

FEATURE

A DAILY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

April-June 2019



*“Let all those
that put their
trust in Thee
rejoice: let
them ever
shout for joy,
because Thou
defendest them:
let them also
that love Thy
name be joyful
in Thee.”*

Psalms 5:11

*“Ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God,
which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” — 1 Thessalonians 2:13*

The following Bible reading schedule was compiled by R. M. M'Cheyne in 1842. The special value of this reading schedule is that with the completion of a year's reading, the whole Bible will be read once and the New Testament and the Psalms will be covered twice. The daily morning (with the "family" or individually) and evening (in "secret" or private) reading of the prescribed texts will provide the reader with a balanced study of both the Old and the New Testaments along with immeasurable blessing and edification. (*Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*, by Andrew A. Bonar, The Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, Pennsylvania)

<i>APRIL</i>									
O SEND OUT THY LIGHT AND THY TRUTH: LET THEM LEAD ME.									
<i>Family</i>					<i>Secret</i>				
Leviticus	4	Psalms	1-2	<i>1</i>	Proverbs	19	Colossians	2	
"	5	"	3-4	<i>2</i>	"	20	"	3	
"	6	"	5-6	<i>3</i>	"	21	"	4	
"	7	"	7-8	<i>4</i>	"	22	1Thessalonians	1	
"	8	"	9	<i>5</i>	"	23	"	2	
"	9	"	10	<i>6</i>	"	24	"	3	
"	10	"	11-12	<i>7</i>	"	25	"	4	
"	11-12	"	13-14	<i>8</i>	"	26	"	5	
"	13	"	15-16	<i>9</i>	"	27	2Thessalonians	1	
"	14	"	17	<i>10</i>	"	28	"	2	
"	15	"	18	<i>11</i>	"	29	"	3	
"	16	"	19	<i>12</i>	"	30	1 Timothy	1	
"	17	"	20-21	<i>13</i>	"	31	"	2	
"	18	"	22	<i>14</i>	Ecclesiastes	1	"	3	
"	19	"	23-24	<i>15</i>	"	2	"	4	
"	20	"	25	<i>16</i>	"	3	"	5	
"	21	"	26-27	<i>17</i>	"	4	"	6	
"	22	"	28-29	<i>18</i>	"	5	2 Timothy	1	
"	23	"	30	<i>19</i>	"	6	"	2	
"	24	"	31	<i>20</i>	"	7	"	3	
"	25	"	32	<i>21</i>	"	8	"	4	
"	26	"	33	<i>22</i>	"	9	Titus	1	
"	27	"	34	<i>23</i>	"	10	"	2	
Numbers	1	"	35	<i>24</i>	"	11	"	3	
"	2	"	36	<i>25</i>	"	12	Philemon	1	
"	3	"	37	<i>26</i>	S. of Solomon	1	Hebrews	1	
"	4	"	38	<i>27</i>	"	2	"	2	
"	5	"	39	<i>28</i>	"	3	"	3	
"	6	"	40-41	<i>29</i>	"	4	"	4	
"	7	"	42-43	<i>30</i>	"	5	"	5	

FEATURE

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*All of the contributing writers are pastors who are dedicated to proclaiming the inerrant Word of God without compromise.
All scripture texts are taken from the King James Version.*

M. H. Reynolds (1919-1997)

Dennis W. Costella (1948-2011)

Matt D. Costella

John E. Duty

Jonathan M. Cowles

Philip N. Flaming

Gary D. Freel

George W. Zeller

April

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

May

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

June

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

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2251 East Beechwood Avenue, Fresno, CA 93720

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Being surrounded can be a terrifying experience. The Israelites were led to the Red Sea with the Egyptians pursuing them. They were surrounded by the enemy on one side and by the sea and other natural barriers on all other sides. They had nowhere to go and were gripped with fear. Moses spoke to the people, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will shew to you to day.... The LORD shall fight for you” (Ex. 14:13-14). They did not realize that all along, they had been surrounded by the protection and loving care of the Almighty. God surrounds His own: “The angel of the LORD **encampeth round about them** that fear Him, and delivereth them” (34:7). As we fear Him, we need not fear anything else. God surrounds the trusting soul, providing protection on every side. Nothing can reach the believer unless it is permitted by our all-wise and loving heavenly Father. “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so **the LORD is round about His people** from henceforth even for ever” (125:2). The trusting believer is surrounded by victorious melodies: “Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; **Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance**” (v. 7). It is our joy to be hiding in Him, protected by Him, and surrounded by songs of praise for the ways God rescues us! The believing heart is totally surrounded by the mercy and love of our God: “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, **mercy shall compass him about**” (v. 10). Our response, like David, is to burst forth in praise: “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart” (v. 11). GWZ

Not Even Death Can Separate Us

April 2nd
Hebrews 11:32-40

The apostle Paul gives us a marvelous list of all the things that can never “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:38-39). First on this list is man’s great enemy: death (1 Cor. 15:26). Not even death itself can separate us from God’s love. Of course, this promise only applies to believers—those who are “in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Death entails separation. Spiritual death is separation from God; physical death is separation of the soul/spirit from the body.

John the Baptist and James the brother of John were both beheaded. Their heads were separated from their bodies, but they were not separated from the love of God. Stephen was pelted with stones until he died, but death for him was a welcoming ceremony into the third heaven (Acts 7:55-60). Samson (v. 32) expired due to the crushing weight of a collapsing Philistine temple, but this did not separate him from the love of the Lord his God. One of God’s servants was “sawn asunder” (v. 37), and the Talmud indicates that King Manasseh killed Isaiah in this manner. If true that Isaiah’s body was separated into two parts by his enemy, this prophet, “of whom the world was not worthy” (v. 38), was never separated from the love of Jehovah. Our Lord told us not to fear those who can merely kill the body but, rather, to fear God who can destroy both body and soul in hell (*gehenna*, Matt. 10:28). The crucifixion of the thief on the cross could never separate him from the love of His Savior; instead, it united him with his Savior in paradise (Lk. 23:43). Bees without stingers are harmless. For the believing heart, death has lost its sting (1 Cor. 15:55-57)! Do we see death as God does? GWZ

Throughout the epistles of the New Testament, the apostle Paul and the other New Testament writers challenge believers to be true and faithful to God even though life will not get better on this earth, spiritually speaking. In fact, God knows that things will get worse. Yet He does not tell us to give up, to give in, or to change course. Sometimes we get discouraged when we see ourselves in the minority or when we see others drift from where they need to be spiritually or when we find it so complicated to do the right thing. Too many Christians see the apostasy in the church or experience difficulties and begin to change their values, change their theology, or simply give up altogether. Yet the reality is this: What we are going through in this life here in the twenty-first century is nothing new to God. Let us take some time to consider the situation in which God's people found themselves in the Old Testament during the ministry of Isaiah and consider some parallels and challenges for us today.

Read today's text and consider the context in which it was written. God called His people to be faithful to Him and warned them of discipline or judgment if they refused to obey. In Isaiah 5, He told His people that He would use other nations to conquer them, nations that "come with speed swiftly" (5:26) if His people continued to forsake Him and call evil good and good evil (5:20). Yet *knowing this*, the people *continued* walking in their own ways and seeking spiritual counsel from the darkness around them. Sound familiar? God has spoken to us as well. His Word is sure and clear. Let us listen carefully and look to Him alone in the midst of this dark world! MDC

God's Word Is Sure

April 4th
Isaiah 8:11-22

Focusing His attention on Isaiah and the faithful remnant, God reminds them of several truths that are applicable to us as well. First, God declares that His Word is sure (v. 11). God spoke to Isaiah "with a strong hand"—not only was God's strengthening hand upon the prophet, but God's Word is certain and strong. Isaiah declared the very words of the living God. What does this mean for us today?

God's Word alone should have our attention. How amazing it is to think that God's people were seeking words from the dead rather than the living God (v. 19)! He asks, "Should not a people seek unto their God?" They were turning to the dead on behalf of the living; rather than pursuing the words of the true, living God, they were seeking out spiritists whose messages were meaningless ("peeping and muttering")! Sadly, we are often guilty of the same sin today. We listen to everyone *other* than God alone.

God's Word alone will stand the test of time. During Isaiah's day, many false prophets told the people what they *wanted* to hear (30:8-13; Jer. 23:16-32). They prophesied lies. The Israelites began to listen to the "wizards" whose words were empty and vain (vv. 19-22). Yet the one, true God is omniscient. He knows the end from the beginning, and everything He says is true and unchanging (14:24, 27; 55:11).

God's Word alone is without error. God cannot lie; therefore, His Word is truth. Man might not grasp it or comprehend it in its fullness, yet it is completely true because God is true. When God's people choose to look for truth in some other book, person, or place, they are bound for disillusionment and failure. To whom are you listening? MDC

His Commands Are Clear

***April 5th
Isaiah 8:11-22***

God addresses Isaiah and the faithful remnant amid Israel's apostasy and declares that His Word is certain and sure (v. 11), and He provides clear commands to His people. Even today, God's Word is sure and clear to all who know Him. Consider the clear message of God to His people of old as well as to us today.

Sanctify God (v. 13a). Set God apart as first and foremost in your life. Make Him your priority. After all, He is Lord of all! This is a vital part of not only glorifying God but also being an example and witness to others (1 Pet. 3:15). God is glorified when we make Him our priority in life (and thus obey Him), but others will see this as well!

Fear God (v. 13b). Possess a reverent respect of God. Sadly, the Israelites had no fear of God or respect for Him, or else why would they have sought counsel from idols? They did not even recognize or acknowledge Him as their God even though they continued to go through the motions of worship (1:2-15). The ultimate problem throughout the realm of Christianity today is this: No fear of God exists. Therefore, we often listen to everyone except Him alone because we want to be accepted of others.

Measure Everything According to God's Word (v. 20). We need a standard for life, witness, and ministry. In Isaiah's day, not only were the people listening to false prophets, but they were actually *seeking* the counsel of wizards or necromancers whom God described as those who "peep" and "mutter" (v. 19), that is, their words were empty and meaningless. Everything we happen to hear and choose to follow should coincide with God's Word *alone*. Truth mixed with error is *all* error in God's sight. MDC

His Promises Are Unfailing

***April 6th
Isaiah 8:11-22***

God's Word is sure and certain, His commands are clear, and His promises are unfailing. This was true during Isaiah's day, and this is true for us today. Are we listening to Him through His Word? Consider two of God's promises to His own:

God promises to be a refuge to the remnant (vv. 14a, 16-17). Despite the vast majority of God's people defecting from belief and fellowship with God, a small remnant remained faithful (1:9). Even today, God's Word tells us that more and more professing Christians will, like Israel, turn from God (2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:2). The New Testament declares that as this age progresses, *regression*—not *revival*—will characterize the age. Despite this sad truth, we must understand that God *wants* to continue to work with the faithful few and be their strength and shield. Isaiah was instructed to declare all the words of the Lord to all the people, but he was to focus his energies upon the small group of faithful disciples (v. 16). We must do the same today.

God promises confusion and discipline to the disobedient (vv. 14b-15, 21-22). Just as sure as God promises to be the strength and support of the faithful, He pledges to discipline the unfaithful. Many of Isaiah's prophecies center around the judgment of God upon His own people for their sin. Even today, the Lord will chasten those whom He loves. What does it take to get our attention when we are far from a proper fellowship with God? His approach today is similar to that in the Old Testament—He promises to discipline those who are unfaithful to Him, but in the meantime, His strengthening hand is upon those who *are* faithful to Him. Do not invite God's chastening hand. MDC

Believers often experience times when it seems as though no one else notices or cares about their service for the Lord. In fact, others may even criticize rather than commend their labor, causing the believer to feel discouraged from continuing to serve the Lord. The devil tries to persuade God's faithful servants that they are accomplishing nothing worthwhile and their hard work is in vain. Fellow pastor or dear believer, if this is your situation right now, the truth of our text should remind you that you are not serving men, but God. He never forgets any services rendered unto Him. Note the blessed promise: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love" (v. 10). Not only must your labor for Jesus Christ be motivated by love, but it also requires "faith and patience" (v. 12). Faith keeps us standing when we feel like falling, and patience keeps us "[pressing] toward the mark" (Phil. 3:14) when we feel like quitting and enables us to bear any reproach we may suffer for His sake.

One of the greatest needs of our day is for more believers to enter into a labor of love, patience, and faith—no matter how inconsequential their ministry may seem in their own eyes or in the eyes of others. It does not matter what others think or even what we ourselves think concerning the worth of our efforts for our Savior. Are we assured of victory through Jesus Christ? Yes, indeed! When we are "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58), are our efforts ever in vain in the Lord? Of course not! Concerning our service, the Lord commands: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). MHR

Some Trust in the Wrong Things***April 8th
Psalm 20:1-9***

When deliverance from times of trouble is needed, it is important for believers to trust in the Lord rather than in people or in material things. Verse seven of our text sets forth this truth succinctly and directly: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." It is, of course, easier to assent to this truth mentally than to apply it experientially. We all face the natural temptation to look to what is tangible rather than trusting in the invisible.

How impossible do our problems appear? In what direction are we looking for help? Verse six gives the only safe, sure answer: "Now know I that the LORD saveth His anointed; He will hear him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand." What a precious promise! We need not—we must not—turn to the arm of flesh for deliverance in perilous times. God often uses "chariots and horses" (human help of one kind or another) in order to supply our needs, but that is not always the case. It is all too easy to substitute confidence in man for unequivocal trust in the Lord.

When the whole world seems bent toward war and people are filled with consternation, it is time for believers to rejoice in the wonderful salvation we have in Christ and to "set up our banners" (v. 5) for the proclamation of the gospel and for the defense of the faith. It is difficult to find faithful believers in these last days, but God has His loyal remnant scattered throughout the world, believers who are willing to obey His Word without compromise and to claim His promises with surety. These are momentous, opportunity-filled days. Let us trust God alone to meet our needs. MHR

It is wonderful to know the Lord as Savior and to experience the blessings of His guiding hand in our lives every day. What a precious privilege it is to be “the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (v. 7). Only the Great Shepherd knows where the best food is found; only He can lead us “beside the still waters”; only He can comfort us “through the valley of the shadow of death” and restore the soul (ch. 23). It is no wonder, then, that this psalm opens with expressions of praise and thanksgiving (vv. 1-2). God’s greatness and His authority go hand-in-hand — “a great King above all gods” (v. 3). The hand that keeps His sheep is the same powerful hand that created all things (vv. 4-5); this glorious truth speaks of Christ, the Creator (Col. 1:15-17). Worship in spirit and in truth is His due. In love and humility we are to “worship and bow down ... [and] kneel before the LORD our maker (v. 6).

The last part of this psalm paints the sad picture of the wayward sheep during Israel’s years in the wilderness. Think about how much the children of Israel lost when they murmured to God rather than thanking Him, when they forgot the miracles He wrought in connection with their deliverance from bondage and longed only for the flesh pots of idolatrous Egypt. Certainly we find in this psalm a lesson for us today. Are we living the first seven verses of this chapter, or are we walking afar off as in the last four verses? Are we enjoying and heeding our Lord’s leadership, or are we pursuing our own desires? Jesus said His sheep would hear and listen to His voice and follow Him (Jn. 10:1-5). Are we following our Savior, or are we going our own way? MHR

“Thy Gentleness Hath Made Me Great”

April 10th
Psalm 18:35

The last phrase of today’s text speaks of *gentleness*—a quality of character and behavior that is in short supply today. Living in a rough world, constantly bombarded by harsh words and violent actions, we must exercise special care lest we become tainted by the turbulent spirit of our day rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and lives with God’s gentleness. Our text verse says, “Thy gentleness hath made me great.” We as fundamentalists today are especially in need of appropriating God’s gentleness in our ministries as we attempt to “[speak] the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). As good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must be unwavering in our stand for the truth and against error with a spiritual tenacity that keeps us from compromising.

Notice that we need God’s gentleness in order to minister properly; this is not something that can be realized by self effort. Is it possible to be “tough” and “gentle” at the same time in our lives and ministries? Yes, and the first two phrases of our text explain why. First, note that the Lord has given us a very special shield: “the shield of [His] salvation.” The Almighty God will deliver His people in time of trouble according to His promise. We need this shield at all times. What glorious protection the shield of His salvation provides, and what confidence it gives the believer in the midst of every battle! Second, the Lord’s right hand holds us up—the hand that never fails and is always available when it seems that we are surely going to fail and fall. Human help from loved ones and friends is always an added blessing, but nothing can compare to what God will do for us, and through us, if we will but trust and obey. MHR

My favorite Old Testament book is Isaiah, and obviously I am not alone in this judgment. This book is quoted by name in the New Testament more than any other of the prophetic books. Because of the prophetic preciseness and accuracy of forecasted future happenings, the book became the target of critics with less-than-noble intentions. It became popular to break up the unity of the book by speaking of “First,” “Second,” and “Third” Isaiah, each written by a different author. Their hope was to spread the penning of the book over centuries and thus mute the miraculous nature of the prophetic utterances. Providentially, God allowed the finding of the ancient “Isaiah Scroll” in a cave in 1947, exposing the foolishness of these critics.

The book is written in the eternal present. The fifty-third chapter, with its description of the suffering Messiah, is declared as an accomplished fact more than seven centuries before our Savior’s death: “But He **was** wounded for our transgressions, He **was** bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace **was** upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (53:5). The prophet Isaiah not only proclaims the Messiah’s death but also His birth (7:14): “Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

Much to the distress of religious cults, Isaiah presents the eternal God as one God but three persons. Notice what God Himself declares in today’s text: The “Lord GOD, and His Spirit” send the “Me” who is the speaker in the text and also named as the “Redeemer.” A careful study of this book may make it your favorite as well! JMC

The Truth

April 12th
John 8:30-32

Have you noticed that the **truth** often has little to do with what people choose to believe? The current views of “political correctness,” “religious correctness,” “social correctness,” and “scientific correctness” are often unquestionably accepted while the truth is subject to intense interrogation. Though the Bible prophesies that believing a lie would be a characteristic of the “last days” (2 Thess. 2:11), people’s response to the truth has divided mankind throughout human history.

As Jesus walked this earth, He spoke the truth. The truth was a stark contrast to the “correct” views of the people and political and religious leaders of that day. Just like today, Jesus’ words of truth divided the people of His day. To those who believed His words, Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (v. 32). Those who chose *not* to believe His words rejected the truth. Jesus identified this second group’s source of authority, saying, “Ye are of your father the devil.... There is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe Me not” (vv. 44-45).

Jesus performed many miracles, most notably the raising of Lazarus from the dead (ch. 11), which revealed and demonstrated the truth that Jesus was indeed the Christ. He raised Lazarus several days after he had died, and even the promoters of incorrect “correctness” were forced to concede a genuine miracle had occurred. Yet, blinded by their “correctness,” they rejected the truth and discussed how they could kill Lazarus and stuff him back into the grave (12:9-11). I challenge you to believe the **truth**! JMC

With this declaration, the Spirit of God, who breathed out the Sacred Text (2 Tim. 3:16), refutes the ideas that dominate popular culture. First, Scripture declares that God exists. It does not attempt to prove He exists; it simply states that “He *is*” (Heb. 11:6). The Bible says that it is God’s very nature to exist (Ex. 3:14; Jn. 8:58). The declaration in Genesis 1:1 stands against *atheism* (the assertion that there is no God) as well as *agnosticism* (the assertion that we cannot know if there is a God). Second, this verse declares that God created the universe. Everything came into existence by His plan, decree, and power. Nothing exists apart from His creative act. Thus, Genesis 1:1 refutes *evolutionism* (the assertion that living things arose from non-living things by natural processes and that simple things *evolve* into complex things). Third, this verse reveals that God existed before “time” as we know it. Jesus Christ, the second person of the triune Godhead, was the Agent of creation and existed (with God the Father and the Holy Spirit) prior to the work of creation (Col. 1:15-19).

Never do we read of explanations concerning how to “prove” God’s existence. Yet, believers do not simply have “blind faith”; the universe abounds with evidence pointing to the Creator (Psa. 19:1-6; 33:6). Secular science continually attempts to convince mankind that this universe exists by mere chance and that considerable evolutionary changes are what account for the amazing world in which we live. Whom are we to believe? Do we put our trust in finite men who were not there in the beginning or in an infinite God who was and who tells us in His Word all about His work of creation? GDF

Young or Old?

April 14th
Genesis 1:1-2

In the past, it was quite popular to propose a gap of time between the opening two verses of Genesis chapter one. Even today, this idea is still prevalent and seems to be gaining more acceptance within Christendom. A couple of reasons underlie this view. First, secular science tells us that the universe is around 14 billion years old and that the earth is about 4.56 billion years old. So, for those who believe in divine creation as well as a very old universe and earth, this necessitates a gap of time in the Genesis account. The best place for such a gap, some suggest, is between the opening two verses. The Hebrew words translated “without form and void” (v. 2) are supposedly evidence of the “gap.” Second, others propose this gap in order to account for the judgment on Satan and the angelic army that rebelled with him (Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:12-17). While the universe does have the appearance of age, keep in mind that God created Adam and Eve as adult humans, not newborns, and He created fruit-bearing trees, not as seeds or saplings, but as mature trees. An *appearance* of age does not equate to actual age. A straightforward reading of Genesis 1:1-2 does not allow for a vast expanse of time, for Genesis 1:31 refutes both of the reasons mentioned above—all that God had created was “very good”! Also keep in mind that death before sin entered the human race could not have happened (2:17; 3:6). The belief that a time gap exists between these two verses is an attempt to accommodate the secularists. Genesis 1:1-2 makes sense and is best interpreted as: God initially created this sphere covered with water and uninhabited. Two days later, that began to change (v. 9)! GDF

The apostle Paul is not defining in this text what the purpose and character of the church worship service should be, as “church growth” specialists often teach. Their “we must be like the world in order to win the world” philosophy leads to the adoption of a contemporary “seeker service” that is intentionally styled after the world in order to attract the lost “seeker.” They believe negative messages, unfamiliar terms, or ceremony are to be avoided at all costs. This strategy necessarily casts off the uncompromised Bible-preaching, hymn-singing, reverential worship service designed to obey God’s Word. The assembling together of the saints on the first day of the week was for the purpose of being built up in the faith and for giving attendance to the “reading [of the Scriptures], to exhortation [the charge to continue in God’s truth], to doctrine [the teaching of ‘all the counsel of God’]” (1 Tim. 4:13). The instruction in the epistles informs the believer how to live the Christian life as well as how to “behave [him]self in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). The pastor is to preach God’s Word—all of it—or the church ceases to be “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

The intent of this text is to show the apostle’s resolute purpose and godly motivation in taking the gospel message to all—Jew and Gentile, bond or free, regardless of the hearer’s ethnic, cultural, or social standing. Paul had no “target group.” All needed to be saved, and he dedicated himself to making Christ known to all. God is “not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). DWC

... That I Might by All Means Save Some***April 16th******1 Corinthians 9:19-27***

The apostle Paul was willing to be a servant to all so that he might present the Lord Jesus Christ to all, regardless of their station in life (vv. 19-20). He went out; he did not stylize a “seeker service” to lure unbelievers in. Was the apostle willing to set aside his Christian distinctives, which were certainly out of step with the licentious, godless, unregenerate walk “according to the course of this world” (Eph. 2:1-3)? No! The believer should be different from those who are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. The world did not set the agenda or the style of the early church; rather, changed people went out to change the world (Rom. 12:1-2; Acts 17:1-6). Paul did not become like the unsaved by adopting their ungodly lifestyle, nor did he change his mission in order to meet their perceived physical and emotional “needs.” No, Paul focused only on what the Lord had called him to do and did not become entangled with the course and the worldly entrapments of this evil age.

In no way does this text imply that we are to pattern our ministries after the world—Paul ministered “under the Law to Christ” (v. 21) and kept his body under the control of the Holy Spirit (vv. 24-27). He became “all things to all men” (v. 22) by knowledgeably witnessing to a whole spectrum of beliefs and cultures, without giving undue offence. For example, to the lost on Mars Hill, Paul went to the trouble of understanding their paganism (not adopting it!) so that he could use it as a springboard to preach Jesus to them; he made himself “servant unto all, that [he] might gain the more” (v. 19 cf. Acts 17:22-34)—a servant relinquishes freedom; he does not exploit it. DWC

God's righteous standards are built into man so that he is without excuse. The unsaved know what is right and what is wrong. Even those who do not have the Ten Commandments have the Law "written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (v. 15). Scripture gives us two fascinating examples of pagan men who clearly knew right from wrong even though they did not have God's Law.

The first example is from Genesis 26:6-11. Because of a famine, Isaac and Rebekah went into Philistine territory where King Abimelech ruled. One day the king happened to see Isaac "sporting with" (caressing) his wife, and this pagan king knew that such activity was inappropriate outside the framework of marriage. Thus Isaac's lie—that Rebekah was merely his sister—was exposed. King Abimelech also knew that if one of his men would have had relations with Rebekah, a married woman, then he himself would have been guilty of a great sin. Therefore, he rebuked Isaac for his dishonesty.

The second example is from Acts 28:1-6. The barbarians on the island of Melita witnessed Paul being bit by a venomous snake, normally resulting in death. They saw what they thought was the penalty (death), so they assumed the crime: "No doubt this man is a murderer" (Acts 28:4). They had never read the sixth commandment, but they knew that murder was wrong and that murderers deserve to die (Gen. 9:6). They were amazed that Paul suffered no harm from the snakebite, and in their eyes Paul went from being a murderer to being a god! How many today have their consciences so seared that they fail to recognize that fornication is wrong and that murderers deserve death? GWZ

Doing All in His Name with Thanksgiving

April 18th
Colossians 3:12-17

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (v. 17). This principle governs every aspect of Christian conduct. Whatever I do, I must make sure that it is in harmony with Him because His name is at stake; His name stands for His person.

As believers in Jesus Christ we are intimately identified with His name. I am in Him (2 Cor. 5:17), and He is in me (Gal. 2:20). The very name *Christian* links me to Him. No Christian lives to himself (Rom. 14:7; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). He died for me so that I should no longer live unto myself but unto Him who died and rose again for me (2 Cor. 5:15). I am not my own person. What I do is not done independently of my Savior. Every one of my words and deeds reflects either favorably or unfavorably upon my Lord. I must never do anything that will cause damage to His reputation before others. My words and works will either exalt His name or disgrace it, and my desire is that Jesus Christ would be praised. If I watch a lurid television program or if I tell an off-color joke, can the Lord Jesus put His name to that? May I never drag His precious name through the mud. "If we permit anything into our lives that cannot be associated with the name of Jesus, then we are sinning. We must do and say everything on the authority of His name and for the honor of His name" (Wiersbe). I am His representative before the world (2 Cor. 5:20), and I bear His name. A witness is one **who causes others to think about God**. May my life always point to the Lord Jesus Christ. May others think highly of Him because of me. His holy name is at stake! GWZ

Have You Ever Been to Calvary?

April 19th
Luke 23:33-46

Have you ever been to Calvary (also called Golgotha, the place of the skull, Jn. 19:17)? The question is **not**: “Have you ever been to the Holy Land?” Thousands of people have stood by the traditional site of the crucifixion, yet sadly, most have never been to Calvary. The question is, “Have **you** ever **personally** been to Calvary?” If not, you need to visit Calvary posthaste. Calvary is that place where a sinful heart meets a merciful God. It is the place where the heavy burden of sin drops off the guilty one’s back and he is set free forever. Calvary is that place where the helpless and hopeless can go to find great help and much hope. Calvary is the place where man offers God nothing and God gives man everything. Calvary is that place where God cried, “***It is finished!***” and where man states, “***It is enough. I believe He did it all!***”

Sinners come to Calvary, and they go away as saints, set apart for the Lord’s service (Eph. 2:8-10). The guilty come to Calvary, and they go away forgiven and freely justified. The filthy come to Calvary, and they go away fully cleansed. The poor come to Calvary, and they go away with eternal riches. The lost come to Calvary, and they go away saved and eternally secure. Dear friend, have you come to Calvary? All are invited to Calvary, but not all come (Jn. 5:40). At Calvary there is a free gift of life for all (Rom. 6:23), but only a few come and receive it (Matt. 7:13-14). You may have heard people talk about Calvary, but have you been there? You may have read about Calvary in God’s Holy Word, but have you come there? Have you personally been to Calvary? If not, there is still room at the cross for you (Jn. 3:16; 6:37)! GWZ

What Is Your Motivation?

April 20th
Luke 18:10-14

Why do you do the things you do? Why do you help others in need? Why do you give to charitable organizations? What is your motivation? Some people do certain deeds of kindness because it makes them feel noble. Others do good things in order to receive recognition and praise. Still others give donations simply for a tax write-off. A reward always accompanies the giving of alms or charitable deeds, yet *who* it is that gives the reward is what really matters. Jesus warned people not to display their acts of kindness, mercy, or compassion before others in order to be seen. When you do that, your reward will be only here on this earth (Matt. 6:1). The religious hypocrites in Jesus’ day actually sounded a trumpet to draw the attention of others, and when people were looking, they would do their good works (Matt. 6:2). The people would then extol them and declare what wonderful and spiritual men they were to help someone in need. However, the praise of men was their one and only reward.

Remember the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray (v. 10)? He began his prayer bragging to God how he was not a sinner like others. He reminded God, “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (v. 12). But God was not impressed, and the Pharisee went back home the same way he had come. But the publican (tax collector) who was praying in a far-off corner humbled himself before God and was justified by Him. The Lord knows why we do what we do. He knows the secret motivations of our hearts, and He will reward us accordingly. When we serve others, it should not be for our own glory but for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). PNF

The resurrection of Christ from the dead is not only a historical fact, but it is the spiritual foundation of the Christian faith. Without Christ's resurrection, we are still in our sins and could be legitimately classified as *fools* before the world. In 1918, Dr. R. A. Torrey aptly described the important place the resurrection played in the life and teaching of the apostles of the early church. Consider his words: “The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was the central fact in the testimony and preaching of the apostles. When it became necessary to choose a new apostle to take the place of Judas Iscariot, he was chosen to be a witness with the other eleven of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22). Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost centers in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. He first proves the fact of His resurrection and then witnesses to that fact and then draws his definite conclusions from that fact. In every one of his recorded sermons he rang the changes on the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The apostle Paul did the same in all his sermons.... In accepting Christianity one does not accept a mere theological system that men have thought out; he accepts facts that are scientifically demonstrated. The Gospel is not theory, but facts; not man's opinion, but God's facts. *Gospel* means good news, and the good news is simply the news of two great facts: first, that ‘Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures’; second, that He ‘rose again the third day’ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Given those two facts, which are absolutely and immovably established facts of history, the whole Christian system of faith and doctrine naturally and necessarily follows.” MDC

The Key to Success

April 22nd

2 Chronicles 26:3-16

King Uzziah faced many decisions in life. Early on, he chose to follow God and not his own way. “He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD” (v. 4). He wanted a life that pleased God, and God's standard of right living was what he chose. “He sought God” (26:5a) in whatever he did. That means that he looked to God in prayer, asking for His wisdom and guidance. He had godly counsel from others, but he purposed to seek God *himself*. He did not rely upon the spirituality of others; rather, he wanted a *personal* relationship with God. “And as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper” (v. 5). As long as God was number one in his life, as long as he did not lean upon his own understanding, Uzziah was enabled by God to prosper and succeed. “God helped him” (v. 7) defeat his enemies and helped him in his work. “But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction” (v. 16). His success went to his head. He began to take credit for his victories. His pride led to his fall. He took his eyes off the Lord and began to sink.

God must be in control from beginning to end. The moment we take credit we begin to crash. God alone is to be our power and provision. Joshua was admonished with these words: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8). God's Word must be a vital part of our lives; it alone shows us the right way to live. Obedience to the Lord is the key to success. PNF

Tucked away in the text of the New Testament, this short epistle of Philemon has been called the finest specimen of early private Christian correspondence extant. That should not surprise us, for it was given by divine inspiration and flowed from the heart of Paul the apostle. The contents center around the circumstance of a slave who had stolen from his master (v. 18), a wealthy householder named Philemon, and had run off to Rome where, providentially, he came in contact with Paul.

Philemon was a believer who apparently was led to saving faith in Christ some years before this letter was penned, perhaps during Paul's ministry at Ephesus (v. 19; Acts 19). He was a man active in the cause of Christ, for Paul refers to him as a "fellowlabourer" (v. 1). It is obvious from the letter that he owned at least one slave: Onesimus, the runaway. During Onesimus' contact with Paul, he became a Christian and began to live up to the meaning of his name—"useful" or "profitable" (vv. 11, 13)—and he quickly endeared himself to the apostle (vv. 12, 16). Clearly, Paul would have been delighted to have kept Onesimus by his side in order for him to minister to Paul's own needs. However, a more pressing matter had to be rectified: Onesimus was a runaway slave, worthy of death under Roman law if his master should so choose. He had wronged Philemon, and now, as a brother in Christ, he needed to return to Colosse and make it right. The apostle encouraged Philemon to receive him back willingly and to recognize that they were now one in Christ. Forgiveness and restoration are prominent in this beautiful letter. May our hearts be profited as we explore it more fully. JED

Salutation***April 24th***
Philemon 1-3

Luther said, "We are all God's Onesimi." It is true that, in this incident, we have a striking picture of our lost condition by nature and practice and of the activities of divine grace on our behalf. This letter sets forth, most beautifully, the great truths of forgiveness on the ground of the expiatory work of Another and of acceptance in the Beloved. Harry Ironside makes a strong case for this truth in a short gospel article entitled "Charge That to My Account." We are presented with an excellent example of what God could do within both a householder and a slave in bringing them to Christ and causing the love of the Spirit to be manifested richly through them.

What a story the name of the writer calls to mind—Paul! It is he who presents the picture of that which we have just spoken. Allow all that you know of this man to roll through your mind. It was William Ramsay who speaks of the "Charm of Paul," and indeed, when we think of Paul, we cannot help but be reminded of him as preacher, pastor, and man of prayer. He is self-described as the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), yet he was one who met Christ and had his life radically changed with sins forgiven and redemption received. God chose this man to pen a large share of the New Testament Scriptures. Paul wrote to numerous churches and individuals, giving us a wonderful view into the very depths of his own heart. When he might have "pulled rank" on Philemon as "Paul the Apostle," he, instead, appealed to his friend and brother in Christ on the basis of "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ" (v. 1), preferring to entreat him (vv. 8-9) as a "prisoner" than as an "apostle." Paul's tact and appeal are consummate. JED

As we saw yesterday, Paul opens his letter with these words: “Paul, a prisoner” (v. 1), and he strikes that same note again three more times (vv. 9-10, 13). His tact and consummate skill in communication make it nearly impossible for Philemon to refuse his request. We are provided with evidence here that *asking* will often succeed where *commanding* will altogether fail. And note that Paul does not speak of being a prisoner of Nero or Rome, but of Jesus Christ. It is striking that Paul is a captive who is pleading for a slave. He, in speaking of his captivity to Jesus Christ, reveals his faith. His eyes are shut to all secondary causes. Paul is well aware that his imprisonment was allowed and guided in the all-wise providence of God, just as Joseph, long before this, saw as well: “Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5). In the same manner, God controlled the circumstances so that Paul was in the right place at the right time to lead Onesimus to Christ and then send him back to Philemon.

For Paul, it was as though Christ Himself had placed the manacles on his wrists and chained him to a soldier. He wore them lightly and proudly, for he understood and believed God's purpose for this situation. He knew that the events in every believer's life have both human and divine aspects, with both primary and secondary causes. He was “a prisoner of Jesus Christ”—he was there according to the will of God and because of his loyalty to Christ. Paul saw the divine aspect of his afflictions and rejoiced in being a vessel in the Potter's hand on the wheel of circumstances (Jer. 18:3-4). JED

Included as a Brother

April 26th
Philemon 1-2

When my wife and I moved to Montana to minister in a small church in a small ranching community, her mother wrote to us every week with all the news of farm, family, and friends at home. Can you imagine the eagerness with which we received and opened those letters? Well, transfer that excitement into the scene before us in Colosse when Philemon received a letter from the apostle Paul in Rome. After all, this was the man who had led Philemon to the Lord and established him upon the path of righteousness. By Paul's faithfulness in preaching the Word, this saint of God had been lifted from an idolatrous lifestyle into the glorious heights of God's grace.

As Philemon began reading the letter to the family, Paul's name, of course, was presented immediately, but he also included “Timothy our brother.” Paul was the spiritual father of Timothy, and he could have spoken of him as such. However, he chose a wider relationship to highlight, for Timothy was a “brother” not only to Paul but to Philemon and, indeed, to all Christians. How gracious of this aged apostle to include Timothy in his salutation to this household! It was not unlike Paul to be generous in his recognition of young men in the ministry. Furthermore, it was a reminder to Philemon of that great brotherhood of *all* believers—the very spirit of brotherhood that Paul was trusting would work in his dear friend to bring about a kindly reception for Onesimus. Paul urged Philemon to receive with open arms the return of his runaway slave because they now belonged to the same spiritual family and were brothers in Christ. Oh that we, too, would receive one another as brothers and sisters in Him! JED

Unto Philemon Our Dearly Beloved

***April 27th
Philemon 1-2***

Allow me to introduce you to Philemon, the primary recipient of this letter. W. Graham Scroggie makes note of the fact that “all we know of this man is contained within this epistle and one or two sentences in the Colossian letter.” He then produces a list of facts that emerge from those Scriptures: 1. Philemon was a Gentile. 2. He was a Colossian (v. 2; Col. 4:9). 3. He was married and had a son. 4. He was led to Christ by Paul (v. 19). 5. He was characterized by evangelical zeal. 6. He was large-hearted and generously disposed. 7. He was well to do. Suddenly, this man appears before us larger than life with his personality fleshed out so that we may look beyond just his name, seeing a bit into the soul of the man. Not only is he seen as a wealthy man of prominent social standing, but there is special reference to his liberality and hospitality that had been extended to brethren even from a distance (vv. 5-7).

Paul is descriptive in his choice of words when speaking of this man. He was counted “beloved” by Paul himself, and, even more than this, Paul called him “dearly beloved” (v. 1). Philemon is obviously a brother in the Lord who was especially close to the heart of Paul. The apostle recognizes this love toward Philemon and will momentarily ask Philemon to recognize it toward his runaway slave, Onesimus (v. 16). Indication is given (at least in part) as to the reason for this love. They labored in a common cause, and it bound them together—Philemon was a “fellowlabourer” in the work of God. He worked in the same cause so dear to the heart of Paul. May our mutual love of the brethren carry us willingly into the cause of God’s work, together. JED

Neither Male Nor Female

***April 28th
Philemon 2***

It is assumed, probably rightly so, that Apphia was Philemon’s wife. The simple positioning of her name between that of two active Christians implies her close relation to Philemon. The *Biblical Illustrator* says, “It seems in the highest degree probable that Apphia was Philemon’s wife; probable, but in a lower degree, that Archippus was their son.” Herbert Lockyer gives the meaning of Apphia as “that which is fruitful.” He further states that “this believer ... is spoken of as our ‘dearly beloved’.... It is likely that she lived out her name by being a fruitful branch of the Vine.” Clearly, “she and Archippus, if they had not belonged to his family, would not have been included with Philemon in the address of a letter on a domestic matter” (JFB).

The mention of Apphia has great significance. Just as Paul recognized Philemon as a brother, so he recognizes Apphia as a sister in the Lord (“beloved”—the same Greek word used to describe her husband, Philemon). Surely the wrong done by Onesimus to her husband was also a wrong against her as mistress of the household. She, too, should be willing to give this returning slave a friendly reception, and, in the process of that, she could influence the decision of her husband in this case. Surely this Christian woman also had the furtherance of the cause of Christ at heart. Thus, Paul appeals to her to take an interest in these matters that concern a church and a household’s well-being, for it is not Philemon alone who is affected by a thieving runaway slave’s return. The appeal to Apphia as well as to Philemon is an unobtrusive yet real hint of the elevation of woman (Gal. 3:28). Her attitude toward Onesimus will carry great sway. JED

Who is this Archippus? Many believe that he was the spiritual leader of the church in Philemon's house. Moreover, it is also highly likely that he is mentioned in this letter because he was the son of Philemon and Apphia. So we have here a beautiful picture of a Christian household that faithfully served the Lord. The concept of godly homes is stressed or illustrated in other portions of Scripture as well (2 Tim. 1:5; Prov. 1:7-10). It is almost certain that Archippus was involved in some special ministry either in the church at Colossae or Laodicea (only about ten miles distant) as noted by the reference to him in the letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:15-18). It is even possible that he ministered in *both* places. Thus, it is natural that he should be mentioned here because Paul wanted the fullest welcome possible for Onesimus.

Paul, old warrior that he was, graciously spoke of Archippus (assuredly a younger man than he) as a "fellowsoldier" (v. 2). Archippus was not the only one in Scripture to be designated as a "fellowsoldier." Epaphroditus, Paul's "companion in labour," was also noted as his "fellowsoldier" (Phil. 2:25). Paul was fond of military and soldiering terms. To his young protégé, Timothy, he gave instructions to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). Soldiers were familiar figures to Paul, and even as he penned this letter, he was in prison and under guard. So, in speaking of Archippus, it was quite natural for him to speak of being a fellowsoldier, for he was engaged in the work of the ministry (Col. 4:17) as was Paul. In the midst of an entirely different matter, Paul encourages a young man in the ministry—a fellowsoldier. JED

The Church in Thy House***April 30th
Philemon 2***

Having saluted the members of Philemon's household, Paul now turns to one final source that he hopes will encourage Philemon to welcome his runaway slave back home as a brother in Christ. In the process, he also reminds us of what was true of the early church: Local assemblies met in homes for times of worship, prayer, and study of God's Word (Acts 2:42, 46; Rom. 16:1-5). Philemon was so committed to Christ that he opened his home to the church, willing week after week and, perhaps, night after night for believers to worship and study together in his home. Thus, the apostle addresses the company of believers who met for worship in Philemon's house.

How many people today would open their home this much for the church? How many love Jesus Christ enough to open their home on a regular basis? Do we have people who, for the sake of Christ, would forget their tiredness and undertake the housecleaning required in order to accommodate fellow Christians in their worship, even sacrificing relaxation, rest, and family time together? We meet, of course, in buildings set aside for the purpose of corporate worship of the church. It is no longer an issue with us, but it does highlight Philemon's fervency of commitment to his Lord.

But Paul writes with a further purpose in mind. His words of greeting to this local church body are a reminder that Philemon's actions toward Onesimus are not strictly a private affair. He is a member of a larger spiritual community. His treatment of his slave will have abiding significance to the whole group of believers. It is a firm reminder to us that our actions and attitudes affect others as well as ourselves for good or bad. JED

An Important Source of Encouragement

May 1st
Acts 28:11-15

These verses give us insight as to how believers can be of encouragement and help to God's faithful leaders today. If time permits, read Acts 27-28, which details some of the trying experiences the apostle Paul endured during his journey from Jerusalem to Rome. Notice that despite all the difficult times Paul faced, he was especially filled with thanks to God for the presence and concern of believers whom he had never even met before. One final delay in the apostle Paul's trip to Rome brought him to Puteoli, where he found fellow believers who were ready and eager for his ministry to them (vv. 13-14). At their urging, his stay lasted seven days—and what precious days those must have been for both the apostle and the unnamed brethren! Yes, the Lord wonderfully works to provide much needed encouragement for His faithful servants when they are enduring great trials or are about to face tribulations.

As Paul approached Rome, some of the brethren came to meet and greet him. When Paul saw them, "he thanked God, and took courage" (v. 15). Their concern and presence cheered his heart and renewed his courage to face the difficult trials that lay ahead. Because many others were ashamed of his "chains," those who were not were a special blessing to Paul (2 Tim. 1:15-16). Fellow believer, if God has made it possible for you to associate with a godly leader, whether by personal contact with a faithful pastor in a local church or by phone or letter to someone at a distance, remember that you can be a great blessing to those whom God has raised up to be His dedicated ministers. Your interest, prayers, and support will encourage those who so need it. MHR

The Glory Is to Follow

May 2nd
2 Corinthians 4:17-18

The words *temporal* and *eternal* are opposites. Something that is temporal exists within a current frame of reference and is subject to the limitations of time. That which is eternal refers to something with no time limit—that which has no end. Whatever is temporal is measured by time (minutes, days, weeks, etc.). However, that which is eternal cannot be measured; its duration cannot be set by time restrictions. The value of things eternal far transcends the value of anything temporal.

Our text sets forth some vitally important contrasts between that which is temporal and that which is eternal. When believers who are born again by faith also walk by faith, they see—by faith—the problems in the temporal realm in the light of the eternal; as a result, the things that are eternal occupy their thoughts and dictate their actions. It is for this reason that heavy afflictions seem lighter and long afflictions seem shorter. If we have faith in God's promises when trials arise, then we will recognize and accept them as that which God will use to bring us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (v. 17). Although present circumstances may be difficult, the faithful, obedient walk that has eternal verities in view is most assuredly worth the effort. Such a walk by faith produces great confidence as we live and serve in expectation of eternal rewards (5:6-10). We will always have those detractors who mock the believer's regard for the eternal above the temporal, but we should keep in mind that these unbelievers are refusing to face what God says is indeed reality. One day they will realize just how wrong they were. May we view the present in light of the glory that is to follow. MHR

In today's text, we find the children of Israel distraught over the "evil report" delivered by ten of the twelve men commissioned to spy out the land of Canaan—the land promised by God to the Israelites. After returning from their journey, these men acknowledged the goodness of the land (13:26-27), yet they determined that they were unable to claim it due to the strength of the inhabitants therein (13:31-33). Their refusal to press forward stemmed from a heart of unbelief—unbelief in the promises of God. Yes, God had declared that He would give them the land flowing with "milk and honey," but their lack of faith in His promises revealed the hardness of their hearts and their disdain toward all who desired to live by faith (vv. 2-4, 10).

God's Word is full of promises to people of every age, and because God is the author of the Bible, He is the author of the promises therein. Men often break promises, but God cannot break any vows He has made. Concerning the promises of God, the Bible declares that God cannot lie (23:19; Titus 1:2), that God's record of keeping His promises is perfect (Josh. 23:14), that God is *able* to do whatever He has said (Rom. 4:21), and that God is completely faithful to His word (2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 11:11). Yes, we can be certain that what the Lord has said will surely come to pass in His time. Our responsibility is simply to live our lives day by day believing (exercising faith) in the promises of God concerning what He has done for us, who we are in Him, and what He will do yet future. The consequences of faithless living are devastating—it hinders our fellowship with God now, and it will bring loss of reward yet future. MDC

The Consequences of Faith***May 4th
Numbers 14:6-10***

Joshua and Caleb stood firm as the only two men sent to spy out the land of Canaan who believed in the promise of God. Although the inhabitants of Canaan were mighty in strength and stature, these two men declared, "If the LORD delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us.... Only rebel not ye against the LORD" (vv. 8-9). They realized God had the power to keep His promise, and they understood that to believe otherwise was to rebel against Him. When we fail to take God at His word and live by faith in the promises of God, we are rebelling against the Lord. This is a serious charge! The Israelites knew that God had promised them this land (Ex. 15:13-17), but they failed to believe that He would fulfill His promise.

After Joshua and Caleb exhorted the people to move forward and possess the land (13:30; 14:7-9), did the Israelites repent and exercise faith in God's promise to them? Did they thank Joshua and Caleb for their exhortation and faithfulness? On the contrary, they "bade stone them with stones" (v. 10). They wanted to kill these two men simply because they exercised faith in the promise of God and encouraged others to do the same. These rebellious Israelites chose to believe the evil report of the majority rather than the faithful report of the minority. Even today, we must not be discouraged when we are despised for seeking to please and obey the Lord. Our faithful obedience to God will not make us the most popular people, yet our Lord will always reward those who believe His Word and live it out in their lives by faith. God allowed Joshua and Caleb to enter the Promised Land while the rest of the Israelites were forbidden. MDC

Many Mansions Prepared

***May 5th
John 14:1-3***

This message from the Lord Jesus Christ brings great comfort and hope to believers, for His words promise an important reality: Though He was about to leave, He did so in order to prepare a dwelling place for His own. Furthermore, He will return to receive unto Himself from this earth His followers, and they will be with Him in those prepared abodes in the Father's house (v. 3)! Why would these words be of such great comfort? It is because Jesus had just informed His disciples that He was leaving (13:33, 36). They had been following Him for three and a half years, and during those journeys, they experienced increasing hostility and turmoil (7:32; Lk. 20:19). In addition, their lives had been transitory over those three years; in fact, Jesus noted that foxes had holes and birds had nests, but He had no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). Christ's words in John 14:2 stand as a fascinating contrast, stating that He was returning to His "Father's house," which we understand to be heaven. Notice that within this "house" are "mansions"—places for one to reside or dwell in, not *temporarily* but *permanently*! In addition, there are "many" of these "mansions." In other words, this is a spacious and glorious dwelling. Who will be residing in such a wonderful place? It will be the members of the Father's family—believers (1:12; 20:17)!

Paul says something similar in his own words, writing that our "conversation is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20-21). We must not set our deep, abiding affection and trust in the things this present world has to offer; a glorious future is ahead. Do you eagerly yearn for His any-moment return to take you to the home He is preparing for you? GDF

"Beware Lest Ye Also..."

***May 6th
2 Peter 3:13-18***

This blessed second epistle of Peter goes to considerable lengths in detailing the dangers of false doctrine and the terrible end of those who peddle it. The apostle Peter foretells, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that throughout the church age there would "be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.... And many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2:1-2). If a Christian is not aware that the prevalence of doctrinal error today is a confirmation of this prophecy's fulfillment or, even worse, if he does know it but remains unconcerned, then he is in desperate need of the solemn warning given in today's text: "Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (v. 17).

Every believer must realize the need for diligence in holding fast to the truth of God's Word (vv. 14-16). He must never twist the Word of God in an effort to support his own misconceptions or prejudices but must know what the Word says and stand firmly upon that unshakable ground, no matter how tempestuously the winds of false doctrine may blow on every side. If we think we are exempt from the possibility of satanic deception, then we are merely boasting in our supposed spirituality, and to such a one the divine warning is given: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). What is the biblical defense against Satan's wiles and doctrines of demons? The child of God is to "beware" of error in every form (v. 17) and to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (v. 18). Both are essential lest we also "fall from [our] own steadfastness" (v. 17). DWC

The Greek verb *peithō* means “to be sure, fully persuaded, convinced that something is true”—it is a strong word of assurance. This kind of certitude allows for no doubts. May our hearts be encouraged as we consider three places where Paul uses this verb: 1. “Being **confident** (fully persuaded, convinced) of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). God finishes what He begins! God is not finished with me yet. “God loves me just as I am, but too much to let me stay the way I am.” I am convinced that He will complete that good work in me, and one day I will be forever free from the presence of sin. What a day of rejoicing that will be! 2. “For I am **persuaded** (fully convinced beyond any doubt), that ... [nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 38-39). Romans chapter 8 begins with *no condemnation* (v. 1) and ends with *no separation* (vv. 38-39). The worst circumstance imaginable, even death itself, can never separate me from the love of Christ. I am bought by blood, bound by love, and God’s loving embrace of me will never be broken. 3. “For I know whom I have believed, and am **persuaded** (fully convinced) that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). “Paul had deposited his soul in the care and keeping of the Savior, and Paul was *sure* (totally convinced) that Jesus Christ would faithfully guard that deposit” (Wiersbe). God will finish what He started in me; His love for me is unbreakable, and He will keep me to the very end by His power! GWZ

Synchronized Falling

May 8th
John 18:1-11

Something unusual happened when the Lord Jesus was arrested in the garden. Of the four Gospel writers, only John records this peculiar incident. Judas led a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, laden “with lanterns and torches and weapons” (v. 3). The term “band” signifies a Roman cohort of about 500 soldiers (one-tenth of a Roman legion). Whether there was a full cohort or somewhat less, it still indicated a significant group of soldiers. Added to this was a Jewish temple police force. When they arrived, the Lord Jesus went right up to them and said, “Whom seek ye?” (v. 4). They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth,” and Jesus replied, “I am He” (v. 5). As soon as He said, “I am He” (or literally, “I AM”) the most amazing thing happened. As if it had been synchronized, this entire arresting force simultaneously went backward and then fell to the ground (v. 6). How fascinating it would be if we could see a video of this! Men who are standing do not normally lose their balance and fall down in unison. This divinely caused event apparently included Judas (v. 5). In a moment of time a large group of men fell down, and only Jesus and the eleven disciples remained standing! As the Lord waited for them to get back onto their feet, it is as if He were saying, “I’m going to allow you to arrest Me so that I might fulfill My saving mission, but I just wanted to manifest this little glimpse of My power so you might know who is in complete control of this entire situation. Now you may proceed with My permission.” How wonderful it is that the Great I AM is also in total control of every situation we face in our own lives. He does all things well! GWZ

Specific Points of Praise

May 9th
Psalms 106:1, 47

The book of Psalms frequently exhorts us to give thanks to God for our many personal blessings, but it also lists three *specific* attributes of God for which we must be thankful. The Scriptures urge us to thank God not only for His *goodness* and His *mercy*, as our text so clearly states (v. 1), but we must be grateful for His *holiness* as well (v. 47 cf. 30:4; 97:12). We are often thankful for the many *things* the Lord has given to us (and, of course, we should be), but how often are we thankful for who God is? It would be wise for us to take the time to consider the person of God; when we do so, we cannot help but praise and thank our wonderful God for who He is!

God's holiness is often understood as His primary or foundational attribute. Holiness entails *separation* or *set-apartness* (v. 47). We serve a God who is completely separate from any evil or wickedness—anything that contradicts His nature or character. And, because of His holiness, we can be assured of His goodness. God's goodness is seen in His creation of man and nature, in His provision for mankind, and in His desire to fellowship with man. He is good, and He desires good for all His creation. And, due to His goodness, He has poured forth His great mercy upon mankind—He has withheld from us that which we truly deserve. Paul describes God as “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4). Because we are inherently unholy and sinful, we do not deserve a relationship with God. But He has mercifully provided a perfect salvation from the “wages of sin” and the opportunity for all to enjoy a relationship with Him. How thankful we must be for these blessings that stem from the Lord's holiness, goodness, and mercy. MDC

Wonderfully Made

May 10th
Psalms 139:1-24

The reality of divine creation should be profoundly important to all believers. To understand how man came to exist and who brought about our existence is critically more important than many seem to realize. Creation, especially as it pertains to the human race, ought to be more than a passing interest or hobby of a curious mind. It is a *doctrine* that should be settled in the heart of every true child of God. The physical bodies we occupy as well as the minds we utilize are marvelous “vessels” formed by an omniscient, omnipotent Creator. As the psalmist David expressed in this great paean of praise: We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (v. 14). The capacity of the physical body to accomplish and withstand tremendously difficult things is amazing! Regardless of what secular, atheistic scientists claim, humans are the crown of God's creation, not just some higher life form that evolved throughout millions of years. The fact is, we have occupied this planet, as God intended, since “the beginning” of the creation (Matt. 19:4)! In fact, man was given dominion by God over the realm of His creation (Gen. 1:26), which quickly was exercised as Adam named all the air breathing animals that the Lord brought before him (Gen. 2:19-20). What evolutionary mechanism could possibly explain the human mind's capacity to do something like that or, after man's fall into sin (Gen. 3:4-6), the body's ability to heal itself in some instances when one becomes ill or injured? Belief in evolution is, at best, dishonoring to the Lord and, at worst, utterly blasphemous. Some might say it borders on treason to the Christ who created us and then died and rose again for us! GDF

The apostle John was an “old man,” most likely in his mid-90s, when he penned the words of today’s text to his friend Gaius. Gaius was flourishing spiritually, and John’s prayer was that his friend’s physical health would be as good as his spiritual health (v. 2). In his letter, John informed Gaius of his intent to travel and personally visit his dear friend and the church in which this faithful servant ministered. Obviously, John was, at this advanced age, still enjoying the health to serve the Lord.

The apostle commends this brother for walking “in the truth” and for actively serving the Lord. Like Gaius, most important to our own physical well-being is our walking “in the truth” and our faithfulness in doing the Lord’s work. Though it is important for us to live in a healthy manner, it is easy to get caught up in the latest product that claims to renew the strength of our youth while forgetting that God is the true giver of strength (Isa. 40:31) and holds the number of our days in His hands.

At the age of nineteen, my grandfather went to the doctor to take a physical for an insurance policy. The doctor dropped his stethoscope and explained that my grandfather could not possibly survive more than six months. Sixty-four years later, after a full life of serving the Lord, my grandfather was called home to heaven. Rather than searching for the “fountain of youth,” he put his faith in Jesus’ words, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). My grandfather put his heart into his spiritual health and left his physical health in God’s hands; he did not die a day too early or a day too late. JMC

Remembering a Godly Mother

May 12th
2 Timothy 1:3-5

I had the blessed privilege of having a truly godly mother. Her character was like that of Timothy’s mother as described by the apostle Paul in verse five of today’s text. My mother had a gentle spirit. She was a woman of biblical convictions that she did not compromise, yet she was gentle. I have no remembrance of her yelling at me. The seriousness of a matter and the depths to which I was in trouble were made known by the use of my first and middle names: “Jonathan Mark” stopped me in my tracks. There was a firmness about the tone of voice but not an angry holler. On at least one occasion this attribute of her gentleness likely saved my life. I mentioned that I have no remembrance of my mother shouting at me, and that is true. However, I am told that there was one time when she did yell, but it was at an early age before my active memory. I was running unintentionally into the path of a truck, and my mother yelled my name. Unlike children who regularly hear their mother shout, I stopped due to the uniqueness of my mother’s raised voice, and that probably saved my life.

In the last decade of her life, I had the joy of becoming my mother’s caregiver, and the relationship between parent and child was largely reversed. My mother exhibited the same gentle spirit, even in the midst of those challenging circumstances. She was truly a godly woman. She was the same unhypocritical person in both public and private life. Her testimony is aptly described in God’s Word: “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.... Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:28-30). JMC

Help in Time of Trouble

May 13th
1 Chronicles 12:16-18

Everybody faces difficulties in life. Everyone finds himself or herself in need of physical, spiritual, financial, or emotional help at times. We all are called upon to endure times of hurt or despair at one time or another in life. Often, we do not know what to do or where to turn amid such trials when so many voices are attempting to pull us in so many different directions. David faced such situations in his life, and we see from today's text where David turned for help in times of trouble.

First, we learn that David helped himself. He did whatever he needed to do to stay alive when his enemies were attempting to destroy him. Specifically, David sought protection in the caves and rest amid his wearisome plight. We all need to realize our responsibility to take the first step to receive the help we need in times of hardship. We must seek refuge in our God and ask for His will to be accomplished in our life. *Second*, David received the help of others who desired to aid him. The men in today's text came to the cave to meet with David for the purpose of helping him. As a result of receiving them with joy, David experienced sweet fellowship with these men. We, too, must learn to receive the help of our brethren in Christ who attempt to bear our burdens and be of assistance. *Finally*, and most importantly, God helped David. The omnipotent Savior was firmly behind David as he sought to fulfill his Lord's will, and the same is true for us today. God wants to bless and strengthen us and bear our burdens (1 Pet. 5:7). Take the time to read Psalm 46:1-3 and thank God for His ever-present help. Are you looking for help in the right place when trouble comes your way? MDC

Known and Read by All

May 14th
2 Corinthians 3:1-3

As the Holy Spirit transfigures us into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, God becomes truly glorified in us. This sanctifying work of the Spirit is a continuous process and is the theme of this third chapter of the apostle Paul's second epistle to the Corinthian church. The Holy Spirit's ministry in the believer is to make the redeemed more and more like his Redeemer with each passing moment. One glorious day, that operation will be complete when we stand before our Lord and see His face (Eph. 5:24-27; Phil. 1:6; 1 Jn. 3:1-3). But until then, we have much work to do!

In the natural world, man turns trees into paper through a preparatory process of cutting, trimming, and refining; he spends a great amount of time drying the paper in the fiery kiln that reduces the mighty tree into fine writing paper. According to our text, we are God's writing paper—His epistles—"known and read of all men" (vv. 2-3). The Holy Spirit transfigures the proud, self-sufficient believer into a suitable form that can properly reflect the Savior. This process entails many fiery trials and tests of faith, but the believer will doubtless come forth the finer and be better "writing paper" upon which the message and likeness of Jesus Christ can be imprinted for others to behold.

Some questioned Paul's apostolic credentials, so his "letter of reference" was the Corinthian believers themselves (vv. 1-2). The Holy Spirit's transforming work had brought forth much fruit through the apostle's ministry, and others could see God at work in and through the church of Corinth. Let us consider—what kind of epistles are we? What message concerning our Lord and Savior are people able to "read" in us? DWC

The apostle Paul was careful not to take personal credit for the work of God among the Corinthians, and he was quick to acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the One who enables the servant to accomplish his Lord's work (vv. 4-6). "Our sufficiency is of God"—that fact should be burned into our hearts, for we can do nothing without God's enabling grace and the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Lord "hath made us able" to accomplish His will—that truth is absolutely certain.

Paul compares the ministration of the Spirit in the church age with the glory of God experienced by His people under the Law (vv. 7-9). Indeed, wondrous events took place in the Old Testament that undoubtedly awed all who witnessed them. But those events pale in comparison to what the Lord wants to do for His children today. In this age of grace the Holy Spirit accentuates the blessedness of a transformed life, and it is only by the Spirit that we now can walk in righteousness and commune with our Lord. Surely this "exceed[s] in glory" (v. 9) the walk of the Old Testament follower of God.

By the ministry of the Spirit we have been delivered from the curse of the Law and have been made partakers of the glorious new life in Jesus Christ (vv. 10-11). This is the "ministration of righteousness" (v. 9), the God-given ability to do right and to be what He wants us to be. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (v. 6); this speaks of the futility of fleshly Law-keeping as opposed to walking by faith through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit; only the walk of faith can produce Christ-likeness—a transformed life—in each one of God's children. Let His strength be your sufficiency! DWC

Changed into the Same Image

May 16th
2 Corinthians 3:12-18

God's redemptive work for Israel under the old covenant was undeniably glorious, as the account of Moses' transfiguration signifies; but it was incomplete and unfinished (vv. 13-14). The coming of Christ and the advent of the Holy Spirit provided a wonderful fulfillment of what was merely foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The veil of Israel's understanding was not lifted until Christ came. As ambassadors for Jesus Christ, we must make the gospel message plain (v. 12) in our witness to all who are blinded by sin, Jew and Gentile alike (vv. 15-16 cf. 4:2-4).

The Holy Spirit works to deliver the Christian from the power of sin once he has been saved from the penalty of sin. As we see the glory of the Lord Jesus revealed in the Word and as we fellowship with Him each day, we are, by the Spirit, "changed into the same image" (vv. 17-18)—this is the work of the Spirit whereby the believer grows in grace and in knowledge of his Lord as he reflects Christ Himself in his life (2 Pet. 3:18). Can others see Christ Jesus in us? Even the pagans marvelled and took notice of Peter and John "that they had been with Jesus" (see Acts 4:13)—how magnificent! The Bible also tells us that the glorious operation of the Holy Spirit within a saint even exceeds the visible glory that radiated from Moses' face (vv. 7-8). We today have a distinct advantage over the Old Testament saints in that we have the indwelling Spirit who saves, seals, and sanctifies us. Do we seek the sanctifying work of the Spirit and allow Him to transform us into the image of Christ? Romans 12:1-2 tells us how we can do just that. Let us ask ourselves: Do others see a resemblance of the Savior in us? DWC

Our nation was established upon absolutes, many of which were taken from the Bible. Absolutes have played an important role in holding the fabric of our country together, allowing us to repeat the pledge, “One nation under God.” With the erasing of absolutes has come the fracturing of our land politically, morally, and spiritually. The present circumstances in America mirror what happened to the people of Israel more than 3,000 years ago. In the closing chapters of the book of Judges, God prompted the writer to repeat a statement: “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). When God repeats His words in the Bible it is for a vital purpose. In this case, it was the key to understanding why the nation of Israel was falling apart at its very seams.

The fact that “there was no king in Israel” depicted the lack of absolutes. The people had no leader who encouraged, taught, and enforced the absolutes of God’s Law. The result was that “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The moral condition of the nation plummeted. The value of life hung in the balance of an individual’s unrestrained immoral desires. Marriage, the meaning of marriage, and the purpose of marriage, were lost to the most sickening of behaviors. The happenings of the last chapters of the book of Judges are a haunting demonstration in history of where we are headed as a people and a nation. Absolutes are important! Notice once again what God exhorted His people in today’s text. As believers, we must unashamedly believe in the absolutes of God’s Word and believe they are “for our good always” (v. 24). JMC

Telling Lies***May 18th
John 8:44***

Many people have no qualms whatsoever about lying. It has become a matter of convenience. Truth is spurned and out-right lying is acceptable and subject to situational ethics. Yesterday, we considered the lack of absolutes in our society and that God’s Word is the absolute truth; His truth is what delivers or makes a person free (v. 32). Lies not only enslave, but they also reveal the nature and character of the liar.

Today’s text contains absolute truth spoken by Jesus, who is “the truth” (14:6), to those who rejected Him. Jesus makes it clear that it is impossible for the devil to speak the truth. It is his nature to lie. He is the source or originator of all lies. That truth should cause us to recognize that whenever we lie we are imitating the devil. A person who calls himself a Christian must be convinced that it is *never* right to lie. We are *always* to speak the truth no matter what the cost. Yet even some Christians think it is not wrong to lie or to be deceptive at times when it is convenient. Notice that when Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter, he said, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?... Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:3-4).

Because people reject the absolute truth of God’s Word, they have no misgivings when it comes to lying, and thus they have “changed the truth of God into a lie” (Rom. 1:25). If you are able, take time to read the entire context of Romans 1:16-32. The Lord commands us to “lie not one to another” (Col. 3:9) and to “[put] away lying, [and] speak every man truth with his neighbour...” (Eph. 4:25). Whom are you representing today through your heart, words, and life: the God of truth or the father of lies? PNF

In Ezekiel's day, most of God's people wanted peace at any price. The majority of the prophets, being men-pleasers, promised the Israelites the peace for which they longed even though, in reality, Israel could not obtain it due to her disobedience. These prophets claimed to be speaking in the name of the Lord, but God saw through their pretense and warned the people that they were being seduced through false promises of peace (v. 10). The Lord had some harsh words to say concerning these self-professed prophets who claimed to be speaking His words (vv. 1-3). God's message to them was a repudiation of their claims rather than a confirmation.

A similar seduction is taking place today. Politically, world leaders are offering peace if the free world responds favorably to the overtures of godless regimes. Religiously, the majority of pastors and other leaders are offering peace if their followers will forget their differences and work together with other religions. All who heed these false promises of peace are being deceived. Many seducing prophets are in the world, but there are few "Ezekiels." Certainly no godly believer desires conflict, but until the Prince of Peace rules and reigns upon this earth, an unbelieving, Bible-rejecting world cannot have peace: "There is no peace ... to the wicked" (Isa. 57:21). Therefore, all who offer peace to a wicked world or to disobedient believers thus identify themselves as seducers and liars. However, a wonderful peace is yet accessible in the midst of this wicked and tumultuous world. Peace with God and the peace of God are available to all who will trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. Do you have this blessed peace? MHR

Untempered Mortar

May 20th
Ezekiel 13:9-16

In our text today, we not only see that God is against the false prophets, but we learn that the day is coming when He will remove them from the assembly of His people (v. 9). They may be popular now, but a day of judgment will take place when He purifies a believing remnant of Israel in preparation for the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. The Lord uses vivid language in revealing the actual nature of the false prophets' empty lies intended to seduce His people (v. 10).

In Ezekiel's day, as in our own, a major plank in the program of false prophets is the promise of peace for their followers. But the peace they pledge is not based upon peace with God or the peace of God; rather, this false peace is based upon an effort to unite all mankind, apart from God. The messages and strategies proclaimed by these deceivers were generated from within their own imaginations (vv. 14-17). Today's text and many others make clear that these man-made plans are predestined to failure. God likens all such peace plans, programs, and prophecies to the efforts of those who try to erect a wall using untempered mortar. Such a wall might elicit praise from those who do not know the difference between tempered and untempered mortar, but any experienced, discerning builder will immediately recognize that this wall could never last. Indeed, such a wall will crumble long before its anticipated completion. The false prophets today are promising a pseudo peace, and far too many believers are being deceived by their seductive words. But God promises no peace in the world until the Lord Jesus Christ returns; therefore, we are to proclaim Jesus, not world peace. MHR

Continue in Righteousness

May 21st
1 John 5:18-21

These last four verses of the apostle John's first epistle provide the believer with a brief creed for Christian living. As an encapsulation of the entire epistle, these verses reveal what we know to be true and exhort us to continue in righteousness (v. 18), to be different from the world (v. 19), to get to know Jesus Christ (v. 20), and to stay away from anything that would deter us from our walk with the Savior (v. 21). If we would only allow the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to heed these four verses, our Christian lives would become vibrant, uncompromised testimonies for God, and our relationship with the Lord would certainly grow and intensify.

John exhorts believers to continue in righteousness, for "whosoever is born of God sinneth not," that is, he does not perpetually practice sin (v. 18). Of course, it is certainly possible for a Christian to sin and wander from a right relationship with God (1:10-2:1), but the true believer eventually will either confess his sin before the Lord (1:9) or else face His chastening hand (Heb. 12:5-7). John says that the believer who is walking in fellowship with his Lord "keepeth himself, and that wicked one (Satan) toucheth him not" (v. 18). It is impossible for Satan to gain a strong, controlling grasp of our lives when we are "[walking] in the light, as He is in the light" (1:7). When we "keep ourselves," or take the responsibility upon ourselves to continue in righteousness, we will walk in fellowship with the Lord, we will obey His Word, and we will keep our lives from being used to further Satan's cause. Do not become the devil's conquered victim! Through the Spirit, we have the power to keep Satan at bay. MDC

Be Different from the World

May 22nd
1 John 5:18-21

Not only is the believer to continue in righteousness throughout his or her Christian life, but he or she also is to be different from the world (v. 19). Notice that verse nineteen contains two contrasting clauses delineating between those who are of God and those who are of the world. "We are of God," John says. In contrast, "the whole world lieth in wickedness." The followers of Jesus Christ are to reject the world system, with its evil ways, man-made philosophies, and humanistic religions.

Earlier in his epistle, John told the believers, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (2:15). In fact, he added, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Why? First, love for the world is incompatible with love for God. Jesus declared that it is impossible to serve two masters (Matt. 6:19-21, 24), and James wrote, "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). Second, this world is only temporary. To involve ourselves in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life might bring "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25), but it will surely wreak havoc on our present fellowship with God and on our future reward. Clearly, a difference should exist between the lifestyle of those who love the world and the lifestyle of those who love the Lord. It is impossible to serve both Jesus Christ and the system of this world. Dare to be different. Boldly follow Christ rather than the way of this "present evil world" (Gal. 1:4). If we love our Savior, His Word, and our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, then our focus will be on heavenly things rather than that which is of the world. MDC

Verse twenty of today's text provides us with the third point in John's brief benedictory creed for Christian living. Not only do we "know" that we are to continue in righteousness (v. 18) and that we are to be different from the world (v. 19), but we also know that we are to continually walk closer to our Lord each day. Of course, the apostle John wrote this epistle to believers who have already experienced the new birth, so to "know" Jesus Christ in this context means to intimately fellowship with Him and to get to know Him as a child knows his father. Just as our personal relationships with earthly friends and family grow stronger or weaker over time, so our relationship with Christ will either progress or wane throughout our life.

The key to having fellowship with the Lord and possessing a right relationship with Him is this: We need to "abide in Him" (2:28) and "walk in the light, as He is in the light" (1:7). What are the results of being in fellowship with Him? We will "keep His commandments" (2:3) and "walk, even as He walked" (2:6). If we "know Him" and "are in Him" who is truth, then our lives will be characterized by truth—we will proclaim Jesus Christ as "the true God, and eternal life" (v. 20) and "avoid" (Rom. 16:17) all other gospels and religions that undermine or reject His perfect, finished work on Calvary's cross. Furthermore, we will look to the Word of God as our final authority in all matters of faith and practice. As we fulfill Christ Jesus' will in our lives, we will get to know Him better each passing day. Believer, seek fellowship with the Lord and speak regularly with Him. He is ever present and ready to hear our prayers. MDC

Keep Yourself from Idolatry***May 24th***
1 John 5:18-21

The final verse of our text, and of the entire first epistle of John, seems like a rather abrupt and blunt ending for this loving letter to the saints. Yet the last verse powerfully reinforces the central truth that runs throughout the book: Stay away from whatever will hinder a close walk and fellowship with the Lord. It does not matter whether a believer's "idol" involves the acceptance of false doctrine (4:1-3) or the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life (2:16)—the believer is to "keep [himself]" (or "stay away," v. 21)—from anything that prevents him from abiding in Christ. The apostle John wanted his readers to understand the serious nature of his warning concerning the false doctrines and worldliness that could ensnare the saints. This was God's direct message to the church. Thus, this very last, concise verse drives home his point in a most effective manner: "Keep yourselves from idols. Amen."

We must understand that an idol is not necessarily a statue constructed of wood or stone. Throughout his epistle, John never even mentions the inanimate idols of pagans. No, the idols to which John refers in verse twenty-one include any objects, ideas, or doctrines that would lure the believers' attention and focus away from God's Word and hinder their ability to grow in fellowship with the Lord. Satan strongly desires to draw us away from communion with our God, and it is never his desire for us to continue in righteousness (v. 18), to be different from the world (v. 19), or to know our Savior better (v. 20). The devil will attempt anything to deter us from applying this text to our lives, but do not let him do it! Instead, be holy (set apart), even as Christ is holy. MDC

A Christian had been neglecting the weekly prayer meeting service.

A humble friend visited him and sought to bring before him the truth of the Word, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). This concerned believer went to the fireplace where the embers were glowing brightly on the hearth, took a live coal, and set it in a place off by itself. Together they watched as it changed from the red glow to a cold, black mass. The backslidden Christian responded, “You need not say another word. I’ll be at Bible study and prayer meeting on Wednesday!” C. H. Mackintosh stated, “Of the many favors conferred upon us by our ever-gracious Lord, one of the very highest is the privilege of being present in the assembly of His beloved people, where He has recorded His Name. We may assert with all possible confidence that every true lover of Christ will delight to be where He has promised to be. Whatever may be the special character of the meeting; whether it be round the Lord’s table, to show forth His death; or round the Word, to learn His mind; or round the mercy-seat, to tell Him our need, and draw from His exhaustless treasury, every devoted heart will long to be there: and we may rest assured that anyone who willfully neglects the assembly is in a cold, dead, dangerous state of soul. To neglect the assembling of ourselves is to take the first step on the inclined plane that leads down to the total abandonment of Christ and His precious interests.” Being with the people of God under the ministry of the Word is both a privilege and a delight! GWZ

The Love of God

May 26th
John 3:16

God’s love is beyond our limited understanding. Too many times we interpret God’s love only through human thoughts, emotions, and experiences, all of which change and are untrustworthy. Many try to bring God down to the level of humans, whose love is fickle and conditional; but that is not the God of the Bible. **God’s love is divine:** “*For God so loved.*” God is eternal, and “*God is love*” (1 Jn. 4:8). He is the true definition of what true love is. His love is not false or fleeting. His love is faithful through time and eternity. **God’s love is universal:** “*the world.*” His love includes you and me. No matter our country of origin, color of skin, language, social status, physical condition, gender, age, or whatever class you put yourself in, God loves YOU (Rom. 5:6, 8)! God’s love is not limited to a select few; it is for the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). **God’s love is giving:** “*that He gave His only begotten Son.*” God is not stingy. He gave His best and His all. He did not withhold what was required for our salvation (Rom. 8:32). God did not give His second-best. He gave sacrificially and freely so that we might be saved and forgiven. **God’s love is saving:** “*that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.*” God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). No sin is too great that God’s love cannot reach and forgive! But, you must accept Jesus Christ by faith and receive Him to become His child (Jn. 1:12). **God’s love is eternal:** “*but have everlasting life.*” The moment you believe in Jesus as your Savior, you possess eternal life (1 Jn. 5:11-13). He will never take it back, and no one can take it from you (Jn. 10:28-30). PNF

Today's text describes a seemingly impossible event—something happened that nobody ever would have predicted or believed could come to pass. One of the greatest antagonists of Christianity, one of the most highly educated Jewish leaders of his time, one of the most feared persecutors of the church—Saul of Tarsus—now possessed a relationship with Jesus Christ. He had become a Christian. A man whose life once centered around destroying Christians had trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior.

We see a brief historical account of Saul's conversion in today's text, yet notice also a more detailed account from the mouth of Paul himself. Read Acts 22:1-16 where Paul gave his testimony of conversion to a Jewish mob, and read Acts 26:9-18 where Paul recounted his testimony to King Agrippa. In each account, Paul demonstrated his former hatred of Christianity and his persecution of the church as well as his confrontation with the very One whom he had persecuted. Paul clearly described his conversion and subsequent obedience to God's command. Certainly, if Saul of Tarsus could become a Christian, anyone can! While nothing is impossible with God, some things are impossible with man. God can do anything as long as it is consistent with His nature, but we are limited in our abilities. Today's text contains a three-fold lesson to us—a lesson that forces us to understand our own finiteness and dependency upon God. Over the next few days, we will consider three things we *cannot* do. But today, take time to focus upon the miracle of salvation, particularly the grace of God demonstrated in the lives of even those who can call themselves the "chiefest of sinners." MDC

Impossible to Thwart God's Plan***May 28th
Acts 9:1-9***

It is impossible to thwart the plan and purpose of God. Notice the Lord's words to Saul: "It is *hard* for thee to kick against the pricks" (v. 5). Jesus had said that He would build His church (Matt. 16:18), but Saul was attempting to destroy it. God had chosen Saul to be the apostle to the Gentiles before he was even born (Gal. 1:15), yet he continued to fight the truth of the gospel. When we attempt to "go at it our own way" and that way is contrary to the purpose and will of God, two things will happen: *First*, we will not have joy and peace in our lives. "It is hard," Jesus said to Paul. We will live a life of futile struggle that brings despair. On the other hand, Psalm 1:1-3 describes the recipe for happiness in the Christian life. It entails: refusing to walk with the ungodly, to stand in the path of sinners, and to sit in the seat of the scorner as well as delighting in God's Word and meditating in the Scriptures. *Second*, we will not succeed. Over 100 times the Bible says, "It shall come to pass." What God declares is final! We can count on the fact that despite our every effort, we will fail if we walk in a manner inconsistent with the Word and will of God. The world is full of people defying the truth of God and seeking their own way of salvation, world peace, or ecumenical church unity—yet these things will not come to pass. We must understand that no one—believer or unbeliever—can find true success in any endeavor that stands in opposition to the truth of God revealed in His Word. Saul, Jeremiah, Jonah, Abraham, and other biblical figures discovered this fact the hard way. We must learn from these individuals that it is not possible to thwart the plan and purpose of God. MDC

Impossible to Grow without Instruction

May 29th
Acts 9:10-19

Not only is it impossible to thwart the plan and purpose of God in life, as Saul of Tarsus (soon to be the apostle Paul) discovered, but we find from our text that it is also impossible to move forward in the Christian life without spiritual training and instruction. Now that Saul enjoyed a personal relationship with Christ, he needed to grow spiritually—he needed to learn much about himself, his God, and his spiritual walk. How did Saul grow spiritually, and how are we to grow spiritually?

First, Saul sat at the feet of Christ—God taught Saul the truth he needed to know. According to Galatians 1:11-18, Saul spent three years in Arabia following his conversion and prior to his public ministry. God’s personal revelation to Saul during this time in his life comprised the content and focus of all his ministry (read Gal. 1:11-12; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 3:1-12; and 1 Cor. 11:23-26; in each text, Paul declares that he personally received such truth from God Himself). Although we do not receive direct revelation from God in the same manner in which Paul received it, we have a great responsibility to ingest and understand these wonderful truths through the personal study of God’s Word. If we are to grow spiritually, we must allow the Lord to teach us!

Second, we grow spiritually by sitting under the teaching of gifted pastor-teachers and other godly men. Even Saul needed the aid of Ananias. God’s plan in this age is for the saints to gather as a local body of believers to grow and learn. The local church is the training ground for saints to be equipped to minister (Eph. 4:11-14; Acts 2:42, 46-47). Personal Bible study *and* corporate teaching are vital to spiritual growth. MDC

Impossible to Please Everybody

May 30th
Acts 9:20-31

Thus far, we have learned that it is impossible to thwart the plan and purpose of God and that it is impossible to grow spiritually without instruction in His Word. Today, we learn that it is impossible to please everyone. Consider Saul once again. When he was loved by the Jewish unbelievers, he was the enemy of the Christians (vv. 1-2). A survey of Scripture reveals several words and phrases used to describe Saul’s attacks against believers: “breathing out threatenings,” “slaughter,” “persecuted unto the death,” “binding and delivering into prison,” “punished them often ... and compelled them to blaspheme,” “being exceedingly mad against them,” “made havock of the church.” It is no wonder that the saints in Jerusalem were hesitant to receive Saul (vv. 26-28). Yet we also notice that when Saul became a Christian and the friend of Christians, the Jewish unbelievers hated him. Following his conversion, his testimony became clear (vv. 20-22). He “confounded” (stirred up; confused) the Jews while “proving” (v. 22, that is, he “put together”) that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. Their response: They sought to kill their one-time hero (vv. 23-24, 29).

Jesus not only made it clear that if we belong to Him we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24), but He also made it clear that if we belong to Him and are truly faithful to Him, we will not be liked by the world (Jn. 15:18-19; 16:33). If we are in company with Jesus, we will not be a friend of the world (1 Jn. 2:15). In other words, it is impossible to please everyone, no matter how hard we may try. We must choose a side. As those who know Jesus Christ as Savior, our goal must be to please Him in all things. MDC

The faithful servant of Christ will receive a “crown of glory” at His appearing (v. 4). Faithfulness means adherence to certain conditions—tenets determined by God’s Word, not by the standards of the world. The godly pastor is to “feed the flock of God” (v. 2); he is to preach the *whole* message God has given him, not just what is “palatable” to the hearers. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that in addition to declaring “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), they were to beware of the false teachers and deceptive wolves that would seek to spoil the flock (Acts 20:28-31). Paul told these pastors that, like him, they also were responsible to preach the truth of God’s Word as well as to inform their flocks about the people or things that would harm them. God’s undershepherd *must* be specific—he must name names and label sins! A faithful pastor will be as concerned about keeping his sheep away from the poisonous shrubs as he is about making sure they have enough tender, green grass to eat.

The pastor/elder also must be an example (v. 3); that is, he must provide a picture of the tender—yet corrective, as needed—care that the Lord Jesus Christ has for each member of His flock. The pastor is not to “lord” over the people, for they are “God’s heritage” (v. 3), not his own. He is simply the undershepherd, the caretaker, who is responsible to follow the orders of the Lord before whom he and his people must one day stand. Carnal motives, self-glorification, and an unwilling heart should have no place among God’s undershepherds (vv. 2, 5). Jesus Christ is the “chief Shepherd” (v. 4), and God resists anyone who tries to focus praise anywhere other than on Him. DWC

The Chief Shepherd’s Care

June 1st**1 Peter 5:6-14**

The believer may feel the “mighty hand of God” (v. 6) through suffering, chastening, or the “fiery trial.” Why does the Lord place His strong hand upon us? He does this so we can realize just how weak and needy we truly are and how dependent we are upon His strength, which is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Our loving heavenly Father reveals His care for us by sovereignly bringing us to the place where we must rest humbly and fully upon His sustaining grace. The Lord has called every believer unto “His eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (v. 10). But take special note of what precedes both this future eternal glory and the fullness of blessing now: “after that ye have suffered a while.” We often long for God’s blessings, not knowing that in order to obtain them we must first be humbled in the Refiner’s fire and molded by the Potter’s hand (Isa. 48:10; Rom. 9:21). We cannot stiffen or rebel against these divine dealings and still expect to be exalted “in due time” (v. 6).

What are we to do when the burden is heavy and when it seems that we are about to fall beneath the load? We are to cast all our “care upon Him: for He careth for [us]” (v. 7). The Lord brought this time of affliction and testing our way because He loves us and wants to prove Himself faithful in our time of need. But, a word of warning is necessary (vv. 8-9): Satan delights to take advantage of the discouraged, disheartened saint. During difficult times, it is essential that we seek the Lord through His Word and through prayer. Do not allow Satan to frustrate what God desires to accomplish through testings and trials. Our reverent and compliant response to His care is essential. DWC

An unknown author once wrote: “**Lord, TAKE me!** Me, with all my selfishness, with all my pride and jealousy, all my willful disobedience, all my lack of love to Thee, me, with all my faults and frailties, all my secret, hidden sins. **And BREAK me!** Break my stiff and stubborn will, Lord. Break myself with all its pride, all its dearest dreams, ambitions. Break my heart, its idols smash—Till in splintered, shattered fragments I lie helpless at Thy feet. **And MAKE me!** With Thy tender, skillful hands, Lord, make me like Thyself to be molded in Thy glorious image, sweet and loving, humble, kind, faithful, gentle, finding pleasure only in my Father’s will.”

An oak tree in the yard, so stately in form, **stood strong and straight** until it crashed amid a storm. Nearby a willow tree **bowed low** to every wind until the storm passed by, then straightened up again. Like people I have known, oaks crash in fiercest wind while bowing willows live. Things break when they do not bend. Oh for the foolish, the weak, the base, the lowly, the despised, the poor (1 Cor. 1:25-31)—Oh to be foolish enough to depend upon Him for His wisdom; to be weak enough to be empowered with His strength; to be base and low enough to have no honor but God’s honor; to be despised enough to be kept in the dust of His feet, an earthen vessel, that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of me; to be nothing enough for God to be everything; to be poor enough to have His riches abound; to be sick enough to run to His health. *Lord, bend that proud and stiff-necked “I” and help me to bow the neck and die, beholding Him on Calvary, who bowed His Head for me.* GWZ

Response to the Word**June 3rd**
James 1:17-27

The preface to the first edition of *Matthew Poole’s Commentary* states: “The same reason which teacheth us to conclude that there is a First Being, and must be a First Cause and Mover, (whom we call God,) ‘that it is he who hath made us, and not we ourselves,’ and that ‘we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture,’ will also oblige us ‘to enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise,’ and to ‘be thankful unto him’ by fulfilling his will; which we cannot do without some revelation of it to us.” What profound thoughts these are! We are obligated to enter God’s presence with adoration, praise, and thanksgiving demonstrated by obeying His will, but we cannot know His will unless it is revealed to us. The Old Testament Scriptures thunder forth with 414 occasions of “Thus saith the Lord,” while the New Testament states unequivocally, “God, who at sundry (various) times and in divers manners (many ways) spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1-2a). God has spoken; His will is revealed. The preface above does not stop with just the acknowledgement of God’s revelation, but it also addresses the need to obey it in order to fulfill God’s will.

The Bible does not suggest that we have exhausted our responsibility to it by confirming that God has spoken, we have heard Him, and His will is revealed. No, there is more! “Ezra ... a ready scribe in the law of Moses ... prepared his heart **to seek** the law of the LORD, and **to do it**” (Ezra 7:6, 10). We must read the Word in sincerity and attend with meditation in order that self-examination may lead to obedience. JED

As we saw last quarter under the tutelage of William Evans in *The Book of Books*, there are precise principles for profitable Bible study: 1. Read with intent of understanding and giving a willing response. 2. Read with sincerity of heart. 3. Let reading be attended with meditation. 4. Respond with sincere, impartial self-examination. We were led to a sample exercise in Genesis 1:1 for the application of these principles. In the stage of self-examination, it is necessary to consider appropriate responses arising out of hearts that understand God's Word and that have, with sincerity, reflected upon its truths so deeply that one begins to ask leading questions such as, in this instance: "If God created all, then what responses should our hearts give?"

Our great God (Psa. 96:4), infinitely greater than all of His creation (Job 38:33-41), allows "the work of [His] fingers" (Psa. 8:3) to "declare ... [His] glory" (Psa. 19:1). Have we considered the great work of God's hands and what it means to us? "Scientists believe there are over 260,000 species (kinds) of plants.... Plants also are the oldest living things" (*World Book*). Psalm 104 speaks of the botany of our planet, without which human and animal life could not exist, as confirmed by *World Book*: "Without plants, there could be no life on Earth. People could not live without air or food, and thus could not live without plants. The oxygen in the air we breathe comes from plants. Our food comes from plants or from animals that eat plants." Yet the Lord challenges us to look beyond creation and to seek the Creator—"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things" (v. 26). We are accountable to God! JED

The Omnipotent Power of the Creator***June 5th***
Hebrews 11:1-3

Omnipotence is defined as "the quality of being all-powerful" (Psa. 62:11; 115:3; Dan. 4:35). Are we guilty of carelessly passing over the great works of God? What measure of admiration do we give to our Creator? Do we truly appreciate His omnipotent power? These are sobering but pertinent questions that we must answer honestly as we examine our own responses in the light of God's Word.

Romans 4:17 contains a wonderful statement about God: He "quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." Abraham and Paul believed in the same God, but what is the character of this God? The aforementioned verse answers this question, helping believers to have a clear understanding of the God being trusted. Paul is not introducing a new concept concerning God in Romans 4; this is the same God the Jews had always worshiped. God is the Creator—the Giver and Sustainer of life. He can bring the dead back to life (1 Sam. 2:6) and bring into existence what previously did not exist (v. 3). In keeping with that omnipotent power, God made Abraham the father of many nations by working miraculously in his body and Sarah's womb so that she conceived in old age (Rom. 4:17-21); He also raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 4:23-25). We know that God can do the impossible.

This infinite power of God must be apprehended by faith (v. 3). As Genesis 1 announces ("And God said...") and as Psalm 33:6 and 2 Peter 3:5 corroborate, God spoke all things into existence. Faith enables us to understand and admire what God does, and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). JED

“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3).

God forbade the nation of Israel to worship the objects of the heavens (v. 19) or to make any carved image of things in heaven, on earth, or in the waters of the earth (5:8-9; Ex. 20:4-5). Nor were they allowed to practice astrology (Isa. 47:13-14; Jer. 10:1-2). They were to worship the Creator, not the creation—unlike those who “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). The Lord is a jealous God—He expects His creation to render unto Him the glory that is due Him, the one true and living God (Ex. 34:14; Isa. 42:8; Jer. 10:10).

The existence of creation implies the existence of a Creator, and the nature of creation implies that this Creator was wise enough to plan it and powerful enough to execute the plan and to maintain what He had made. The complexity of the universe demands a Creator who can do anything, who knows everything, and who is present everywhere. Genesis 1:1 emphatically states, “God created the heaven and the earth.” David knew that the Lord speaks to the inhabitants of earth by means of His creation (Psa. 19:1-6); it is a “wordless book” needing no translation, for everyone can read it. Silently, abundantly, and universally, creation declares His glory and handiwork; yet most ignore it and reject God (Rom. 1:18-23). They are guilty of admiring the heavens more than the God who dwells therein (Isa. 66:1). Yet we must ask ourselves: Are *we* guilty of esteeming the heavens more than our Father who is in them? The Lord’s handiwork is marvelous, but it is just that: His handiwork. It points us to Him alone! JED

A Lie in the Right Hand***June 7th******Isaiah 44:9-20***

Man’s refusal to glorify the true God while accepting the insanity of idolatry described in today’s text is quite ironic. Having rejected the true Source of wisdom, man’s claim to be wise is an idle boast. The one who rejects God progressively becomes a fool, and his foolishness culminates in the concocting of his own ideas concerning what a god should be and do. When one refuses to acknowledge and glorify God, the result is a downward path moving from valueless thinking to moral insensitivity and ending in the religious stupidity seen in idol worship (Rom. 1:18-25). Though creation clearly demonstrates “that which may be known of God” (Rom. 1:19), man chooses to believe and propagate a lie rather than to receive the truth (Rom. 1:18). Man withholds from God the thanks and glory He deserves—willing to use His bountiful gifts but unwilling to worship the Giver. What is the result? An empty mind and darkened heart! What a sad commentary upon the vast majority of mankind!

Is a message here for the believer? The Bible teaches that idolatry extends beyond the worship of images and false gods; it is a matter of the heart and is associated with pride, self-love, greed, gluttony, and love of possessions. In fact, anything that is loved or sought above God is an idol. In light of Genesis 1:1 and the need for considering and subsequently obeying God’s Word, we must ponder: “Have I loved the creature more than the Creator?” Jehovah will not give His glory to another nor His praise to idols (42:8). As wonderful as God’s creation is, exalting anything (including ourselves) above the Lord is a misdirection of allegiance, robbing God of His rightful honor. JED

Bible study should always lead us to the objective of full obedience.

Reading with the intent of understanding and the bowing of our will—with sincere hearts, with the accompaniment of meditation, and with self-examination—will bring us ultimately to that goal. Self-examination in the light of God’s Word will cause us to ask questions pertaining to the Scripture under scrutiny—in our present series of consideration, Genesis 1:1 —“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” We have considered a number of responses that should flow from the heart as we read that verse and gaze into the creative work of God. If we have carefully considered the work of God’s hands and what it means to us, then what measure of admiration have we given to the Creator? Or, are we guilty of admiring the heavens above God and, thus, loving the creation more than God? How has the viewing of God’s creation affected our thoughts and life? What are our contemplations as we consider the heavens?

God created, from nothing previously existing, the heaven and the earth (33:6-9; Heb. 11:3), including the incalculable reaches of sidereal space (the stars or the constellations). David, in his original occupation as a shepherd, had gazed often into the sky and entertained glorious thoughts of God’s greatness exhibited in the visible heavens. Observing the splendor of the heavens as God’s finger work, he was amazed at the finiteness and relative insignificance of man (v. 4). Yet David knew that, in His great love, the Lord had chosen the earth for Himself (24:1) and created man in His image, giving even more reason for appreciating God’s wonderful concern for man. JED

Haunting Questions

June 9th
Psalms 8:1-4

“What is man?” (v. 4)—that is a rather haunting question, is it not?

What eternal profit is gained from man’s observations of the heavens unless they lead him to such questions and conclusions? The heavens are teeming with galaxies so vast in extent and number as to be beyond the wildest flights of human imagination.

A relatively insignificant part of this heaven is our sun from which comes most of the light and all of the heat on our planet. Set by God at a distance of about 93,000,000 miles away from us, the sun is God’s “greater light to rule the day” (Gen. 1:16). In terms that we might more easily grasp, travelling at a sustained rate of 140 mph for 24 hours a day and 365 days a year would carry us 1,226,400 miles in one year. Thus, it would take us approximately 75.8 years to reach our sun. With a diameter of 864,000 miles, this splendid orb would hold the equivalent of 1,300,000 worlds, each the size of earth, inside. In terms of heat, our earth receives every hour, in form of sunlight, as much heat as could be achieved by burning 300,000 tons of coal every minute (18,000,000 tons per hour). The amount of heat thus given off by the sun’s surface in all directions is estimated to be equal to that produced by burning 600 trillion tons of coal in pure oxygen—every minute. It is no wonder that Dr. Edwin B. Frost (former director of Yerkes Observatory) wrote, “The source of the sun’s heat and its steady maintenance are not yet understood.... Omniscience would be required to understand Omnipotence.” Awed by the observable universe, David burst forth, “What is man?” Gaze into the heavens, consider God’s work, stand in awe, and fear Him (33:8). JED

Overwhelmed by His Display

June 10th
Psalms 8:1-4

At night, we are overwhelmed by God's display of beauty from the moon, stars, planets, and galaxies. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that if the stars came out only once in a century, people would stay up all night gazing at them. Yet even greater than the vast display of sidereal space is the name of our God in all the earth and His glory above the heavens (v. 1). He is the Conqueror (v. 2) and the Creator (v. 3) of the world. The psalmist's observation of creation led him to speak of God's finger work. By inspiration of God, David used human language that condescends to man's understanding—"the work of Thy fingers." The fingers are instruments by which we construct a piece of delicate work, perhaps indicating skill rather than strength. David saw creation as coming from God's "fingers" (v. 3) and "hands" (v. 6), the glorious work of a Master Craftsman. The heavens, moon, and stars were fixed by God in their appropriate spheres, and they continue to show forth His glory for all the world to see.

The viewing of the heavens affected David's thoughts and life. He immediately had his attention turned earthward to man (v. 4)—weak, mortal, earth-born man (Gen. 2:7)—and God's immense care for him. Both titles ("man" and "son of man") emphasize the weakness and frailty of mankind. Yet, as John Phillips wrote, "How wonderful! God is more interested in *people* than He is in *planets*, more interested in *souls* than He is in *stars*, more interested in *us* than He is in the *universe*! And because He is interested in us He *visits* us." The Lord remembers us (Gen. 8:1; 19:29; 30:22) and cares for us (Jer. 29:11; Job 10:12), finite creatures though we are (144:3-4). JED

We Stand in Awe of You, O Lord

June 11th
Genesis 1:1

One is struck with the simplicity of this profound verse. Question: Has God created the earth and all the creatures therein? Answer: in a word, ***yes!*** The biblical evidence is crystal clear: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (v. 1). Consider these additional statements of fact: "The LORD made the heavens" (1 Chron. 16:26); "Where wast thou when [God] laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4); "For by [Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth" (Col. 1:16); "The worlds were framed by the word of God" (Heb. 11:3). In forthright opposition to any explanation of the world's origin in terms of natural processes, the Bible states that God created all things supernaturally. In other words, the world came into being in a way that was different from anything that can be observed in the present universe. Today, nothing can be created apart from preexisting materials. In His work of preservation, God keeps the universe in existence (Heb. 1:3), and by His providence He directs it toward its glorious goal (Col. 1:20). But the Lord's work of creation, as far as the present universe is concerned, has been completed (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:11).

The Lord has given us not only the drama of creation but also the drama of redemption. While reviewing the natural creation, our minds should think of that spiritual creation whereby a new heart was created and a new spirit was put within us (2 Cor. 5:17). We should "stand in awe . . . and be still" (Psa. 4:4). A hymn by Kathleen Shupp suggests this same response: "We stand in awe of You, O Lord, we stand in awe. . . . You are Creator, King, Redeemer, Judge of All; We stand in awe, we stand in awe." JED

The Sacrifice of Leaving Home

June 12th
Matthew 8:14-20

Arno C. Gaebelein (1861-1945) had a Christ-honoring Bible-teaching ministry throughout America and Canada, speaking to many thousands. He preached to countless numbers of Jews in the New York City area. He taught himself Hebrew and Yiddish so well that many orthodox Jews had difficulty believing he was not a Jew! He was the editor of *Our Hope* magazine and travelled from state to state, often preaching on prophetic themes, especially the Lord's coming. He was often asked if he enjoyed traveling up and down the land, and he answered with a resounding "No!" In his own words: "My wife and I always had a comfortable home. I love my home-life more than anything. If I had followed my natural inclinations, I would have remained at home. Once I was in North Dakota, at a very small and rather primitive farm-house. The bed was hard and the meal almost insufficient. Why did I leave my comfortable home for this? I was so homesick that I was tempted to take the next train back. That evening a voice seemed to speak to me in prayer: 'I left a better home than you could ever leave; I had not where to lay My head; I suffered and died for you.' I bowed my head in shame and wept and thanked Him for the small sacrifice I could make and for the grace which permitted me to seek out some of His beloved sheep and minister to their needs. Nor must I forget what all these years of my wandering ministry meant to my wife, who stood by me so faithfully. Many months each year she spent in a sacrificial widowhood." May we, too, gladly be willing to suffer hardships for the sake of the One who left the glories of heaven for us (2 Cor. 8:9)! GWZ

"Teach Us to Number Our Days"

June 13th
Psalms 90:1-12

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (v. 12). This prayer of Moses, recorded by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, deals with a very important concern that we, too, should have. Time is such a precious commodity for the believer. Lost time can never be recovered, and wasted time can never be recycled. Applying our hearts unto wisdom requires that we set aside less important activities in favor of spending more time obtaining God's wisdom, which we so desperately need in our lives. The "blessed hope," that is, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to receive us unto Himself, could happen even today (Titus 2:13); we are to be eagerly "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23).

The world thirsts for human wisdom and has neither the time nor the desire for God's wisdom. But what about those of us who know Christ and are striving to please Him in all we do? Do we make "[applying] our hearts unto wisdom" (v. 12) a high priority in our daily schedule? We ought to spend much time in the study of God's Word, for this is the only viable way we can gain genuine wisdom. Yet, professing Christians spend millions of dollars on books, seminars, and other forms of worldly wisdom, and almost every new doctrine that comes along seems to arouse their interest. Many believers waste far too much time reading books and listening to sermons by religious leaders who are shallow and compromised, who speculate and give their opinion rather than a "Thus saith the Lord." By "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13), let us apply our hearts unto true wisdom found only in the Word of God. MHR

The King of Fierce Countenance

June 14th
Daniel 8:15-25

In today's text, Daniel receives the interpretation of the prophetic vision found in the first portion of the chapter. From Daniel's historic vantage point, the events symbolized in the vision had not yet occurred—they were still future. The succession of these prophesied Gentile governments will consummate in the time of the Seventieth Week of Daniel (9:24-27)—the seven-year great tribulation that is yet future even for us today in the church age. These coming kingdoms will gain prominence and, "in the latter time" (v. 23), the final form will produce the "king of fierce countenance," the Antichrist himself. He will ascend to power at the beginning of the great tribulation. At that time, the peace program that paved his ascent to power (v. 25 cf. 11:21; Rev. 6:1-4) will suddenly be replaced with terrible fury that is unleashed upon "thy [Daniel's] people and upon thy holy city [Jerusalem]" (9:24, 27). This will be a time of amazing and unprecedented distress for all of the inhabitants of the earth.

The certainty of the Antichrist's final defeat is assured, among other things, because of his demonically inspired arrogance to "stand up against the Prince of princes" (v. 25b). When the Lord returns at the end of the tribulation, the Antichrist and his armies will be destroyed ("broken without hand" v. 25 cf. 2:34, 44-45), and the millennial kingdom will be ushered in by the King of Kings. The church, Christ's body, will be removed before the Antichrist ascends to power in the Day of the Lord. The Holy Spirit's restraining force, manifest in and through the regenerated church, must be taken out before the Wicked can come in like a flood (2 Thess. 2:3-10; Rev. 3:10). DWC

Just Really Depressed

June 15th
Daniel 8:26-27

Daniel's personal reaction to the aforementioned vision is instructive for believers today. First, he believed without reservation that the prophecy "which was told [was] true" (v. 26a). When God speaks in His Word of future events, we can be 100% sure that they will come to pass. The prophecies claimed by cult leaders and charismatic schemers and dreamers of our day are so unlike the revelations found in the Bible. Can any of today's self-purported "prophets" even come close to the accuracy of the sure Word of God? Never! Why? The Bible "is true"—always—but the claims of man are "spoken ... presumptuously" (Deut. 18:19-22; Isa. 8:19-20).

Second, notice that Daniel was devastated by the realization of this certain, coming tribulation for his people (Israel) and the holy city he so loved (Jerusalem) (v. 27). He "fainted," for the mental strain that accompanied his understanding of these coming events was overwhelming. His physical reaction to the pending deeds of the Antichrist and the suffering he would cause made Daniel "sick certain days." He was "astonished at the vision," for the spiritual implications of his vision seemed just too much to bear. Christian, as we consider what lies ahead, what is our reaction? Are we fearful, doubtful, deeply troubled, or even downright depressed? What got Daniel going again? "Afterward [he] rose up, and did the king's business"—he crawled off his bed of despair and got back to work. When we feel like we cannot go on, let us renew a close walk with God and get busy serving the King! He will provide enabling grace to take us through the trials we face (Rom. 8:16-18, 35-39; 1 Pet. 5:7; Phil. 4:4-7). DWC

The abortionist and the “pro-choicers” of our day attach no value to the life of the unborn. But what does God’s Word say? The Bible reveals that our Lord has a far different estimation of the worth of the unborn. Notice today’s text: The one who caused the “fruit [to] depart” (v. 22) from the pregnant woman was himself to be killed should the newborn die as the result of a premature birth (v. 23). “Mischief” here speaks of harm coming to the little one. If the “fruit” of her womb should live, however, then a lesser punishment would be levied against the one who had inflicted the initial injury (v. 22). The context and the text itself make it plain that the death or life of the unborn infant is the issue here, not the well-being of the mother. In many other places in the Law, God deals with the penalty attached to murdering another man or woman. Here in our text, however, the concern is a “woman with child” and the negligently induced birth of her “fruit.” If the latter were to die, the adult offender was to die—“life for life”! The Lord views the aborted life of the unborn as murder.

Now notice how this same judgment is rendered in some contemporary Bible translations. The Living Bible says if the “woman ... dies,” the offender shall be executed. The New International Version skirts the issue by saying if there is “serious injury,” the guilty must die. The New American Standard Bible suggests if there be “any further injury,” then the penalty is “life for life.” Each of these translations distorts the clear intent of this text. God’s judgment awaits those who take the precious lives of the unborn as well as those who distort God’s Word regarding this vital matter. DWC

Worse than a Fool***June 17th***
Proverbs 26:12-16

No pretense eludes God’s discerning eye; therefore, when God labels someone a “fool,” we can have the utmost confidence that He has not miscalculated the person’s true character. In this text, God says that the man who holds an exaggerated opinion of himself and believes he has the answer to just about every question and situation he will ever face is hopelessly deluded—“there is more hope of a fool than of him” (v. 12). A person who is “wise in his own conceit” believes he does not need divine direction. He has a generous dose of “self-esteem” and presumes that all his actions are correct. Sadly, many in the church have swallowed the devil’s lie that they can exalt themselves and their own agendas against what God has clearly revealed in His Word. Such a lofty attitude has definite consequences (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

Our text reveals an interesting by-product of an excessive sense of self-worth: “The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason” (v. 16). In other words, the puffed-up individual sees no need for industry or for exercising himself unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:6-8), and he excuses his laziness with a multitude of rationalizations. Quite often his reasons for spiritual lethargy and carnal indifference are a bit fanciful (v. 13). Do we ever become spiritually lazy and insensitive to the things of the Lord and try to defend ourselves by saying, “I’m doing okay because...”? Trying to justify our sin is the epitome of being wise in our own conceit. God sees through our pretense. We must examine ourselves in the mirror of God’s Word and, if necessary, take the required steps to change! See James 1:22-26; Hebrews 3:12-13. DWC

May Every Day Be a Day of Reckoning

*June 18th
Romans 6:1-13*

In the first part of Romans chapter six, God has set forth facts that the believer needs to **know**: “know ye not ...” (v. 3); “knowing this ...” (v. 6); “knowing that ...” (v. 9). As we come to verse eleven, we find the first command of the chapter: “Likewise **reckon** ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The word *reckon* in this verse is a mathematical term meaning “to calculate, to count, to count on something as being true.” In other words, verse eleven is saying: I am to take these facts into account, believe them, and consider them as true; I thus agree with God and see myself as having died to sin on the one hand and, yet, as being alive to God in Jesus Christ my Lord on the other hand.

This life-transforming truth is also summarized in Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” The verb *reckon* in verse eleven of today’s text is in the present tense. I am to keep on reckoning, day by day, moment by moment. Reckoning is my constant duty as I walk by faith. The word *reckon* is a faith word. By faith the believer must count on God’s facts and claim them as his very own. It is not enough just to know the facts. I must personally appropriate these facts by faith. God does not ask me to “reckon” a thing to be true in order to make it true. The facts are the facts whether I reckon or count them to be true or not. Yet, I will not benefit from the facts unless I claim them by faith. The believer is to be dead to sin and alive to God. Count it so! GWZ

The Great Reversal

*June 19th
Ephesians 2:1-10*

I was once dead to God and alive to sin. I was dead in trespasses and sins (v. 1). I had no relationship to God and no vital connection to Him. I was separated from God because of my sins (Isa. 59:2). My understanding was darkened, and I was alienated from the life of God (4:18). I was spiritually dead to God. But I was very much alive to sin: I practiced sin; I approved of sin; I continued in sin; I wallowed in sin; I enjoyed sin. My thoughts, words, and deeds flowed out of a wicked and sin-filled heart. I was a slave to sin and had no way to free myself from its hold.

“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.... But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us [made us alive] together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Tit. 3:4; Eph. 2:4-5). Because of the amazing grace of God, a great reversal has taken place in my life! Though once dead to God and alive to sin, I am now dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ my Lord (Rom. 6:11). Sin is no longer my master. I now serve the living Christ (Col. 3:24). I am no longer the enemy of God, for I have been reconciled (Rom. 5:10). The Son has made me free indeed (Jn. 8:31-36). I have been called to the fellowship of my faithful God’s dear Son (1 Cor. 1:9). I have been called out of darkness and into His marvelous light, that I might show forth His praises to all (1 Pet. 2:9). And I am never to forget that I am now dead indeed unto sin and alive indeed unto God. My God says that I am to continually count (*reckon*) on these facts and consider them to be true (Rom. 6:11). GWZ

Pre-modernity gave us the Inquisition and the Dark Ages.

Modernity gave us the Nazi death camps and Communist gulags. Are we really surprised that Post-Modernity is giving us abortion mills, euthanasia, and social anarchy on unprecedented and ever increasing scales? We live in a fallen, depraved, and cruel world. Paul describes it as “a crooked and perverse nation” (v. 15). The underlying Greek word translated “nation” literally means “generation”—the general population of any culture since the fall. What does Scripture say about such people? First, they are “crooked” (v. 15). When this term is used in the ethical sense, it means to be curved, bent, or twisted morally. This depicts unscrupulous and dishonest persons. It characterizes both political and religious leaders, even those professing adherence to Christianity. Notice the second term: “perverse.” The underlying word describes those who deviate from accepted and approved standards of morality and virtue. Combined, these two terms describe fallen, unregenerate mankind as morally perverted reprobates.

Are believers to curse the darkness or wage a physical attack? No. We are to “do all things without murmurings and disputings” (v. 14). New Testament believers must strive to exhibit exemplary and honest lives, even when we are mistreated by the world or treated unfairly by fellow believers. We are not to whine and complain when those around us manipulate situations and circumstances to their advantage, even at our personal expense. Frankly, such actions by the unsaved should come as no surprise to us. Our response should be in accord with the teachings of God’s Word: Be lights! GDF

Blameless and Harmless Sons**June 21st**
Philippians 2:14-16

To live an exemplary life for Jesus Christ ought to be of paramount importance for the believer every God-given day. We know that some people who disagree with our life or message will seek to accuse or criticize us, but if we are truly living a “blameless” life, then no legitimate charge will stick! Notice the expressions “harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke.” The word *harmless* means “sincere, unadulterated, as in a sense of wholesome purity.” This term is used to describe metal without any alloy. Our text also refers to us as “the sons of God.” The believer enjoys a strong, unbreakable, and eternal familial relationship with the triune God. As a child of God, every soul who has trusted in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ must strive to be “blameless and harmless” before others. Finally, consider the description “without rebuke.” This phrase means “spotless, having no blemishes.” The believer’s life should bear no unwarranted or unsightly stains that bring dishonor to God. We are exhorted to continually seek to live a commendable, Christ-honoring life.

Obviously, this text is not demanding, or even suggesting, “sinless perfection,” which God’s Word declares is impossible (1 Jn. 1:8). Rather, Paul is exhorting his readers to allow nothing in their lives to hinder their relationship with Christ or their testimony before a lost world. Unbelievers need to witness great testimonies—trophies of God’s amazing grace—so they can understand that salvation is something life-changing and real. This wicked world in which we live desperately needs to see what true Christianity is and how faith in Jesus works itself out in a person’s life. GDF

The Scriptures describe this present world as “evil” (Gal. 1:4) and, in today’s text, as “crooked and perverse” (v. 15). Such terms depict how the world is in reality; this is not simply an exaggerated description. Consider some of the religious systems that contribute to the “darkness” (Eph. 6:12) of our world system: the New Age Movement, including Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Hinduism; the cults, including Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses; and quasi-Christian systems, including Catholicism, charismatic/Pentecostalism, and, sadly, even some within evangelicalism who deny or denigrate the full inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16) and inerrancy (Jn. 17:17) of the Word of God and who refuse to disassociate from demonic doctrines such as “open theism.” What is the solution to living in this dark world? The answer is simply this: Believers must be “lights” (v. 15)—they are to be bright, luminary, and radiating to the extent that their light shines to be of help to those who are in darkness.

The world will not look favorably upon such light that illuminates their situation (Jn. 3:19)—not only because they dwell in the darkness but also because their deeds are evil and the light exposes their character. John writes that they actually “love” this dark condition. As instruments of light, how are we to dispel the darkness? We are to be “holding forth the word of life” (v. 16). The picture that comes to mind is of one who holds up a bright light to see where one is and what the safest route is along life’s journey. This often is not the easiest path or the way with the fewest dangers; nevertheless, the light of the Word provides illumination, facilitating a successful journey. GDF

An Eternal Workout***June 23rd***
Philippians 2:12-16

What does it mean to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (v. 12)? Clearly, it cannot mean that to be a believer one must work *for* salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). We know that salvation is “not by works” (Titus 3:5); it is a gift bestowed from God to undeserving sinners (Rom. 3:24), given “freely” (lit. “without a cause”). It is *because* one is saved that a believer should work in accord with the salvation he possesses (Eph. 2:10). Therefore, we as believers should seek to live in a manner consistent with the gospel of Christ in which we are trusting to save us from our sins (1:27). This is of God’s doing and through His enabling (v. 13).

Consider the words “with fear and trembling.” The idea is that whatever work we do must be accomplished with sincere humility. Such living will quell all boasting, bragging, and pride, for we will realize that it is not our talent, skills, or innate mental acuity that enables us to be “light” that shines in this dark, evil-filled world (v. 15). It is God working in us “to will and to do of His good pleasure” (v. 13) that empowers us to live for Him. This expands upon what Paul had previously stated in chapter one: that the Lord who began working in us will see it through to the end (1:6). His plan and purposes cannot be thwarted! We are responsible to submit to and abide in Him, but we must recognize that it is God who enables and labors through us. This provides both comfort and confidence in our spiritual state and walk with the Lord. He did not save us so we could live isolated, self-serving lives; we are to render our spiritual service to Him. He saved us to live for Him from the moment we trusted in His Son! GDF

How Do I Follow Hard after God?

June 24th
Psalms 63:1-11

“My soul followeth hard after Thee: Thy right hand upholdeth me” (v. 8). Blood-bought children of God ought to desire to follow the Lord fully (1 Kgs. 11:6; Jn. 10:27), so a verse about following hard after God is of great interest. The Hebrew verb “followeth hard after” (*dabaq*) means to cling, to cleave, to keep close. It is used of a man being joined to his wife (Gen. 2:24). It is used of a belt clinging to one’s waist (Jer. 13:11) and of a tongue stuck to the roof of the mouth when one is intensely thirsty (Lam. 4:4). The same verb is used of the great sea dinosaur Leviathan whose scales were tightly joined together (Job 41:17) and of a disease clinging to a person (Deut. 28:21). It describes a soldier whose hand is clinging tightly to his sword (2 Sam. 23:10). It is used of Ruth who was clinging to her mother-in-law, attaching herself to Naomi and to Naomi’s God. It is used to describe King Jehoram who did some good things but who still clung to the idolatrous sins of Jeroboam. If we were to use the word in a modern context, we might think of those today who *cling* to their smart phones. Also, if you were walking in the pitch-black woods without a flashlight, you would want to cling to the person in front of you. The Lord wants us to cling to Him and to follow Him with unquestioned loyalty and affection (Deut. 11:13; 13:4; Josh. 23:8): “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; Him shalt thou serve, and to Him shalt thou cleave” (Deut. 10:20). May we be like King Hezekiah, a man who followed hard after God: “For he clave (clung) to the LORD, and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses” (2 Kgs. 18:6). GWZ

The Way through Tribulation

June 25th
2 Thessalonians 1:1-6

Without doubt, believers in the early church knew what tribulation entailed. Their lives were in constant jeopardy. Forsaken by their former friends, they were the objects not only of ridicule but also of physical persecution. It was in the midst of their trials that God sent words of encouragement to the Thessalonians through Paul, joined by Silvanus and Timotheus (v. 1). Although the words were written by Paul, the message was from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 2). What an encouragement it must have been to them during this trying time! We must take such instruction and edification from the Word as God’s message to us as well.

Note especially that they were patient in the midst of persecutions and tribulations (v. 4), and their faith grew exceedingly (v. 3). Furthermore, this patience and faith produced abounding love for one another (v. 3). Romans 5:3-5 reminds us that the combination of tribulation and patience results in an unshamed hope. Since many believers today are experiencing times of special testing and tribulation, it is important to remember that being patient in tribulation produces a stronger witness for Christ and a closer walk with the Savior, just as the believers in the early church experienced. Through patience and hope, God’s children can enjoy His grace and peace. One day, His righteous judgment will fall upon those who have persecuted the saints of God (v. 6). But meanwhile, we should rejoice in the privilege of suffering for Jesus Christ in the anticipation of that glorious day when we will reign with Him (v. 5). The Lord will reward our patience and faith in the midst of tribulation—keep looking up! MHR

“Rest with Us”

June 26th
2 Thessalonians 1:7-12

In every adversity, a special rest is available to God's children. When the wicked are thriving and prospering in the world, they will do everything in their power to make it difficult for the true believer. They will despise, mock, scorn, and twist the Scriptures, some while even professing the name of Jesus Christ. Compromisers who claim to be Christians are often well received by the world, but those who remain true to the Lord in word and deed come under fierce opposition. Faithful believers may sometimes begin to wonder if perhaps they are being too adamant in their stand, especially when many professing Christians tell them that they are bringing unnecessary trouble upon themselves by being so determined to obey the Word of God and unmovable concerning their Holy Spirit-wrought convictions.

Our text, however, reminds the faithful who are facing persecution that they should rest in the Lord for two reasons: (1) A terrible day of righteous judgment lies ahead for the wicked persecutors of true believers (vv. 7-9), and (2) a wonderful day of glorification lies ahead for every believer when our Lord returns (v. 10). Things may be difficult now, but an omnipotent God is in control and knows our every situation. Therefore, the desire and prayer of every Christian should be for God's strength to live by faith, walk by faith, witness by faith, and serve by faith. We should count on His enabling power to accomplish His will as we strive to glorify our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in all things (vv. 11-12). Our times of tribulation will become times of blessing as we follow God's Word and rejoice in His sustaining grace. MHR

“I Will Come Again”

June 27th
2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

The “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) of every believer is the return of Christ for His church. Although many are no longer watching daily as did the early church, Jesus said He will return for us (Jn. 14:2-3). In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, believers who have died will be raised incorruptible, and living believers will be changed (1 Cor. 15:52). We shall meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17), and, with new bodies like Christ's glorious body (1 Jn. 3:2-3), we will enter eternity.

Is it any wonder, then, that Paul's prayer for the suffering believers at Thessalonica was that the Lord might “direct [their] hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ” (v. 5)? Is it any wonder that he reminded them of God's faithfulness in caring for their present needs (v. 3)? In a day when patience is considered a weakness rather than a virtue, believers must not allow themselves to be driven into programs of compromise that attempt to get “the work of God” done as quickly as possible by sacrificing fidelity to God's Word for supposed expediency. Too many Christian leaders today are urging believers to get involved with a variety of new projects and programs. Most promise the participants impressive results with minimal effort, and their programs are often characterized by a disregard for adherence to Bible truth. Crash-course systems for church growth and world evangelism may sound attractive and even spiritual, yet they generally involve serious indifference toward biblical precepts. Faithful witnessing for Christ and patient waiting on Him to touch hearts have become distasteful to many, but this is still God's will for His own. MHR

“Touch Not the Lord’s Anointed”

June 28th

1 Samuel 24:1-15

Time and again the cry — “Touch not the Lord’s anointed” — is parroted as a supposedly biblical rebuke against those who attempt to alert the unsuspecting believer of dangerous, unbiblical teachings by a particular ministry or individual. The demand is often echoed, “Since these ministries influence millions, they must be ‘God’s anointed’ — don’t you touch them!” This pious-sounding verbiage is repeated by those who try to place key religious leaders into a category that supposedly makes them exempt from scriptural examination. If a warning is given concerning doctrinal error or ungodly inconsistencies in the public ministries of religious leaders, one can be sure that in the estimation of many, the one who has uttered a word of caution is guilty of “touching the Lord’s anointed.” What an ominous sounding indictment this is!

The context of this phrase reveals that scriptural reproof and rebuke do not at all constitute “touching God’s anointed.” In fact, God made sure that Saul was forced to face up to his compromise. The ministry of the king of Israel was judged according to the Lord’s commandments, and no man today is exempt from this same kind of biblical scrutiny. David refused to slay King Saul with the sword, for the latter was *the Lord’s anointed ruler*. In God’s time and way, He would remove him, and David would ascend the throne. To “touch the Lord’s anointed” in this context refers to David killing King Saul, which was clearly not God’s will. Saul was still David’s king, and David humbly and submissively acknowledged the same. The Lord, not David, would remove Saul in His perfect time and according to His sovereign plan (26:8-10). DWC

How to Lose God’s Anointing

June 29th

1 Samuel 15:1-26

Any honest Bible teacher would admit that Saul’s anointing has primary reference to his reign as king of Israel. Because of this we have already considered the fact that King Saul was not to be murdered by the sword. However, some go further and suggest a secondary application in this text that includes the forbidding of any negative comment about an individual’s ministry, for this would constitute “speaking against” one of God’s servants and, thus, would be “touching God’s anointed” as well. But when we hear this, we must ask: Is this sound teaching?

If this criterion is to be used in determining what “touching God’s anointed” entails, then Samuel certainly “touched God’s anointed,” for he forcefully spoke out against Saul’s disobedience. God told Saul to “smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all...” (v. 3). But under a pretext of pious intention, Saul “spared the best ... to sacrifice unto the LORD” (v. 15). Is partial obedience acceptable? The prophet Samuel said it was tantamount to witchcraft and idolatry (v. 23)! To obey is better than to sacrifice. It was Saul’s compromise that eventually removed him from the place of God’s anointing (vv. 22-26). Saul had a visible testimony that affected all of God’s people. When the king failed to minister according to the Lord’s commands, God’s faithful prophet was commanded to cry out against his error. Take his life? Certainly not! Rebuke his sins? Yes! Believers must understand what the Bible forbids and what it demands. Scriptural rebuke of an errant brother is not “touching God’s anointed”; rather, it is obeying God’s order to judge all things by the perfect standard of His Word (2 Tim. 4:2). DWC

One day as Jesus was condemned by the Pharisees for hanging around sinners, He told a story as found in today's text. Jesus concluded by saying, "Joy shall be in heaven *over one sinner* that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (v. 7). Nearly twenty years ago the young people from our church were presenting a gospel program in a rural village in Mexico. As was our habit, we visited the twenty-five or so homes in the little farming settlement and then set up a puppet stage and chalk easel in the plaza area. For the first time in probably well over a hundred occasions of doing this, a most unusual happening occurred—no one came! As darkness was falling and we were preparing to take down the equipment, an elderly fellow wearing a well-used cowboy hat walked up. He had come to see the program. The lone occupant carefully listened, and the youth put their hearts into it as though there were a crowd. In closing, a simple presentation of the gospel was made, and opportunity was given to anyone who desired to receive Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. Again, it was a first: The whole audience responded to the call of salvation—one hand went up! The well-weathered man was wonderfully saved that evening, and there was rejoicing in both earth and heaven. Little did we know that within just six months, this new brother would pass from earth to heaven.

The Lord is concerned for every lost sinner, and there is joy "in heaven *over one sinner* that repenteth" (v. 7). Statisticians might say, "An audience of *one* is a big-time wash out," but that night an audience of *one* caused the hosts of heaven to rejoice. JMC

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Biblical Basics for Believers—is a 166-page book specifically designed to direct the new Christian as well as the growing Christian into a program of discipleship through a careful study of the teaching of the Word of God and the application of biblical doctrine to everyday living. Written in an organized, easy-to-follow outline format with study questions at the end of every chapter, this book is designed to be flexible enough for use by believers of all ages in a variety of settings. Cost: \$10/copy plus \$4.00 postage & handling (plus \$6.00 Canada/\$12.00 foreign [U.S. funds only]); call for bulk rates.

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<i>MAY</i>									
FROM A CHILD THOU HAST KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.									
<i>Family</i>					<i>Secret</i>				
Numbers	8	Psalms	44	<i>1</i>	S. of Solomon	6	Hebrews	6	
"	9	"	45	<i>2</i>	"	7	"	7	
"	10	"	46-47	<i>3</i>	"	8	"	8	
"	11	"	48	<i>4</i>	Isaiah	1	"	9	
"	12-13	"	49	<i>5</i>	"	2	"	10	
"	14	"	50	<i>6</i>	"	3-4	"	11	
"	15	"	51	<i>7</i>	"	5	"	12	
"	16	"	52-54	<i>8</i>	"	6	"	13	
"	17-18	"	55	<i>9</i>	"	7	James	1	
"	19	"	56-57	<i>10</i>	" 8-9 to v. 7		"	2	
"	20	"	58-59	<i>11</i>	9 v. 8 to 10 v. 4		"	3	
"	21	"	60-61	<i>12</i>	10 v. 5		"	4	
"	22	"	62-63	<i>13</i>	" 11-12		"	5	
"	23	"	64-65	<i>14</i>	" 13		1 Peter	1	
"	24	"	66-67	<i>15</i>	" 14		"	2	
"	25	"	68	<i>16</i>	" 15		"	3	
"	26	"	69	<i>17</i>	" 16		"	4	
"	27	"	70-71	<i>18</i>	" 17-18		"	5	
"	28	"	72	<i>19</i>	" 19-20		2 Peter	1	
"	29	"	73	<i>20</i>	" 21		"	2	
"	30	"	74	<i>21</i>	" 22		"	3	
"	31	"	75-76	<i>22</i>	" 23		1 John	1	
"	32	"	77	<i>23</i>	" 24		"	2	
"	33	"	78 to v. 37	<i>24</i>	" 25		"	3	
"	34	"	78 v. 38	<i>25</i>	" 26		"	4	
"	35	"	79	<i>26</i>	" 27		"	5	
"	36	"	80	<i>27</i>	" 28		2 John	1	
Deuteronomy	1	"	81-82	<i>28</i>	" 29		3 John	1	
"	2	"	83-84	<i>29</i>	" 30		Jude	1	
"	3	"	85	<i>30</i>	" 31		Revelation	1	
"	4	"	86-87	<i>31</i>	" 32		"	2	

<i>JUNE</i>									
BLESSED IS HE THAT READETH AND THEY THAT HEAR.									
<i>Family</i>					<i>Secret</i>				
Deuteronomy	5	Psalms	88	<i>1</i>	Isaiah	33	Revelation	3	
"	6	"	89	<i>2</i>	"	34	"	4	
"	7	"	90	<i>3</i>	"	35	"	5	
"	8	"	91	<i>4</i>	"	36	"	6	
"	9	"	92-93	<i>5</i>	"	37	"	7	
"	10	"	94	<i>6</i>	"	38	"	8	
"	11	"	95-96	<i>7</i>	"	39	"	9	
"	12	"	97-98	<i>8</i>	"	40	"	10	
"	13-14	"	99-101	<i>9</i>	"	41	"	11	
"	15	"	102	<i>10</i>	"	42	"	12	
"	16	"	103	<i>11</i>	"	43	"	13	
"	17	"	104	<i>12</i>	"	44	"	14	
"	18	"	105	<i>13</i>	"	45	"	15	
"	19	"	106	<i>14</i>	"	46	"	16	
"	20	"	107	<i>15</i>	"	47	"	17	
"	21	"	108-109	<i>16</i>	"	48	"	18	
"	22	"	110-111	<i>17</i>	"	49	"	19	
"	23	"	112-113	<i>18</i>	"	50	"	20	
"	24	"	114-115	<i>19</i>	"	51	"	21	
"	25	"	116	<i>20</i>	"	52	"	22	
"	26	"	117-118	<i>21</i>	"	53	Matthew	1	
27-28 to v. 19		119 to v. 24		<i>22</i>	"	54	"	2	
28 v. 20		vv. 25 to 48		<i>23</i>	"	55	"	3	
"	29	vv. 49 to 72		<i>24</i>	"	56	"	4	
"	30	vv. 73 to 96		<i>25</i>	"	57	"	5	
"	31	vv. 97 to 120		<i>26</i>	"	58	"	6	
"	32	vv. 121 to 144		<i>27</i>	"	59	"	7	
"	33-34	vv. 145 to 176		<i>28</i>	"	60	"	8	
Joshua	1	vv. 120-122		<i>29</i>	"	61	"	9	
"	2	" 123-125		<i>30</i>	"	62	"	10	

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