled Him in the temple had said to Him, “If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). Instead, Jesus gave a discourse on who the true followers (sheep) of Christ were, claiming unity in the work of salvation with the Father. He said, “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (v. 28), and “no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (v. 29). This is followed with “I and my Father are one,” which prompted the crowd to try and stone Him.

Their heated response was rooted in the writings of Moses, specifically Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD.” A more literal rendering of the Hebrew is “hear, Israel [imperative command]: *Yahweh* our *Elohim* [is] *Yahweh*—One.” *Yahweh* is the unique name of God, and *Elohim* is the grammatical plural of God (*El*), giving veiled reference to the Trinity toward which Jesus is now making a startling revelation.

When Jesus claims unity with the Father, we have the added bonus of its specificity being written in Greek, in which the word for “one” is *hen*, which is neuter as opposed to the masculine form *heis*. This distinction preserves the trinitarian aspect that is one in purpose and will with the distinction of its individuals.

And of God’s Son, John tells us in his gospel that Jesus is the Word made flesh, the Lamb of God, the Light of the World, the True Vine, the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life, and that all things were made by Him, our Creator. JPT

Wednesday, March 30

A Lesson from Idolatrous Handiwork

“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.” (Psalm 115:4-7)

The overriding lesson in this Scripture passage is the solemn admonition that we shouldn’t worship anything, including the works of our own hands, above the living God, our Creator Jesus Christ. The modern equivalent of this idolatry is the mental construct of a mystical imaginary process of nature selecting and crafting creatures—otherwise known as Darwinian evolution. This fake agent put in the place of an omnipotent Creator God is not only idolatrous but also devoid of solid scientific evidence both currently and in the fossil record.

But there’s more to glean from this text. One of humans’ unique features is their ability to purposefully engineer and craft elaborate things. This is one aspect of being created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) as compared to other living creatures. In these verses, the Lord uses this fundamental and inherently understood principle to highlight idolatry in a contrastive scenario, human engineering vs. God’s engineering. In the modern world of bioengineering, research scientists across the world use this same perception of design to imitate the elaborate systems created by God that are found in living creatures, whether they want to acknowledge it or not.

Thus, humans inherently perceive design. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made...so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). JPT

Thursday, March 31

God of Peace

“Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” (Romans 15:33)

This short verse gives yet another New Testament name for God—the God of peace. The conclusion of this verse with amen tells us that what Paul said isn’t just a wish but a brief prayer. Paul uses this title again in another short prayer in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “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.” And in Hebrews 13:20-21: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

This God title is also mentioned in Philippians 4:8-9 regarding the battleground of the mind: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”

And let us remember that the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace, told us, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). JPT

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Friday, April 1

God of Love

*“Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”
(2 Corinthians 13:11)*

The title the “God of love” declared by Paul near the close of his second epistle to the Corinthians is another one of the New Testament’s descriptive names for God. But this title is especially unique because the apostle John tells us that “he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). And again in verse 16, “we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

When John says “God is love,” he isn’t making an ontological declaration about what God is in essence but rather saying that God is loving in all His activity, and love is His essential quality and nature. In fact, the use of the Greek noun *agapé* (love) is without an article in this statement, indicating a nonsymmetrical relationship. In other words, the relationship between God and love is not equational, and thus it isn’t reversible to claim “love is God.”

In 1 John 4:9-11, John clarifies God’s incredible love toward us as revealed in the redemption provided through Jesus Christ: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” And the practical personal application in our lives is made clear: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” JPT

Saturday, April 2

The Workmanship of God

“For 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)

The Greek noun *poiēma* (“workmanship”) is only used twice in the New Testament, which is noteworthy given that at least eight different noun options existed in this particular semantic domain that Paul could have used. In contrast, the verb from which it is derived (*poieō*, to do or to make) is quite common and used 576 times in the New Testament. Significantly, ancient pagan Greek literature typically used *poiēma* to refer to works of divine creation, which Paul has appropriated for two of his epistles to refer to the true Creator.

In this amazing workmanship of salvation, we literally become new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17), created for good works that God prepared beforehand in order “that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). One of these scripturally mandated works is to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

This mandate to be prepared to share our faith in the midst of an increasingly evil world leads us to the second place where God’s workmanship (*poiēma*) is proclaimed. Romans 1:20 boldly points out the obvious handiwork of God: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made [*poiēma*, handiwork].”

Our mighty Creator God, the Lord Jesus Christ, has done the groundwork for us in creation and redemption, and it’s our responsibility to tear down the vain imaginations of evolution and point to His workmanship. JPT

Sunday, April 3

Learning to Make This Day Count

“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12)

The book of Psalms is divided into five “books.” Book 4 begins with the oldest psalm written by the psalms’ oldest author, Moses. This book was assembled after the Babylonian captivity following the Jews’ return to Jerusalem during the lifespan of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Book 4 contains many parallels, including between Israel’s 40 years of desert wandering and the Babylonian captivity. Both scenarios, sadly, came about because a disobedient generation of Israelites defiantly rebelled against God.

Why put this psalm at the beginning of Book 4? The Holy Spirit through the pen of Moses wanted to impress on God’s chosen people then and now that there is only one Person in the universe who will teach His children to live in obedience. That person is Yahweh! God doesn’t want His people to repeat the same mistakes of the past, living life in disobedience apart from God’s wisdom. Think about the 40 years of wasted wandering and another 70 years in exile as a result of ignoring God’s precious Word.

Before we, living in the 21st century, cast proverbial stones at these people, let’s ask ourselves this question: How are we ordering our lives and allowing Yahweh to teach us so that we may “gain a heart of wisdom” as we live out the few numbered days we have on this earth?

Our goal as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should be to refrain from following the same sinful patterns of disobedience depicted in this psalm and make this day count for Yahweh. CM

Follow Me

“And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.” (Matthew 4:19-20)

It was not unusual for a man with a political cause or message to develop a following in the Israel of Jesus’ day (see Acts 5:35-37, for example). It was even common for a Jew to follow a religious “master,” calling him Rabbi and becoming his disciple. But what made the disciples leave the lives they knew and follow Christ? Perhaps they hoped He would lead a successful rebellion against Rome, but He had done nothing to make them think so. Nor had He promised them a life of luxury and ease, but rather hardship and hard work in their new occupation as “fishers of men.”

However, John the Baptist had prepared the way for the Lord. He had trained at least most, possibly all, of the men who would eventually become Jesus’ disciples. “John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus” (John 1:35-37). Training by John even became a requirement for a potential replacement for Judas (Acts 1:20-22).

But a credible witness in John was not their only reason to follow, for they had a great body of compelling evidence. For example, Luke records in Peter’s case, Christ had already gained local recognition (Luke 4:14-15). Jesus had been to Peter’s house for dinner, where his mother-in-law had been healed (4:38-39). Christ had used his boat for teaching (5:3) and had miraculously directed them to an overwhelming catch of fish (5:6). In response, Peter and his partners “forsook all, and followed him” (5:11).

We have a much surer testimony and much more evidence. Should we not do likewise? JDM

Tuesday, April 5

Arrows in the Hand

“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.” (Psalm 127:4)

This is the central verse in the 101 verses contained in a remarkable group of 15 psalms called “The songs of degrees” (Psalms 120–134). The central verse in the central psalm of this group is the preceding verse: “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3). The origin of these psalms and this peculiar superscript has always been uncertain. Four are said to be by David, one by Solomon; the other 10 are anonymous.

A reasonable supposition, however, is that they were composed by King Hezekiah after he had been miraculously healed of a lethal illness. “I will add unto thy days fifteen years,” God had said, and gave Hezekiah a miraculous sign as confirmation, causing the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz to go “backward ten degrees” (2 Kings 20:6, 10). In thanksgiving thereof, the king proclaimed, “Therefore we will sing my songs...all the days of our life in the house of the LORD” (Isaiah 38:20).

It is significant that the word for “degrees” is the same in both cases. It apparently means “steps” or “ascents.” The shadow miraculously ascended 10 steps back up the sundial after it had gone down, and Hezekiah’s life was miraculously extended 15 years. Perhaps, therefore, “my songs” mean the 10 songs the king composed in commemoration of the 10 degrees. He then added five songs of David to round out the total to 15, corresponding to his added “days of our life.” And right at the center was his great testimony to the blessing of children. He was childless at the time, but he had a son three years later (2 Chronicles 33:1) by whom he was able to continue the Messianic line promised to David through Solomon. HMM

Like a Wave of the Sea

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” (James 1:5-6)

A contrast is set up in these verses between faith and doubt. Jesus taught that “if ye have faith, and doubt [same word as ‘waver’ in our text] not ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:21-22).

James explains that a doubter can be compared to ocean waves. Waves (in contrast to the tides that are caused by the gravitational attraction of the moon and sun) are caused by wind that imparts energy to the ocean water that scarcely attenuates until the wave crashes onto the shoreline, perhaps many miles from its original source of energy. A wave cannot stay in one place. It surges onto the shore and recedes backward. It rises up and sinks down. It contains much froth, as well as great energy, which cannot efficiently be harnessed for good but has the potential to cause great damage.

What an elegant picture of the doubting, half-believing soul. Willingly receiving onward and upward impulses, he cannot sustain them, quickly sinking to former depths, only to rise again, in an endless cycle, until ultimately dissipating all energy on some rocky shoreline of life. “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8).

In much the same way, Paul urges that we “be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:14-15). JDM

Thursday, April 7

Assembling Together

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)

This verse is often cited as an incentive to regular church attendance, but it can also relate just as well to any gathering of two or more believers in Christ’s name. The Lord Jesus said: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

It is fascinating to note that the Greek word translated “assembling together” in this verse is used only one other time in the New Testament, and there it is translated “gathering together.” “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him” (2 Thessalonians 2:1). In this verse, Paul was reminding the Thessalonians of his previous letter to them, in which he had written about the return of Christ and the gathering together of all believers to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Perhaps the writer of our text verse, since he was using the same unique terminology, was referring to the same event.

That is, whenever there is an assembling together of believers, it is in a sense a little preview of that great gathering in the skies when Christ returns, as we exhort one another to “look for him” (Hebrews 9:28), and so much the more, as we see the day approaching.

Since our text verse does not actually mention the church by name, it seems to apply to any assembling of believers. However, there is one very significant use of “church” in Hebrews, and it refers specifically to the coming meeting in the air, where we shall all gather at “the general assembly and 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” (Hebrews 12:23). HMM

Friday, April 8

Boldness in the Holy Place

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” (Hebrews 10:19)

In the ancient tabernacle only the High Priest was allowed to enter the “holy of holies” to commune with God, and that only once a year, on the great day of atonement. This most holy place was separated from the rest by a very heavy veil. When Christ died, however, as the one final and perfect sacrifice, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:51).

This miraculous rending of the veil was intended by the Lord to symbolize the wonderful truth that we now have open access to come into the very presence of God, “by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Hebrews 10:20). Thus, as our text says, we no longer must go by way of priests and sacrifices to come to God. We can enter directly “into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.”

Because of what Christ has done for us, we can come boldly (not arrogantly or presumptuously, however) into God’s presence in prayer. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 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 4:15-16).

We can also have confidence (same Greek word as for “boldness”) in witnessing for Christ. After praying for boldness, “with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

Just as did the apostles, in Christ we now “have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Ephesians 3:12). HMM

Saturday, April 9

Without the Shedding of Blood

“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22)

It is strange that so many people object to the biblical doctrine of salvation through the shed blood of Christ. Even some evangelicals will argue that the blood is merely a chemical mixture, and that it was the *death* of Christ that was the price of our redemption.

Chemistry aside, the Bible does indeed stress that “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14), that He has “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20), and that we are “now justified by his blood” (Romans 5:9). We receive His great work of propitiation—that is His sacrificial death for our sins—“through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25).

Why this emphasis on the shedding of His blood, which seems offensive to so many people? Could He not have been put to death in other ways—drowning, stoning, asphyxiation, etc.—ways not involving the ugliness of bloodshed?

One can speculate with many “what if?” questions, but we must go by the Word of God. It remains true, theologically as well as biologically, that “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11, also Genesis 9:4). The basic rationale of sacrifice—the death of an innocent substitute to provide life for the guilty—has centered from the beginning (when God provided coats of skin for the nakedness of Adam and Eve) on the spilled blood of sacrificial animals to atone for (that is “to cover”) the sins of the one bringing the offering, until finally “the Lamb of God” could be offered by God as “one sacrifice for sins for ever” (Hebrews 10:12). When the blood gushed from His pierced side, His spotless life was poured out at the foot of the cross, and the price of our redemption was fully paid. HMM

Sunday, April 10

A Good Name

“A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one’s birth.” (Ecclesiastes 7:1)

It seems odd at first that Solomon would link these two maxims together. How is the day of death better than birth, and what has this to do with the value of one’s good name? The great king had once enjoyed a name synonymous with godliness and great wisdom, but his name had eventually become so sullied with the excesses of wealth and fleshly indulgence that he began to long even for death. It is a tragic thing for godly young people to allow their good names to be ruined by careless carnality, thenceforth never to be able to fulfill the promise their lives once seemed to carry. Solomon could employ all the most costly ointments and other comforts to ease his declining years, but they could never redeem his good name. “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold. The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all” (Proverbs 22:1-2).

The Christian believer has a double incentive to maintain a good name, of course, for his words and deeds inevitably reflect, for good or ill, on the name of Christ as well. When we cause our own names to be damaged, we also (as David did) give “great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme” (2 Samuel 12:14), and there are, sadly, many such enemies eagerly watching for us to give them yet another occasion to “blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called” (James 2:7).

In a very real sense, of course, even those who do maintain a good name all their lives can joyfully anticipate the day of death. Christ has promised: “I will write upon him the name of my God...and I will write upon him my new name” (Revelation 3:12). That will, indeed, be a “good name” and one we shall enjoy forever! HMM

Monday, April 11

The Same Mind

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

The days of the early church were the days of its greatest power because they were days of its greatest unity. “They, continuing daily with one accord...and singleness of heart.” “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul:...and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 2:46; 4:32-33). It was not long, however, before divisions, contentions, and schisms crept in. Therefore, the New Testament contains many exhortations toward a restoration of the unity—and thus the power—of the early church. Note the following examples.

“Be of the same mind one toward another” (Romans 12:16). “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God” (Romans 15:5-6). “Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11). “Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:2). “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8).

Real unity, of course, must be both “the unity of the Spirit” and “the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:3, 13), and “the same mind” must be nothing less than the mind of Christ. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). HMM

Tuesday, April 12

Gospel by Revelation

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11-12)

In writing to the believers in Galatia, Paul was concerned that they were “so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (v. 6).

What was Paul’s gospel that he was so concerned about? “Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever” (vv. 3-5). Furthermore, he added that “if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (v. 9). They were not to listen even if Paul or “an angel from heaven” (v. 8) preached another gospel.

Paul’s gospel, on the other hand, was “not after man,” i.e., not the sort of thing that men would make up. Human religions are all man-glorifying and God-degrading, blurring the difference between the two and tempting man with the age-old taut: “Ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). In contrast, the gospel that Paul preached recognized man’s utter sinfulness and worthlessness and rested in a glorified Christ for His finished work.

Paul had not “received it of man.” This was not the tradition among his people. “Neither was I taught it,” said Paul, even though he had been taught extensively in the religion of Judaism. On the contrary, he was taught the gospel “by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” We can therefore not only be sure of its accuracy, but, also with Paul, join in the “ministry, which [he] received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). JDM

Wednesday, April 13

The Aroma

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Incense in Scripture has a variety of rich and meaningful usages, particularly as related to the blood sacrifice. “And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon:...And thou shalt put it before the vail that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee” (Exodus 30:1, 6). Without this incense, it was impossible to meet with God in this prescribed way. It was to be offered both morning and evening (vv. 7-8). Great care was to be taken in its preparation (vv. 34-36), and it was not to be used for any other purpose (vv. 37-38).

In the New Testament we find a totally different application of this principle. As in our text, we see that Jesus Christ Himself has become an offering and a “sweet-smelling savour” to God. His freely offering Himself is an example to us to live a life of sacrifice and love.

While He was the final sacrifice, we are to “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). This may even take the form of material “things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18).

In the mind of God, our life of sacrifice is a sweet-smelling savor. “Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved” (2 Corinthians 2:14-15). Without our willing, living sacrifice, we cannot approach God, but with it we are a “sweet savour of Christ.” JDM

Thursday, April 14

Hints of Redemption

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, God pronounced the dreadful curse on all of His creation, from mankind to the animal and plant kingdoms and even the earth itself (Genesis 3:14-19). From that point on, everything began to die, but at the same time God predicted the coming Redeemer who would set things right.

There are several hints of the coming Redeemer in these early chapters of Genesis. Dr. A. T. Pierson, a Bible scholar of the late 1800s and early 1900s, mentioned an unnamed Hebrew scholar, a Jewish rabbi, who held that the names of the 10 pre-Flood patriarchs (Adam to Noah) formed a redemptive sentence when read together. Keep in mind that certain meanings of some of these names are lost in antiquity, but the exercise is interesting, if not definitive. According to the rabbi, Adam means mankind; Seth is appointed; Enos, mortality; Cainan, wailing for the dead; Mahalaleel, God be praised; Jared, He shall descend; Enoch, a mortal man; Methuselah, dismissing death; Lamech, the weary; Noah, rest. Stringing the translations together yields the following sentence: “Mankind is appointed [to] mortality, wailing for the dead. God be praised. He shall descend, a mortal man, dismissing death, [bringing to] the weary rest.”

Modern scholars prefer Enoch as dedicated man, Methuselah as when he dies, judgment, Lamech (uncertainly) as conqueror, and Cainan (very uncertainly) as humiliation. Our sentence now reads, “Mankind is appointed [to] mortality, [bringing] humiliation. God be praised. He shall descend, a dedicated man. When He dies [as] judgment, [He will] conquer, [bringing] rest.” JDM

Friday, April 15

Born to Die

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

Especially as noted in the gospel of John, Christ identified many reasons why He had been born. Consider the following sampling of verses and references. First and foremost, Christ came to redeem those who would believe: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). But under that umbrella of redemption come many other aspects.

Jesus said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34). God’s will was paramount even in judgment (John 5:30) as well as resurrection. “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). It also governed His teaching (7:16-17). In everything, Christ sought to bring glory to His Father (7:18).

Many aspects of Christ’s work are to be realized in this life, for He said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). His desire in it all was that we might have an eternal relationship with God. “That they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

But the primary goal was to bring to climax His redemptive strategy. He knew that none of the other aspects of His work had any effect without atonement for sin, which was only possible if a blood sacrifice was made for that sin. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). This was the reason He came to Earth. JDM

Saturday, April 16

Blessed Assurance

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.” (Isaiah 32:17)

As expressed in the old gospel hymn, the “blessed assurance, Jesus is mine” is a “foretaste of glory divine.” According to our text, this “assurance for ever,” together with true peace of soul and quietness of spirit, are products of the “work of righteousness.”

The New Testament exposition of genuine righteousness makes it clear that we who have received Christ’s work of righteousness by faith have been “made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5).

Thus, salvation is the priceless possession of those to whom Christ’s work of righteousness has been imputed, through faith. On the other hand, the assurance of salvation, accompanied by quietness and peace of heart, is “experienced” only by saved believers who practice the work of righteousness in their daily walk with the Lord. If we truly have salvation, then we ought to manifest the “things that accompany salvation.... For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name.... And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Hebrews 6:9-11).

We can, indeed, know that we are saved simply through faith in His work and His Word (e.g., 1 John 5:13). Nevertheless, to know that one’s faith itself is genuine, God has given us this test of faith. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3).

This is surely blessed assurance of salvation and a foretaste of glory divine! HMM

Sunday, April 17

The Resurrection and the Believer

“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 resurrection of Christ is no less crucial to the gospel than the death of Christ. If He did not rise from the dead, then we who believe in Him “are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Christ’s resurrection assures us, first of all, of our justification. Speaking of Abraham’s faith and the imputation of God’s righteousness to him, Paul writes, “For us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:24-25).

God imparts to us the power to serve Him effectively through the resurrection, “that [we] may know...what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:18-20). As the passage continues, Paul declares that through the resurrection Christ is now “the head over all things to the church, which is His body” (vv. 22-23 and also in our text).

In His resurrected and glorified state, Christ continues His ministry to us. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens....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 4:14, 16).

Finally, Christ’s resurrection assures us that we too will one day be resurrected, if we should die before He returns. “He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:14). JDM

Monday, April 18

Be Instant

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.”
(2 Timothy 4:2)

Paul’s “charge” to young Timothy, just before the great apostle’s martyrdom, was urgently needed by Christians in those early days of persecution and incipient apostasy, and his words are even more appropriate today.

The admonition to “be instant” is worth special note. The Greek word *ephistemi* is translated in various ways (“be present,” “be at hand,” “come upon,” etc.). The main idea is simply to be there, doing what needs to be done at the time it is needed. In this particular context it is stressing the Christian’s responsibility to be there with the right words from the Word of God—words of exhortation, of doctrine, of reproof if needed, yet words given patiently, even when rebuffed by the hearer. “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6).

Furthermore, the charge applies not only to those times when we are officially on duty, so to speak. It applies to off-hours as well as work time. Be instant out of season, as well as in season! The Christian must always be “on call” when God calls.

Paul could rightly issue such a charge because he himself had set such an example. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:...thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience” (2 Timothy 4:7; 3:10). It is touching Paul could then use the same word (*ephistemi*) concerning his own coming death, when he said, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand” (2 Timothy 4:6). He was as ready to die as he had always been to speak, for the Lord! HMM

Tuesday, April 19

Ye or Thee

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:6)

In perhaps His primary teaching on giving, prayer, and fasting, Christ used an interesting blend of singular (thee, thou) and plural (you, ye) pronouns. Since even pronouns as recorded in Scripture are inspired and profitable, there must be a lesson to be learned from them.

Although Christ begins the passage using the plural pronoun—“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them” (v. 1), evidently addressing the large group assembled—He switches and speaks in the singular. In the verses dealing with giving (vv. 2-4), with praying (vv. 5-6), and with fasting (vv. 17-18), He uses the singular pronoun and singular verbs over 30 times, but each teaching is balanced by a comparison, in the plural, to those who practice these deeds wrongly (vv. 1, 5, 16).

Evidently, our Lord is stressing the need to do these things privately, as opposed to publicly. Public giving and public fasting are often done to gain the praise of men and to appear overly spiritual. “They have their reward” (v. 5). Public prayer is certainly not improper, and indeed Christ uses the occasion to teach on public prayer by giving what has come to be called the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 9-13), again in contrast to improper public prayer (v. 7). But public prayer can never totally substitute for private prayer, for there is a continuing need for the intimately personal “closet” time with our God. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret” (v. 6).

In each case, “thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (vv. 4, 6, 18). JDM

Wednesday, April 20

Preached in All Creation

“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.” (Colossians 1:23)

Many times Christians piously say, “Why get worked up over creation, why don’t you just preach the gospel?” But such a question reveals a faulty knowledge of what “the gospel” consists of, for, as has been noted many times on these pages, the gospel consists not only of the redemptive work of Christ but His entire person and work as well. The message of the “everlasting gospel” is to “worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Revelation 14:6-7). Elsewhere, the gospel includes His coming Kingdom (Matthew 4:23, for example). From creation to redemption to ultimate restoration, all is “good news,” all the work and person of Christ.

In our text we see that the gospel “was preached to every creature,” or perhaps better translated “in all creation.” What was the message of the gospel for which Paul was so jealous? The answer is found in the preceding verses.

Christ is preeminent, literally “the firstborn of every creature” (v. 15), totally God (v. 19). He is the Creator of all things, both physical and spiritual (v. 16), and continues to maintain His creation (v. 17). He leads the church, assuring victory over death (v. 18). He is the Redeemer, the perfect sacrifice for sins (vv. 20-22), providing each believer total sanctification (v. 22). He will ultimately restore all of creation to its original created intent (v. 20).

Only as we recognize and believe the teachings of His Word on the entire “good news,” from creation to consummation, can we hope to victoriously “continue in the faith grounded and settled.” JDM

Thursday, April 21

Where Are the Nine?

“And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” (Luke 17:17)

Ten lepers, hopeless and incurable, came to Jesus, begging for His help, and He miraculously healed them. All 10 should have fallen down to worship and thank Him, but only one praised God and thanked Him for His marvelous deliverance.

We are at first amazed at such ingratitude, until we realize that not more than 10 percent of even those people who know about Christ ever stop to give Him thanks for His innumerable blessings—life, freedom, food, shelter, health, family, and especially easy access to the Bible and His gracious offer of salvation—far greater in value than the gift of special healing received by the 10 lepers.

The thankful leper received a much greater gift than the others. “Thy faith hath made thee whole” (Luke 17:19). They had received an outward cleansing of the body, he an inward cleansing of the soul! These words spoken by Christ are found four other times in the New Testament (Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 8:48), plus two times where the word for “made whole” is translated “saved” (Luke 7:50; 18:42). This word (Greek *sozo*) occurs many other times. For example: “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:25).

Ten lepers were healed, but only one was saved, and the proof of his salvation, received through genuine faith in Christ, was his gratitude, giving glory to God. The primary evidence of being “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18) is that the one so controlled by God’s regenerating Spirit will be “giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20). Those who are not thankful to their saving Lord are the 90 percent who have not been made whole. HMM

Friday, April 22

Joy in the Christian Life

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11)

The word “fun” is never mentioned in the Bible, and “entertain” is used only in reference to being hospitable. Such activities as “reveling” and “playing” receive nothing except condemnation in the Scriptures (with the exception of little children at play).

Yet, there is growing emphasis today in many churches and parachurch organizations on providing “entertainment” and “fun times” for their members—especially for teenagers and young adults. This is the way to reach them and keep them for the Lord, so they say. Perhaps so, but one wonders why neither the Lord nor the apostles nor the prophets ever told us so. Is this a program kept in reserve by the Lord just for the young people of this generation?

Actually, Christians can have something far better, more effective, and more lasting than fun and entertainment. In Christ they can have heavenly joy! “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Proverbs 17:22), where the word for “merry” is more commonly translated as “joyful” or “rejoicing.”

While the Bible never mentions “fun,” it has many references to “joy” and “rejoicing.” Here are just a few. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jeremiah 15:16). “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). “For the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

We must remind ourselves continually that the Lord Jesus daily, through His words, shares His joy with us, “that [our] joy might be full.” HMM

Saturday, April 23

The Godhead

“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”
(Colossians 2:9)

The term “Godhead” occurs three times in the King James translation. Each time it translates a slightly different Greek noun, all being slight modifications of the Greek word for “God” (*theos*, from which we derive such English words as theology). It essentially means the nature, or “structure,” of God, as He has revealed Himself in His Word.

The first occurrence is in Acts 17:29: “We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” Men have been guilty throughout the ages of trying to “model” the Godhead, but this leads quickly to idolatry, whether that model is a graven image of wood or stone or a philosophical construct of the human mind.

What man cannot do, however, God has done, in the very structure of His creation. “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20). His tri-universe (space, matter, and time, with each component unique in definition and function, yet permeating and comprising the whole) perfectly “models” His triune nature (Father, Son, Holy Spirit—each distinct, yet each the whole).

This analogy can be carried much further, for this remarkable triunity pervades all reality. The tri-universe is not God (that would be pantheism), but it does clearly reflect and reveal the triune nature of His Godhead.

The last occurrence of the word is in our text. Although we cannot see the Godhead in its fullness, that fullness does dwell eternally in the Lord Jesus Christ. All that God is, is manifest in Him. “And ye are complete in him” (Colossians 2:10). HMM

The Works of the Lord

“Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.” (Psalm 111:1)

The first phrase of this majestic psalm of praise, “praise ye the LORD,” translates the compound Hebrew word *hallelujah*. The psalm in its entirety boasts about the works of the Lord (i.e., Jehovah) in various realms.

The psalmist promises to praise the Lord with his entire being, wholeheartedly extolling His works. He will do so in two spheres. First, in “the assembly of the upright,” where “assembly” refers to an intimate circle of friends of like faith. Secondly, in the larger “congregation” called together for that purpose.

The next three verses identify some of the praiseworthy acts of God, each verse employing a different word for “works.” The word translated “works” in verse two usually refers to God’s “great” handiwork in creation, well suited for careful study (i.e., “sought out”), bringing “pleasure” to all those who recognize that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). (Incidentally, this verse two of Psalm 111 is inscribed on the entrance to the famous Cavendish Physics Laboratory in Cambridge.)

The word for “work” in verse three implies an ongoing practice and carries the connotation of His providential acts. He reigns in righteousness, honor, and glory over all His creation.

Finally, the phrase “wonderful works” (v. 4) usually refers to God’s great redemptive acts on behalf of His people Israel (vv. 5-6, 9), as well as all those who put their trust in Him (see Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31, for example). Surely “the LORD is gracious and full of compassion” (v. 4).

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:...his praise endureth for ever” (v. 10). JDM

Monday, April 25

The Spirit and the Word

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (Romans 8:9)

As we see in our text, the Holy Spirit indwells every one who is a true believer, a child of God. Each believer is born again through “the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21), for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

But the role of the Spirit of God and the Word of God in our salvation only begins the Christian’s relationship to them, for we are enjoined to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18) in the same sense that a drunkard is filled with and controlled by wine, and to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). These two entities equip us to be effective representatives of Him here on Earth.

Note, however, that in both of these passages the immediate results of such controlling input are the same. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms [primarily the Old Testament psalms] and hymns [songs of praise directed to God] and spiritual songs [a generic word for song, but here ‘spiritual’ songs], singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19), and “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16). A Spirit-filled Christian, knowledgeable in the Word, just can’t quit singing!

Nor can he stop “giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20; see also Colossians 3:17).

May we always manifest the work of the Spirit and the knowledge of the Word by our thankful hearts and the songs on our lips. JDM

Tuesday, April 26

Ancient Times

*“I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.”
(Psalm 77:5)*

The Bible provides for us a fascinating perspective on the passage of time. Three thousand years ago, the psalmist was reflecting on God’s ways in even earlier times and was seeking to understand God’s ways in his time. Each new generation seems to think that it is the “new wave,” leading the world out of its past darkness into a new age of enlightenment.

There is need for scientific research, of course (in fact, this is implied in the “dominion mandate” of Genesis 1:26-28), but we need to keep in mind that true science is really “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” The results of our scientific “discoveries” should always be to glorify the Creator and to draw men closer to Him, not lead them away from Him.

The same is true of history. We are merely the children of ancient patriarchs, and our moral natures are the same as theirs, all contaminated by inherent sinfulness and the need for divine salvation. God dealt with them as He does with us, so that every later generation needs to study and learn from the generations of ancient times and from God’s inspired histories of them in the earliest books of the Bible—especially Genesis, as well as Exodus, Job, and other ancient books. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

God is the same today as He was in Eden, on Mount Ararat, in Babel, and Canaan, and Sinai, and Calvary. “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. 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 90:1-2). HMM

Wednesday, April 27

Christ the King

“But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.” (Luke 19:14)

In this parable, the nobleman who had gone into a far country to receive his kingdom is a picture of Christ in the interim between His first and second comings. The “citizens” of His Kingdom, however, refuse His Kingship. Nevertheless, He is the King, and when He returns, those “enemies, which would not that I should reign over them” (v. 27) will be slain. How much better to accept Him now!

The first title ascribed to Him was “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). Long before that, however, He was King of creation. “For God is the King of all the earth,...a great King above all gods....The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land” (Psalm 47:7; 95:3, 5).

He is also King of redemption, providing salvation for the world He created. “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psalm 74:12). “[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).

He is not only King of all the worlds, but also King of all the ages. He is “my King of old” and also “King for ever” (Psalm 10:16). He is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (1 Timothy 1:17).

He is “King of saints” (Revelation 15:3), the “LORD of hosts, my King, and my God” (Psalm 84:3). Indeed, He is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). Therefore, let His citizens say: “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13). HMM

Thursday, April 28

Forty Days

“To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”
(Acts 1:3)

It is interesting how often the Scriptures refer to a 40-day period. There are nine different 40-day periods noted in Scripture (the phrase itself occurs 17 times), and it may be noteworthy that 40 days is 1/9 of the original (and prophetic) lunar/solar year of 360 days (note Genesis 7:11; 8:3-4; Revelation 11:2-3). Thus, the total of the nine 40-day periods equals the ideal year.

The periods are as follows: the intense rainfall at the Flood (Genesis 7:12, 17); the first giving of the law (Exodus 24:18; Deuteronomy 9:9, 11); the second giving of the law (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:18, 25); the searching of Canaan by the fearful spies (Numbers 13:25; 14:34); the defiance of Israel by Goliath (1 Samuel 17:16); Elijah’s journey to Horeb (1 Kings 19:8); Jonah’s reluctant preaching in Nineveh (Jonah 3:4); Christ’s temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2); Christ’s post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3).

Each of these periods was a time of intense testing for one or more of God’s people, except the last. The final 40-day period, encompassing Christ’s ministry to His disciples after His resurrection, was a time of triumph and great blessing. He had come victoriously through the most intense time of testing that anyone could ever experience, and now He could show Himself alive eternally to His disciples and promise them the same victory. Forty days of testing, then 40 days of triumph! Even a lifetime of testing is more than balanced by an eternity of blessing. “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). HMM

Friday, April 29

And Forty Nights

*“And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.”
(Genesis 7:12)*

There are nine 40-day periods in Scripture, but on only five of these the notation “and forty nights” is added. On the other four occasions (the spies in Canaan, Goliath’s challenges, Jonah in Nineveh, and the post-resurrection ministry of Christ), we can assume that the activity ceased at night. But on these five it continued unabated.

The first of these was the great Flood. The most intense rains ever experienced on the earth poured torrentially, night and day. One can visualize the stress-filled nights for Noah’s family, with the cries of the dying outside, and no light of the sun or moon to pierce the outer darkness. But, of course, they were all safe in God’s specially designed Ark.

Many years later, Moses twice spent 40 days and 40 nights in the presence of God on Mount Sinai, receiving the divinely inscribed tablets, with the Ten Commandments and all the laws of God. The mountain was intermittently quaking and breathing fire and smoke while he was there, and the nights were surely more awesome even than the days, but God was there!

Elijah spent 40 days and 40 nights traveling back from Beer-sheba to Sinai, even though this relatively short journey would not normally require 40 days. Evidently Elijah experienced great hardships and obstacles along the way and many sleepless nights, but God met him again at Sinai, and it was worth it all.

Finally, the Lord Jesus (God Himself!) was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil...forty days and forty nights” (Matthew 4:1-2). In weakened human flesh, without food or rest, this was a greater trial than any of the rest, but He was triumphant, and then the “angels came and ministered unto him” (Matthew 4:11). HMM

Saturday, April 30

Christ the Foundation

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11)

The only sure and lasting foundation for either a Christian institution or an individual Christian life is the Lord Jesus Christ. No other foundation will endure in that coming day when “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (v. 13).

It is vital, therefore, to build on the foundation that Christ Himself has laid. This is laid in three courses, each of which is essential for its permanence. First of all, we must acknowledge with the apostle that “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (Hebrews 1:10). He is the Creator of all things, and therefore Lord over all.

Second, we must acknowledge with Peter that we have been “redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ...who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:18-20). His foreordained work of redemption thus was foundational even to the foundation of the world!

Then there is the Word of God, which is foundational to everything beyond creation and redemption. “Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them....He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock” (Luke 6:47-48).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the true foundation, for He has Himself laid every sure foundation. He created all things, His shed blood is the price to redeem all things, and His written Word, by His Holy Spirit, reveals all things needed to build a beautiful, fruitful Christian life or ministry. No other foundation will last, and “if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3). HMM

Sunday, May 1

The Power in Us

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” (Ephesians 3:20)

This amazing assurance of God’s unlimited ability to answer our prayers is related to a unique “power [Greek *dunamis*] that worketh in us.” Paul had used the same word twice before in this same epistle, speaking of “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe” and “the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power” (Ephesians 1:19; 3:7). “Effectual working” in the original is one word, *energeia*, from which we get our word “energy.”

Such power working in us is actually nothing less than the presence of God Himself. Its very first occurrence is in the model prayer. “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever” (Matthew 6:13). It is this “power of God unto salvation” that is received when we first believe on Christ through the gospel (Romans 1:16). It has been so ever since the fulfillment of Christ’s promise when He told His disciples that “ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

This remarkable power of God is thus imparted to us and energized in us by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we can be filled “with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Romans 15:13). He thereby provides impregnable security for time and eternity, for we “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).

With such a resource of unlimited spiritual power working in us, God is able indeed to accomplish far more than we can ever imagine, as He works in and through those yielded to His will. HMM

Monday, May 2

The Trinity in Salvation

“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14)

There are a number of significant references to the work of all three Persons of the Trinity in the great work of salvation. Note the implicit reference to the Trinity in our text: “The blood of Christ...through the eternal Spirit offered...to God.” There is also a beautiful Trinitarian implication in Ephesians 2:18: “For through [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

The promise of Christ to send the Holy Spirit is a high point of the gospel of John. “I will pray the Father,” said the Lord Jesus, “and he shall give you another Comforter” (Greek *parakletos*, meaning “one called alongside”), “that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16). “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26).

It seems very clear from such Scriptures that all three—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—are each distinct persons. Yet that the three together are one God is also clear from the fact that they are identified by name as One. Converts are to be baptized “in the name [note the singular—one name] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). Note also the benediction formula. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13:14). What we cannot fully understand in our minds of this wonderful triune Godhead, we can understand and believe with our hearts. HMM

Tuesday, May 3

Action Verbs

“Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates.”
(Deuteronomy 11:18-20)

This passage is similar to others (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:6-9) throughout Moses’ writings and concerns the preserving and propagating of the news of God’s miraculous protection of the people of Israel and the marvelous legal code He had revealed to them. We can understand better the care by which this preservation was to take place by noting the action verbs used in this passage.

First, the people were to “lay up” or impress the information in their hearts and souls. Every fiber of their being was to be aware of and in submission to the law. This personal commitment was to be aided by physical reminders “bound” on each person’s hands and clothing, in plain sight, so that it could not be ignored or forgotten.

Next, the personal saturation was to move from the family leaders into the family, particularly the children. Parents were to “teach” the law, “speaking” of it at every opportunity, whether sitting, walking, lying down, or rising up. In this way, the personal would become corporate.

Finally, it was to become public, for each was instructed to “write” portions of the law where all could see and know of the personal commitment within.

Before God will give us a public ministry, there must be an inner submission to and love for the things of God. This should be obvious to everyone around us. Then God can use us at home and elsewhere to His glory. JDM

Forsake and Follow

“Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.” (Luke 5:10-11)

Perhaps we take too lightly the fact that the disciples “forsook all, and followed him.” This action involved at least two aspects, the leaving of their former life and the realignment of their loyalty.

The word “forsook” is used in a variety of extreme situations, including the “putting away” of a spouse (1 Corinthians 7:11-12; also “leave,” v. 13), and even death. “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up [same word] the ghost” (Matthew 27:50). This leaving implies a complete severing of a situation or relationship.

Furthermore, they forsook *all*. For Peter, James, John, and Andrew, this involved leaving a prosperous business; for Matthew, a prestigious position of wealth; i.e., their careers. Certainly each left their livelihood, security, training, possessions, relationships, hopes—everything! “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Next, the disciples needed to restructure their lives and loyalties to those of Christ. The word “follow” implies a unity of purpose and direction. Jesus told the rich young ruler to give up all vestiges of his materialistic life “and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21).

Christ issues the same call to discipleship to each of us. Peter asked Him the question that we frequently ask. “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Matthew 19:27). Christ answered, “Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (v. 29). JDM

Thursday, May 5

Spirit, Soul, Body

“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.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

The threefold nature of mankind reflects, to a degree, the triune nature of the Godhead. Just as each member of the triune God is complete and wholly God, yet distinct, so each aspect of mankind is also the whole, yet distinct. The body of man comprises the entire man, yet he also possesses certain soulish emotions, desires, and propensities; and finally, the total man is endowed with a spiritual, eternal nature, somehow reflecting the image of God.

These three reflect the three great creative acts of God during creation week, identified by the three usages of the Hebrew word *bara*, or create. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1); i.e., physical material. Later, certain of this physical material was granted consciousness (1:21), which man shares with animals. On the sixth day, man was created as a spiritual being “in the image of God” (1:27), setting him qualitatively distinct from the animals, though he shares body and consciousness with the animals.

As in our text, when the “God of peace” sets about the task of sanctifying representatives of sinful, fallen mankind, restoring such ones to a measure of Christ-likeness, He does so in the order mentioned, beginning with a spiritual awakening. Then, through the transformed spirit, the soul is reached, and finally the body, with its appetites and lusts.

The wisdom of man says just the opposite, claiming the inner man can be improved by changing outside influences, a mentality all too often reflected even in evangelistic efforts. God’s way is to start with the inner man—the root of the problem—and then affect the outer man. JDM

Friday, May 6

Seeking Signs

“An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:39-40)

If there was ever “an evil and adulterous generation,” it is surely this present one and, once again, there is a widespread seeking after signs (same word in the Greek as “miracles”). The almost explosive rise of the so-called New Age movement has produced an amazing interest in all forms of occultism and supernatural phenomena: astrology, channeling, ESP, near-death experiences, UFOs, meditation, and mysticism of many strange varieties.

Even in Christian circles, there is an unhealthy interest in new revelations and other supernatural signs. The Lord Jesus, however, rebuked those who wanted special signs before receiving Him. “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe” (John 4:48). He has already given us the greatest of all signs—His bodily resurrection from the dead, the best-evidenced fact of all history—and this should suffice, as He told the scribes and Pharisees in our text.

In fact, there is a real danger in seeking such signs and wonders, for many of these things—while perhaps supernatural—are not from God. “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).

Unlike the first generation of Christians, we now have the complete written Word of God, both Old and New Testaments, and it is sufficient for every need of every believer until Christ returns, “whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). HMM

Saturday, May 7

He Counted Me Faithful

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.”
(1 Timothy 1:12)

The testimony of a changed life is perhaps the best evidence that God is alive and active today. The fact that at salvation a dead slave to sin is given life and a new nature comprises the only rational explanation for one who lives in victory and power after a lifetime of defeat.

Take Paul, for example. Our introduction to him is at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58), after which his ardor for the Jewish traditions and hatred of Christianity caused him to wreak “havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). This was not just casual opposition, for he was “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). He was a “blasphemer, and a persecutor [not only of Christians, but of Christ Himself—Acts 9:5], and injurious” (1 Timothy 1:13).

However, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I [Paul] am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15), he said. Paul “obtained mercy” (v. 13), not receiving the punishment he deserved, through “the grace of our Lord [which] was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (v. 14), even though he was not even seeking God (Acts 9:1-5).

To a greater or lesser degree, God has worked that same work of grace in each life that now belongs to Him. Paul called himself the chief of sinners, but each of us has done or has been capable of equally heinous acts. Through His grace, we are not only rescued from addiction to sin, but rehabilitated and empowered and given, as we see in our text, missions to accomplish that are of eternal significance. Let us “thank Christ Jesus our Lord” with Paul. JDM

Sunday, May 8

The Mother of Us All

“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.” (Genesis 3:20)

Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was called the mother of all “the children of promise” (Galatians 4:28), and the wife of Noah was the mother of all post-Flood mankind, but Mother Eve, alone, was “the mother of all living.” “Adam was first formed, then Eve,” Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:13, and so-called “Christian evolutionists” have never yet been able to explain God’s unique formation of Eve’s body in any kind of an evolutionary context.

Eve, as our first mother, experienced all the great joys and great sorrows that all later mothers would know. She evidently had many “sons and daughters” (Genesis 5:4) and probably lived to see many generations of grandchildren. With Adam, she had even known paradise, but sin had entered their lives when they rebelled against God’s Word, and God had to say, “In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16). The greatest sorrow was no doubt when Cain slew Abel, and as with another mother whose Son’s innocent blood was shed many years later, it was like a sword piercing her own soul (Luke 2:35).

Nevertheless, as near as we can tell, after her first great sin, Eve trusted God’s Word henceforth and received His forgiveness and salvation. Later, as the mother of Seth, she taught him and her grandson, Enos, about the Lord and all His promises. “Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26).

Most Christian believers are looking forward to seeing their own mothers again someday—restating their love and appreciation for all they did in bearing them, and in caring, teaching, and praying for them. But it will be a wonderful experience to meet our first mother, also, as well as Sarah, Hannah, Mary, and all the other godly mothers of old. HMM

Monday, May 9

The Promise of Liberty

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” (2 Peter 2:19)

This chapter consists of a strong denunciation of false teachers. They are, among other things, sensuous, beguiling, covetous, and accursed (v. 14). They desire personal wealth (vv. 15-16), but their message is empty, and even destructive, and will be judged (v. 17), appealing to the pride and lusts of their hearers (v. 18).

In our text we see the false teachers are quick to make promises. Promises are cheap; they cost nothing. Satan first revealed himself to mankind with a promise: “Ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5), and later attempted to seduce the Son of God with “all the kingdoms of the world” (Matthew 4:8). Empty promises are Satan’s golden hook, and many are the foolish ones who take the bait.

In this case, the false teachers promise liberty—liberty to act without the shackles of responsibility and moral law. But they themselves are “servants of corruption,” slaves of a most abhorrent mentality. And who are they to offer liberty? These are indeed “great swelling words of vanity” (2 Peter 2:18), for slaves cannot rightly offer liberty.

How is this promise kept? Bondage. Bondage to that which has overcome. The liberty that sin promises is slavery, and the greater the sinner, the greater the bondage to the sin. There is perhaps no more wretched a state than to be in bondage to abject corruption in the name of liberty. It is a bondage of the spirit; a captivity of the soul. Of all states of slavery, it is the most lasting.

On the other hand, through grace we can “stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” with no need to be “entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1). JDM

Tuesday, May 10

A Test for False Prophets

“Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.” (Deuteronomy 13:4)

Our text for today seems somewhat out of place, for it is tucked into a passage dealing with false prophets, instructing the people of Israel in ways to detect one who would lead them into false worship. The penalty was death, “because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt” (v. 10). The purpose was both purification and example, for “all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you” (v. 11).

The chief test of a prophet was not his ability to perform signs and wonders (v. 1). Elsewhere the test of total, lifelong accuracy was applied. “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously....that prophet shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:22, 20). A more immediate test lay in the absolute harmony of the prophet’s message and deeds with the revealed Word of God, and the wholehearted commitment to the Lord Himself. This test takes the form of the holy standard set forth in our text.

Note that an inward attitude will be expressed, as given in the six action verbs. If we are to please God, we must “walk after” or “pursue” Him, and “fear” or “reverence” Him in all things. Furthermore, we must “keep” His commandments, striving to “obey” Him on every issue He addresses. He expects such a one to “serve” Him: to do His bidding. Finally, we must “cleave” or “cling” to Him, holding fast to Him in an ever-deepening relationship. To do less is to fail the test used to discern false prophets, incurring at the least His displeasure, at the most His wrath. JDM

Wednesday, May 11

Things We Cannot Do Without

“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20)

We can well do without many things in life, but there are at least seven things a Christian simply cannot do without.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking of the heathen nations before Christ, Paul said: “At that time ye were without Christ,...having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).
2. Christ’s shed blood. “Without shedding of blood is no remission.” “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things,...But with the precious blood of Christ” (Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18-19).
3. Christ’s sinlessness. The Lord Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, He could die for our sins.
4. Faith in Christ. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is” (Hebrews 11:6).
5. Faith-generated works. True faith in Christ inevitably produces good works. As our text reminds us, “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20).
6. True holiness. “Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Genuine faith in Christ both receives His imputed holiness and also generates practical holiness in the believer.
7. Heavenly chastisement. Unconfessed and unforsaken sin in a Christian’s life must receive chastisement from the Father. “If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye...not sons” (Hebrews 12:8).

Without saving faith in the Lord, we have nothing of eternal value, but with Him, we have “all things” (1 Corinthians 3:21). HMM

Thursday, May 12

The Linen Clothes

*“Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.”
(John 19:40)*

The Jews of Jesus’ day prepared bodies for burial in a much different fashion than we do today. In our text the word “wound” actually means “to bind, tie, or wind,” and bodies were tightly rolled up in long strips of linen cloth. Parallel passages in Matthew 27:59, Mark 15:46, and Luke 23:53 employ words derived from the Greek *hellisso*, meaning “to coil,” from which we get our word “helix.”

The tightness of the winding can be inferred from the raising of Lazarus from the dead. After Christ had called him back to life, “he that was dead came forth, bound [same word as ‘wound’] hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44).

On resurrection morning, after hearing the news of the missing body of Christ, Peter and John ran to the sepulcher. “Peter...went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped [same word as ‘wound’] together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple...and he saw, and believed” (John 20:6-8).

John recognized, as we should, that only a miracle could account for the state of these linen clothes. If thieves had stolen the body, they would either have taken the clothes, or the clothes would have been strewn around, not lying in the same location and shape as they had been when the body was present. Previously, John “knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead” (v. 9), but when he saw the linen clothes, he “believed.”

Christ miraculously rose from the dead. John believed; we have his eyewitness testimony. Can we do less? JDM

Friday, May 13

The Faithful Lord

“But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.” (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

The Lord Jesus Christ has many wonderful attributes, not the least of which is His faithfulness. That is, He is believable and trustworthy, sure to do all He promises. He will keep us from the evil one and from being overcome by evil in our lives, as promised in our text. Also, “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted [that is, ‘tested’] above that ye are able” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Why does He care for us so?

In the first place, He is our Creator and has a distinct purpose and will for our lives. Therefore all who are His can safely “commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19). He will keep us to the end; Paul said, “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then follows his confident assurance: “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Even when we yield to the temptations along the way, and fall into sin, He promises: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9), because He has paid the penalty for all our sins, and He is “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17).

With such a faithful Savior and Lord, we surely ought to trust Him fully. In spite of this, we often doubt Him and His Word, but even this does not change His love toward us. “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). Indeed, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called” (1 Corinthians 1:9), for His very name is “called Faithful and True” (Revelation 19:11). HMM

Saturday, May 14

Watching for Christ's Return

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come....Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” (Matthew 24:42, 44)

Those who try to predict Christ's return may become skeptical about biblical prophecy. But this would be a sad mistake. Regardless of just when it will happen, Christ will return, for so He promised, and He cannot either lie or fail. He has repeatedly made it plain that no one can determine the date of His coming. Not even He, while in His human limitations, knew that (Mark 13:32).

Again and again He urged us to watch and be ready for His return. He did not tell us to watch for the Antichrist or the revival of Rome's empire or a great apostasy or a great revival or a world government or anything else—just for Him! Note some of His commands to do this (in addition to the two in our text).

“Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:33).

“Watch ye therefore:...Lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping” (Mark 13:35-36).

“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13).

In addition to such exhortations by the Lord Himself, the apostles also sounded similar warnings.

“Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).

“Abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

Space limitations preclude listing others, but again in the words of Christ: “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:37). HMM

Sunday, May 15

Rejoice

*“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”
(Philippians 4:4)*

This encouraging command has been used in many generations of Sunday school teachings and sermons to challenge the saints. The apostle Paul uses nearly half of the 74 appearances of the word in the New Testament in his epistles.

This simple statement in Philippians 4:4 seems to summarize all of the other passages: “Rejoice [imperative command] in the Lord [the qualifier, or the ‘way’ to rejoice] always [in every circumstance and condition].” Joy is a godly thing.

Because of our sinful condition, we cannot easily “rejoice in the Lord.” We can have fleeting moments of happiness and experiences that fill our hearts with delight and pleasure, but true joy—the ability to “rejoice”—only comes “in the Lord.”

A quick review from the “Songs” of Israel can help us grasp how the righteous rejoice.

- “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart” (Psalm 32:11).
- “Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright” (Psalm 33:1).
- “Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified” (Psalm 40:16).
- “My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed” (Psalm 71:23).
- “Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness” (Psalm 97:12).

Joy and rejoicing from born-again believers produce emotion (gladness, cheering, praise, singing, thanks, etc.), but the object of the emotion is always the source of our joy—the Lord Jesus our Savior, King, and Creator. HMM III

Moderation

“Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.” (Philippians 4:5)

There are three important aspects to this instruction. First, we are to be “moderate,” the core meaning of which is to be equitable or fair, with further associations of mild and gentle.

The Greek word rarely appears in the New Testament. Twice the qualifications of church leaders include this characteristic (1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 3:2), both times stressing the “gentle” aspect of the term. Once, and importantly, the term is used in a broad sweep of adjectives outlining the “wisdom that is from above” (James 3:17)—all aspects, incidentally, fleshing out the idea of “fair” or “equitable.”

Secondly, today’s verse tells us to make our moderation “known unto all men.” That is demanding, since it is more difficult to apply equity to all people rather than just attempt to be fair and gentle in our dealings. Surely the Holy Spirit is insisting that our inner character be “moderate” so that the resulting actions will flow from a person’s character rather than his circumstance. As noted of those of the Corinthian church, they were “manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:3). Everybody “reads” us, and what others decide about us must include the reputation of fair and gentle behavior to all.

Finally, the reason that this requirement is so significant is because “the Lord is at hand.” Although a quick application might lead one to think “the Lord is coming back soon,” the time element is not at all implied in the sentence. A better translation may be “the Lord is alongside,” “He is close,” or even “the Lord is with you.” It is easy, sometimes, to forget that God indwells us through the Holy Spirit and that our every action and thought are known by our Creator (Psalm 139:3-4). HMM III

Tuesday, May 17

Careful for Nothing

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” (Philippians 4:6)

Many of us know those types of precious people who seem to thrive on making sure the details are right. They keep us careful, ensure our safety, and strengthen our plans, and yet that same strength can lead to anxiety, troubling our souls and dominating our lives. Our verse today warns us about this facet.

Our Lord gently admonished in Luke 10:41: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.” Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazurus were longtime associates of the Lord Jesus. He had spent many hours in their home and had come to love them as close friends. No doubt Martha had often “given thought” to Christ’s visits and had been “in turmoil” over the details many times. But our gracious Lord saw the circumstances controlling Martha, and He softly insisted that she not lose the thing of greatest value by sacrificing the permanent on the altar of the immediate.

And that is the admonition in our text. Nothing should absorb us so much that we attempt to solve things on our own before submitting our requests to our Lord. Jesus made it pretty clear: “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on” (Matthew 6:25). Look around, our Lord insisted. The birds and the flowers can’t be altered by our “thoughts.”

After all that Job’s friends did to “encourage” him, our great Creator reminded Job of the many wonders that he could see if he paid attention. Nothing is beyond the care of our Lord. Sometimes, we need reminding, too. HMM III

Wednesday, May 18

Peaceful Security

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 4:7)

This precious promise is rooted in the “garrison guard” that God will set around our hearts and minds through His peace. Imagine the war circle of angels “full of horses and chariots of fire round about” that Elisha spoke of (2 Kings 6:17).

And it is a war! “But I see another law in my members,” Paul wrote, “warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23). Were it not for the peace that exceeds human comprehension, we would quickly succumb to the fact that “in the world [we] shall have tribulation”; but Jesus also said, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The “peace of God” is a supernatural peace, not a false calm of meditative hypnosis or a denial of the turmoil that surrounds the “roaring lion” who seeks to devour (1 Peter 5:8). This peace is from our Lord Jesus and “not as the world giveth” (John 14:27). It comes through the “things I have spoken unto you,” Jesus said, “that in me ye might have peace” (John 16:33).

Since, however, this kind of supernaturally guarded and God-given peace comes from and through the message of the Scriptures, this peace must “rule in your hearts” (Colossians 3:15). There can be no vacillation, no hesitation about the source, the authority, the capability, or the stability of such peace—or the war that rages in the members of our body will dissipate the vision of God’s garrison surrounding our hearts and minds. “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6).

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15). HMM III

Thursday, May 19

Right Thinking

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,...honest,... just,...pure,...lovely,...of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

Our lives are surrounded with ungodliness and demands that often bleed away our thoughts until we are worn and weakened. Reflect for a few moments on this inventory of empowering thinking.

- Truth—Literally “that which is not hidden”; Jesus Himself (John 14:6); the Word of God (John 17:17; Psalm 119:11).
- Honesty—Not just accuracy, but “sober” and “venerable”; sometimes “magnificent” or “great”; used of church officers (1 Timothy 2:2; 3:8).
- Justice—Righteous, just, right, suitable; “The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom....The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable” (Proverbs 10:31-32).
- Purity—Morally and sexually chaste; closely connected with “holiness”; the emphasis is on physical and mental purity (1 John 3:2).
- Loveliness—Beauty, friendship, delight, and wonder are all suggested by the “good love” of this word (Luke 12:27).
- Good News—This takes discipline, because there is far more bad news than good in this world; we are admonished to take “inventory” (dwell on, recall) the “good reports” (Proverbs 25:25).

These excellent and praiseworthy matters should dominate our thinking in a conscious “inventory” of the attributes on this final list. If we do so, God promises His peace in our lives. HMM III

Friday, May 20

Pay Attention

“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Philippians 4:9)

From earliest childhood, we learn by watching the actions and lives of others. First, of course, our parents, then our peers and educators, politicians, business leaders, musicians, celebrities—the list is nearly endless. We learn by what we receive, hear, and see.

Jesus said, “They shall be all taught of God” (John 6:45). The foundational learning process that enables the receiving and hearing of further truth must come first from God, through His Word and by the born-again believer. Paul’s young protégé, Timothy, first learned from his mother and grandmother about God, and then under Paul’s tutelage from the Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

But the key to learning is active attention! One must first receive, hear, and see. Paul commended the Thessalonians because they “received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Bereans were “more noble” because they “searched the scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11). The wise preacher “gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs” (Ecclesiastes 12:9).

Information, however well absorbed, is worthless without applying that which is learned. The philosophers of Athens were scorned because they “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21).

All of us must first be learners. Soon, however, we must work out our “own salvation with fear and trembling,” since God has chosen to work through us (Philippians 2:12-13).

HMM III

Saturday, May 21

Be Content

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” (Philippians 4:11)

The English word “content” can bring up thoughts of indifference and mild temperament. Modern usage tends to give “content” a negative connotation, as though such an attitude has little ambition or drive.

Not so of the Greek term that the Holy Spirit chose for this passage. It is composed of the pronoun for “self” and the noun for “sufficiency.” Both in Scripture and in secular Greek literature, the word demands an ability to conquer whatever circumstances that may oppose one’s purpose or goal and to continue through in spite of difficulties.

The context of our text is a prime example. Paul had experienced hunger and satisfaction. He knew what it meant to be obscure and to be a celebrity. There were times when he had more than enough resources to accomplish what he understood God had called him to do, and other times when resources were very scarce. In whatever state he found himself, Paul had learned to be self-sufficient.

Our problem is that we often are looking only at the physical and circumstantial issues and have not learned that our Lord Jesus provides grace that “is sufficient for thee: for [His] strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). The resources of the omnipotent Godhead are enough for us to “be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

The self-sufficiency of the twice-born rests on the eternal fact that God “worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). HMM III

Sunday, May 22

Christ's Strength

*"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."
(Philippians 4:13)*

This little verse gets quoted out of context a lot. It is used to justify bizarre plans and dreams, as well as to suggest that every Christian should be rich and healthy all the time. Not only are such applications without any support in Scripture, they are completely out of the context of this passage.

In the previous verses, Paul lists a variety of circumstances that he had faced, from poverty to wealth, learning to be "content" in each of these developments. Then he notes that he "can do all things" through the strength that the Lord provides during conflicting circumstances.

The "do" of this text is the prevailing of the power of God in which and by which we minister. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament" (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).

The early church experienced a stunning growth in converts as it preached and testified of the resurrected Christ. This result, however, is due to the fact that the Word of God grew "mightily...and prevailed" (Acts 19:20).

Our fight is not a physical one. We wrestle against the great spiritual powers of wickedness that have their source in the heavenlies. The history of God's people is replete with the battle that was begun in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve lost because they sought to deal with the issue on their own. We win or prevail only when we arm ourselves with God's armor and become "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Ephesians 6:10). HMM III

Monday, May 23

Communicate Well

“Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.” (Philippians 4:14)

“Communicate” is one of the older words from the era of the King James Version that takes some reconnecting in order to clarify the term. Our use today normally means speaking, understanding one another, or simply passing on instructions. The Greek word is *sugkoinoneo*, a compound of the preposition “with” and the primary word for “participation.”

The basic term is often translated “partner” or “partake” and is frequently connected with the act of sharing finances in the ministry of others. That is the application in the context of today’s verse. Paul commends the Philippian church for partnering with him over his journeys and recognizing time and again the needs that were necessary to fulfill for the success of the ministry.

Today, there are a vast array of charity-based organizations, from large hospitals and universities to local food and clothing distribution efforts. Most of those, by the way, were started by Christian groups as a way to “communicate” to the “affliction” of many. But how do we determine who among the many, or at what ratio, to attempt to distribute “to the necessity of saints” (Romans 12:13)?

Two main principles must guide our “communication” in the Kingdom. First, it is clear that our New Testament responsibility is first to the church in which our Lord has placed us. Some disagree, but “storehouse” tithing appears to claim our first priority. Then there is opportunity to follow the specific leading of God among those ministries with which we are familiar and of whom we are confident that first seek the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). HMM III

Tuesday, May 24

Sweet-Smelling Sacrifice

“I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” (Philippians 4:18)

The reference in this text goes back to the “sweet savour” that God smelled when Noah offered his initial sacrifice after disembarking from the year-long Flood. That offering triggered a promise from God that He would never again curse the earth or destroy every living thing with water, as the Flood had done. Furthermore, the Lord promised to maintain the seasons and functions of the earth until the end (Genesis 8:20-21).

Later, Moses would bring the Lord’s instructions for those laws of Israel that would keep the nation separate from the rest of the world and constantly remind them of the very personal relationship that the Creator of all things was establishing with them. Some of the sacrifices would be an “offering by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto the LORD” (Numbers 15:3).

It is interesting to note that the twice-born are “unto God a sweet savour of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:15). Our very existence as His children smells good to our heavenly Father! We are also compared to living stones that are being built into a spiritual house that is “to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Our bodies are to be “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1) that render the “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15), while God Himself is making us “perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 13:21). HMM III

Wednesday, May 25

God's Complete Supply

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

The key to this promise in today's verse is the need that must be met by the riches of the great King as we render our service in His Kingdom. But how vast those needs can be and how different the supply is!

Millions of Israelites needed food in the wilderness, and the manna came fresh from heaven each day for 40 years (Exodus 16:35). Gideon needed victory over the innumerable Midianites, and God caused confusion to fall on his enemies (Judges 7:22). Elijah needed a powerful demonstration of God's authority, and fire came down from heaven (1 Kings 18:38).

In the New Testament, a crippled man needed a new hand (Mark 3:5), a blind man needed new eyes (John 9:5-6), and a dead man needed life (John 11:43-44). Jesus made the best wine anyone had ever had when the party needed supply (John 2:10-22). He calmed the sea when the disciples needed freedom from their fear (Mark 4:38-39). And He pulled Peter up from the sea when he needed rescue (Matthew 14:30-31). No matter the size of the need, the resources are more than sufficient.

More often than not, however, the need is spiritual. We all need God's forgiveness from the "sickness" of sin (Mark 2:17). When we first come into His Kingdom, we need the "milk" of the Word (Hebrews 5:12). We all need the wisdom to "walk honestly toward them that are without" (1 Thesalonians 4:12).

And our great God has the resources to supply all our needs. HMM III

Thursday, May 26

God's Grace

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."
(Philippians 4:23)

The basic form of today's verse appears 13 times in the New Testament. In Scripture, repetition is not for lack of something to say but the Holy Spirit's intentional emphasis on something.

God extends His grace to the very creation itself by merely keeping the universe together (2 Peter 3:7), intending thereby to "speak" and supply knowledge (Psalm 19:1-4) sufficient to display His very nature and power in such a way that there can be "no excuse" about His existence and care for humanity (Romans 1:20).

In seven of the 13 times, this "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" is focused on "you." God's grace is very personal. Everything that He has done is because He loves you and me beyond any grasp of our earthly imagination. No one is beyond the touch of God's grace: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Once, in contrast, God says some will turn "the grace of our God into lasciviousness" and deny Him who has bought and paid for all the horrible sin that they embraced to spite such grace (Jude 1:4). No wonder the apostle Paul calls such people "abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16).

The Lord twice focuses His grace on our spirits, indicating God's intimate knowledge of our innermost thoughts (Romans 8:26). Paul noted that God's grace is "exceeding abundant with faith and love" (1 Timothy 1:14), and he insisted that His grace is designed to be "glorified in you" (2 Thessalonians 1:12). Like today's verse, most of the prayers for us end in "Amen." And that's the way it should be. HMM III

Friday, May 27

Lazarus and the Rich Man

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.” (Luke 16:22)

Many scholars believe that the episode reported in Luke 16:19-31 actually happened, that it is a true story. If it is a parable, it is not identified as such, and it is the only one in which the name of a participant is given. Christ related the story as if it were true. But whether history or parable, we can learn much from the contrast between these two dramatically different men, their deaths and destinies.

The rich man, of course, surrounded himself with luxury (v. 19) while Lazarus struggled each day just to survive until the next poverty-filled and pain-wracked day (vv. 20-21).

No one can escape the grave, however, and in the passage of time both died. But, rather than reducing those two different individuals to the commonality of death, their differences actually are heightened. The rich man, “being in torments” (v. 23), was aware of the comfort of Lazarus in “Abraham’s bosom” (v. 22). The interchange between the rich man and Abraham, and the timeless instruction Christ gave, are well known.

Note also the contrast between “carried” and “buried” in our text. The beggar’s body was no doubt unceremoniously dumped into a pauper’s grave, while the rich man’s corpse was placed in a costly sepulcher and his funeral attended by many friends and mourners. But look beyond the earthly spectrum. While the rich man begs for mercy and relief from torment, the poor man’s eternal spirit is “carried” (literally “carried off” or “borne away”) by a convoy of angelic beings into the presence of God, where “now he is comforted” (v. 25). For Lazarus, and indeed for all who die in the Lord, “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). JDM

Saturday, May 28

The Builder of the House

“He who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.” (Hebrews 3:3-4)

Perhaps the single greatest category of evidence for supernatural creation is in the nature of the creation itself, which everywhere shows such intricate design that it could not have come about by random chance. Consider the earth: Its size, mass, distance from the sun and moon, rotational wobble, chemical makeup, etc., are critical within very narrow limits. Any significant deviation in any of these or other characteristics would make life impossible.

But inorganic molecules, planets, and galaxies are simpler by several orders of magnitude than even the tiniest living organism. The marvelous genetic code that regulates life, growth, and reproduction is so unthinkably complex, so obviously designed, that it would take a “willingly...ignorant” (2 Peter 3:5) mind to conclude a naturalistic origin for it. Life at every stage and at every level of investigation shows symmetry in its order, purpose in its function, and interdependence between its parts; all of these are clear marks of design by an intelligent designer.

The evidence speaks so eloquently that even “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20) if they choose not to believe and therefore to merit and face His wrath (v. 18).

“All things were created by him, and for him” (Colossians 1:16). Mankind can take no pride in it nor rebellious solace in the idea of naturalistic origin, for “thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). JDM

Sunday, May 29

Hereby Know

“Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.” (1 John 4:13)

It is surprising to note that this phrase “hereby know” occurs eight times in the little epistle of 1 John. Each of these listed below is given as a means of both testing the genuineness of our professed faith in Christ and then of giving assurance and comfort to the true believer.

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3).

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:5).

“Hereby perceive [same Greek word as ‘know’] we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (1 John 3:18-19).

“And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24).

“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:2).

“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).

The eighth and last such reference is our text for the day. Note that the common thread running through all is the importance of the indwelling Spirit of truth, leading those who know the Lord into lives of doctrinal purity, obedience to God’s Word, and love toward the brethren. HMM

Monday, May 30

Call to Remembrance

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.”
(Hebrews 10:32)

Our American younger generation, like the Hebrew Christians back in the first generation after Christ, seems in grave danger of forgetting the great sacrifices of those earlier generations in this country who made our nation the land of the free. What seems almost a deliberate “dumbing down” of our great Christian heritage has been taking place in our public schools and universities ever since World War II ended.

Memorial Day should not be merely an occasion to give people a three-day time of leisure and pleasure, but rather a call to remembrance of those who suffered and died to ensure our political and religious freedoms—especially that freedom to believe and proclaim the saving gospel of Christ, which so motivated our forefathers.

And it is even more important, every day, to call to remembrance the unfathomable sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ who died, not just to give us temporal freedom, but eternal freedom, providing everlasting life to all those who believe. We have a formal time for remembering this—whenever we observe the special supper He established, remembering His broken body and shed blood. “This do in remembrance of me,” He said (1 Corinthians 11:24-25), and Christians have been remembering Him in this way ever since He met with His disciples the night before He died for our sins.

But we need also to remember Him every day, not just on the days scheduled for communion, just as we ought to remember and thank God for those who died for our country, and to do so far more often than just once each year. As Paul said concerning the dedicated, but suffering, Christians in Philippi, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3). HMM

Tuesday, May 31

Soldier's Duty

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

As Paul came to the end of his earthly life, he took great pains to encourage his disciple to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1) and to guard and pass on the precious teachings that Paul had taught him.

Paul compared Timothy's life in the ministry of the gospel to the life of a soldier. The Greek word translated “endure hardness” is used twice more by Paul, each in this book. “But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions [same word], do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5). Paul holds himself up as an example of such endurance when he claims: “I suffer trouble [same word], as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound” (2 Timothy 2:9).

As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we are to avoid entangling ourselves with something that will hinder our effectiveness. The word “entangled” means “entwined,” or “involved with.” The soldier must be able to draw his weapon freely and use it effectively, and cannot do so if something is clutching onto him, binding his arms and legs.

Our text follows the well-known admonition “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-2). The goal of a soldier is to please his leader. So must be our goal in the warfare at hand, preserving and passing on the truth. As Christians, we have been chosen to be in the army of the General who Himself died to assure our ultimate victory. He deserves our total devotion. JDM



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