

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS



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Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

Bible Quotations:

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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Preface

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster
Oct. 2015

LESSONS IN GALATIANS



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“BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
LONGSUFFERING, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS,
GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL - AGAINST SUCH THERE IS NO LAW.”

GALATIANS 5:22,23

LESSON 163
Another Gospel
GALATIANS 1

Today's lesson introduces us to the book of Galatians in our New Testament. This letter was written to correct and warn Christians about the dangers of a false gospel. The Christian gospel is so important to our spiritual welfare, that one of the strongest condemnations in the bible is pronounced here against anyone that perverts the gospel.

Paul is writing to Christians from the area of Galatia, which was in Asia, or what is known today as Turkey. As Paul greets these Christians he immediately wants to establish his apostolic authority, because of the serious nature of this letter. This letter will deal with another gospel, which was not a gospel, but a perversion of the true gospel. It seems that some false teachers had moved in to the Galatian churches, and were teaching that to be saved a person also needed to be circumcised according to the Jewish Law. However this teaching is false, and can condemn souls to an eternity in Hell, if they should believe this lie. Therefore Paul comes on very strong in his confrontation against this false teaching. He asked them why they are so soon turned away from God to follow a perverted gospel. When a Christian is not careful, and follows a false message about the gospel, they are in fact turning away from God. They might think they are still being a good Christian, but the bible here tells us that any change or compromise from the simple gospel message is the same as turning away from God. God takes very seriously the purity of the gospel message. We need to be so careful to understand the gospel and share it with others in the clearest possible way, so that there will be no misunderstanding. In fact, Paul boldly condemns any, even angels, who preach another gospel, and says they should be accursed. This means that they should be sentenced to judgment from God, with no hope of being recovered, condemned to the tortures of Hell. To make sure that no one is mistaken in what he means, Paul repeats this curse upon any that would preach a false gospel. Having heard this warning, it should make us all fear to say or do anything to distort or misrepresent the gospel.

Paul will now defend his own ministry, as that which is from God, and not men. Paul said that his preaching was not aimed at pleasing men, but God. This added authority and authentication to his ministry. It is quite tempting for a preacher to please his congregation, because he realizes that they are the ones supporting him. It would threaten his job to upset the people who give him his wages, so he may avoid preaching and teaching what might offend. Paul was not supported by any one church, and thus had no restrictions in telling the truth, and preaching boldly, even if others did not like it. We all want others to like us and accept us, and the preacher is no exception. The faithful servant of God, however will not be a man pleaser, but faithfully present God's word, no matter how others might respond.

Paul said that God had set him apart, even from before he was born, for the purpose of preaching the gospel. This does not imply that God choose Paul to be a Christian, for that was a decision that Paul would have to make on his own. God knowing that Paul would become a believer, had foreordained that he should also be a gospel preacher. There is no doubt that God has a definite plan for your life. To find out what that purpose is you should read and think carefully about the words found at Romans chapter 12, verse 1 and 2. Paul also wants his audience to understand that when he received the gospel by revelation from God, he did not consult with the elders or apostles in Jerusalem, as though he was one of their disciples sent forth to preach. He wants everyone to understand that his ministry was given to him directly by the Lord. Even when he did make a trip to Jerusalem he only saw Peter and James for a few days. After Paul was converted and the Lord made it known to him the revelation of the gospel message, he stayed in the areas of Syria and Cilicia. He stayed at Antioch in Syria helping the church there by preaching and teaching the word for more then a year. He also went to his home town of Tarsus in Cilicia and spent some time there. All this was explained to the Galatian believers, so they would not count him to be like others that had come to them from Jerusalem and were false teachers. He did not want to identify in anyway with these evil imposters, and their evil doctrine. If they doubted Paul, then they would doubt his word, and reject the true gospel.

Perhaps these false teachers were also making accusations about Paul, and they did their best to undermine his ministry. Paul's defense of his ministry is to demonstrate that the revelations which he received were directly from God, and were not learned by men. The false teachers had come from Jerusalem, and were determined to destroy the new teachings that were circulating about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. They wanted to add to this message the need to obey the Law. They had always had their Jewish religion, with sacrifices in the temple, and their attention the Law. It had become so ingrained into their life and thinking, it was difficult for them to set that all aside and simply follow Jesus in faith. They felt they had to add some Law keeping to the message of salvation. This lie was from the devil, and is still being taught today in many places. Make sure that you are not just following any gospel, and that the preachers you listen to are teaching the word accurately. Do not take any chances of being wrong about the gospel, lest you end up in Hell. This is not something you or I can afford to be wrong about. The people who find the gospel most difficult to believe and accept, are religious people. That is people who think they are Christian, but have no personal relationship to Christ through faith. Churches fill up each Sunday morning with many people who are merely religious. They have been convinced that their acceptance before God has something to do with their own religious observances. I want to be absolutely clear with all who are listening today, that the gospel message teaches us that only through our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will give us salvation. We cannot add or take away anything from this simple message. The bible simple calls on us to believe in Jesus, and God will grant us eternal life.

Do not hesitate to accept God's free offer of salvation by placing your trust in Jesus today. Come just as you are, confess your sins to Him, and ask Him to rule over your life as Lord, and save you from sin. When you ask Him in faith, then trust what the bible says, "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved" (Rom 10:13).

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Gal 1:8

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we were introduced to the book of Galatians which warns us about a false gospel. To defend his gospel ministry, and thereby the gospel he preached, Paul shows how God had called him to be a preacher of the gospel. Someone might ask the question, "How can we know if someone has received revelations from God?"

Today's lesson was about how Paul had to defend the true gospel, because a false gospel was being presented to the Galatian believers, by false teachers. It would be very easy for young believers to become confused about the gospel, if they heard two different preachers, and two different messages. How could they tell if one man had a revelation from God or not? In Paul's time, when preaching the gospel, people would have to be convinced by the authority of his ministry. Often Paul performed miracles and this attested to his ministry being from God. We have to be careful about this though, because the devil can do some miracles too, and men are very good at tricking people into believing a miracle or healing has taken place, when in fact it has not. When a man preaches, it is so important that we compare his teachings with the written word of God. God the Holy Spirit can help us to discern the truth from the false, if we are sincerely examining the word of God to see if these things are as the preacher says. I hope as you listen to this message you will also have a bible open in front of you, and you will examine and see if the words I am speaking match properly with the what the bible is teaching. This how we can discern if the message came from God or from men.

Paul received many revelations during the course of his ministry, and they are recorded for us in the various New Testament books that he wrote. The gospel message was something revealed to the apostles and church in Jerusalem, but Paul received the gospel personally by revelation from God. It would have seemed just as easy for God to send Paul to Jerusalem to hear the gospel and learn how to preach the word accurately. However, that is not what happened, and it seems that God designed it this way to protect Paul's ministry as coming from God and not men. God was pleased to give Paul divine revelations about the gospel and New Testament church. In fact without these revelations given to Paul, there would be certain truths that we would not have known, such as the mystery of the resurrection body, and the rapture of the church. These were given to Paul by revelation, and not to any other of the apostles or New Testament writers. The confirmation of the authenticity of Paul's revelations, can be discerned from several things.

1. Paul's writings are spoken of as God's word by the apostle Peter (2Pet 3:16).
2. It is clear from Luke's account in Acts, that God was using Paul as a preacher to the gentiles.
3. It is also clear from the recorded miracles of Paul, that He had God's stamp of approval.
4. The writings of Paul have been accepted by the church as divine in origin.
5. The writings of Paul demonstrate the power of God for the conversion of souls to Christ.
6. The transformation of Paul from a enemy of the gospel, to its' greatest preacher reveals God's work in him and through him.
7. All of Paul's teaching are in harmony with the other scriptures, whether Old or New Testament.

Today many people are claiming to receive revelations from God, and we need some way of testing the truth of their words. We might ask several questions to test them, and not just believe whatever anyone says. In fact the bible would teach us that the prophetic ministry of receiving special revelations from God, ceased with the apostolic age. The bible says that the "faith" was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The faith here means all Christian doctrine, including the gospel. This verse show us that all Christian doctrine has already been delivered to the church through the writings of the apostles and other New Testament writers. Those who claim to have further revelations, are in direct contradiction with what the bible says. It was admittedly a challenge for people to know who was true and false in the days of Paul, and therefore God added miraculous signs to accompany his preaching, and that of the other apostles. These miracles testified to their message being from God. Today we no longer need the miracles, because God wants us to believe his word, and not the signs that might be easily faked, or imitated by Satan. God has given us His full revelation In the bible, and so we just need to read and study our bibles carefully, to understand all that God wants us to understand and obey. Believe me the bible gives us plenty enough revelation from God, and will take us all of our lives to learn, understand and obey all that has been written for our benefit. People that are claiming more revelations, have not appreciated what God has already revealed to us in the word. They are in great danger of adding to God's word, distorting the gospel, and finding themselves accursed from God.

"for I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gal 1:12

LESSON 164
Jerusalem Visit
GALATIANS 2

In the last lesson we heard Paul's severe warning to those who preach a different gospel, and how they should be accursed. Today we will learn more about Paul's defense of his own ministry as a servant of Christ, and preacher of the gospel. He will use, as his defense, his relationship to the other apostles in Jerusalem to demonstrate his God given role, and responsibility to uphold the gospel.

Paul recounts to the Galatian believers how he had traveled to Jerusalem fourteen years after his original visit with them. It was God directing him by revelation to travel to Jerusalem, where he shared with the apostles the gospel message he had been preaching to the gentiles. He first went to them privately, to ensure that they heard from him clearly, and there was no misunderstandings about himself, or the gospel message he preached. He did not want this trip to Jerusalem to be a useless trip that only incited division and controversy among the church. He thought it wise, therefore, to first privately confer with the apostles. This is a wise thing for us to remember when we are faced with a potentially controversial meeting with others. If we first go and discuss the matter with those in charge, and explain all the details, often problems can be avoided. Too often we are hasty to enter into confrontation, when there is really no need to do so.

Titus who was with Paul was not compelled to be circumcised, for he was Greek and not Jewish. As a gentile Christian Titus did not need to be circumcised, since circumcision was a Jewish rite, and not a Christian obligation. Some brethren had some to spy on Paul and his companions to observe their liberties in Christ. They tried to enforce their own religious rules upon them. This is what is called legalism. Legalism is when others try force people to follow religious practices that are not clearly spelled out in scripture, taken out of their proper context or dispensation. For instance Christians do not take lambs to Jerusalem today to offer them on an altar for the atonement of their sins. Today Christians understand this, because the offering of lambs as sacrifices to God was only a picture of the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who was offered up once and for all. Some religious groups would like Christians to observe certain portions of the law, such as keeping the Sabbath, offering tithes, and using priestly garments. It is important though to recognize that the law has been superseded by something much better, and that is the person and offering of Jesus Christ, as our Savior. We can find our rest in Him, and make our offerings out of love, and not obligation. The garments of the old testament priest were to help us understand certain aspects of Christ's character and work, but now that Christ has finished his work, and is in heaven interceding for us, we no longer need priests all dressed up in special garments. The Christian is to be clothed in humility, and wear the armor of a good soldier of Christ. His clothing is spiritual in nature, and not the literal garments of the high priest of Old Testament times.

Paul gave no place to these legalists, for he did not want the gospel to be corrupted. He did not care how important these men appeared in this world. He knew that God did not show favor to any man. The apostles did recognize that Paul had received a commission from God to preach the gospel to the gentiles, while they had also been sent to the Jews. Peter, James and John stood out as the strength of the church in Jerusalem. This was likely due to their teaching, leadership abilities, and work. When these men saw how God was working through Paul, they extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. This simply means that they showed their full and hearty agreement with Paul and Barnabas, and the gospel which they preached. When a new member is invited into the church fellowship, it should be based upon agreement over Christian doctrine and practice. When agreement has been found then the right hand of fellowship can be extended to them. This might imply a formal shaking of hands, but does not necessarily. It is simply a way to express fellowship with each other. The apostles also suggested that Paul and Barnabas remember the poor, and that was what they also had in their hearts to do. God always has his eyes and heart turned towards the needs of the poor, and Christians should be known for their interest and care in those who are less fortunate.

Now Paul tells of an experience when Peter came to visit in the gentile city of Antioch. At first Peter was willing to eat with the gentiles Christians, but when some Jewish brethren had arrived from Jerusalem, Peter and Barnabas both separated themselves from the gentiles to eat together with their Jewish brethren. Their actions not only denied that the gentiles were made clean through faith in Jesus Christ, but were undermining the gospel itself. Paul was so indignant by this action that he rebuked Peter to his face, for he knew this would affect how people viewed the gospel, and suggest that there was a distinction to be made between Jews and gentiles. Although difficult for the Jews to accept, Peter knew in his heart that the only way of salvation was through faith in Jesus Christ, and that all believers whether Jew or gentile were the same before God. Paul's rebuke to Peter includes one of the clearest explanations of the gospel in the New Testament, where Paul plainly states that justification is by faith in Christ alone, apart from works. When a person becomes a believer they become dead to the law, in the sense that they are no longer trying to keep the OT law for justification before God. If a person first accepts Christ as the one who paid the full penalty for all sin, but later tries to do some work to add to justification, then they rebuild what they had destroyed, denying the only way of salvation. The final thing that Paul explains to Peter is that he was crucified with Christ, and no longer lives, but Christ lives in him by faith. This means that for the Christian all their former life, and religious hopes died when Christ died on the cross, and their entire hope rests now on Christ, and his sacrifice for our sins. This means that the Christian now lives his life in love and gratitude to Jesus who gave up his life for them. Have

you dedicated your life to Jesus Christ in faith? Today is a good day to give over your life entirely to him, and cast away all hope in religious behavior, good works, or anything else to save you.

"knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Gal 2:16

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard more of Paul's defense for his ministry and apostleship. He recounts his travels to Jerusalem, and the fellowship he had with the apostles, and how they had agreed that the gospel he was preaching to the gentiles was one and the same as the gospel they preached to the Jews. Paul also points out how he had to rebuke Peter for his conduct which was contrary to the gospel. Someone might ask the question, "Why did Paul find it necessary to rebuke Peter?"

In today's lesson we heard Paul tell the Galatians of an experience he had with Peter the apostle, while he visited the Christians in Antioch. Peter had been eating with the gentile Christians, but then when some Jewish brothers arrived from Jerusalem, he and Barnabas separated from the gentiles to eat with the Jewish brothers. Paul tells this story for a very specific reason. It was not his intent to make Peter look bad to others. Peter's behavior was not correct, for his actions suggested that there was a distinction to be made between Jewish and gentile believers. However Christ receives all into His church without distinction. The gentiles were to be on equal grounds with the Jewish believers, as they were all saved on the principle of grace, and not works, or national heritage. Peter was well known, not only an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also as a pillar in the early church. His actions could influence many others, and potentially distort the gospel, if people misread his conduct. Peter may not have harbored any difference in his heart between the Jews and gentile believers, but his actions of only eating with the Jewish brothers, was showing something else to those who were watching him. This certainly teaches us the importance for spiritual leaders be very careful about their conduct, so they don't send the wrong message to others, who might misread the situation. I recall one preacher telling of how someone had thought he was drinking alcohol because he was holding a drink that appeared to be alcohol. He was not doing anything wrong, not drinking alcohol, but someone misread his actions, and assumed he was drinking, and therefore a hypocrite. Paul's rebuke is not because Peter believed there was a difference, but because his behavior was sending out that message. Paul explains in detail how men are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by the works of the law. Peter's behavior seemed to imply that being Jewish, and observing the law had some merit towards salvation. This was entirely false, and Paul explains it for the benefit of the Galatians to whom he was writing. False teachers had moved into the churches of Galatia and were trying to convince the believers that they had to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. They preached a false gospel, and Paul uses strong words of condemnation for them. While Paul defends the gospel, he wants the Galatian believers to understand his calling and authority as an apostle. By referring to the episode with Peter, he is showing that his ministry is not under Peter, and his authority comes directly from the Lord himself. He was even in a position to correct Peter, who was an apostle, and pillar in the early church. Paul would not allow these false teachers to convince any that he was less than an apostle of the Lord Jesus. He did not have to take second place behind any of the other apostles when it came to his integrity, and labors as a gospel preacher. He was not boasting about himself, but he needed to establish his God-given ministry so that no one would doubt the authority of the gospel which he preached. The rebuke of Peter serves as a strong evidence for his apostolic authority in the early church. It is not that he was someone any greater than Peter, for both were mere men, servants of Christ. They were fallible, and accountable to one another, and to God, for the gospel which they preached.

We can learn from Paul's actions, that when it comes to defending the gospel, it does not matter who opposes, or how great they may appear before men, there is no compromise with the gospel. All men must be subject to questioning, and the rebuke of others, when it comes to defending the gospel message. The authority of men in the church is established by Christ, and according to His word. If someone in a position of authority begins to act contrary to the written word, then any godly believer has the right to challenge, correct, or even rebuke them if necessary. We also see that men in positions of spiritual responsibility are fallible, and they can and will make mistakes. This is why it is important to have a plurality of leaders to help hold one another accountable to Christ and His word. We should not hold up spiritual leaders as those who could never make a mistake or be wrong in their opinions or actions. They are human like the rest of us, and so we need to give them room to be human, while being prepared to confront them when they are wrong, humbly correcting their mistakes. Peter's actions did not disqualify him from being an apostle, he just needed to be corrected so that he would not be a poor example to others. If we have humble leaders who are willing to be corrected it would help save the church from many potential scandals, because they would be held accountable for their words and conduct.

"those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear." 1Tim 5:18

Justification through faith

GALATIANS 3

In the last lesson Paul was defending his ministry and the gospel by referring to his relationship to the other apostles, and how he was not under their authority, but directed by Christ himself. Today we will have a detailed explanation about why a person cannot be justified by the Law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ.

The book of Galatians centers around the importance of the gospel message, and the danger of deviating from its simple message of justification by faith alone. False teachers were at work trying to convince the Galatian believers that keeping the Law was also necessary for salvation. Paul hits this false doctrine head-on, and uses several points of argument to establish the truth of the gospel, and rescue his Christian friends from a false gospel.

Paul challenges the Galatians by asking them, "who has bewitched you?" Perhaps the false teachers had used flattery, or smooth speech to charm the Galatians to hear their teachings, and be influenced by it. The Galatians had heard that Jesus was crucified for their sins. While they heard the clear gospel of Christ's perfect sacrifice, they were so convinced of Christ's crucifixion, that it was as though they could see Him crucified before their very eyes.

To begin his argument he asks several rhetorical questions, to cause them to think carefully about the gospel. He asks them if they had been received the Holy Spirit through the works of the Law, or by hearing in faith? For a second time he accuses them of being foolish, for being tricked, or convinced, that salvation which began through the work of the Holy Spirit in them, would be completed through the flesh. He asks another question saying, "have you suffered so many things in vain?" By this he means that they had suffered through their decision to follow Christ, perhaps being persecuted by the Jews, and even threatened with injury or death. Now that they had suffered so much for the sake of the gospel, was it all vain, because they wanted to find justification through another means? He further asks if the works of the Holy Spirit among them were done by faith or through the works of the Law? All these initial questions were to establish the evidence that God's work of grace in the believer is purely a work of the Holy Spirit, owing nothing to man's efforts to keep the Law.

Now Paul brings Abraham's example into the argument, to prove that Abraham was justified by his faith. He points out that the promises, given to Abraham, of being declared righteous before God, was also a blessing that would come upon those who follow Abraham in faith. He contrasts this blessing with the curse of the Law. Those who seek righteousness by the Law were cursed if they did not keep the whole Law perfectly. He then uses a quotation from Habakkuk to prove his point, saying, 'the just shall live by faith'. It was required that someone living under the law did the works of the law, but Christ came and redeemed us from being under the curse of the law. He became a curse for us when he went to the cross and died. The bible says, 'cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'. It should be a remarkable things to our minds to see Jesus being made a curse for us, and willingly for our sins. He did this so that the blessing of Abraham might be available to all people through faith in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit may dwell in them.

Paul uses the example of human covenants, which are binding and unalterable, to show that God's promise made to Abraham and his seed was all the more binding on the basis of trust. God made a promise to Abraham's and to his "seed" singular, and not his "seeds" plural. This promise to his seed was pointing to Christ. God's promise to Abraham of an inheritance was made 430 years prior to the giving of the law, and was not withdrawn when the law was introduced.

At this point someone might be asking Paul, what is the use of the law? Paul answers this question by pointing out that though the law could not fulfill the promise made to Abraham, it did serve the purpose of restraining transgressions by helping the Jews understand God's righteousness. When Christ, the seed would come, then the service of the law would be superseded by the promise acquired through faith. But the law did serve to prepare people for the coming of Christ, and pointed to him. The law was not against the promises of God, even though it was not the means of acquiring the promises. The law prepared men to receive the salvation, that would come through God's promise, and come to all those who believe in Christ. The law is like a tutor, or school teacher, helping us to learn that we need a Savior, because we are sinful and cannot please God. After Christ had come there was no longer a need for the law as a tutor, for the answer to sin was found in the death of Christ on our behalf. Through faith in Jesus we not only have learned of our need for a Savior, we have found the perfect Savior in Jesus Christ our Lord. When a person trusts in Jesus, they are transformed into God's own children, and are now in Christ, and have put on Christ. Perhaps these terms are difficult for us to understand, but it means that we now belong to Christ entirely, and His identity becomes our identity also. This means we are no longer to think of ourselves first as a Jew, or gentile, male or female, slave or free, but as Christians first of all, for we are all one in Christ. If we belong to Christ, then we are of Abraham's seed. This means we are children of faith, and find redemption, and the blessing of Abraham according to God's promise.

Today we have heard Paul carefully explain that justification comes through faith, arguing from the scriptures that the Law was unable to add anything to man's justification. The Law was only a teacher to show our need for salvation, and point us to the Savior Jesus Christ, who was promised the blessing of Abraham. Through Jesus Christ we enter

into the wonderful salvation, and spiritual inheritance that is promised to Abraham, and to us through faith. Today if you want to be made right with God, and assured of an eternal place in God's kingdom, then place your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. He is the perfect and only answer to man's need for a Savior. If you need Him, and want Him, then just ask Him to enter into your heart by faith, and receive Him as Lord of your life.

but the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." Gal 3:22

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard Paul explain that justification comes through faith. He also helped us to understand that the Old Testament law had no power to save a sinner, but that did not mean it was useless. The law was given to teach us our need, and then introduce the Savior who can take away our judgment. Someone might ask the question, "If the Law cannot save us, then what is the value of the Law?"

Paul is so careful to explain how the law could not be depended on for justification. In explaining this he does not want Christians to assume that the law never served any purpose, or had no value. We need to understand that God accepts us as His children on the principle of grace, when we place our full trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. The law was given to the Jewish nation to help them, and all people, to learn about God's judgment against sin, and man's desperate need for grace and forgiveness. We could not find this forgiveness from observing the law, but we could find it through Jesus Christ, for he stood between the wrath of God, and our sinful souls. It is when we listen to God's law that we learn about God's holy character, and His justice. We also learn about the sinfulness of man, and how he is constantly bent towards sin. Even when men try to do right, eventually they always seem to fall into sin. There are some rare exceptions, but no one can claim constant and perfect righteousness before God. Some men like Joseph, Joshua and Daniel, have almost nothing negative written about them, but then the bible also says 'there is none good, no not one'. Even men that appear to be so godly and honest, are still sinners before God, and need God's forgiveness and salvation. So the law helps us to look inwardly and recognize the true sinful condition of our hearts. We learn through God's law that we are desperately in need of God's grace. We need some way of having our sins paid for. So the law definitely served an important purpose. The trouble is that the law showed us our problem, but could not provide the full and eternal answer to our estrangement from God. I say full, because in part, and in prediction, the old testament certainly did offer a solution to the problem of sin. The law did show a means of approaching God, and finding atonement for sin. This was not the removal of the sin, but was the requirement God needed to issue atonement. This was not a forgiveness, as much as it was a covering of the sin. It was as though God was saying, I accept your faith and obedience in view of the full payment that will be made by the Messiah when He comes. The provision in the law through animal sacrifices, helped to deal with man's sinful conscience, but it never had the power to remove sin, or cancel its' power. Each year sacrifices had to repeated over and over to deal with the sins of the people. It was not until Jesus death made a once and for all payment for man's sin, that the conscience of the believer could be freed from the guilt and shame of sin. The consequences of sin did not need to fall upon the repentant sinner, because Jesus paid their debt for them. This is not to say that Christians will not struggle with sin, or face consequences for their sinful behavior. The point is that those who are in Christ will never have to face God's wrath and judgment against sin, because that has been taken away by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The law is precious and important because of it's power to expose the sinfulness of men. Many people will claim they are justified before God, but are, in fact, trusting in their own efforts and good works. When confronted with the law, and questioned about their faith and obedience, it becomes quite clear that they have not kept God's law, and are therefore guilty, and need a Savior. Preaching the law is a great way to bring sinners under conviction of sin, and then turn them to the answer, which is salvation through Jesus Christ. The law is not only a teacher leading us to Christ, it is also a great illustration book to teach us about God, and his dealings with men. As we read through the Old Testament, we learn that God loves humanity and reaches out to help and bless men. However we also learn that men have a sinful nature, and are therefore constantly departing from God. If there is one thing that we should all be convinced of, when reading through the long history of the nation of Israel, it is that if righteousness were possible through keeping the law, they should have had plenty of time and opportunity to prove it. However the Old Testament scriptures show us that man is hopelessly lost, and could never be justified before God by his own merit. The Old Testament is a great object lesson in the hopeless condition of man, and thus his need for a Savior. Besides all of this the Old Testament also provides many wonderful stories, prophecies, and psalms to help us walk with God in joy and godly fear. The stories of the old testament have so much to teach us about how to live godly. The prophecies of the old testament should confirm to our hearts the truth and authority of the scriptures, and the psalms help us in many ways to direct our minds to God, comfort us in sorrow, and fill our hearts with wonder and joy. Yes every word that God has spoken has great purpose, and should not be neglected by Christians.

"but he answered and said, "it is written, 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of god.'" Matt 4:4

LESSON 166
Gospel in the Scriptures
GALATIANS 4

In today's lesson we shall continue to explore the important doctrine of the gospel, namely justification by faith. Since this doctrine is vital to our spiritual welfare, Paul spends plenty of his time addressing concerns he had about the Galatians being influenced by a false gospel. If this is important enough to be the theme of Galatians and Romans, then it is something we need to be careful to learn and understand.

Paul will use three more arguments to demonstrate the authenticity of the doctrine of justification by faith. He will argue about the difference between a young child and a grown son taking an inheritance. He will also argue from the response of the Galatians to the gospel; and lastly he will argue from an interesting allegory that portrays the gospel.

The first argument in support of the gospel is about who can claim inheritance. A small child is no different in his rights and inheritance from a servant or slave, for he is but a child. However when the child grows, and has come of age he becomes heir, and will have an inheritance, and be made master of his father's house. Until that time the child is under guardians and stewards. This practical example from life, is used by Paul to show how the Jewish nation, in old testament times, was similar to the young child, under the bondage of the law, but through the coming of Christ they may be redeemed, and adopted as God's sons and heirs. The mark of being a child of God is the indwelling Spirit who causes us to recognize God as our own beloved Father.

Now Paul is going to speak to the Galatians about their own responses to the gospel. It was only more recently that they had turned back, and tried to follow God's law, which he calls weak and beggarly. At first they had cast their hope in Christ, but now they were adding law-keeping for their justification, and Paul worries that he had labored in vain for them. He reminds the Galatians of how in his own physical trials while he was with them, they had received him as though he were an angel from heaven, or even as Christ himself. Paul says that they would have given Paul their very eyes if possible. From this statement it seems as though Paul had suffered from eye problems, or perhaps injuries while among the churches in Galatia, and thus their sympathies were towards Paul due to his suffering for the gospel. But since Paul had left Galatia other false teachers were moving in and taking their attention away from the truth of the gospel. These false teachers were zealous to win the hearts of the Galatians, but not for good purposes. They simply wanted to impose the law upon them, with no genuine care for their souls. Here Paul shows that not all zeal is good, sometimes people can feel and act very passionately, but that does not mean they follow the truth. Paul feels like a woman in labor, struggling in pain until he could see Christ formed in these believers. He wishes he could be with them and change his tone, for he was having doubts about them. He challenges those among them who want to be under the law to consider what the law has to say. It appears there were just a few among them who were being influenced by this false gospel, and Paul is greatly distressed about the situation. Here he shows his heart as a shepherd of God's people wanting to protect them from the dangers of false teaching.

For his final argument in support of justification by faith, he turns to an allegory in the Old Testament. He compares two covenants represented by the bible characters Hagar and Sarah. The old testament covenant of the law, was a covenant of slavery to those who were under it, just a Hagar was a slave girl. The new testament covenant of grace, offers freedom from the law, and was made available to both Jews and gentiles. This new covenant is represented by Sarah, who was not a slave in bondage, but was free. Hagar represents the unbelieving Jews, and Sarah believing Jews and gentiles. Although Sarah had been barren, eventually her children, the children of faith, will be more than those born of the slave woman, that is those who are in bondage under the law. The allegory should not confuse our understanding about who the true children of God are. It is those who place their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior that are God's children. As Ishmael mocked Isaac so do the children of flesh persecute children of the Spirit. Christians have frequently been persecuted, especially by those who are religious but do not have the Spirit. The flesh and Spirit are always at war with each other for they are contrary to each other. It maybe difficult for us to understand Paul's use of this allegory from Sarah and Hagar, but it does go to show us that the scripture has much more to teach us, than what we see on the surface, and there are many levels of understanding and teaching. Even the roles of Sarah and Hagar are representing a distinction between two covenants, and between the flesh and the Spirit. We have much to learn when we come to the bible, and so we should take more time to think carefully about all that God is trying to show us as we read, and reread, through our bibles. The lesson today was a lengthy demonstration of the doctrine of justification by faith proven by various arguments. He showed that just a son becomes heir when he is of age, so the sons of faith become heirs through faith in Jesus Christ, and not through following the law. He argued that the Galatians had received the gospel with zeal, and even faced persecution, and were so willing to accept and help Paul as God's servant. They were being moved away from what had been done through faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, departing from God.

Lastly he uses the allegory of Hagar, the slave, and Sarah the free-woman to contrast the covenant of law, and the covenant of grace, which brings freedom. The scripture shows that law and grace cannot be mixed together. There is no way to inherit God's blessing through human effort or law-keeping. The believer in Christ has found a freedom from the law, by not needing it or depending on it for justification. They are children of the free woman, and truly

free in Christ. If you want to be free from all bondage to religion and good works, then surrender your heart to Jesus Christ today in faith.

"and because you are sons, god has sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, father!'"
Gal. 4:6

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson Paul argued in support of the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from law keeping. He used several arguments to support his position, and convince the Galatians to not follow the false teachings that were infiltrating their fellowship. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to have Christ formed in you?"

While Paul was struggling over the Galatians, because they were being easily influenced by a false gospel, he said that he longed to see Christ formed in them. The Galatians were believers, but still young in their faith, and therefore easily susceptible to false teachers and doctrine. It is only through diligent study and time spent in God's word that a Christian develops a greater discernment between true and false teaching. So often churches are led into all kinds of unbiblical practices, and strange teachings, because the people generally have not been developed into mature believers through the work of the Holy Spirit. If Christians are being fed on the word, with a balance and healthy diet of teaching through the word, then they should grow. But it is not enough to listen to your pastor or church leader teach you a one hour sermon once a week. That would be like eating a bowl of rice once a week, and expecting to remain healthy and strong.

The Christian must be in the bible day by day, reading and learning. I have often noticed with the young people I work with and teach, that some can answer questions with keen observation skills, while others seem unaffected by what they read, and cannot even recall anything they heard from the bible reading. The difference is in how we approach our bible devotion time. If we actually take a personal interest in the bible with a hunger to hear and know what God is communicating, then we are in a better position to hear Him speak and learn something from His word. Even though some can read the bible, know what they read, and recite the story carefully, it is an even greater skill to read the bible and understand the point of the passage. This takes meditation.

Meditation means to think. When we read our bibles God wants us to apply our minds and think carefully about the words on the page, asking questions like, who is this talking about, when did this take place, what is going on, and why was this passage written. By answering these questions, we can then take the next step to apply the word to our own circumstances. For instance, if I read in my bible the words of Jesus, where he said, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me", I need to not only know the words, I need to understand what the words mean, and then know how I can apply it to my own experience. These words certainly do have important application to my own life, and God did not write these words down for my entertainment, or education, but to move me to respond correctly. I am to put God's will before my own, and be willing to suffer in the cause of Christ, and dedicate my life to following the instructions of the Lord Jesus. This is how I should think about the meaning, and then apply the word to my own experience. Without this our Christian life is shallow and immature, and we frustrate the purpose of God in saving us. God saved us not just to bring us to heaven, but so that Christ would be formed in us. This happens as we take that important time each day to learn the word of God, by reading it, meditating upon it, and then applying it to myself. It is as the word gets inside of me, and transforms me into all that God wants me to be that I become like Christ, and bring glory to God.

It is the image and character of Christ that God wants to see in us. So the best way for us to cooperate with God's work in us is to study carefully the Lord Jesus and all of his actions and words while he walked in this world. If Jesus thought it was important to pray, then I should also consider it important in my own life. If Jesus went about doing good to people, then we are also to do good for people. If Jesus taught people about God's righteousness and salvation, then I should also teach people the same things. If Jesus was willing to serve men, even to stoop down and wash their feet, then I also should be willing to humbly serve the needs of others. If Jesus was willing to suffer for the spiritual welfare of others by going to the cross, I also should be willing to endure some hardships for the sake of the gospel. When I begin to live like the Lord Jesus, think and talk like Him, then Christ is being formed in me. Of course we are constantly battling against the flesh that wants to live in selfishness and pride, so it takes determined effort to move forward towards maturity by working hard at it. It has become accepted by most Christians to depend on their Sunday sermon for feeding in God's word, but this only produces spiritual babes, and not men and women of God who can make a spiritual impact on the world. Paul longed to see the Galatians grow into mature and discerning believers, not just for their own sakes, but so that through them the blessings of Christ would flow out to others also. Every parent wants to see their children mature, and learn to take on the responsibilities of parenting for themselves. This is also true in the spiritual life, where each Christian is expected to be a leader, teacher, evangelist and bear spiritual fruit. I hope Christ has been forming in you, and you are cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit.

"for everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe" Heb. 5:13

LESSON 167
Flesh and the Spirit
GALATIANS 5

In our last lesson we heard Paul make some arguments in support of the gospel. We have seen Paul defend the doctrine of justification by faith in the first four chapters of Galatians, and he goes on in chapter 5 to challenge the Galatians about their departing from the gospel. He will also speak about the difference between walking in the Spirit and the works of the flesh.

Since Paul finished his speech about bondage to the law in the last chapter, he begins chapter five with an exhortation for the believers to enjoy their liberty in Christ, and not to be entangled in bondage to law keeping. He addresses the subject of circumcision, teaching that it was not necessary. If a person subjected themselves to this Jewish rite, they would make the gospel void, and Christ would not profit them. He says that if anyone becomes circumcised then he is again practicing the law, and must therefore keep the whole law. If any wants to keep the law, they become strangers to Christ, because they are attempting to be justified by the law. They have therefore departed from the gospel of grace. To fall from grace, does not mean that one has lost salvation, for that is impossible. What it means is a person who professed salvation, and then turned back to their own efforts to be saved, which indicates that they never had salvation. This is what is called apostasy. True Christians are not trying to be made righteous through their own efforts, good works, or keeping the law. They are hoping for the day when Christ comes and they are made entirely righteous, with no more capacity to sin. This hope is apprehended by faith, and for the Christian the works of the law count for nothing towards his righteousness or salvation. This means circumcision really counts for nothing.

Paul says to the Galatians that they ran well, but asked who hindered them from obeying the truth? Their being drawn away from the gospel of grace to a law-keeping religion was not from the Lord, who had called them to salvation. He is trying to show them that they are following some person, or persons, who have corrupted them. He then points out how leaven spreads quickly through the whole lump of dough. This is an illustration of how false teaching can infiltrate into a church, and quickly spread and infect many. Paul also expresses confidence in the Christians to deal with the false teacher, and not allow him to have any place to teach among them. Eventually the Lord will judge this false teacher, but the Christians should not have any fellowship with such persons.

Paul says that if he was still preaching circumcision he would not be persecuted, for the Jews would not have any reason to resist him. However Paul was persecuted fiercely by the Jews, because of the offense associated with the cross of Christ. In thinking about those who were insisting on circumcision, Paul said he wished that they were themselves cut off, meaning castrated. This is very strong language in opposition to their evil doctrine.

The remaining section of this chapter moves into a discussion about the works of the flesh in contrast to the works of the Spirit. The Christian has both natures within him, and they are constantly at war with one another. Paul is telling the Galatians to be careful to follow the Spirit, and not the work of the flesh. The keeping of the law for justification would be an example of walking in the flesh, and thus the subject is expanded for further understanding. While Christians are given liberty in Christ, that liberty is not to serve the flesh, but to serve one another in love. He reminds them that all the law is fulfilled in the words, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself". If we all understood the intent of the law is to teach and foster greater love for God and one another, then we can just go about doing this, and all the requirements of the law will be fulfilled in us. When Christians quarrel and fight they must be careful that they do not destroy each other through their fleshly behavior. When Christians walk in the Spirit, they will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. This is important point for us to get a hold of. We all struggle with battling the desires of the flesh, which is always running away from God, to satisfy our sin nature. To overcome this enemy in our lives, Christians must constantly work at walking in the Spirit. There is a battle raging within the believer, but he must overcome all the works of the flesh, by giving place to the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul lists many works of the flesh in this chapter to help the Galatians, and us, to recognize them within ourselves and others. We could put these works of the flesh into a few categories, namely sexual (to do with the body), religious (to do with the spirit), emotional (to do with the heart), attitude (to do with the soul), conduct (to do with the mind). Those who violate God's standards and practice these works of the flesh, will not inherit the kingdom of God, for they demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is not in control of their lives. When the Holy Spirit works in the believer he provides to him the fruit of the spirit, which love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. No one will ever object to this kind of attitude and behavior, and no laws stand in opposition to them. It is worthwhile to take time as Christians to memorize Gal 5:22,23 which teach us those various aspects of the work and fruit of the Holy Spirit in us. We can compare our conduct with these nine aspects of godly living, and challenge ourselves to improve by letting the Spirit do his work in us more and more. I might suddenly feel a desire to do some good thing to help someone in the name of Christ, and as I give way to that desire I will be cooperating with the Holy Spirit in me, who teaches us kindness and love. When we are in Christ we learn to crucify (that is destroy) the evil passions and desires in us. Since the Holy Spirit has given us new life in Christ, we are to walk by the Holy Spirit's directing. He will teach and guide us through the word of God, and speak to us often while we pray. When our hearts are in love with God, and we eagerly look for ways to serve and please God, the Spirit will be glad to direct us in all that we should do.

There is no room for prideful behavior that provokes, or envies others, since humility and love should reign in the heart of every believer.

"but the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. against such there is no law." Gal 5:22,23

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson Paul challenges the Galatians to keep themselves from the bondage of the law, by not allowing false teachers to impose circumcision as a requirement for salvation. We also considered differences between the works of the flesh, and walking in the Spirit. "Someone might ask the question, how can I tell if I am walking in the Spirit?" There is two lists provided in Galatians 5 to help us understand the difference between the work of the flesh, and walking in the Spirit. The works of the flesh are:

Description of the 17 works of the flesh sited in Galatians 5			
Adultery	Unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship.	Not content with God's provision	Ruins Marriage
Fornication	Unlawful sexual intercourse.	Not content with God's purpose	Ruins People
Uncleanness	Moral evil, sensuality.	Not content with God's purity	Ruins Conscience
Lewdness	Shameless conduct involving absence of restraint.	Not content with God's permissions	Ruins body
Idolatry	Worship of idols, immorality that accompanies demon worship.	Not content with God's person	Ruins dignity
Sorcery	Witchcraft, intercourse with evil spirits, the use of magic spells.	Not content with God's power	Ruins protection
Hatred	Feelings of malice towards others.	Not content with God's patience	Ruins heart
Contentions	Discord, variance, quarrels.	Not content with God's pardon	Ruins fellowship
Jealousies	Distrust, suspicions.	Not content with God's promises	Ruins trust
Wrath	Hot anger or passions.	Not content with God's passion	Ruins respect
Selfish Ambitions	Self-centered strivings.	Not content with God's plans	Ruins kindness
Dissensions	Separations caused by disagreements.	Not content with God's peace	Ruins unity
Heresies	Sects formed by men with self-willed opinions.	Not content with God's pronouncements	Ruins souls
Envy	Displeasure at the success or prosperity of others.	Not content with God's prosperity	Ruins contentment
Murders	Unlawful killing of others.	Not content with God's punishment	Ruins lives
Drunkenness	Intoxication by strong drink.	Not content with God's persuasion	Ruins homes
Revelries	Riotous gatherings for entertainment, with drunkenness.	Not content with God's pleasure	Ruins joy

The fruit of the Spirit is:

The 9 aspects of the fruit of the Spirit	
LOVE	Willing expression of patience, kindness, gentleness, honesty, affection, benevolence.
JOY	Cheerful exuberance of spirit.
PEACE	Calm contentment of spirit between God and men
LONGSUFFERING	Patience in afflictions, annoyances, and persecutions
KINDNESS	Gentleness, compassion of the heart.
GOODNESS	Disposition to do good to others.
FAITHFULNESS	Loyal to commitments.
GENTLENESS	Not forceful, careful and sensitive of one's own actions and words.
SELF-CONTROL	Able to restrain desires, emotions and compulsions.

Although we do not space here to describe each of the works of the flesh, or these aspects of the Spirit's fruit in our lives, we certainly get a picture of how a person, walking in the Spirit, would behave. And if we should see the works of the flesh, it indicates the Holy Spirit is not present or at work. The Spiritual life produces:

Manifestation & Compulsions of the Spiritual Life:		
1	Love:	<i>Ro 15:30, Col 1:8</i>
2	Unity:	<i>Eph 4:3</i>
3	Joy:	<i>1Th 1:6</i>
4	Holiness:	<i>1Co 6:19,20</i>
5	Affection for Christ:	<i>1Co 12:3</i>
6	Witness of righteousness:	<i>2Co 3:3</i>
7	Witness of Christlikeness:	<i>2Co 3:18</i>
8	Witness of Relationship:	<i>Ga 4:6</i>
9	Witness of Opposition: (From the flesh without/within)	<i>Ga 4:29, Ga 5:17</i>
10	Filled with Spirit: (Joy, Gratitude, Song, Submission, Giving, Word, Witness)	<i>Eph 5:18</i>
11	Discernment:	<i>Heb 9:8</i>
12	Responsiveness:	<i>Heb 3:7-8</i>
1	Preaching:	<i>1Co 2:4, 2Ti 1:7</i>
2	Use of Gifts:	<i>1Co 12:7</i>
3	Confronting sin:	<i>Ga 6:1</i>
4	Praying:	<i>Eph 6:18</i>
5	Godly Testimony:	<i>Eph 5:9</i>
6	Fellowship:	<i>Php 2:1</i>
7	Worship:	<i>Php 3:3</i>
8	Obedience:	<i>1Jo 3:24</i>

May the Lord help us to understand the work of Holy Spirit so we can recognize His presence by the behavior he produces in us. If you do not know this work of the Spirit, then you are likely not a Christian at all. So why not accept Jesus today as Lord and Savior by placing your trust in Him.

"and do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the spirit," Eph. 5:18

LESSON 168
Reaping what we Sow
GALATIANS 6

In our last lesson we learned that law-keeping cannot add to our salvation, and is a denial of the gospel. We saw the difference between the works of the flesh and walking in the Spirit. Today we finish our study of Galatians with an exhortation to do good to others, remembering that a person reaps whatever he sows.

Paul begins this chapter speaking about the need to lovingly restore a brother who has been overtaken by a trespass. Due to our sin nature we are all prone to fall to the temptations of sin. We need to show compassion on those who have been overtaken in some trespass, when we see that they have been lead off of the right path. This may be a reference to some of the Galatians who were convinced to listen to, and give place to the false teachers, perhaps entertaining them, or submitting to circumcision. We really cannot say, but we know that when a sincere brother has fallen into some wrong behavior our reaction should not be to pounce on him with anger and judgment. We must remember that we all are capable to fall by the same temptation. Therefore Paul calls on those who are spiritual to restore such a brother who has fallen into a transgression. The spiritual brother would be the mature one, who will go in the gentleness of the Spirit, and help the brother see the error of his way.

The Christian life is summed up nicely in these verses, where we are called to bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. The law of Christ, means to live by the Spirit, and fulfill the righteousness of the law. There is here a warning though for Christians not to think of themselves as being somebody. In Christ we are nothing but sinners, who have found grace and compassion from the Lord. This puts us all on equal ground, and we should not have an attitude of superiority due to age, intellect, economic status, or position in life. In Christ we are all the same, no matter if we are the president, or one who takes out the trash. If we think too much of ourselves, we are deceiving ourselves. We are to examine our own work for God, and then we can rejoice in what He has accomplished through us. It is important that we do not look to the accomplishments of others, and count that to our own credit. If your church leader is a great preacher, and wins plenty of souls for Christ, that might make you very happy, but do not think it will be for your credit, unless you participate in that work also. By sharing in the practical needs of those who teach us the word, we show our fellowship with them, and help them carry out their important work for God. This is required from all of God's children, as they are fed the word of God. If we fail to share in the needs of those who teach us the word, we are warned that we shall reap what we sow. If we value God's word, then we will be glad to show our appreciation by supporting those who labor at it for our benefit. We may find it easy to sow to our flesh, that is catering to our own desires for wealth and comfort. But when we sow to the spirit, that is give to the work of God, and use our resources to build up God's kingdom, then our rewards will be to reap everlasting life. It is not that we earn this life for ourselves, but as Christians who possess life, we shall be instrumental in bringing that life to others also. God will bless our efforts, when our sincere sacrifices are invested towards His kingdom and His righteousness.

While we seek to do good as Christians, we must recognize that we live in a world that has been broken and damaged by sin. This means that often our good may go unnoticed, or unappreciated. Some may take advantage of our goodness, and seek our harm. It is a sad fact that doing good for God and His people will not bring much present reward or joy. It can bring joy and blessing, but often the day by day drudgery of laboring for God also means disappointments, losses and heartaches. But we must all remember that our rewards are in heaven, and we must press on in faith knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain, even when others fail us, or oppose us. Our Lord Jesus himself suffered the disappointment of a close friend betraying him, and the denial of another. In fact all his disciples forsook him and fled when he was arrested. In the end they upheld him as the risen savior, and many came to faith in Christ. We are not to lose heart in our labors for God, for at times things may look discouraging, and it seems our efforts are producing little for God, but we must be patient and wait for the harvest to come, when all our faithful sowing will reap it's eternal rewards.

Our first responsibility for doing good is for the household of faith, that is all Christians. It is not that we shouldn't help others, but our first responsibility is to our own family, the family of God. It is this love within the family, that will help others see Christ, and be attracted to Him.

Paul says he wrote with his own hand in large letters, which may indicate that he had some eyesight problems. Paul points out as he finishes off this letter, that those who want to make a good show in the flesh, and are compelling some Christians to be circumcised, were doing so to avoid conflict with the Jews, and the persecution they would bring upon them. The cross of Christ is an offense, and the Christian must be willing to bear his own cross in order to be a faithful follower of Jesus. While the false teachers wanted to boast in those whom they had circumcised, Paul would rather boast in the cross of Christ, through whom the world is crucified to him, and he to the world. In Christ circumcision meant nothing. What was important for Christians was the new life given by the Holy Spirit. For the Christians that walk in the Spirit Paul would desire the peace and mercy of God, and also for the nation of Israel. Paul says no one should give him further trouble, since he bore the marks of the Lord Jesus in his body. He meant that he had suffered much for the Lord Jesus, and the marks of his love and service could be seen in his beaten and scared body. He closes the letter wishing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to be with their spirit. Let us learn from Galatians

to have a greater respect for the doctrine of the gospel, fearing lest we alter it in anyway, or mislead others into believing a false gospel. I hope all listening today will hear the Spirit calling upon them to place their trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Call upon Him today to cleanse and forgive you, and he will save your soul.

"brethren, the grace of our lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." Gal 6:18

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard Paul's final words to the Galatian believers, where he calls on the spiritual to restore an erring brother; to show love, humility, and to do good, especially to the family of God. He teaches the important principle of reaping what we sow, when it comes to supporting things of eternal value, or worldly value. Someone might ask the question, "How can a person sow to the Spirit?"

In today's lesson Paul made a contrast between sowing to the flesh, which reaps corruption, and sowing to the spirit which reaps everlasting life. This principle is very important for all Christians to grasp and then apply in their experience, if they hope to enjoy heaven to the fullest measure. The illustration is taken from farming, with is a simple analogy to help us understand. When the farmer plants plenty of seed, he will have much more harvest to reap, but if he sows little, his harvest will be little. This principle is easy for us to apply to the spiritual life. When a Christian invests much into the kingdom of God, he can expect much spiritual fruit, and reward in heaven. If a Christian neglects building up the kingdom of God, then he will have little fruit, and little reward in heaven. But we also have a difference in the type of sowing. If a farmer throws his seed onto rocky ground, it will not likely bring forth much crop, for the ground is not good for growing anything. If however he places the seed into soft soil, then he will get more crop at the harvest time. It is not only how much we sow that matters, but how we sow that is also important. So lets think about the difference between sowing to the flesh, or sowing to the spirit. In the context of this book, and this particular chapter, the writer is talking about our investments into the work of God, specifically helping support those who teach the word of God. He is not talking about paid salaries to professional clergymen, but an appreciation and support given to the brothers in the assembly who take the responsibility to teach the word. When a man studies the scriptures carefully, in order to feed God's people, then he is serving God, and making sacrifices to ensure the spiritual health of others. Christians are to appreciate such men, honor them, and make sure they are able to continue laboring in the word, by sharing with their needs. If they have to work with their hands to feed themselves and their families, clearly it would limit the time they could spend in prayer, and in the word, preparing to minister to the believers. If the believers, who appreciate them, and are taught by them, should help them financially with gifts, then it can free them up to labor more diligently in the word to feed the flock of God. When Christians support their Christian teachers, they are providing for their own spiritual enrichment.

Reaping what we sow is a general principle that can be applied in many ways in our lives, but not all. We know that when we work hard, we will benefit from our labors. We know that when we look after our health we will live a good life. We know that when we treat others with respect and kindness, our children will learn to do the same. This is a general principle however that does not always hold true, for sometimes people look after their health and still become sick. There is one area in life where we certainly do not reap what we sow. The Christians knows that he is a guilty sinner, and he deserves God's judgment in the flames of Hell. In this case the Christian certainly is not getting what he deserves, or reaping what he sows. This is because God has shown mercy, and allowed Jesus to take our judgment for us. We sowed evil, and Jesus reaped our punishment.

Let's think of some other areas in the Christian life where we can learn how this principle can be applied. The bible tells us that if a man loves to sleep, and is lazy, he will come to poverty (Prov 6:10). Certainly hard work is rewarded with wages, and the bible teaches us to be diligent in whatever we do. We could apply this to education as well. When a student is diligent in his or her studies they can expect to score well on their test. Some students might be naturally bright, and do well on their exams, but eventually they will have to prove themselves to be diligent in their studies if they want to succeed. It always amazes me to watch how people drive, and how careless they can be, and how dangerously some people drive. If you are always taken chances or driving to fast, eventually you will reap what you sow, and you will be involved in an automobile accident, or even cause loss of life. We cannot take foolish risks, and then think God will be obliged to protect us from harm, this would be putting the Lord to the test, and is not faith, but presumption. I think one of most important ways for Christians to apply the principle of sowing and reaping has to do with our witnessing and sharing the gospel with others. If we share the gospel message of faith in Jesus Christ, then we will likely win souls for the Lord, and reap great joy in heaven when we meet these Christians there. We are all investing in one thing or other. What are you spending your time, money and energy on? Is it watching TV, playing sports? Is it playing games on your mobile phone, or wasting hours away that could be productively used? So many of us are just spending our valuable time doing nothing of any eternal value. If we labor for the Lord, serve Him, share the gospel, read our bibles and pray, then we shall reap greater rewards in heaven. If you do this, then you will sow to the spirit.

"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" Matt 6:20

LESSONS IN EPHESIANS



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"HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, JUST AS CHRIST ALSO LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR HER, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY AND CLEANSE HER WITH THE WASHING OF WATER BY THE WORD, THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT HER TO HIMSELF A GLORIOUS CHURCH, NOT HAVING SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY SUCH THING, BUT THAT SHE SHOULD BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH. SO HUSBANDS OUGHT TO LOVE THEIR OWN WIVES AS THEIR OWN BODIES; HE WHO LOVES HIS WIFE LOVES HIMSELF."

EPHESIANS 5:25-28

LESSON 169
Spiritual Blessing In Christ
EPHESIANS 1

In our last lesson we finished our study in Galatians where we learned the importance of not perverting the gospel, and how to walk in the Spirit. Today we shall start a study in the book of Ephesians, where we will learn about the blessings we have in Christ, and what these blessings are intended to produce in our character and relationships.

In Chapter one Paul will focus on the blessings that the believer receives when he is in Christ. This phrase "in Christ" is used many times in the book of Ephesians, and describes our privileged position of being in relationship to God through Jesus Christ as our Lord. He is our representative, and we are hidden in Him. Therefore when God looks at us He always sees Jesus. We should be very happy to know that Jesus is perfect in God's sight, and therefore we also look perfect in God's eyes.

This letter begins with praise to God for all the spiritual blessings that belong to us because we are 'in Christ'. The blessings of the believer are spiritual in nature, though he may at times also experience some physical blessings. Spiritual blessings are from heaven, and will affect our position in, and enjoyment of heaven forever. The spiritual blessings listed in this chapter, which include the following.

1. Adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ – being accepted in the beloved.

This means that we have found perfect acceptance as God's beloved children through Jesus acceptance with God.

2. Redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ - giving us forgiveness of sins by His rich grace.

Our sins have been paid in full by the death of Jesus on the cross, and we shall never be judged eternally for sin.

3. He has made known to us the mystery of His will – which is to gather together into one all things in Christ.

God has shared with us his plan and purpose to gather together the whole church with Christ, to be forever united.

4. Obtained an inheritance – being predestined to be to the praise of his glory.

In heaven their awaits an inheritance to be with Jesus, and like Jesus, and to be for His eternal glory.

5. Sealed with the Holy Spirit – who is the earnest of our inheritance.

The Holy Spirit dwells inside the believer, and shall never be taken away from us, guaranteeing our eternal reward.

These rich blessings are in heaven and spiritual, and therefore cannot be altered or changed by anything man can, or could ever do. God has showered upon us such great riches and kindness, beyond our greatest imagination.

After listing the spiritual blessings that belong to those who are in Christ, Paul now says that he had heard about their faith and was always giving thanks to God for them in his prayers. He prayed for them, that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Jesus more fully. He also prayed that God would open the eyes of their understanding, so that they would understand all that was theirs in Christ, including the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. He wants us to understand how precious we are to the heart of Jesus, and how God's glory shines within us since we believed in Jesus as our Savior. He also prays that we may know the exceeding greatness of his power towards us. This is the same power which raised Christ from the dead, seated him at the right hand of God in heaven, above every power, principality, might and dominion, both now and forever. While he prayed for the Christians to receive wisdom and revelation about Jesus greatness, he is also thereby revealing some of the greatness of Christ, and our part in Him. He says that Christ will have all things put under his authority, so that He is seen as the supreme authority in heaven and earth, with nothing above Him. His rule and headship is over the church, to which he is inseparably joined. It is hard to comprehend, but scripture here points out that church completes Christ, to become His fullness, that will fill all in all. Since he gave himself for the church, now she is forever part of Him, and without her he would not be complete. This cannot mean his intrinsic deity, or the perfections of His character, for these are constant and eternally complete. It therefore must mean His heart and love can only find their full expression when having His beloved bride, the church, with Him forever.

It is Clear that Ephesians will lift us into heavenly places to consider lofty spiritual truths concerning Christ, and His beloved church. While Paul prays for greater insight, wisdom and understanding for us to know Christ, and the riches, power and glory that belong to Him, we should take time to carefully consider these marvelous revelations. We should also be ever so grateful, not only to be saved from punishment in the flames of Hell, but for all the riches that await us in heaven, when we are with Christ.

From this passage we should learn that the greatest objective in the Christian life is to know more of Christ. We can spend our time laboring and serving the Lord, but never invest much time into getting to know our Savior. We might be obedient to his commands, and preach to others His love and salvation, and that is very good, but even greater than this, should be our desire to get to know Jesus better and better. I am not just talking about having head knowledge, but a deeper insight into His heart and purposes for us. When Paul speaks of the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, he is talking about a deeper spiritual work within the heart of the believer. When a man marries a woman, he knows something about her, and can tell his friends several details about her, but the intention of marriage is that the two become one, so that even the thoughts and emotions of the heart are increasingly known and understood. Our relationship to Christ is to be similar to the bond of marriage, where intimacy and increasing knowledge are the rewards of love. To know Christ is the greatest pursuit in our lives, and the Lord has provided us with all we need to learn of Him. As we read our bibles prayerfully and thoughtfully, we shall find the

Holy Spirit revealing Christ to us. We must be careful to not treat our pursuit of Christ as an academic exercise to preach, or teach a Sunday school lesson. It should be an exercise of love, passion and joy to discover the wonder and glory of our great Redeemer. I wonder if you know Him? Why not ask Him to come into your life today as your Lord and Savior, and begin your journey exploring the vastness and endless goodness and glory of God.

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." Eph. 1:17

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the spiritual blessings that belong to those who are in Christ. We also discovered that Christ ought to be our greatest love, with our attention centered on knowing Him better. Someone might ask the question, "Why are God's blessing invisible and intangible?"

One might lose heart when they realize our spiritual blessings are in heaven and not on earth. In the weakness of our faith we would prefer to see some tangible evidence of God's blessing upon our lives. This would confirm our acceptance and approval by God. In fact, God does want to provide all of His children with assurances of His love and salvation, and that is not normally the way which we would choose. Faith is essential to are enjoying these spiritual blessings. God requires our faith. He wants us to trust in Him and in His promises. In fact the bible tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Clearly we cannot not know everything, or test everything's validity, or it's benefits, so we all have to go by faith. This applies to many things in our day to day lives. When we enter into a car to drive somewhere, we do so by faith, hoping and believing that we shall end up at our destination safely. If we did not believe that the car was capable, or the traffic safe, we might not ever drive anywhere. When we eat our food, we trust it will make us healthy, and satisfy our appetite. We do not believe it will make us sick, or be harmful, otherwise we would not eat it. Clearly we cannot always protect ourselves from potential harm or error, so we must move in faith. Faith does not need to be blind, however, and God does provide many things to encourage and support our faith. The fact that we cannot be absolutely certain of all information, means we must act in faith. When we doubt God, we are acting as though He cannot be trusted, and that maligns His character. God is trustworthy, and has shown this through the revelation of the scriptures, and testimony of the Holy Spirit. The evidences which God provides for us of His trustworthiness, are more than enough so that we can put our confidence in Him. When we do place our trust in God, we bring glory to Him. We will discover through our experience that God is faithful, and will always fulfill His promises to us. God is looking for this faith in our lives. To encourage our faith, He doesn't provide signs and wonders, although at times He has done that for those of immature faith. He provides us His infallible word, and examples through history of His character and faithfulness. He also provides prophetic verification as a means to build our faith.

All the spiritual blessings of Ephesians chapter one are true, even though we cannot see them or touch them immediately. Forgiveness of sins, is not something we see with our eyes, or touch with our hands. It is a work of the Holy Spirit through regeneration, and the believer will have evidence of this work in His life. God wants us to take hold of these blessings, by trusting in His word. As we do put our confidence in God, then we see how these blessings reveal themselves in our lives by the way in which we live. If we believe we have an eternal inheritance in heaven, then it will affect how we look at our present lives. Instead of trying to accumulate as much money and possessions as we can, we ought to work towards the inheritance that will last forever.

I suppose God could chose to bring us all immediately to heaven. However, our Lord is not just interested in giving us our heavenly inheritance; He also wants to prepare us to receive everything He has for us in heaven. Therefore as we move closer each day towards our hope in heaven, and our faith grows, He is transforming us into the image of the Son of God. This happens through the exercise of faith as we observe Christ in the word of God. We can think of our spiritual lives like a race towards the finish line. God has prepared great rewards for all of His children, but in order to appreciate those rewards, He wants us to labor and run after them by faith, and through hope. Those who are most diligent in their pursuit of their hope, will be most delighted when they reach the finish line, when their faith is answered by the glorious scenes of heaven and it's rewards.

If we live for this world, and all it's passing pleasures, giving little attention to our heavenly inheritance, then heaven will lose it's luster. Rewards will be diminished by our lack of capacity to appreciate and understand them. Because they were not valued in this life, their true worth will be hidden to some extent even in heaven.

If I were a computer expert, and bought the latest and greatest laptop, with 8gig of ram, 2TB Hard-drive, and quad-core processing, showed it to a friend who didn't know much about computers, he might say, 'yeah, It's okay, I guess?'. But if he knew about computers, he would appreciate and be enthusiastic about my purchase. Heaven will be enjoyed most by those, who through faith, appreciate the blessings that await them there.

"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." Matt 6:20

LESSON 170
God's Amazing Grace
EPHESIANS 2

In our last lesson we heard about the many blessings that belong to those who are "in Christ". Today we will learn more about the blessings God has for His children, and in particular the Amazing Grace of God in salvation. We shall also consider the revelation of the church being made of both Jews and gentiles, as an eternal habitation for God.

The first section of this chapter will teach us of the amazing grace of God that rescued us, and brought us into the church, where God will dwell eternally. He begins by speaking of where we were before we were saved. We were dead in our sins, prisoners of Satan, disobedient, running after every lustful desire, and destined for God's wrath. When the scripture here says we were dead, it does not mean physical death, but rather spiritually dead. This means we were separated from God. Satan is called the Prince of the power of the air here, and this teaches us that Satan has authority and power to rule over people in this world, since they are his captives, through their sinful nature. Men serve Satan, even when they do not realize it.

Into this bleak situation God intervenes with His great mercy, showing us His great love. Out of death He brought life, joining us to be with Christ in heavenly places. The purpose God had in saving us, was so that He could show us all the great riches of His grace given to us through Jesus Christ, throughout the eternal ages to come.

We have here one of the clearest and most important statements in the bible about the way God saves a soul. He does this by **grace**, apart from any effort or work on our part. Salvation is God's free gift and you cannot pay for it, or earn it in any way. Make sure that your confidence is in Christ, and in Christ alone to save you, for if you are trusting in yourself, or your good works, then you do not have God's salvation, and will not be in heaven.

We are called God's workmanship, that means God's masterpiece. When God saves us from judgment, and gives us a new nature, through the work of the Holy Spirit, He then begins transforming us to be more and more like Jesus. We reflect God's glory, abide with Him forever, we are for His pleasure, and this is God's greatest masterpiece. It reveals the greatness of the master, and is intended so that all may know Him, and praise Him.

With such lofty position and privilege we must always remember where we came from, so that we have a grateful, and humble heart, willing and ready to serve our great master. Once we were aliens from God's chosen people, we did not know Christ, and we were strangers to the blessings and hope given to Israel in the scriptures. We were without God, and without hope. Now in Christ we have been brought near through his blood, and are being joined together as Jews and gentiles into one body. There is more separation or enmity, bringing an end of the law through His cross, by paying for sin's penalty. God's plan to join together all nations into one body in Christ, both Jew and gentiles was an important revelation, not known before. This was difficult for many of the Jews to accept. The Ephesian believers were mostly made up of gentiles, and they ought to be thankful to be part of this great salvation that came through Jesus Christ, and the nation of Israel. Here the church are described as citizens of heaven, belonging to God's household. The church foundation was provided through the ministry of apostles and prophets, but the chief cornerstone, upholding the entire church, is Jesus Christ himself. The church is being built as a holy dwelling place where God will eternally reside through the Holy Spirit.

There are so many remarkable truths to consider from this chapter, and indeed we are lost with wonder, as Paul carries us into heavenly places, showing us all that we have been given in Christ. The salvation that comes to us by grace, means that is free, and comes from the heart of God to us. There is no work or payment to be made, we just reach out and receive it, and just say thank you. We see the great extent of God's grace, when we consider where we were as lost sinners. We lived in darkness, alienated from God and His chosen people. We did not have the Holy Spirit to guide us into the light of the scriptures, and God's promises of redemption. The devil held us captive, and lead us in the path of disobedience, and fleshly lusts. Of course many people do not even realize that they are slaves to Satan and sin, because they have not experienced the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. I have met plenty of people who once professed to be Christians, and continue to say they are Christians, when there is no evidence that they have the Holy Spirit. Their lives still appear to be controlled by Satan and their sin. Their conduct is not what the Holy Spirit would teach, but is rather what Satan would teach them. Don't fool yourself into thinking you are a Christian simply because you once met with some Christians, went to church, or got baptized. Their ought to be a real transformation in your life, conduct, attitude, words, ambitions, and affections, so that no one can mistake the fact that Jesus has come into your life, and made you new.

One amazing truth revealed to us in this scripture is God's plan to join together people from all nations into one body, the church. People from the Jewish nation, formerly were thought to be God's only chosen people, and so when God began to call gentiles to faith in Christ, the Jews became more than indignant, for they thought they alone were God's chosen. However God has made it very clear that He loves all people, and desires the salvation of all men everywhere. The church is God's great design, with people from every tribe, tongue and nation. Men of all different backgrounds, living in unity, through the work of the Holy Spirit, and made into God's eternal dwelling through the Spirit. If you are a Christian God lives inside of you, through the Holy Spirit, and He will be in you forever. This truth is difficult for us to understand, and to appreciate the wonder of it. The Almighty and eternal God living inside of me?

Wow, that is remarkable. This was made possible because God came into His creation as a man, and took upon Himself the judgment for sin. Jesus was crucified to rescue our souls from God's wrath, and Satan's rule. Not because we were good, or deserved it, but because He wanted us to learn about the riches of His grace, and see the glory of our Savior. We are saved by God's Amazing grace. If you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you can sing "Amazing Grace" with a sincere heart, inspired by God's kindness to your soul.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Eph. 2:8,9

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard about the amazing grace of God, who saved us, and brought us into the body of Christ, to be an eternal dwelling place for God. We saw the great distance bridged by God when taking us from being dead in sin, to being God's habitation through the Spirit. Someone might ask the question, "What will we do when we get to heaven?"

In this chapter we certainly are carried away into heavenly places to view some of the riches that belong to Christians. We also learn something about our occupation when we reach heaven. Let me start by saying that if you are hoping to reach heaven, then you must be sure that you are saved. Have you believed on Jesus as Lord and Savior? Do you have clear evidence in your life of the transforming power of God to change you from a child of Satan to a citizen of heaven? If you are truly saved there will be evidence of it in your life. One of the great evidences is a hope of future glory.

Many people might wonder though, what will I do in heaven? I have often asked this question to people, and they often respond with things like, praising God, worship, or resting, but that is often as far as people go when imagining what they will do in heaven. Worship and praise are wonderful, but is that all we shall do 24 hours each day, 7 days a week? Shall we play football, watch TV, work on a computer, read books, walk, dance, or eat ice cream?

When we read the bible carefully we discover that there is not a great deal of information about our specific activities in heaven, but there are certainly some ideas about what will occupy us in heaven. It is fascinating to ask questions, and wonder just what God has in store for us. While studying scripture we will find some important teaching that helps us to understand what heaven is all about, and what we shall do there. Here is a list of 8 things that I have found in the bible about what Christians will do in heaven:

1. Be with Jesus (John 14:6) – Affiliation

We shall be joined together with Jesus and be with Him forever and ever, and this speaks of our affiliation.

2. Behold Jesus (John 17:24) – Admiration

We shall behold the glory of Jesus, more beautiful than a sunrise or flower, and this speaks of admiration.

3. Study Jesus (Eph 2:7) – Appreciation

We shall learn about the grace of God throughout eternity, and this speaks of appreciation.

4. Be like Jesus (1John 3:2) – Adaptation

We shall also be changed to be like Jesus, and this speaks of Adaptation.

5. Serve Jesus (Rev 14:3, Luke 9:17) – Attention

We shall serve our Lord Jesus, and this speaks of Attention.

6. Reign with Jesus (Rev 5:10, Ps 8:6) - Administration

We shall also reign with our Lord and have dominion, and this speaks of Administration

7. Receive from Jesus (1Peter 1:4, Rom 8:17,18,32) – Accumulation

We shall also receive an inheritance as God blesses us with His abundance, and this speaks of Accumulation

8. Love Jesus (Phil 1:23) - Affection

Finally we shall be bonded together in love with our Savior, and this speaks of Affection

We can therefore sum up our activities in heaven with just one word, "Jesus". Everything we shall do, or enjoy in heaven has reference to our Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven is all about Him. So if our heart is right we shall be in love with Jesus, and if our thinking is right, then we shall look forward to being with Jesus, admiring and serving Him.

I am not convinced that all of us will do exactly the same thing all the time in heaven. Since our rewards are giving in proportion to our faithful service, then it stands to reason that positions and service in heaven will differ also. In one of the parables of Jesus, from Matt 25, the faithful servants were given more to rule over in His kingdom, because they had been faithful in their service on earth. This shows us the connection between our service now, and the activities, or service we shall enjoy in heaven. To get the most out of heaven, we need to be sure we are investing into heaven now, through faithful service for our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." John 17:24

LESSON 171
The Fullness of God
EPHESIANS 3

In our last lesson we learned about God's Amazing grace that takes undeserving Hell-bound sinners, and makes them alive in Christ, seated in heavenly places as God's eternal dwelling place. Today we shall learn about the mystery of God's plan to save gentiles, Paul's privilege to reveal this mystery, and his prayer that they would be filled with the all the fullness of God.

As we have said in our previous two lessons, Ephesians will carry us into heavenly places, letting us see into the greatness of God's heart, and the glory He intends to share with His beloved children. As we look at today's chapter we learn that Paul is trying to express the greatness of the revelation of the gospel, and his lofty position as a servant of this gospel. He also offers a prayer for the Christians that reaches the heights of glory, the depths of God's love, the expanse of God's greatness, and ending with magnificent praise to God. Paul at times seems lost for adequate words to express the greatness, and fullness of God's love and purpose in the gospel. These are very lofty truths presented to us, and if we hear the Spirit of God speaking to our hearts of these wonderful things, our hearts will burst forth in praise for God, as we cannot contain the joy.

Paul speaks of his own portion in God's great purposes of revealing the gospel. He says that he had received by revelation the mystery of the gospel message, which was the mystery of gentiles being included in God's plan for salvation of men's souls. When Paul uses the word mystery here, it does not mean something hard to understand or obscure. His meaning is explained, when he says this truth was not previously revealed, but now was being made known by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets. There are some things that men cannot learn through their own efforts to acquire knowledge. This is true of God's revelation of Himself, and His great gospel message for all people. Paul considered it the greatest privilege to be made a minister of the gospel through God's grace and power working in him. Somehow this man was made great by the things he saw and understood from God. He considered himself less than the least of all the saints, and yet being granted the highest of all honors, to preach to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ. This phrase that Paul uses, "the unsearchable riches of Christ", is interesting to think about, for it shows us that the depth of Christ, all that He is in His love, goodness, and grace is something we can never fully grasp, because it is much too vast to take in. A weak analogy might be of an explorer trying to discover the vastness of an ocean by travelling across it. Even in all his journeying he will only discover a small portion of that great ocean, for even a lifetime of exploration will never provide him enough time to view the whole of this great expanse. But I suppose if an explorer was given 1000 or 2000 years it is conceivable that he could discover all there is to know about an ocean's size, depth, and contents. However no matter how long we search the love, grace and goodness of our Lord, we will never come to the point where we can say, we have reached the end, and know it all. It shall be an infinite journey of exploration and wonder.

Paul's mission in life was to reveal the mystery of God's great plan of drawing together all believers into one body in Christ. This mystery, that was hidden with God from the beginning of time, was going to reveal God's great eternal purpose, that at the right time in history, the manifold wisdom of God would be made known, by the church, to all the angelic powers and principalities in heaven. Angels are also created beings as we are, and do not have all knowledge and understanding. The way God shows them His great wisdom is through His love and grace displayed to the church. When angels behold women obediently submitting to Christ's authority, and showing this through wearing a head covering and remaining silent in church gatherings, they are seeing the power and wisdom of God at work in redeeming mankind into a proper relationship to Him through faith and repentance. This is not a forced conformity, but a willing submission inspired by God's love. How beautiful to bold obedience, and how wonderful that angels learn from us about God's wisdom.

Paul now breaks into a prayer for the believers that is certainly one of the greatest prayers, and most profound you and I will ever hear. It is not a long prayer, but it is packed with spiritual power, and wonder beyond our greatest imaginations. He says he bows on his knees, which is a good, and reverent, posture for prayer. He addresses his prayer to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all in heaven and earth receive their family name. He asks that by the riches of God's glory, the Christians would be strengthened in the inner man (in the soul), that Christ would dwell in our hearts by faith, and being firmly established in His love, that we shall be able to comprehend the measureless love of God, and to know His love which passes knowledge, being filled with the fullness of God. These extraordinary requests are a great paradox, for he seems to be praying that we attain to that which is impossible to attain. How can we know the fullness of God's love and grace, when these reach into infinity. Such is the wonder of our future hope. We shall never know everything as God does, but somehow the apostle is led to pray by the Holy Spirit that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. To help us understand this prayer, perhaps we can remember that in Jesus all the fullness of God dwells, and because we are in Him, we also, in some way, experience all the fullness of God. Whatever is meant, it certainly is an extraordinary prayer that shows us that God has wonderful things in store for His children. Paul ends his prayer with a most magnificent word of praise, wishing God to be glorified in His church forever and ever. He speaks of God's great power to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. Here we see how Paul piles up words on top of each other to show God's immeasurable resources. He says God is able to do, exceedingly. But he does not stop there, but adds to this saying "exceedingly abundantly"

to make sure we all understand that this is so much more than we can imagine. Yet he still goes on further to say "exceedingly abundantly above all we could ask or think". God is great and we can only look with wonder into the vast ocean of His riches, grace and love, knowing there is so much more that he wants to share with us. Praise His name! We also desire that God would be glorified in us throughout the eternal ages to come.

"to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of god." Eph. 3:19

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard about the great mystery of the gospel, which Paul was privileged to be a minister of through God's grace. We also heard Paul's prayer that we could know and comprehend the love of God which is beyond our knowledge. Someone might ask the question, "If spiritual truth is unsearchable, why should I chase after that which I can never know fully?"

While we consider the lofty truths presented to us in this chapter of the bible, we might be inclined to think that some spiritual ideas are just beyond our grasp, and therefore why do I even try to learn of them? I know in the end that I will still not discover all there is to know, so why should I try?

Paul saw the importance of our comprehending the love of God, which passes knowledge, and being filled with God's fullness. He wanted the Ephesians, and all Christians, to absorb as much as possible, into their hearts and minds, the greatness of God, and His love towards us in the gospel. Yes, it is true that we cannot explore this entirely, but in the exploration and on-going discovery, we shall find that we are changed. We will learn our purpose for being, and be given a greater vision of all that we can be for God's glory. As we behold the wonder and immensity of God's love it will transform us into greater worshippers. The remainder of Ephesians will teach us how to walk as children of light, as imitators of God in a dark and sinful world. It is our transformation that will be a message of hope to the world. As the world looks at our lives, and sees the change that Christ has made in us, by the way we behave humbly, faithfully, obediently, joyfully, and lovingly they will not just hear the gospel, but see it in us. This is God's effective way to show all the heavenly hosts his wisdom through the church, and the way in which he speaks to the world today so that men can be saved and enter into heaven.

Exploring the vast ocean of God's love and grace is an endless journey, but one that we must begin, and continue on daily. This will be the means by which God's power will change us into all that He wants us to be, and all that He wishes to communicate through us, for the spiritual benefit of others. It would be a shame if we should receive such riches from God, and fail to appreciate those riches, or allow our lives to speak for God and his glory, showing His riches to others.

God is glorified when we learn of Him, and His eternal plan to save men and bring them together into one body in Christ. But the end goal is not simply that we learn, but that we are transformed. Our pursuit for spiritual knowledge is a pursuit which defines our Christian character and depth of maturity. Some people have had little education, or opportunity to go to a bible school, but they can have a great depth of knowledge of God, for they do not depend on men to teach them, but the Holy Spirit. And the opposite can also be true, for a man might be very well educated, and study at the best bible schools in the world, and still be far away from God. So we are not talking about the acquisition of knowledge, just for the sake of fulfilling our prideful desire to advance above others. We are talking about spiritual apprehension of God's grace through Christ, which the simplest of believers can gain insight into through the gracious revelation of the Holy Spirit.

How grateful we ought to be that God has revealed to us His purposes, and included us in His great plan to save a people for Himself and for His glory. Paul had a great appreciate of God's wonderful revelation and eternal plan. This is what made Paul such a great Christian servant, for he saw the depth of his own sinfulness in contrast to the heights of God's immeasurable love.

In our last lesson in Ephesians 2 we explored the exceeding riches of God's amazing grace, and today we have further reached into the vast and immeasurable love of God through Jesus Christ. It is in view of these great truths, that the remainder of the book will call upon believers to walk worthy of being called a Christian. I wonder if you call yourself a Christian? Do you understand the significance of using that name? Do you know the lofty privilege of representing Christ, and proclaiming Him to the world? Remember, you cannot call yourself a Christian, simply because you attend church, or own a bible. Being a Christian means to have a relationship to Jesus Christ through faith. The bible refers to a new birth. When the spiritual birth takes place, there is an entirely new life, with new desires, ambitions and fellowship. Can you say that you have been born of God, because you have seen Him transform your life to be more like Jesus? Do you desire to know Jesus? Why not make today the day of your salvation, by calling upon Jesus to save your soul? I pray that all those listening to this message will not only discover God's salvation, but will take full advantage of it, by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord, and beginning the great journey of exploring the vastness of His love and grace towards us.

"but god demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Rom 5:8

LESSON 172
The Worthy Walk
EPHESIANS 4

In our last lesson we learned about God's great revelation of the gospel, and Paul's lofty privilege to know and share this message. We also were left to wonder at what it means to be filled with the fullness of God. Today we will learn how the high and privileged position of believers to be "in Christ" requires them to walk worthy of their calling.

Paul begins the practical teachings of this book, by making reference to the wonderful truths he presented in the first chapters. When he says *therefore*, it is important to look back at what was said previously to understand, or be properly motivated to hear and obey, what follows after. Paul says Christians are to walk worthy of their calling. He does not command this, but rather beseeches them, which means to make a strong appeal. Grace does not demand our response, but certainly should inspire it. The rest of Ephesians is taken up with what it means to walk worthy of being called Christians. Interestingly, Paul calls himself a prisoner of the Lord, and not a prisoner of the Romans.

In this chapter the worthy walk includes having a proper attitude in the church, finding a place to serve in the church, putting off the old man, and putting on the new man. Since we are saved by grace we are to change our attitude first of all, such that God's people become precious to us. We are to act in all lowliness and gentleness, just as our Lord has shown to us by His own character and example. We are expected to bear with one another in love, and work diligently to maintain the unity of the Spirit among believers. We share in common the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, our calling, our Lord, our faith, our baptism, and our heavenly Father, who above all and in all. It is only the Holy Spirit that can make us humble in character like our Lord Jesus, and keep us living in true spiritual unity.

Paul mentions the means by which Christians grow into maturity, and unity in the body. This is done through the spiritual equipping of the saints to do spiritual work. Christ has provided for this equipping by giving various gifts to the church including pastors, teachers and evangelist. The apostles and prophets that Paul mentions were provided during the initial foundational period of the church, but after the church was firmly established these two offices were discontinued by the Holy Spirit. It is unfortunate to see men who are serving the church as teachers or pastors, and calling themselves prophets or apostles, since these ministries ceased shortly after the original apostles died. The intention of equipping Christians is not only serve in the church for spiritual unity and growth, but also to be protected from every wind of doctrine. When believers are strong in Christ, they have discernment, and will resist false teaching. Unfortunately so many professing Christians lack the spiritual maturity needed for discernment, and thus these winds of doctrine are all around us, deceiving the masses. Men use cleverly thought out plans to deceive gullible Christians, robbing them of their meager resources, and preying on their simplicity to take advantage.

God would have us strong in Christ, mature and discerning, learning the character of Christ, and following His example. This is called putting on Christ. Christians are to speak the truth in love. You cannot have love without truth, and truth ought to be ministered in Christian love if it is to bring about a desired response. Christians are not only supposed to grow individually, but also corporately, by everyone doing their particular part of service within the body of Christ, so that the body of Christ is built up together in love. This certainly suggests some important and consistent interactions between believers, and so Christians are to actively care for one another.

When putting on Christ, the Christian is also responsible to put away the old sinful man, which had controlled him entirely before he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. Putting away the works of the flesh includes such things as, empty thinking, lack of understanding, spiritual blindness, unrestrained lust, filthy behavior, and greed. The Christian is given better alternatives and motives. He is not to take from others, but work in order to share with the needs of others. He is not to tell lies, but always speak the truth. He is to not allow himself to act sinfully when angry, and not go to sleep angry. Also a Christian's tongue is to be marked by grace and not by filth, perversion, or malicious words.

Putting on the new man involves much putting away of the old man. We first must destroy that part of our nature that enjoys sin, and seeks the harm of others. If our attitude is controlled by the Holy Spirit, and we are meek and lowly, then we will not be looking to hurt anyone, but rather to express the love and kindness of God. This affects the way we think, the way we see, the way we feel, the way we work with our hands, the way we use our mouth, and the attitude of our heart. So we can see that Christ wants to take control of our lives and bodies entirely so that we will reflect His character in every way possible. As Christ is formed in us, we will find that the old man has less and less room to occupy, until he is squeezed out, being replaced by the attitudes and behavior of our Lord Jesus Christ.

One area I think we all struggle with is the area of speech. In this chapter we are told to not allow any unwholesome word proceed from our mouth, but how often do we allow corrupt speech to come from our lips. It is so common to hear people use the Lord's name in vain, or to use bad words and insults. One of the marks of Christian maturity is not only be generous and kind towards others, but also to control the use of our tongue. In the book of James we read that the tongue is the most difficult part of our body to train to act righteously. It is so easy and tempting to say something that is not helpful, but can cause damage and hurt to others. While we talk of putting on the new man in Christ, it is important to recognize our need to be in a right relationship to Jesus Christ by trusting Him as Lord, and accepting Him as our Savior. It is not possible to put on Christ, until you have first placed yourself under His authority. If you want to be the captain of your own life, it will not matter how hard you try, you can never do the works of God,

but just your own works. Why not turn in faith to Jesus now, and ask Him to come into your life, and be your Lord and Savior. He is longing to save you, if you are willing to be saved.

"but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head - Christ." Eph. 4:15

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we saw that the appropriate response to our blessings in Christ, is to walk worthy of our Christian calling. This involves putting on Christ, putting off the old man, a transformed life of humility, care for others, and finding a place of service in the body of Christ. Someone might ask the question, "What is the intended goal of Christ for His church?"

In today's lesson we read how our Lord Jesus Christ, gave spiritual gifts to the church, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. It is explained why Christ has given these men to the church. It is for the equipping of the saints to do the work of the ministry. But the goal is not simply to get all Christians working, but to get all believers mature in Christ, unified into one body, serving each other in love. So the ultimate goal is a church which looks something like a mature man, who is complete. In life we are all growing until eventually our physical, mental, spiritual and emotional development has reached a fullness or completeness. In fact, no matter how long a man may live, he will never reach the end of maturing spiritually, but in the physical sense there is a point in a man's life where we can say he has reached the pinnacle of physical condition. This is what the church aims for; a time when the church will be complete, and acting like Christ, so that all parts are working, and demonstrating a true picture of Christ. It seems the whole church will never reach this point of maturity before we arrive in heaven, because of our tendency to fail in our spiritual disciplines of prayer and attention to God's word. This is also true of any local church. However any individual, or any local church, can certainly apply themselves so that they are well on their way towards this mature status in Christ.

It is important to understand the goal of our Lord Jesus Christ in saving us. It is not just to rescue us from the flames of Hell, or to get us inside the gates of heaven. His goal is to unite us together into a company of believers who find a way to serve the interests of fellow Christians, so that everyone doing their part, brings spiritual growth to the whole company. Christ's goal and work in us is one of growth, maturing, and unity, until we are considered perfect or complete, in the sense that we produce an accurate image of Himself. If we understand His goal, then we will not neglect the fellowship with other believers. It is vitally important to be gathered regular with the church, so that we can affect this purpose of spiritual development. The more time the church can spend together, pray together, teach and learn together, the greater will be the bonds of fellowship, and the spiritual maturity. It is also important to recognize that spiritual maturity is not the same as being biblically educated. There are some men who are very well equipped to know and explain God's word, but that does not necessarily mean they demonstrate maturity. Christian maturity has much more to do with Christian character, than with spiritual knowledge. Both are required, but character is the first thing mentioned in this chapter, because it is the first and most important requirement of walking worthy of the Lord.

We learned that Christ provided several different gifts to help the church reach this goal of maturity. It is therefore important for us to understand these particular gifts, and how they are applied to the church. The five gifts mentioned are men who are uniquely fitted to equip the church for its spiritual development. The apostles were men who witnessed the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and were directly sent forth by Him to make disciples and teach them. The prophets of the New Testament were those who provided us the revelations of the New Testament teachings, and who were often also apostles, such as John, Peter, and Paul. Evangelists are those individuals who have been gifted to help others win souls for Christ effectively. Pastors are those who train others to provide spiritual care to God's people, looking into their individual lives, and being available to offer spiritual help and counsel. Teachers are those who are gifted to help equip others to teach the word of God. While Evangelists, Pastors and teachers carry out their own ministry to the Lord, they are also to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. This should help us to see that distinctions between clergy and laity are not scriptural. Everyone is to be equipped to do the work of the ministry, and these gifted men are responsible, not to do all the teaching, or evangelizing, but to equip others to do the work. By this means the goals of spiritual maturity will be reached faster and more effectively.

What part are you playing in the church to serve the spiritual needs of your brothers and sisters. If you come to church just to listen to sermons, you have missed the mark of what Ephesians four is teaching us. We are all to be involved in the process of serving, teaching, evangelizing, so the church can be complete in Christ. Let us cooperate with the goals of our Lord Jesus Christ, by contributing to the maturing of the church.

"from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." Eph. 4:16

LESSON 173
Imitating God
EPHESIANS 5

In our last lesson we began the practical section of Ephesians, where we learn how to walk worthy of our calling in Christ. Chapter four focused on our Christian character and maturity, and in chapter five we shall learn more about the worthy walk, particularly about imitating God, being filled with the Spirit, and showing Christ in our marriages.

Chapter 5 continues the practical instructions to Christians found in chapter four, calling on God's dear children to be imitators of God. He explains that this means to walk in love, in the same way that our Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself for us, which was by the sacrifice of Himself. This sacrifice was something pleasing to the Lord, and described as a sweet smelling aroma. Unselfish sacrifice for the benefit of others will imitate God's heart of love and please Him.

To walk as an imitator of God, requires that we also walk in holiness, for God hates all sin. This means that sins such as fornication, uncleanness and covetousness should not be known at all among believers. This kind of behavior does not match who we are in Christ. Filthiness, foolish talking, or coarse jesting must go, being replaced by expressions of gratitude. Paul says people who practice these sins do not belong to God's kingdom. No one should be deceived into thinking God will ever approve of such behavior, for it is this very behavior that will bring God's wrath upon the world.

When we come to Christ in faith, and are born of God, we are expected to no longer join in the sins of this world. Once we did not understand the consequences of our sin, but now in Christ we have spiritual insight into God's hatred and judgment against sin. Walking as a child of light, means to walk in full agreement, by faith, with God's word as true, knowing sinners will be judged for their wickedness. Our desire as Christians should be for all goodness, righteousness and truth, as we discover what is acceptable to the Lord. Christians are not only to stay away from sinful conduct, but even avoid any association with such behavior. Christians do not want to give any appearance of agreeing with sin, but rather should expose sin as wickedness. Even the mention of some sin done in secret can be shameful. This should teach us that to walk in holiness requires that we guard ourselves from speaking about things that are disgusting, revulsive, and wicked. Some things are better left unspoken, for they do not edify. Walking in light means to be spiritually awake to the truths of God's word, and live accordingly. The effect of walking as a child of light is that the light penetrates the darkness exposing the sinful conduct that is trying to hide there. This provides greater opportunity for the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction and repentance for those whose sin is exposed.

There is a proper way for Christians to walk, in wisdom, and using our time for doing good, in an evil world. We are to know God's will, not following the drunkenness of the world, but rather being filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, does not mean getting more of the Holy Spirit, but rather allowing Him to have full control of our lives, attitudes and actions. This will produce a spiritual mind, that loves sharing God's word, singing with joy to the Lord, and giving thanks to God. Being filled with the Holy Spirit will also involve submission to one another. This reflects back to the beginning of chapter four, where we were told to walk in all lowliness. Without lowliness, there can be no submission, or unity. The Holy Spirit's work in our lives, will promote spiritual knowledge, joy, gratitude, and unity through humility.

The next great subject of this chapter is that of Christian marriage and the respective responsibilities of the wife and husband. Paul begins with instructions for the wife, and says she should submit to her husband as to the Lord. Some women may find it difficult to submit to their husbands, when the husband is acting roughly toward them, and rules their home with force rather than with love and kindness. But the wife is to fulfill her responsibilities not because her husband is good and kind. She looks to her husband, as Christians look to the Lord as their guide and provider. It is certainly challenging, but when a godly woman submits to her husband's authority, God will be glorified. Her submission to him may change the man's heart, so that he will love her more, and appreciate her more.

The husband's role is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for her. When we consider the love of the Lord Jesus for the church, we see that the husband's calling is much higher than that of his wife, for he must be willing to sacrifice himself for her. His role is one of love, giving, providing, and sacrifice, and hers is to respect and submit. If each in the marriage follow their respective roles in Christ, then we can be sure that the marriage will be joyful for both of them, and set forth a beautiful picture of Christ's love for His people. God uses marriage for this purpose, and so every Christian marriage should be striving to meet these very high goals in their marriage.

Jesus plan for the church is to purify her that she maybe presented glorious, and without blemish. Husbands ought to love their wives as their own flesh, as this is for their own good. Hating or mistreating your marriage partner is the same as hating yourself. Just as the Lord intends only good for those who belong to Him, the husband should desire only good for his wife, for she is part of him, and they are joined as one flesh. Herein lies a great mystery, that Christ is joined to the church in the same manner as a husband is joined to his wife, making them one flesh. Christ is the head and we are His body, eternally bound together as one flesh. Thus husbands are to love their wives, and wives respect their husbands.

In this chapter we learned to imitate God, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and reflect Christ's love through our marriages. This shows us how our worthy walk is intimately connected with our triune God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Our union to God begins with a relationship to Christ through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. He is the greatest lover of all, and we ought to love Him also. Trust in Him today to save your soul, and be joined to Him forever.

"therefore be imitators of god as dear children." Eph. 5:1

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that walking worthy of Christ, means to imitate God, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and reflect the love and obedience of Christ in our marriage relationships. Someone might ask the question, "How can I be filled by the Holy Spirit?"

There has been much confusion among Christians about the filling of the Holy Spirit. Some are teaching that a Christian should pray for the 2nd blessing, an anointing of the Holy Spirit, or baptism of the Spirit. They believe that when this happens that a believer may receive special spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues. This is an unfortunate understanding, and very widespread in churches today. The baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place only once, at the time when a Christian trusts in Jesus as His Savior. At that moment the believer is immersed into the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit comes to abide within the believer. We do not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit living within us in the same way that we feel a stomach ache because we ate some bad food. The Holy Spirit's presence is known by the way He leads us and causes us to behave. As we fill up on God's word, the Holy Spirit fills up our heart with the glories of Christ, and that brings a generous, joyful, and thankful spirit. It is also a mark of the Holy Spirit's presence when humility is exhibited in the life of the believer, and a love for God's people. Being filled with the Spirit then has to do with an attitude and conduct that are fully under the His guidance and influence.

The comparison given to us in this chapter, is that of being drunk with wine. When a person drinks wine it affects their walk, their speech, their mood, and their conduct, and all in a negative way. The Spirit does exactly the opposite. Whereas a drunk person's speech is slurred, the person controlled by the Holy Spirit has a clear voice and godly speech. A drunk person will stumble when trying to walk, but the spirit-filled believer walks correctly before the Lord. A drunk man may be in a violent mood, or in a cheerful mood, but this is not his normal character. When filled with the Holy Spirit the person's spirit is affected in the most positive way to be humble, joyful, grateful, genuine, and sincere. Also a drunkard will often behave poorly, making a fool of himself, or hurting and embarrassing others. Those filled with the spirit act in the most godly and dignified way, that causes all to see the work of God in their lives.

Now that we have considered the nature of being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can answer our question about How to be filled. This does not happen automatically, or by some earnest pleading with God in prayer. There is not some magical formula. It is not reserved for only the spiritually mature. Potentially all believers can be filled with the Holy Spirit. To have the Spirit engulf my whole life and being, and control my thinking I must immerse myself in God's word. My mind and heart must be consumed with knowing God, and drawing near to Him, without distractions. This kind of dedication is often seen in professional athletes, who are entirely consumed with being the best at their sport. Their every waking breath is dedicated to one goal, and that is to perfect their skills, study their discipline, noting how the best perform and why they succeed. The Christian who wants to be filled with the Spirit, must be consumed by God's love, driven with singular devotion to hearing and obeying God's voice. This motivation is strengthened by spending time in God's word. The bible should become part of our being, until we can quote it freely, apply it to our varied situations, understand it, and enjoy it more and more. As we grow in our appreciation of God's word, and it captures our daily interest and attention, we shall find that when we are talking, we talk about God's word, helping others to see and understand it. We will feel its' convicting power as we recognize things in our life that are not in agreement with God's holy standards. We will also fall in love with spiritual activities such as prayer, fellowship, worship, and hearing others teach the word of God. When we seriously take hold of God's word, we shall find that God's word will take hold of us, and without even realizing it, we shall be filled with the Holy Spirit. There is a close relationship between let God's word dwell in us richly (Col 3:16), and being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). If we look at these two bible texts, we will notice that being filled with the Spirit, or letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly, has almost identical results, producing a desire to communicate God's truth, singing unto the Lord, and a grateful spirit. Since the two results are virtually identical, it stands to reason that both of these things, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and Christ's words dwelling richly in us, are in essence the same. The Spirit is not the word, but the two are so closely related that to be filled with one, suggests being filled with the other also. We must remember this does not mean just a knowledge of the bible. Someone might know the bible well, but that does not mean they are a Christian, or controlled by the Holy Spirit. When we consider what it means to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, it suggests to us that this is not merely an intimate knowledge of what the bible says, but an intimacy with the one of whom the scriptures speak, namely our Lord Jesus Christ.

"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the lord." Col 3:16

LESSON 174
Spiritual Relationships
EPHESIANS 6

In our last lesson we learned how each member of the triune God is involved with our Christian walk, for we are to be imitators of God, Filled with the Spirit, and follow Christ's example in our marriage relationships. Today we will continue to learn about walking worthy of our calling through our spiritual relationships.

In this chapter we will find several spiritual relationships mentioned. When we say spiritual relationship, what we mean is how a Christian, that is walking by the Holy Spirit, relates to others. The first relationship mentioned in how children are to relate spiritually to their parents. Christian children are expected to obey their parents, and give them honor. Of course, this is true of every child, not just Christians, but those children who are being raised in a Christian home must learn that God desires for them is to be obedient to their parents. The promise of scripture is that those who honor and obey their parents, will live long on the earth.

The next relationship is that of a Christian father to his children. He is not to abuse his children so that they lose heart and become discouraged, but he is to train them through the word of God. He also mentions servants. This could be applied to slaves, which was a common status in the Roman world to which Paul was writing. It could also be applied to any servant, which includes just about all of us, in our various occupations, for we all answer to some human authority or boss. The servant is to also show obedience to his boss or master. He mentions that a servant should not just obey when being watched, but do his work so as to please the Lord in all that he does. Our work as Christians is for the Lord, and so we ought to honor Him in it. Masters or bosses are not to take advantage of those under their authority by mistreating them. They should remember that they too have a master in heaven, and he does not show favoritism. These various relationships could be broadly applied to each of us, for we all have authorities in our lives, whether parents, bosses, teachers, church leaders, that we are expected to be obedient to. Human authority is never perfect, but that does not excuse us from obeying all the authorities in our life. The only case where we may be forced to not obey an authority, is when that authority calls upon us to do something in direct disobedience to the word of God. For instance if my boss at work ask me lie about something, then I must politely refuse to comply with his request, because lying is a sin before God. We all have spiritual responsibilities to those under our authority, or those who are above us in authority. Our Lord expects us to relate properly to all authority, if we are to walk worthy of our calling in Christ.

Paul will now speak about our spiritual relationship to the Devil. He is our opponent, and always seeking our harm, and therefore we need to prepare ourselves for spiritual battles with Satan. Paul describes several facets of Roman armor to draw spiritual lessons about how to prepare and protect ourselves from our enemy. The Devil is much more powerful than we are, and our only strength against Him, is the greater power of God, which works on our behalf, as we are God's beloved children. This is spiritual power to fight against spiritual forces. In order for us to take advantage of God's power to protect us, we need to cooperate with the Lord in several areas of our spiritual life. Thus we need to put on the whole armor which God provides. We are to be surrounded with the belt of truth. This means we should let God's word be a constant influence in our lives, surrounding us on every side. We also need the breastplate of righteousness. It is not enough to hear God's word daily, we also need to obey the word of God, if we want God's protecting hand upon us. Our feet are to be prepared for moving out into the world to share the gospel. If our minds are not interested in the salvation of souls, and our mind is distracted from God's purposes, then the Devil will be glad to sidetrack us with all kinds of entertainment, and useless worldly pursuits. The shield of the Christian is his faith. He overcomes the world, and Satan, when He believes God's word and acts according to it. The helmet of salvation is there to protect us from the world's way of thinking, by taking God's word and allowing it to shape our thoughts, attitudes and actions. And finally we also need the sword of the Spirit, that is God's word, and use it wisely so the Spirit of God can do His work of conviction in our lives, and through us for the sake of others.

Perhaps our greatest weapon of all is prayer. We are to pray always by the leading of the Spirit of God. Prayer requires a spiritual attentiveness, and perseverance, if we are to be of help to the church. Satan is always ready to pounce on a weak believer, but we can win the battles against him, through persistent prayer for God's people. Paul valued prayer very much, and was not ashamed to ask the Christians to pray for him and for his labors for the Lord. He wanted, through the help of their prayers, to be able to speak boldly, and make everyone learn of God's revelation of the gospel. He was God's ambassador, but locked up with chains in a prison cell. This does not deter his spiritual vision and determination to send out the message of hope to all. Paul wanted, and felt a great need for, the prayers of the Christians. He understood that to overcome spiritual battles, prayer would be his greatest and strongest ally.

Paul ends this letter to the Ephesians by speaking of Tychicus, a beloved brother and servant of the Lord, who would come to Ephesus to report about Paul and how he was doing. Paul's purpose was not only to let them know of himself, but also so that he could comfort their hearts. Likely it was Tychicus who carried this sacred text of scripture to Ephesus for their spiritual blessing. What wonder must have filled their hearts as they read this letter for the first time, and began to see all the great spiritual blessings that belong to them in Christ. How they must have marveled at the greatness of God's love, and His plans to make us His own eternal dwelling place. As we finish today's lesson, and our study of Ephesians, I think we should think carefully about how great God is to provide us the revelation of the

gospel, so that we became His children, and will with Him forever in heaven. God sent His Son into the world to die for our sins; He sent forth His word to bring the light of salvation to us; and He sends forth the Holy Spirit to teach and convict us, so that we understand and know our need for a Savior. Then He calls us to believe in Christ. I hope you have chosen to place your trust in Jesus as your Savior, and if you are a Christian, I hope these studies have helped to inspire you to walk worthy of your calling in Christ.

"finally, my brethren, be strong in the lord and in the power of his might." Eph. 6:10

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the responsibilities we all have as Christians in our spiritual relationships. Children obeying, Fathers teaching, servants serving with sincerity, masters acting gently, and all Christians preparing themselves for the spiritual battles they must face. Someone might ask the question, "How do Christians go about battling spiritual forces?"

In today's chapter we have learned about the Christian armor, and how every believer is to prepare for spiritual battles. The Devil is our enemy and seeks our destruction, and we must be prepared to stand against his attacks. The Lord has graciously provided us the strength and power to overcome our enemy. We must be wise then in taking hold of those things that the Lord has provided for our protection, and for winning the battle against our enemy. We use the armor of God to protect us from the powers of darkness.

Today many in the church are seeking to engage Satan in battle. They try to rebuke Satan with their chanting prayers, as though they somehow wield the Holy Spirit's power by their earnest appeals in prayer. We must be very careful that we are not trying to take on Satan in the power of the flesh. Satan will laugh with glee at those poor deluded souls who think they are somehow invoking powers against him through their deceptive showmanship. Defeating Satan is not something that can be staged for the camera's, and applause of the preacher. Satan is our most formidable foe, and we need to take very seriously his power to do us harm. For those who are busy putting on a spiritual show, Satan will be glad to oblige, and even provide some evidence of his power, so that deceived souls can continue in their darkness. Satan is the father of lies, and many that claim to be guardians of the truth, are nothing more pawns in the hand of Satan to deceive the masses. When we take Satan's power seriously we will not try to do battle with him ourselves, but rather plead with the Lord for His intervention. The Lord is the only one strong enough to overcome Satan and his schemes. This is why we must pray, not as though we had authority to cast out Satan, or bind Satan, but our Lord Jesus has the power both to bind or cast out Satan, for Satan is no match for God's greater power.

It is vitally important that all Christians learn how to stand against the Devil. The references to the armor of God are very instructive, teaching us how to prepare for battle and be good soldiers for our Lord Jesus Christ. While the soldier of Ephesians 6 has plenty of armor to protect him, we notice that most of his armor is protective. His breastplate, shield, helmet, belt and boots, are all for his protection to keep him away from the devil's artillery. It is only the sword that is used for attacking the enemy. We see how Jesus used the sword of the word of God to battle with Satan, when he was tempted in the wilderness. The protective armor speaks to us of prayer, service, holiness, and fellowship. When we are walking worthy of the Lord, we will give attention to all of these spiritual activities, and that will give us strength, and protect us from our enemy. These spiritual activities are normally practiced weekly by Christians, and for some daily. It is important to attend a church fellowship regularly, where we can pray with believers, serve the Lord, be accountable for our Christian life, and where we enjoy fellowship with other believers. As Christians meet and do these things, their spiritual life is nourished, and they are guarded from Satan. Buffalo have a very interesting and illustrative example of how they protect their young. If they sense a wolf, or other predator nearby, they will form a circle with all the adult buffalo, and their young ones inside that circle. By this means the small ones are protected from the attack of the enemy. This principle can be applied to Christians as well, for when Christians gather together it is the mature ones who will watch over those who are younger in the faith, encircling them with prayer, and teaching from God's word, to protect them from the enemy's attack.

While battling Satan, remember our position is not to attack him, but to defend ourselves against his attack, and this happens through the spiritual weapon of prayer. We pray for God's protecting hand, and say, "deliver us from evil", as the Lord has taught us to pray. We are to flee from the devil, and not allow him any foothold. This is done by constant attention and participation in the spiritual life of the local church. Meeting with fellow believers for prayer, study of God's word, and fellowship is a vital way to protect ourselves from Satan's attack. When we do feel Satan coming after us, that is when we draw the sword of the spirit, and quote scripture. This is why it is important to know God's word, and memorize it. There will be times when we have to draw on our memory of certain verses in the bible to help us face temptations, and the enticement of Satan.

"then Jesus said to him, 'away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'you shall worship the LORD your god, and him only you shall serve.'" Matt 4:10

LESSONS IN PHILIPPIANS

Inscription of statue: "Folge Mir Nach" – Follow Me



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"LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO, BEING IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT CONSIDER IT ROBBERY TO BE EQUAL WITH GOD, BUT MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION, TAKING THE FORM OF A BONDSERVANT, AND COMING IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN. AND BEING FOUND IN APPEARANCE AS A MAN, HE HUMBLING HIMSELF AND BECAME OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS."

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

LESSON 175
Suffering for the gospel
PHILIPPIANS 1

Today we start a new study in the book of Philippians. This book is a joyful letter sent by Paul to the Christians at Philippi thanking them for their fellowship in the gospel. He also encourages the believers by telling them that his present circumstances were working out for the furtherance of the gospel. Philippians will not only encourage our spiritual joy, but should also foster a sincere and humble service for our Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter one Paul introduces this letter, along with Timothy his companion in the gospel, by greeting the saints, bishops, and deacons. These are the three groups that make up a local church. You do not hear about the pastor and congregation. The church is made up of all the Christians, the saints. The bishops are mature in Christ, and nurture the church with the word, and provide spiritual leadership. The word "Bishops" is an unfortunate translation, because of the abuse of this title in the church. The word is better translated as "Elders", those responsible for the spiritual care of the local assembly. The "Deacons" practically serve the church, assisting the elders in carrying out their work.

Paul begins by speaking of his joy and prayers for the Philippians. Every time he thought of them he would have reason to thank God and rejoice. This was due to their fellowship in the gospel from the first time they met Paul, when he came to Philippi with the gospel, and they were saved. They had always shown themselves supportive of Paul, and his labors for the gospel, and so Paul was deeply encouraged by them. In fact Paul has such confidence that these sincere believers would be used by God, and God's work in them would continue until the day of Christ.

Paul's great affection for these believers is expressed through his prayer for them, where he asks that their love would increase more and more with knowledge and judgment. He asks that they would learn to approve excellent things, be sincere without offense, and be filled with the fruits of righteousness. This is a wonderful prayer, and we could all benefit from learning to act upon these principles. Love ought to always be on the increase in our Christian lives, as well as discernment, and pursuing excellent things. We ought to see the results of righteous living also increasing and abounding. As we increase in love, spiritual discernment, and good works, God is glorified in us.

The remainder of this chapter deals with Paul's personal circumstances in Rome, where he was in prison for the sake of the gospel. This may have been causing concern to his Christian friends at Philippi. He wanted to assure them that, though his circumstances did not look very comfortable or favorable, yet God was using his afflictions for the furtherance of the gospel. Rather than being discouraged by his personal hardships and persecution, Paul saw a greater purpose being fulfilled by God. The advancement of the gospel meant more to Paul than his own comfort or safety. He also wants them to understand, that due to his persecutions, some brethren were more bold to speak the gospel. This caused him joy. Even when some were preaching Christ for wrong motives, he could still find joy because the gospel message was getting out for others to hear. This is a wonderful attitude, and something we should also learn to adopt in our own Christian lives, namely that we can rejoice in the good things that God is doing, and not worry and complain about situations that we have little control over anyway. Paul looked at the positive outcome of the circumstances, and used that for his personal encouragement and joy. How easily we could become discouraged, when we look at the failures of men, bad attitudes, and sinful behavior. However we can find joy by considering the good things that are being done by God in spite of the folly and rebellion of sinful men.

The gospel was moving even into the palace in Rome, which meant the highest authorities in the Roman empire were being exposed to the gospel message. This meant that the gospel could potentially reach a much wider audience. As Paul thought of the possibilities his heart rejoiced. Though Paul was in prison for the sake of the gospel, he felt confident that he would be delivered through the faithful prayers of the saints. His deliverance may not have meant from prison or death, but from fear or shame, for he desired above all things that Christ would be magnified in his life, whether through life or death. His sole ambition was to live for Christ, and if he died, that could only be his gain. He said he was torn between the desire to go home to heaven and be with Christ, or staying to help his Christian friends. He knows, as he writes this letter, that his journey on earth is not yet complete, and that God will preserve him a while longer, so that he can help teach and nurture the church for greater faith and joy. He knows that when he does visit them it will bring much joy to their hearts. He therefore exhorts the Christians at Philippi to make sure they always behave in a manner that agrees with the gospel. This meant unity in spirit and mind, and laboring together for the gospel. He said they did not need to fear their enemies. Their bold faith and confidence would prove their salvation, and convict their enemies of their own impending judgment. Paul reminds his readers that Christians are called to suffer on behalf of Christ, just as he was also suffering.

As we listen to Paul speak to his beloved Christian friends about his personal circumstances, we can learn such important lessons about how to behave in a way that pleases the Lord. We must ensure that the gospel is more important than our own personal comfort or circumstances. It is okay if we have to suffer so that the gospel can reach others. We also need to remember that all of our conduct is to agree with the gospel message. Everything we do, and every word we speak, ought to help people to see the gospel message at work in our own lives. When we always act consistently with the gospel we profess, then others will also be convinced that our gospel is more than just words to live by, but a completely new life, with new desires, a new master, and a new future. We can learn to find joy no matter what circumstances come our way. This is because we know, and are assured, that Christ is our

Lord and Savior, and that He will bring us safely to heaven, because we have placed our trust in Him. I hope you also have this hope, and if not, why not trust in Jesus today, asking Him to forgive, cleanse and make you new.

"but I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." Phil 1:12

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned how Paul could rejoice that Christ was being preached more and more because of his own persecutions as a Christian. He even rejoiced when men preached Christ from an insincere heart, trying to afflict him. Someone might ask the question, "What things should motivate men to preach the gospel?"

We can certainly learn from Paul the correct attitude for preaching the gospel to others. Paul was very sincere and passionate in his preaching because he realized that Jesus Christ was the only answer to man's greatest need for salvation. He knew that apart from faith in Jesus Christ, it did not matter what religion men practiced, or how good they behaved, they could never reach heaven or possess eternal life. The judgment that awaits the unrepentant sinner is eternal torture in the flames of Hell. Paul felt deep compassion for those who, as yet, were on their way to God's judgment in Hell. Paul also felt a deep sense of gratitude, and therefore an obligation to preach the gospel to others. This was because of the grace of God shown to himself. When he was an enemy of Christ, and persecuting the church, God should have judged him and condemned him, but instead, he confronted him with the truth of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, and only Savior of men. Paul immediately bowed to Jesus as Lord, surrendering his life and will to Jesus. This remarkable transformation in Paul's life changed him, and made him a dedicated servant of Jesus. He preached with his whole heart, because he knew the matter was of grave importance, and out of sincere gratitude and a sense of obligation for the grace of God.

Having seen the correct motive to preach the gospel in Paul, it is also important for us to recognize that so often men who preach are not motivated as Paul was. Instead of sincerity, they are motivated by money. We are reminded of Jesus words which say, "you cannot serve God and money, for you will love the one and hate the other". Yet what we see today in so many churches is a love of money and prosperity. Men who preach are constantly pleading for their congregations to give more. They are clever enough to mask their greed, by telling everyone it is for the work of God, and for the ministry, or to feed hungry children. They may even support some good works, but so often these evil imposters are lining their pockets from their greedy pillaging of the church. When money becomes a major topic in the preacher's message, you can be sure that his motives are not pure. A man of God is concerned with pleasing Christ, and caring for God's people by feeding them the word of God. Often a sincere servant of the Lord will make much personal sacrifice to also assist others in practical ways, as the Lord enables him to do so. Preaching is not about getting rich, it is about suffering for Christ and for his people, so that they can be rich spiritually. The prosperity gospel that is so widely preached today, is simply a front for these greedy preachers to make their money, and live in luxury, while justifying their extravagant living to their gullible adherents.

It may not only be money that motivates men to preach, for some enjoy the fame and reputation that comes along with being considered a man of God. In a culture that highly esteems preachers and pastors, it is not surprising to hear young people say they aspire to be a pastor. But notice carefully the words a person uses when expressing their personal desires to be God's servant. Some will speak of wanting to be a "Pastor", for that will give them money and prestige. On the other hand if someone says, I want to teach the word of God, and help people to know and follow Christ, then we can see their motives are aligned with God's purpose, and not simply for personal ambition. There are many street corner preachers, who always have a box to collect money. Their message might be biblical, and even helpful, but we may realize this is how they make their living, and therefore their motives come into question as soon as we hear them begging for support. Of course, it does cost money to setup a church building, buy a PA system, and feed God's messenger, but if the motivating factor is simply to employ someone and feed them, then the word of God is compromised. A man of God is expected to live by faith, and trust the Lord for his support, with no need to beg men for money. If God calls a man to preach He is well able to supply that man his basic needs, without any need for begging others to give to him, or to his ministry. Today we see far too many using the word of God as a means to rob people of their meager resources. We all need to be good, and careful, stewards of the money that God entrusts to us by carefully considering whom, or what, we are supporting before we give.

Paul was in prison, and willing to give his life for the sake of preaching the gospel. He was often hungry and suffered beatings and persecution. He was not trying to get rich, but was trying to help his fellow men find and follow Jesus Christ as their only hope for heaven.

"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise." Rom 1:14

LESSON 176
Setting an Example for the gospel
PHILIPPIANS 2

Our Last lesson was an introduction to Philippians, and we learned how Paul rejoiced that the gospel message was spreading further due to his own personal imprisonment. His care and love for the Philippians was evident, as he expressed his prayers for their spiritual development, and exhorted them to live consistently with the gospel. Today we move onto the 2nd chapter where we shall learn from the examples of Christ, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Philippians is such a great letter of joy and encouragement. Much of our joy comes from learning how to live for Christ through the examples that God provides for us. The greatest example of all is our Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled himself, even to death on a cross. While the cross provides us with such a wealth of spiritual blessings, here in Philippians chapter 2, the cross is set forth to teach us the humility of our Lord Jesus, and how this attitude of mind should characterize all of God's children. We are not to be selfish or proud, but rather work together with one heart, remembering all the comfort and fellowship we enjoy in Christ. We are to consider others better than ourselves, and care about them. This will emulate the mind and character of Christ. God gave the highest honor to Jesus, so that everyone will bow to Him as Lord one day. The principle taught here is that when we follow Jesus path of humility, we can also expect to enjoy fellowship in his exaltation in heaven some day.

The Philippians had always been careful to follow God's instructions through Paul while he was with them. Now that they were apart, Paul wants them to be all the more diligent in their spiritual lives. They should recognize how God is working in them to give them the desire to do what is right and pleasing to the Lord. Thus they should not argue and complain, so that others will speak badly about them. Living clean and pure lives as God's children in a dark world full of perverse people, letting the light of Christ shine through them. They need to hold onto God's word tightly, so that Paul will have reason to boast in them when in the presence of Christ, and not find his work among them was vain. Paul says he would be happy to give his life sacrificially for their spiritual good, and that they could find joy in this also. Here we see Paul's willingness to follow the example of Jesus in giving himself selflessly for the spiritual good of others. Next he mentions Timothy, his son in the faith and companion in the gospel. He wanted to send Timothy to Philippi to learn how they were doing. He reminds them about Timothy's attitude, which was unlike any other of Paul's companions. Timothy cared for the Philippians as no one else would do. Most people think about themselves, and not the things that concern Jesus Christ. This sad note is still very much true today, for most of us would have to admit that we tend towards selfishness. We give more interest to our own desires than serving our Lord Jesus. Timothy had served with Paul, as a son works with his father, showing diligence, respect, and faithfulness. Though Paul was sending Timothy ahead to visit the Philippians, he also was hoping to come and see them, when he was released from prison. Timothy also proves to be a good example for us to follow because of his unique dedication to the Christians at Philippi. Sometimes doing what God wants us to do, is not something anyone else cares about or thinks is important. It become difficult to apply ourselves to a work, when we feel alone in our purpose. Thankfully Timothy had Paul as an example to follow, and as a mentor to encourage him in his service for Christ. We all need good mentors to disciple us, and encourage us to be faithful for Christ.

The last example mentioned to us in this chapter is a man by the name of Epaphroditus. This man is called a true brother, faithful worker, and a courageous soldier. Paul had the greatest respect for this man, who traveled from Philippi to Paul in a Rome, to deliver him a financial gift from the Philippians. The journey was long, perhaps taking weeks, or even months, and filled with potential dangers to his health and safety. In fact, in the course of bringing this gift to Paul, Epaphroditus fell sick, and had almost died while he was with Paul at Rome. But fortunately, through the mercy of God, he recovered. Paul was so grateful to have Epaphroditus spared from death as this would have brought great sorrow to this dear servant of God. Paul says that the Philippians should respect men like Epaphroditus, because for the sake of the gospel he risked his life and was near to death. This shows how important the gospel was to Epaphroditus, and how important he thought it was to travel to Paul and support him in his labors. Paul may have been the greatest admirer of Epaphroditus, because he himself knew what it was to daily risk his life for the sake of the gospel. These men stand forth as examples to us of how we are to live and please the Lord. When we take our time, resources, and our lives, and place them at the service and disposal of our Lord, He will be glorified in us.

Paul commented that Epaphroditus had supplied to him, what was lacking from their service. What Paul was saying was that Epaphroditus had stood in their place to complete their service to Paul. The gift sent was carried by the hand of Epaphroditus at great risk to himself. It was he, and not another, who made the trip, met with Paul, and comforted him in his prison cell. The work of the Lord is something we may all share in, but recognize that there are some whose service supplies what is lacking in our own. Each Sunday someone must come and prepare the meeting place, perhaps sweeping the floor, or setting out chairs. The deacons may look after the finances for the church, the elders preach the word, and some faithful souls visit the sick and discouraged. Each work done by others is supplying what is lacking in your own service for Christ. We should be so grateful to those who take up the cause of Christ, and take care of all those tasks that you and I are not able to do, or are unavailable to do. If you have every played a team sport you will know that all team members must cooperate and do their individual parts in order to achieve success. Spiritually also the church should recognize that each one must do their part in serving in the body of Christ, so that no one is overburdened, while others sit and do nothing. I suppose we shall always find, that in any group of

believers, there will always be those who are more dedicated, applying themselves diligently and sacrificially to God's work, while others are too busy with their own affairs. But let us learn from these examples, in this chapter, to place others ahead of ourselves, and God's work as the supreme priority in our lives.

"that you may become blameless and harmless, children of god without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." Phil 2:15

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned from the examples of Christ, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus. We learned that humility is essential for having the mind of Christ, and also that sacrificial service in the church should be a shared responsibility. Someone might ask the question, "How does a person work out their own salvation?"

Though we did not make mention of this in our lesson today, it is a command given in this chapter, for believers to work out their own salvation. In context, Paul is talking about the obedient path of the believers, and just finished speaking of following the example of Christ in his humility. Clearly it is important for Christians to learn the character of Christ, and submit under His authority, so that we can be of one mind, sharing the love of Christ with our fellow believers. This may be primarily what Paul had in mind when calling the Christians to work out their own salvation. We might paraphrase it this way, "since you have been saved by God's grace, and Christ has displayed a character and pattern for you to follow, you should now also do what agrees with God's plan in saving you, namely walking in humility, and promoting unity and love in the church". To support this view, we would add that the following verse says, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure". **God in us**, is a reference to the Holy Spirit, who lives within believers and works in us by promoting the character of Christ, namely the fruit of the Spirit. There were those in Philippi who may have been involved in some contention, as is hinted at by the instruction given to Euodia and Syntyche in Phil 4:2. Perhaps this instruction was given in response to the mindset and behavior of these two believers who were not getting along. Whether this is the case or not, we can still take instruction from the scripture here, and ensure that our Christian conduct is such that we strive to maintain peace, and promote harmony among the church.

The idea of working out our own salvation, should not be taken to mean, that we have to work for the salvation of our souls. This would deny the basic truth of the gospel, that we are saved by grace apart from our works. Here the instruction is not to work towards salvation, but to work it out. That is, what has already been granted to us from God, will take a positive active response from ourselves. We are not only to receive the free gift of eternal life, but thereafter, we are to comply with God's call to be holy people. Being a Christian, does not simply mean that I have been given a free pass to enter heaven. Salvation also means that God wants to change me, and help me to overcome temptation, saying no to sin. God wants us to live in righteousness, serve Him by sharing the gospel with others, and building up the church. As we contribute to the life of the church, grow in righteousness, mature in faith, and develop a Christ-like character, we are working out our salvation.

While salvation is not something we work to acquire, it is certainly something that requires some investment and work once it has been freely given to us. Let us think of it this way; it is as though God gives us all the building materials to build a house, and the means and strength to accomplish the task. Of course the house can't build itself, we must put our own effort in and use the materials according to the plans. The foundation must be laid, the walls built, then the roof, and so on until the job is finished according to the design. This is what God's gift of salvation is like. He provides us with His design in the word of God, and gives us power by the Spirit of God. Now we must cooperate by going to work, and building up our Christianity, until we have worked out all that God intended for us.

Here are some ideas about how you and I can work out our salvation in practical terms. Since God desires that we grow in character, then we must apply ourselves diligently to the study of the character of Christ in the scriptures. As we do so, the Spirit of God will steadily transform our own character to be more and more a reflection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus a daily devotional life, where we read and meditate in God's word, is essential to our spiritual development, and working out our salvation. Another thing we can do is to ensure that we join ourselves to a local church, where the word of God is faithfully taught and practiced. Our Christian lives were never intended to be lived independent of the spiritual fellowship provided by belonging to a local assembly of believers. Many Christians view church as a place to visit when it is convenient for them, rather than a body to which they belong and contribute. Find a place in your church to serve the body of Christ. Even if it is a small task. If nothing is offered to you, that does not mean that anyone will stop you from contributing to the church, as the New Testament instructs. If you can find someone to teach and encourage, then you should try to do so. Perhaps you can help those who are poor, or sponsor some needy child for their school expenses. Whatever we decide to do, we should all find means and ways to work out our own salvation with reverence.

"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." 2Cor 5:15

LESSON 177
Apprehending Christ
PHILIPPIANS 3

In our last lesson we learned from the examples of the Lord Jesus, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus, the importance of Christian character, unity, love, and service in the church. Today Paul will use his own example, of turning away from the religion he grew up with, to knowing and apprehending Christ, as a pattern for believers to follow.

Paul's writing to the Philippians was to encourage their joy in the Lord, and He knew that they would benefit to hear from him. He warns them against false teachers, which he describes as, dogs, evil workers, and mutilation. Because the false teachers were promoting the idea that Christians needed to be circumcised to be saved. Paul uses these harsh descriptions to show how wicked and dangerous their doctrine was. He said that true believers were the true circumcision, because they understood that the flesh profits nothing, and outward rituals are meaningless without the true meaning in their hearts.

Paul now uses his own example in life to prove his point that the flesh counts for nothing. He speaks of his past confidence in the flesh, for he was circumcised according to the Law, a true Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Hebrew, familiar with the language, customs, and religion of his people. He was a Pharisee, which meant he belonged to a strict sect of the Jews, and was very well taught in the Old Testament scriptures. He had a zeal that led him to resist those he believed belonged to a false religion. As far as keeping the Law he was blameless. This does not mean he never sinned, but his conscience was clear in that he had done all that the Law required of him. After listing his impressive credentials, Paul said he counted it all as filthy rubbish in comparison to Christ. He counted any competing idea, philosophy, or religion to be nothing when compared to the excellence of knowing Christ as Lord. He had suffered the loss of all his religious attainments, and likely many friendships and opportunities for advancement. These mattered nothing to him because He had Christ, and had found a righteousness that did not come from keeping God's Law, but was given to him through faith in Jesus Christ.

He gave up all for following Christ in faith, and wanted to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. He desired to know the fellowship of His sufferings, so that he could be like his master, dying to all the world's appeal, being willing to give his life if necessary for the sake of the gospel. He hoped to attain to the resurrection from the dead. This does not mean he doubted that he would one day be resurrected, for he plainly states his confidence in resurrection in other places. What he meant was to live such a life, like Christ, that if he should be called to give his life in sacrifice, as Christ did, he would in some measure be made more worthy of sharing in Christ's resurrection. He points out that while he seeks this mature conformity to Christ, he does not consider himself to have reached that goal. He was pressing forward, forgetting his past, and seeking by all means to know Christ, and fulfill all that Christ intended when He saved his soul. He said he was pressing towards this goal, similar to someone running a race and looking for the prize or trophy. He saw himself being called upwards to heaven and glory to be with Christ, which was the greatest prize of all. On the way he knew that he had so much to learn and experience to be all that God intended, and to emulate the love and goodness of His Lord.

Paul having set out his own desire to apprehend Christ, says that all mature believers should adopt the same mind. If anyone was thinking differently, Paul assures them that God would reveal this principle to them. This is a gracious way of instructing the believers, who were undoubtedly all at different stages of Christian maturity. While some would be well prepared to adopt the same mind as Paul, and offer their lives unreservedly to Christ to become more like Him in suffering; there would also be some who were not yet at this stage of Christian maturity. Paul assures that the younger in faith will eventually be given understanding from God, that this is the pursuit that they all need to adopt in their Christian lives. Paul says that they could follow his own example, even as he followed Christ. It shows his wisdom and humility by adding that his example was only as good, as his own willingness to obey and follow Christ himself. We ought to remember this when seeking to learn from others, or follow their example. Any man will always have limitations, and will not in every point be perfect before God. The thoughtful believer will learn all he can from a mature Christian, but also recognize that in some instances, they will not prove to be the best example.

Paul also warns them not to follow the false teachers. He had warned them passionately in the past about these imposters, who are enemies of the cross, who are only interested in feeding their bellies, and glory in their shame. These will be judged with destruction because their mind was set on earthly things, and not heavenly things. When men preach about getting wealthy and having a comfortable life, and live in luxury, they are fixing their minds on earthly things. Those who are most interested in their own wealth and fame, show that their god is their belly.

By contrast Paul speaks of the Christians whose citizenship is heaven, from where we look for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians are those who are heavenly minded, not earthly minded. Christians are looking forward to being with Christ, anticipating that his coming soon to bring us to heaven. Paul reveals something very wonderful about our future hope in Christ. He says that He will transform our bodies, so that they are made like his glorious body. He will do this through his own power, a power by which He has everything under His control. The assurance of a glorified, eternal body like our Lord Jesus should thrill our hearts, and keep us thinking about our great future in heaven. If you would like to share in this great promise from God and have a new and glorified body, you must first receive Jesus by faith as your Savior. Acknowledge to Him your sin, and ask Him to forgive you, and He will save you

soul. The Christian is not promised comfort and ease in this world, but rather suffering. By faith the believer looks to heaven where he will receive rewards and glory, and eternal fellowship with the Son of God.

"yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Phil 3:8

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned from Paul's personal religious experience that no matter how great our position in life is, or how devoted we are to religion, it is worth nothing at all when compared with the excellency of knowing Christ Jesus as our Lord. We also learned that our hearts should be set on apprehending Christ, maturing in our faith, with our hope fixed on heaven and not this world. Someone might ask the question, "What did Paul mean when he said he wanted to **know Christ?**"

This chapter is one of the great chapters of the bible, for it reveals to us that the greatest pursuit in life is a pursuit after Christ. This should be our desire if we are God's children, but how often those who are called Christian have their pursuits set on this world, and what they can gain from it. Paul had reached a point in his life where he recognized the greatest thing he could seek after was Christ. He said he wanted to "know Christ, and the power of his resurrection". What did he mean by this, for certainly if anyone knew Christ, it was Paul, who was an *apostle of Jesus Christ*? We have to think a bit deeper about the meaning here, so we can appreciate what Paul was seeking after.

To know someone is far more than being acquainted with them. We might say that we know Barack Obama, though we have never met the man, or had a conversation with him. We have some general knowledge because we have seen him make speeches on TV, or we read something about him in a book or magazine. This is a knowledge, but it is rather limited. If I really wanted to know Barack Obama, I would have to get close to him, and he would have to allow me to get close so I befriend him, and over time he might reveal himself to me. As I learn his heart, his thoughts, emotions, experience and will, I am getting to know him. This is what Paul means when he says he wants to know Christ. He did not want a remote and sketchy knowledge of Christ. He wanted to increasingly grow familiar with Christ, befriending him, knowing his ways, thoughts and will. Unlike trying to know some other human being, Christ is God, and infinite in His knowledge and power. Therefore getting to know Christ is not a simple matter, and we can never exhaust the riches of Christ's wealth. We also have the disadvantage of not having him in person to talk to, and watch with our eyes, or hear with our ears. He has left us His record in the scriptures, and this is the source which God has given to us so that we may come to know Christ more fully. As we learn of Christ in the scripture, the Holy Spirit will reveal more and more about his character, work and power to us. This exciting pursuit after Christ is something that can occupy us for the rest of our days on earth, and on into the eternal ages. We shall never exhaust the wonders of his goodness and grace. It is a joyful exploration to learn of Him through all of His creation. As we observe all the things that He has made from the fish of the sea, birds of the air, and the starry heavens, we learn of his great wisdom and power. As we study the Old Testament, we learn of His love and dealings with sinful man, and in the New Testament we learn of His great humility and sacrifice for our eternal blessing.

Men pursue after many things in life, but all comes to nothing in the end, unless we have a relationship with Christ through faith. He is the reason for our existence, and He is the goal of our existence. We are meant to know Him and enjoy Him forever. This is God's blessing to us. It is a shame then that people would rather pursue the fleeting fancies of this world, and ignore the splendors of the Son of God. He who holds our life in His hands, is often someone we show just a vague and passing interest in.

If I pass someone begging on the roadside, I might give him little attention, because I know that my only relationship with him will require that I offer some money, and that might just bother me. However if I should pass by the Son of God with little interest, what damage I can do to my soul and my eternal happiness. He is not someone distant, or someone who has no affect on my life and future. He is the one that holds my life in His hands. In fact, He is the one who designed me, and put me together in my mother's womb. It is not only important to take interest in getting to know our Lord Jesus Christ, it is vital to our eternal future.

How well do you know Jesus? Is he just a name to you, or is He someone you feel close to, and talk to daily. Do you understand His heart and feelings. Are you proving to be a good servant and friend to Him, by obeying His instructions and commands? To know Christ means to invest my life and interest in learning about Him, understanding His plan and purposes for me, and cooperating through obedience. Paul's desire was noble, but also necessary for every Christian. May the Lord place into each of our hearts that great desire and purpose to know Christ as fully as we possibly can during our time in this world.

"for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil 1:21

LESSON 178
Content in Christ
PHILIPPIANS 4

In our last lesson we learned about Paul's own example of apprehending Christ, and how he wanted to know Christ as fully as possible. Today we will complete our study of Philippians and consider what it means to be content in Christ. Paul will also speak of his appreciation for the sacrifices of fellow believers who shared with his needs.

Paul begins this chapter by expressing his love for the Philippian believers and the joy that he had found in them. He not only calls them beloved, but also those he longed for, his joy and crown. He had such affection in his heart for them. He imagined them in heaven with him and bringing him such great joy and reward. He calls on them to stand fast in the Lord. There are many things to distract or diminish our spiritual zeal, but we are to persevere for Christ, and be faithful in our Christian walk.

He addresses two individuals, Euodia and Syntyche, saying they need to be of the same mind. It seems Paul had been made aware of some contention, or lack of love between these two, and wants to be sure that they behave in a proper Christian attitude towards each other. Unity of mind and spirit among Christians is vital to our spiritual health, and the health of the whole church. We must not entertain a contentious spirit, for that is contrary to God's purposes in our lives. Paul also instructs that the believers assist those who had labored with him in the gospel. He says their names were written in the book of life. Paul had great confidence in their salvation. It would bring such power and victory into our lives if we too had the assurance that our names were written in God's book of life.

Paul tells them to rejoice in the Lord, and then repeats the same thing again to add emphasis. As Christians we have so much reason to rejoice. Our rejoicing sends a gospel message to others, a message that says we have found something of such great value that our joy cannot be contained. How inappropriate to call yourself a Christian and be marked by misery, and contention all the time. Paul's final instructions to his beloved Christian friends in Philippi included instructions to be gentle to all because we know the Lord is near. We must act according to His gentleness if we are to represent Him well with the short time we have left in this world. He also speaks to them about prayer. In life we often have many worries and concerns of heart, but we are invited to pray without being anxious, asking what we need from God, and also remembering to give thanks always. When we make it our habit to always pray, then we are promised to have God's peace guarding our hearts and minds because we belong to Jesus. Paul also instructs them on how to engage their minds. Our minds are often permitted to think in evil and corrupt ways. The bible says "as a man thinks, so is he". Paul lists several things we are to focus our minds meditation upon. These include things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, things of good report, and things that are praiseworthy. The discipline of a healthy mind is perhaps one of the most difficult challenges in the Christian life, but well worth the pursuit. A well disciplined mind will certainly bring us nearer to Christ, and better prepare us for our future glory in heaven. Perhaps we all need to make better choices about the way we use our minds, or what we allow our minds to be exposed to. TV, internet, video games, movies, bad conversation, or poor company can all contribute to our mind's being polluted with the sin and rebellion of this world. It would be better to spend more time reading scripture, where we find things that are true, noble, just, and pure.

Paul spoke of his contentment in Christ, for he had learned in all situations to accept his lot in life, even if that meant suffering or going hungry. His joy was not in the outward comforts of life, but in the Lord who saved his soul. It did not matter what man did to him, he would rejoice in Christ. He says that he can do all things through Christ's strength. This is a beautiful verse, and one we ought to remember, and recall when we are faced with difficult circumstances or challenges. Christ is my strength, and through him the possibilities are endless, so long as they are according to the will of God.

Paul thanks the Philippians for sharing with him because they had sent him a financial gift through the hands of Epaphroditus. He explains that no other church had shared with him, except the Philippian believers, and they had always helped to support him. He mentions these things not to express any present need that he had, but so that they would enjoy more fully the rewards of their faithfulness. He was more concerned about their spiritual blessings by their giving, then getting anything for himself. This is the attitude that should characterize every servant of God. So often men are greedy and begging for support from others, but let us learn from Paul to only seek the good of others, and not our own selfish gain. Paul even refers to their gift as a sweet smelling aroma that is well pleasing to the Lord. This equates with the OT sacrifices made on an altar, that were fragrant to God and reflected the love and sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross. When we give to the Lord, or his servants, it is an act of worship. When we do so from a sincere heart of gratitude and love for the Lord, it will be pleasing to the Lord, and true worship. Giving our money to the Lord means much more than all the songs we sing, and all the noise we make from our loud instruments. God is looking for how much we are willing to sacrifice to express our love and devotion to Him, and not how loud, or earnest we sound, when we sing songs together, or pray together, since these cost us very little.

Paul assures the Philippians that God would supply all their needs in Christ. This does not mean that by giving to the Lord we should expect to get more in return, since that would corrupt our motives. God promises to meet the needs of his children, when they are faithful to him, and needs are not the same as wants. He ends this beautiful letter of joy, with a prayer for God our father to be eternally glorified, and greetings for all the saints. He also sends greetings

from the brethren with him, and those of Caesars's household. This means the gospel was having an impact on the highest authority in the Romans empire, giving the gospel more opportunity to spread throughout the empire. He wishes the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for them all. I hope you have found spiritual joy from our study in Philippians, and if you are still in need of knowing Christ as your Savior, then why not place your trust in Him today?

"and my god shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Phil 4:19

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the peace gained through prayer, the importance of disciplining our minds, and that giving to the Lord is an act of worship, which is very pleasing to the Lord. Philippians has also taught us to rejoice in the Lord always. Someone might ask the question, "How can a person rejoice always?"

Here in chapter four, Paul calls on the believers to rejoice always, and repeats the same instruction twice to add emphasis. Is it possible to always rejoice? Wouldn't we find it difficult to always put a smile on. Would this not be unrealistic in world that is filled with sorrow, violence and corruption? How can I rejoice when I just heard news that a dear friend or family member has died? Should I smile and laugh when trouble comes crashing in around me, and I feel so defeated? This instruction to rejoice always, might almost seem to mock us, especially when life has thrown to us some very difficult challenges and trials. When I am hungry, I don't feel like rejoicing. When I am sick, I don't feel like singing. When someone steals my money, I am not ready to smile about it. So what is meant by this instruction to rejoice always, again I say rejoice? You will notice, that I did not read it quite correctly to you. The instruction is not simply to rejoice, for any reason, but the instruction is to rejoice **in the Lord**, again I say rejoice. It is this qualifying statement that makes the text come alive with meaning. We can rejoice in our Lord Jesus Christ. Even when life has knocked us around with some severe blows, we can still find joy in our blessed master. He suffered greatly for us, and no matter how much we are called to suffer, we shall never have to endure all that He had to endure. His love has secured for us eternal life, and forgiveness for all of our sins. We now have peace with God, and are accepted into God's presence as His own beloved children forever and ever. This unconditional love, and assurance of being with Christ in glory fills our hearts with a peace that surpasses understanding. This peace that floods into our souls through the gracious revelation by the Holy Spirit, is that stabilizer that makes every trial and difficulty fade into insignificance. We are saved, and saved for eternity, and nothing can ever change that. This is joy, and no one can take that away from us. Remember that Jesus desired that his joy would remain in us (John 15:11). When they saw Christ resurrected from the dead, such joy filled their hearts. The hope in Christ was certain, and that made all of life so much sweeter. When the Holy Spirit assures us of our salvation through Christ, then the grass looks greener, the birds sing sweeter, and the air smells fresher, food tastes better, and people are all beautiful, and the world is such a better place. This new appreciation of life, is due to the joy of having peace with God, and knowing that our lives are precious in God's sight. Before we knew the Lord, our life was aimless and pointless. We only lived for the things we could enjoy for a few days in this world. If we had given any thought to our sad plight, we would have recognized how futile all of life is without Christ. We work to earn money so we can eat and gain strength and go back to work again. This endless cycle continues until we die. What a hopeless view of life we have when this world is all we are living for, because in just a few short years it will all be gone. However, Christians have every reason to rejoice, since Christ has revealed God's love and salvation.

We should recall that Paul himself, who was in prison as he wrote the letter to the Philippians, was also once in prison in Philippi. God had used his imprisonment to actually lead a prison guard to salvation in Christ, and subsequently his whole family was save and baptized. While in that prison cell he and Silas were singing praises to God, and when their chains were miraculously opened they did not run away and escape. They had joy in the Lord, and cared for the life of the man who held them captive, more then their own safety and welfare. This was enough to convince the jailor to surrender his life to Christ. He said to them, "sirs, what must I do to be saved". You see when the Christian rises above his circumstances, showing joy in the Lord, the world will take notice, and souls will be saved. Remember this next time you are going through some difficulty, or challenge in your life. Perhaps sorrow has filled your heart, or you are in despair because of losses and setbacks. Remember that Christ loved you enough to die for your soul, and secure a place in heaven for you forever. Embrace Christ, cling to Him by faith, and let your hope in Him lift you out of your sorrows, into the joy that comes from knowing that all is well with your soul. Others will see the light and love of God in you, and glorify Him.

Nothing else in life is so important as knowing you are in a right relationship to God, by accepting Jesus by faith as your personal Lord and Savior. Once you are in Christ, then nothing can harm you, nothing can suppress the peace and joy in your heart. Even if all should be taken away from you, your money, your job, your education, your marriage, your family, you still have more riches then all the world could afford, because you have Christ, and you have Him forever and ever. Yes, Rejoice in the Lord, again I say rejoice!

"for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil 1:21

LESSONS IN COLOSSIANS

Statue of Martin Luther: Dresden, Germany



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“LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM, TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING WITH GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS TO THE LORD.”

COLOSSIANS 3:16

LESSON 179
Preeminence of Christ
COLOSSIANS I

In our last lesson we ended our study of Philippians where we learned about being joyful in the Lord, giving to the Lord as an act of worship, and learning to be content in all circumstances. Today we begin a study in the letter to the Colossians. Colossians reveals to us the preeminence of Christ, his deity and the efficacy of his redemptive work. He does this to combat the errors of false teaching that were having an influence among the Colossians.

In Chapter one of Colossians we shall learn about the preeminence of Christ. What we mean by preeminence, is His supreme position of honor above all others. Some false teaching had arrived in Colossae that suggested that perhaps Jesus was not fully God, but only had a divine influence during his earthly ministry. This heretical teaching was a denial of the fundamental truth that Jesus is God's eternal Son. The doctrine of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ is essential to our salvation. We cannot compromise, or afford to make any mistake, about the true identity of our Lord Jesus Christ and God's eternal Son, wholly and truly God.

The letter to the Colossians is written by Paul, and he includes Timothy in his greetings, since Timothy was likely with him at the time of writing this letter. His greeting includes a desire for the grace and peace of God to be with them. Paul had not met these believers personally, but had heard about their faith. Since hearing about them, Paul always prayed for them. The believers were exhibiting love to one another because of their common hope of one day being in heaven with the Lord. They learned this hope when they were taught the gospel, which was the same message being sent throughout the world. The gospel was bringing forth fruit, by which he means converts to Christ, as was evident in Colossae and elsewhere. It was Epaphras who brought them the gospel, or nourished their faith as a loyal minister of Christ. It was Epaphras that had informed Paul of their faith and love for one another.

Paul tells them what he is praying for on their behalf. He wanted to see them filled with the knowledge of God's will with wisdom and spiritual understanding. He also said he prayed they would walk worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him fully, and bearing fruit by doing good works, while constantly increasing in their knowledge of God. He desires that they be strengthened with God's power for patience, longsuffering, and joy. We may think of God's power as producing great signs, or moving mountains, but God's power in the believer is seen through a Christ-like character.

Paul is filled with gratitude, when he thinks of how God has qualified believers to partake in the inheritance of the saints in light. This lovely description of God's children, expresses to us the lofty privilege and position that is ours in Christ, as being joined with those whom God has glorified. He also speaks of our deliverance from the power of darkness, having been brought into the kingdom of God's beloved Son. He says we have redemption by Christ's blood and forgiveness of sins.

Now Paul begins to describe the deity and preeminence of Christ, our redeemer and Lord. He tells us that he is the image of the invisible God. In other words, we see God through the person of Christ. He also tells us that it was through Christ that all things were created in heaven and earth, including all angelic powers, and earthly dominion. He is at the head of all of creation, and holds everything together in all of creation. This is a profound thing to think about, especially considering that the one who holds all power over creation, keeping every atom from flying apart, is the same person whose name is so frequently used disrespectfully or in vain. How patient He is with His creation! He is also the head of the church, and the first to experience resurrection with a glorified body. We will also be resurrected with glorified bodies, but He had to be first so that in all things he would be preeminent. There is no one higher in glory, power, or dominion than our Lord Jesus Christ. We are told that it pleased the father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and this is a clear statement of his divinity. It was Christ who reconciled all things to Himself, all the redeemed in heaven and earth, having made peace through the blood of His cross. He initiated the peace, and made it possible through his own sacrifice. We were God's enemies, separated from God because of our own wickedness, and yet he reconciled us by his own death on the cross. His aim was to make us holy, blameless, and above reproach in his sight. In order to attain this desired goal we must cooperate with Him by remaining faithful, and clinging to our hope in the gospel. This gospel was being preached to all people, and was the message Paul was called to preach.

Paul speaks personally about his own sufferings for the sake of the gospel, saying that he was filling up on what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ. By no means does this imply that there was anything lacking in what Christ did to pay for our sins. What Paul means to say is that Christ sufferings in this world have not yet ended, for we who are his children will suffer for his sake, and for the gospel. Paul was experiencing some of that suffering, and was therefore fulfilling that measure of suffering that Christ must still endure until His church is at home with Him in heaven. Paul also calls himself a steward of the mystery of the hope of glory, which was Christ living within believers. The mystery means that this was a revelation not previously known, but now made known to the gentiles through the ministry of Paul. This new revelation was rich with glory, as it revealed how Christ would actually take up residence inside of those who placed their trust in Him as Savior. Being indwelt by God Himself gives assurance of glory, and being together with Christ forever.

This same Jesus, God's eternal Son, preeminent, head of the church, redeemer, living within believers, creator of all, is the one Paul preached, warning men to obey Him in faith, with the purpose of presenting every man mature in Christ. This was Paul's great goal in life, and what he strived for through God's great power working in him. Have you recognized Jesus as the supreme authority in your life? Do you realize that you will have to answer to Him someday, and that just might be sooner than we plan or think? Why not confess to Him your sin, and ask Him to forgive and cleanse you today. Remember he holds your life together, as He does for everything else in all of creation.

"and he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may have the preeminence." Col 1:18

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the deity, preeminence, and redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We also listened to Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers, seeking after their spiritual advancement in knowledge, and good works. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to say 'in Him all things consist'?"

In verse 17 of this amazing chapter in our bibles, the Holy Spirit led Paul to write these remarkable words about our Lord Jesus Christ, 'in Him all things consist'? This is not a verse we should stumble over quickly without taking time to consider what is meant. I think if we consider this carefully, we shall grow in our admiration and wonder of our Lord, as well as walk before Him with godly reverence. I am not sure we can even adequately explain the full extent of these words, but let us try to shed some light on the topic, so we may be blessed by the truth of it.

The word "consist" means to hold something together, or to arrange things in order, or to keep and maintain order. This verse tells us that God did not just create everything, and then stand back and let things unwind. In fact, every atom in this universe is held together continually because His power and will. If not for Christ's will that we should exist, every cell in our body would burst into millions of uncontrolled and disordered parts. Think of every substance on earth, and how we have used those materials to build our homes, buildings, or provide food and clothing. Apart from the order and design of our Lord Jesus Christ, it would all just vanish or vaporized into meaningless and unordered elements.

Scientists study the universe, the forces that hold the atoms together, and the planets in their places. While they can describe gravity, and write equations, and theorize about how everything works, they simply can't explain why things exist at all, or why everything does not just come flying apart. The Laws that govern our universe, and everything in it, are observable to us, but men cannot understand the power which operates those laws, apart from God's revelation. When the bible says that, "In Him all things consist", it means that the laws were written by Him, and are sustained by Him throughout creation. It is His power that holds the atom together, and the planets in orbit, and causes molecular structures to form elements and compounds. It is He who controls the wind and waves. It is He who holds the nuclear power at His disposal. Men think they have created powerful weapons, using the nuclear properties they have discovered in God's creation, and indeed they have tapped into great power, but we must remind ourselves that the power that men access is not from themselves, but was inherit within nature, and atomic structures, so that they are only releasing the power that was already designed into the elements. When men use oil and petroleum to burn fuel, and run vehicles, they are simply making use of a power that God has made available to them. Our Lord placed this power in the elements when He created them, and we simply make use of this power as we discover it, and it's usefulness.

We might think of how things are ordered and are held together as an amazing revelation, but another way we can appreciate the Lord's control over His creation, is to consider that all that is under His supervision is intended for the good of man. It might at times appear to us as though the environment is hostile to us, with changing weather, violent storms, earthquakes, floods, and a host of other natural disasters. We might conclude that we have little chance to protect ourselves from the seeming chaotic and unpredictable conditions that surround us. However we need to recognize how well ordered our universe and our planet are for our safety and well being. As we consider how the Sun provides light and heat to the earth, and the earth has a good supply of water and food to nurture all life, we can discern the caring hand of our Lord, ordering His creation for our good and for our sustenance. At times things might appear chaotic and hostile for life, but we know that creation has been damaged through sin, and therefore we are all subject to the consequences of sin, which is disorder, destruction, and death. However, in general, the environment is a wonderful testimony to the loving care of our creator sustaining us in peace, and with abundant provisions for our good.

There is much here in this verse to stir the imagination, compel scientists to study the nature of our universe, its' origin and maintenance. But there is something also for the believer to enjoy with wonder and worship, as He considers the great power and majesty of our Lord as displayed in His creation. The practical outcome of this teaching is that we should live in godly fear before the one who holds our breath in His hands.

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Heb 1:3

LESSON 180
Combating False Doctrine
COLOSSIANS 2

In our last lesson we learned about the preeminence of Christ, and how all things consist by His power and will. In chapter two of Colossians we hear the apostle combating against false doctrine. Both Gnosticism and Asceticism were making an impact on the Christians at Colossae, and Paul deals with these false teachings, as well as Judaizers, who falsely mixed law with grace.

In order to understand why Paul wrote as he did in Colossians chapter two we need to gain some understanding of the false teachings he was combating in Colossae. These same heresies are still with us today in various forms.

"Gnostics professed to be Christians but claimed to have additional knowledge, superior to what the apostles taught. They claimed that a person could not be completely fulfilled until he had been initiated into their deeper "truths." Some taught that matter was evil, and that therefore the Man Jesus could not be God. They made a distinction between Jesus and the Christ. "The Christ" was a divine emanation which came upon Jesus at His baptism and left before His death, perhaps in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to them, Jesus did die, but the Christ did not die. They insisted, as Michael Green put it that "the heavenly Christ was too holy and spiritual to be soiled by permanent contact with human flesh." In short, they denied the Incarnation, that Jesus is the Christ, and both God and Man."

"Some Gnostics, believing that the body was inherently sinful, practiced asceticism, a system of self-denial or even self-torture, in an effort to attain a higher spiritual state. Others went to the opposite extreme, living in carnal indulgence, saying that the body didn't matter or have any affect on a person's spiritual life!

Two other errors may have also had influence upon the Colossian believers. These were antinomianism and Judaism. Antinomianism is the teaching that under grace a person does not need to practice self-control but may give full vent to his bodily appetites and passions. Old Testament Judaism had degenerated into a system of ceremonial observances by which a man hoped to achieve righteousness before God.

These errors which existed in Colossae are still with us today. Gnosticism has reappeared in Christian Science, Theosophy, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unity, and other systems. Antinomianism is characteristic of all who say that because we are under grace, we can live as we please. Judaism was originally a God-given revelation, whose forms and ceremonies were intended to teach spiritual truths in a typical way, as the Epistle to the Hebrews and other parts of the New Testament show. This lapsed into a system in which the forms themselves were considered to be meritorious, and so the spiritual meaning was often largely ignored. It has its counterpart today in the many religious systems which teach that a person can gain merit and favor with God by his own works, ignoring or denying his sinful state, and need of salvation from God alone.

In Colossians, the Apostle Paul masterfully counteracts all these errors by displaying the glories of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Believers Bible Commentary – Introduction to 1John, and Introduction to Colossians)¹

Paul speaks of his own internal conflict for the believers at Colossae and Laodicea. He had not seen these believers in person, but desired their spiritual encouragement, unified love, and assured knowledge of God and Christ. He says that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. This statement was to dispel the false teaching of the Gnostics, who said their was a deeper knowledge that had to be attained. When rooted and grounded in Christ they would not have to be deceived by these false teachers. As Paul warns them about Philosophy he realizes that what these false teachers offered was from men's traditions, principles of the world, but Christ was all they needed for salvation. Christ was fully God, and those who place their trust in Him are complete, which means that they have a full salvation because Christ is head over all principalities and power. Paul says that in Christ we were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, that is a dying to the flesh through Christ's work on the cross. Not only do we identify with Christ in His death, but also with his burial and resurrection. Just as he died to set us free, we also experience death to the old nature, and a whole new life through the power of Christ's resurrection. It was our faith that led us to trust in Jesus as our Savior, and God accredited to us forgiveness for all of our sins. The judgments that were against us, the Old Testament requirements of the Law, were removed by Jesus when He was on the cross. Whatever curse or judgment that we deserved, He took upon Himself when on the cross. Those judgments have been paid in full by our Lord Jesus Christ, and they can have no effect to harm us again, since justice has already been served. There is no power or authority which can stand in judgment against the believer in Christ.

It is important for Christians to be aware that they have all their spiritual need met in Christ through faith in Him. If Christians do not take care to learn of Christ and His work of grace at the cross, they may fall into various spiritual traps set by the devil, who wants to confuse and rob Christians of their joy and assurance, or have them pollute the minds and hearts of those seeking to find peace with God. Paul lists several areas where false teachers stumble believers. One is by various religious practices as borrowed from Judaism. These practices were intended to point to Christ, and did not offer salvation in and of themselves, whether dietary laws, festival days, or Sabbath days. Today some are teaching the need to worship on Saturday, and rest on that day. This was borrowed from Judaism, and had spiritual lessons for us to learn, but we are no longer bound by the Jewish ceremonial laws. He also mentions the worship of angels, promoted by men whose pride puffed them up. He mentions those who practice Asceticism, refusing to touch, taste or handle some things. There outward practices have an appearance of making them look religious or spiritual, but have no power to overcome the passions of the fleshly nature in man. Religion looks good on

the outward appearance; but at the heart of all this false practice and religion is emptiness and corruption. Our only hope is found in Jesus Christ, who can redeem a sinner, and give power to live holy. Let Him be the answer to your hopes today, by placing your trust in Jesus to save you!

"as you have therefore received Christ Jesus the lord, so walk in him." Col 2:6

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about false teachings affecting the believers at Colossae and how Paul preached the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ over all the religion and philosophy of men. Someone might ask the question, "Is philosophy a dangerous pursuit for Christians?"

In our lesson today from Colossians chapter 2 we heard Paul warning the Colossian believers against the various false teachings that were affecting the church at Colossae and at Laodicea. Among the many false ideas that Paul speaks against in this chapter he also warns against Philosophy. This word is widely used among us today, and refers to the broad study of our thinking and believing. Philosophers are those who try to use reason and logic to solve problems of life, existence, values and beliefs. Philosophy in it's broad sense of study today is interesting, and sometimes very helpful to work through some understandings of how life and values affect us. Where Philosophy can go wrong is when men think they are smarter than God and His revelation given to us in the scriptures. Man must recognize his own limitations of reason and understanding, because He is created and only can access information as it is revealed to him. When we realize how small we are in this universe, and how limited our understanding and knowledge are, then it is rather arrogant to try to settle some of the greater questions of existence or morality on our own. Since our God, who is infinite in wisdom and knowledge reveals Himself to us, then we must submit ourselves to His wisdom as revealed to us in the scriptures. Sometimes we may not fully appreciate or understand God's word, simply because we are not as smart as God is. If we knew everything as God did, then we would heartily agree with all that He says in His word. Men love to appear wise, and so they develop systems of thought to try to understand themselves, their environment, and the spiritual world. In their efforts to seek enlightenment, so often men venture deeper into darkness, for their philosophies are based on their own limited access to information.

During Paul's time philosophy had become an important part of Greek culture, and had also made it's way into the Roman empire. There were different schools of philosophy, Stoics and Epicureans as we read about in the book of Acts. There were those who studied the teachings of Pythagoras, Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato and were lovers of wisdom. They prided themselves on their learning, and wanted to appear to be ahead of others in their understanding. This pride of knowledge or wisdom made an impact on the early Christian church in the form of Gnosticism, which was a man made philosophy that suggested that men needed to have special knowledge, apart from simply trusting in Jesus. It is this type of philosophy which Paul speaks against, warning believers to be aware of it, and avoid it.

It is not uncommon for men of learning to explore various philosophies, and adopt one for themselves, sometimes quite dogmatically. Their higher learning has given them an exalted opinion of themselves, such that they think they can argue and prove their understanding is better than others. This form of philosophy, that caters to men's pride is very much a part of our modern world. It comes to us in the form of atheism, the belief that God does not exist, or in the theory of evolution. These beliefs are increasing in momentum, especially among more developed and richer nations, among the well educated. We might think to ourselves, that if these folks are rich, and they have the best education, we should listen to them, and learn from them. This is what seems reasonable, but we can be so easily deceived. With money and knowledge come power and corruption, because the heart of man is sinful. When we look more deeply to the moral life of the rich and educated we might be surprised to find that they are no more moral than those who are poor and uneducated, and even quite immoral, while the poor man can behave very morally. To gain knowledge for the sake of self promotion, will lead down a path of self-destruction. Our lives were never intended to be lived in selfish pursuits, and God will not bless such a philosophy of life. On the other hand, someone who seeks after the knowledge of God, to learn God's wisdom, and obey Him, will find life, health, joy and eternal blessing. God desires that we know and love Him, but that means submitting to His wisdom as revealed to us in the word of God. You may think you are smarter than God. Well you probably would not say it that way, but the way you live, and the choices you make reveal that this is what you believe. God says do not lie, cheat, steal or harm your neighbor, but you practice all these things and still think you are a good person. God's wisdom teaches us to recognize our sinful condition, to repent and believe in Christ as our only hope for heaven, seeking to follow Christ's teachings and commands. Which philosophy is ruling in your life? Are you following the wisdom of men, or are you following Jesus Christ? Why not surrender under His authority today, and let Him cleanse you from all your sin.

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." 1Cor 1:27

LESSON 181
Spiritual Wisdom
COLOSSIANS 3

In our last lesson we learned about the errors that were influencing the Christians at Colossae. We heard about the Gnostics and their Philosophy for life that catered to man's spiritual pride. Today the apostle moves into practical exhortations, demonstrating that true spiritual wisdom is displayed in godly conduct, and not by superior knowledge.

Chapter three of Colossians is a long list of exhortations to the believers, and we shall move quickly through this list to find good application for our own Christian experience. Firstly he calls on those who have been raised up to new life in Christ, to seek things above where Christ sits in heaven, developing a heavenly, not earthly mind. The reason for this is because we have died with Christ, and our life is hidden with Christ in God. This lovely scripture reminds us of our close and eternal bond with Christ, which secures us a place in heaven with Him. Since we have this assurance and fellowship, we are to put away the deeds of the flesh, including fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, which is a form of idolatry. We should notice that it is not just the outward sin that matters to God, but inward passions and desires of the heart, for that is where sin is conceived. We have been made new in Christ, and will bear His image as we learn more about Him. We realize, that in Christ, God has removed cultural, religious, ethnic, and social barriers between men, for we are all one in Christ.

As God's beloved children we are to build a Christ-like character by showing mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness in the same way that Christ has offered forgiveness to us. The greatest achievement in developing a Christ-like character is to develop a spirit of love, which is called the bond of perfection. This means that a truly mature Christian is one who has learned to love in a manner that reflects Christ's love to us. Not only are we to develop a godly character, but we are to pursue certain things in the spiritual life. These include a pursuit after peace. This is not just outward agreement, but a condition of the heart that is governed by God's kind attitude towards all people. This is especially important within the context of the church, since we are called to be unified in Christ. We are also to pursue the attitude of gratitude. Thankfulness should always characterize the life of those who have been freely given all the riches of eternal life and fellowship with the Son of God. Another great pursuit of the spiritual life, is to allow God's word to dwell in our hearts and minds richly, with wisdom, and using it for the benefit of others, by teaching them, and correcting them. The book of Psalms is well suited for this purpose of offering spiritual help to others, along with hymns and spiritual songs. Someone has pointed out that Hymns are songs directed to God, and spiritual songs are simply songs with a spiritual theme, and not addressed directly to God. We notice here that the music we sing is with grace in our hearts to the Lord. Our singing has often degenerated into a worldly type of entertainment, rather than a message from our hearts directly to our Lord. It is unfortunate that we see the music service in the church as an opportunity to feel something through the rhythm and words of the song. It is as though we can work ourselves up into a spiritual state in which we feel closer to God, or feel we are worshipping. Perhaps all we are doing is allowing our emotions to make us feel good, and imitating spirituality. Sincere singing comes directly from our hearts, and is directed to the Lord, and flows from a thankful heart that appreciates all that God has done. Oh, how rare it is to see the genuine praise of God in song. True praise has less to do with the musical content, volume, or repetition of words, but has to do with a heart pouring out its sincere admiration and gratitude before God.

He now moves onto the important conduct we must have in our various relationships in life. Wives are to submit to their husbands, as is proper for those who call Jesus Lord. Husbands are to love their wives without feeling bitter towards them. This speaks to our hearts about the real and potential risk of men taking their wives for granted, and not appreciating their loving support; even mistreating them because they have power over them. Children are to be obedient to their parents if they want to please and follow the Lord. As fathers raise their children for Christ, they must be careful not to provoke them by being too harsh, or condescending, so they don't become discouraged. Again there is implied in these words the problem many men struggle with, and that is knowing how to be a loving leader, who does not abuse his power and authority, or expect standards of conduct and maturity that are unreasonable to their particular stage of growth. Servants are also instructed how they should related to their masters. While we do not have the same slave – master type of relationships today, the worker – employer relationships we see are often very similar due to unfair treatment, and pathetic wages paid to workers. How often people are expected to work for someone who does not even provide them their basic needs for food and clothing. Christians are to behave in a better manner. Workers are to put in an honest days work, even when the boss is not looking. Their attitude should be to do their best work because all of our work is service to our Lord, and not simply for our human bosses. The Lord in heaven rewards his children for their faithful work, and judges the lazy, dishonest and rebellious. We must remember that God watches over all that we do, and a day of reckoning is coming, when justice will be served and rewards issued. There is more to say about how master's must treat slaves, but that will be covered in chapter four in our next lesson. In today's lesson we heard many practical instructions that display true spiritual wisdom. As we submit ourselves to the Lord's authority over our lives, we shall learn to build a Christ like character, pursue spiritual things, rather than earthly things, love peace, be grateful, richly absorb God's word, and prove faithful in all of our relationships in life. Having a spiritual mind means to embrace the Christian life fully, by learning of Christ, and obeying all that He instructs His children to do. It is not a matter of trying to be smarter than others by knowing the

bible better, but showing that we are grateful to be saved, and behaving in a manner that reflects God's love to us. You cannot live this life of obedience until you have first come to the cross and see Christ dying for you sins. By accepting His sacrifice for you, and acknowledging by faith that He is Lord, you will find salvation. I pray you will!

"if then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of god." Col 3:1

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the spiritual wisdom found through pursuing an obedient walk with Christ, and growing into His image by letting God's word dwell in us richly. Someone might ask the question, "How can I let the word of Christ dwell in me richly?"

Among the many exhortations in Colossians chapter 3 there is also this exhortation to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. We need to take some time to consider what this means. The bible is not simply a book that we refer to when the preacher is talking to us on Sunday. It is not to be a book we treat like a newspaper, novel, or poetry book, although it has aspects of each of these kinds of literature. The bible is God's word sent to us to give us wisdom and instruction on how we should live and behave. It is, we might say, like an *'operators manual'* for human life. The book is also spiritual in nature, for though written so long ago, it still has power to speak into our hearts, and change us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to have the right frame of mind when we think about the bible. If we treat it as just another book, then we will not value it, or learn much from it. We must understand and view God's word as the most important information which is vital to our life now, and our eternal welfare. When we have a proper respect for God's word, then we show our faith and respect in God Himself.

Now if we value God's words then we will want to learn them well, and store them in our hearts and minds, to help us when we need God's wisdom to direct us. This certainly means that Christians should be reading their bibles daily. I recall once a man questioning me about reading my bible, and asking if I had finished reading the bible. I told him I had read through the bible, but a person never really finishes learning from the bible. You could read the bible through hundreds of times, and yet still not understand all that God has for us in His word. The bible is unique this way, because it was written by God, and has many layers of insight and truth. It takes much time and thought to discover, enjoy, and put into practice God's word. Men who preach through the bible their whole lives, will often admit in their senior years, that they feel they have only scratched the surface of what God says in His word.

So we know that the bible must be valued, and that even a life long commitment to read and study does not uncover all of the treasures and wisdom God has left for us in His word. With this in mind it is important that we invest ourselves in a pursuit to know God's word, trying to understand all that God wishes to communicate with us. Our question is, how can I let the word of Christ dwell in me richly? The answer to this question is largely dependent on our spiritual motivation. God is pleased to reveal himself to those who seek after his wisdom, with the correct attitude of heart. If we wish to know His word in order to do His will and please Him, then He will reveal much to us. However if our desire of heart is to appear more spiritual than others, or to gain prestige and honor, then God will not be inclined to show us the deeper things in His revelations to men. As Christians we should be highly motivated to learn God's word, for the same reason that we would be motivated to learn about cancer, if we were diagnosed with this disease. My life and future would be at stake! Learning God's word is not so difficult if you are motivated. To let the word of Christ dwell in us, is more than just being familiar with the text, it means to love God's word to the point that it lives happily inside of us. This means that when people are talking about the bible, I am able to give a clear answer to what God says in His word, because I have carefully kept it in my heart. As we grow as Christians, we should have increasing familiarity with the text of scripture, but also a good understanding of the meaning of the text, so we can apply it at the right time and in the right way. The better I can use the bible to know how to think and behave, the more it is dwelling within me. The instruction is not just to let it dwell within us though, it is to dwell in us richly, meaning that we should continue to learn more and more, until we are able to handle just about any part of the bible with sincerity and understanding. The instruction also includes developing an ability to use the word for the benefit of others. The word of God is not just an interesting story, but a book of correction and instruction to men who have departed from God, and choose to live in sin and rebellion. Thus much of God's word needs to be preached to the wayward and disobedient, because God desires that they hear His call to repent. It is no good to preach at others though, unless we first have experienced what we are preaching about. When calling others to repent and believe the gospel, it should be evident in our own lives that we have done so. When we preach holy living and faithful service, we need to also be actively pursuing holiness and proving useful in our ministry.

Letting Christ's word dwell richly within us involves much more than getting God's word inside of us, it involves getting God's word through us for the benefit of others.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2Tim 3:16-17

LESSON 182
Laboring at Prayer
COLOSSIANS 4

In our last lesson we heard Paul give a series of exhortations to the Colossians on how to live for Christ by seeking things above and not on the earth. Today in Chapter 4 Paul continues his exhortation, and closes off his letter by mentioning several co-workers, with a request for prayers, and greetings to the saint at Colossae and Laodicea.

In our last lesson Paul was instructing Christian slaves to be obedient to their masters, while doing their work faithfully because they serve the Lord in heaven. Now Paul turns his attention to the masters and calls on them to treat their slaves with all justice and fairness, remembering they also have a master in heaven. How frequently men abuse power, and oppress those under them. They take advantage of them, not paying fair wages, or by mistreating them. He calls on believers to be diligent in their prayer life with a thankful spirit. Prayer is often one area of weakness in the Christian life. Like the apostles who could not stay awake when the Lord asked them to pray. We can be encumbered with many things, and when it is time to pray, we are either forgetful or tired. We must pray for God's kingdom to advance, and not just for our personal needs, as is so often the case. Paul ask the believers to pray for himself with a focus on his labors for the Lord, and his effectiveness in that work.

The letter to the Colossians has many similarities to the exhortations given in the letter to the Ephesians. This shows us that the needs of the individual assemblies are much the same from place to place. He calls on the them to walk in wisdom and redeem time. Time is so precious, and something we should value much more then we do. Each day is a precious gift from God, and should not be wasted in fruitless activity. Believers are called upon to have gracious speech, seasoned with salt, knowing how to give answers to all who ask. The tongue can be an instrument of salvation to needy souls, or an instrument of destruction to divide and ruin men. Our tongues are most powerful, and have a great impact on others, so we need to be very guarded with all that we say, and try to ensure that all our speech includes something that might lead others to the Lord, and to glorify Him.

Paul now ends off the epistle with mention of several fellow believers. He mentions Tychicus, whom he wanted to send to Colossae, likely to deliver this letter. Paul wanted to learn how the believers were doing, and to report on how He was doing. The purpose was to comfort the believers. This shows us that caring for believers involves visiting them, and sharing personally about how each are getting along. Fellowship means taking a very active interest in one another as believers. I hope this is what you find among the believers you meet with. He next mentions Onesimus. He was a run-away slave that had found his way to Paul, and had become a believer. He was from Colossae, and the letter written to Philemon in our New Testament was written specifically to request a favorable reception from his former master Philemon, since now he was a brother in Christ. He also had become a faithful and beloved brother, whom Paul has confidence in to report to the Colossians about Paul and his gospel work. He mentions greetings from Aristarchus and Barnabas' cousin Mark. The Colossians had received special instructions about Mark, and therefore were to welcome him among them. We cannot be sure why Paul found it necessary to write this way about Mark, but it might be that Mark had lost some respect in his service for Christ, because he had abandoned Paul on their first missionary journey. Mark withdrew from their mission early, failing in his service for Christ, but that did not mean the Lord could not use him again in His service. In fact, Paul writes about him later in his life, in 2Timothy, and says that Mark was profitable to him for the ministry (2Tim 4:11). It is comforting to know that when we fail our Lord, he is willing to restore us, and even make us profitable again in His service.

He mentions these along with Justus who were Christian brothers of Jewish descent. He then mentions Epaphras who belonged to the church at Colossae, but was with Paul at the time of his writing this letter. He speaks of Epaphras' zeal and fervent prayers for the believers in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. His prays were not focused on their success in life, but rather that they would mature in Christ, knowing and performing the will of God perfectly. By this Epaphras demonstrated that he was a true shepherd of God's people, for his love for them was sincere, and his spiritual labors fervent on their behalf. How good it is to know that someone is praying for our spiritual progress.

Luke, who is called the beloved Physician, is also mentioned. Luke was the great historian who traveled with Paul during his missionary work, and wrote both the gospel that bears his name, and the book of Acts. What a valuable contribution he made through these books. We know it was through the inspiration of God, but we can be thankful that brother Luke was faithful to learn everything accurately so that He could record it for our benefit. Then he mentions Demas, who would later abandon his Christian service, because of his love for this present world. Even God's servants can fail by faltering in their faith, or becoming greedy for money or comfort in this life. Paul mentions a house church at the home of Nymphas. The early believers often met in one another's homes as they were likely small in numbers, and not compelled to spend money and time building places of worship, as has become the pattern in our modern era. Paul warns Archippus to fulfill the ministry he had received in the Lord. This is a good exhortation for all believers. Are we being faithful in what the Lord has given us to do? Don't quit, finish what God asks you to do.

Paul now concludes this letter with his personal salutation, and mentions that he had written this letter in his own hand-writing. He often used scribes, but in this case he wanted to sign with his own hand, perhaps as a way to show his great interest and love for these dear Christians. He calls upon them to remember him in prayer, and that he was imprisoned with chains. At times the apostle must have felt restricted by those chains, but through prayer he had

confidence that God would complete the work he had commissioned him to do. He wanted to finish his course well. I trust all listening to today's message will also desire to fulfill their service for Christ. You can only serve if you know Him as your Savior. You can trust Him today, by simply reaching out to Jesus in faith and asking Him to forgive your sins and save your soul.

"And say to Archippus, 'take heed to the ministry which you have received in the lord, that you may fulfill it.'" Col 4:17

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard Paul continue to instruct the believers in godly Christian living, which includes being fair and just, having a gracious tongue, and having a diligent prayer life. Someone might ask the question, "Why is prayer considered a labor?"

Colossians chapter 4 tells us about a man named Epaphras, who belonged to the church at Colossae. He was with Paul in Rome when Paul wrote this letter to the Colossian believers. Epaphras is mentioned with special notability because of his spiritual care for his fellow Christians at Colossae. Epaphras, we are told, was laboring in prayers. It would be worth our time to consider what it means for someone to labor at prayer.

There could be a potential misunderstanding about what it means to labor in prayer, for some might be inclined to think this has to do with the intensity, or our emotional involvement, when we pray. We might think the more we get ourselves worked up into some kind of frenzy, and the more intense we pray, the more we are breaking through Satan's wall that keeps us from God's answer to our prayer. We see this kind of attitude in prayer more commonly these days, where people are striving with so much pain and emotion, as though all their frenzied behavior will get God's attention. This is a false notion of God. We must not think God is hard of hearing, or reluctant to hear and answer us. Satan is no barrier for our prayers. As we pray, even quietly in our rooms, we do not even need to speak the words out loud, for God searches our hearts and knows our thoughts. He knows what we will ask before we ask it. Also we must avoid vain repetitions. Repeating ourselves in prayer also is poor thing to do, for it suggests that we think God did not hear us the first time. Maybe we want to impress God by repeating ourselves for more emphasis. The answer to our prayers has very little to do with how much we work up our emotions in prayer, and much more to do with whether the request is in the will of God or not. If my child comes to me and asks me to give them something, and I am not inclined to give it to them, because I judge they do not need it, or it might harm them, then I just say "No", and the child must accept my answer. If the child begins to beg me, and plead with loud repetitious and earnest entreaties, groaning and crying, that is not likely going to convince me to give them what they want, but rather I would become annoyed by their bad behavior. Why is it that we treat God like this, shouting our prayers with incessant repetitious cries. It is an insult to the love and compassion of our heavenly Father to behave in such a manner when we pray.

The idea of laboring in prayer means to spend quality time with a sincere heart of interest. We can imagine that Epaphras was mentioning each member of the church by name in his prayers, and that as he thought of each one, he would remember their particular circumstances and pray for their particular spiritual needs. The petitions were likely made daily since each new day presents new needs. This why the Lord taught us to pray, "give us this day, our daily bread". The prayer is for today, not tomorrow. The Lord also said, "sufficient to the day is the trouble thereof". This teaches us that we must not worry so much about tomorrow's needs, but rather today's needs, for each day presents enough trouble of its own. Therefore prayers are needed daily. We also want to give thanks to God with each new day that he gives to us, and for all that He provides for us. So laboring means to participate in prayer faithfully, daily and with sincerity. It means to care about the people we pray for with genuine interest in their spiritual welfare and physical condition. Prayer is perhaps one of the best ways we can express our love towards others, for we are asking the one who is infinite in power and goodness, for His kindness and favor to bless those we pray for. Prays do not have to be long to be effectual. The length of time in prayer should reflect the many different concerns, petitions, praise and thanks we wish to offer in the presence of God, and should not just be babbling on endlessly without really saying anything. Would you like to listen to someone ramble on and on, and not really communicate anything. I think you would become rather tired of listening, if they did not get to the point. Our prayers should be intelligent, thoughtful and sincere. Once we have said our petition, we may take confidence that God has heard, and will answer in His time and in His way. If we pray with confidence in the one we petition, then we can leave our requests with Him, and trust in Him with a peaceful spirit. In fact, prayer should foster a peaceful spirit according Philippians 4:6-7, and take away our anxious spirit. So when people seem uptight and anxious when praying, we wonder if they really know the one whom they are addressing. They might be as the prophets of Baal who contested with Elijah, and for all their jumping and shouting could not be heard by their imaginary god. Those who know Christ, will find a welcome place in the presence of God, and can leave their requests with confidence before Him, and then rest peacefully, assured of His benevolence.

"Pray without ceasing" 1Thess 5:17

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