

Sunday, December 2, 2019—Romans 9-11

Jesus felt profound separation from God as He hung on the cross, crying out, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” The penalty and consequence of sin are indescribably severe. Paul was so serious about the salvation of the Jewish people he said he was willing to be cursed, cut off as well, if that would bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus (9:3). He knew the Law and Jewish tradition like few others, and he experienced the fulfillment only Jesus could bring. He wanted that for all His people.

The Cornerstone remained a stumbling block for many (9:33). Only faith in Jesus would bring a person to righteousness. The Law only described righteousness and sinfulness. It had no power to make someone righteous. Jesus alone could do that, and Paul hoped that the Jewish people would come to that realization (10:1-4). To trust in the Law meant having to keep every commandment perfectly (10:5). This was impossible.

Not all the Jews had rejected God. Some, like Paul, had embraced the Messiah. God had a remnant of people throughout history who truly understood what He required—faith. As He brought Gentiles to faith, He knew the Jewish people would be jealous and awaken from their spiritual slumber (11:11-12). Paul urged all who believed to share this good news as this was the only way people could come to faith (10:14-17).

Praise God today for His wonderful gift of salvation and His mind-boggling plan for sending the message to the nations. Pray for faithfulness in walking with Him and sharing His good news.

Sunday, December 1, 2019—Romans 5-8

Christmas is the season of giving. Co-workers exchange gifts. Bosses provide bonuses. Families gather around piles of presents.

Christmas reflects the character of God. He is a giver. Paul told the Romans that God expressed His great love through two priceless gifts—Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He sent Jesus at just the right time to die for those who were dead in sin, and He sent the Holy Spirit to show His great love and fill the hearts of

believers with love (5:5-6).

Paul said His great mercy provides a third gift—forgiveness (5:16). The Law pointed out how utterly sinful every person is. God sent Jesus to pave the way to forgiveness and the Spirit to lead the way to walk in it. This new life is one that avoids the sin that led to death. Sin is no longer the master. Righteousness is the new master leading the believer (6:1-23).

This new way is empowered by the Spirit. The old nature will continually try to resurrect its hold on the believer, enslaving him to sin. Jesus renews the mind to surrender to the Spirit each moment of each day (7:1-25). There is, therefore, no condemnation by the Law for those freed by the Spirit. God has set the disciple free from the power of death (8:1-2).

Believers are no longer slaves to fear but adopted sons in the family. That guarantees the treasures of Jesus but also His suffering (8:15-17), but the future glory far outweighs any temporary difficulty.

Praise God for the gifts of King Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Saturday, November 30, 2019—Acts 20:2, Romans 1-4

While collecting an offering for the Jerusalem church, Paul took time on his third missionary journey to write the church in Rome. This was a remarkable congregation—people following Jesus while living in the capital of the empire that worshiped Caesar. Paul was headed to Jerusalem but hoped soon to come to these brothers and sisters, and he penned this letter during a three-month stay in Corinth.

Paul was eager to encourage the Romans and have them encourage him by their faith in Christ. The gospel was the power of God to save Jew and Gentile alike. Creation itself testified to the power and nature of God, so no one—Jew or Gentile—had an excuse for rejecting Him, yet many did. They made up their own ideas about worship and truth and worshiped the creation rather than the Creator.

God will judge all sinners, and Paul told the Romans they were just as bad as the pagans. Jesus will judge even the secret things of every heart (2:16), and without His forgiveness and righteousness, everyone is dead. Only Jesus can

make the heart right and pleasing to God. This faith in God has been the way God has worked all along (3:21). Acquittal is based not on one's works but on the goodness and mercy of God. No one can boast.

Praise God for His promise of eternal life in Jesus. Thank Him for the gift of Jesus as this Christmas season begins. Pray for righteousness in Christ that pleases God and blesses others.

Friday, November 29, 2019—1 Corinthians 13-16

The Corinthians were human. They had a new nature given to them by God. Their lives daily showed the battle between the new nature and the old one. Paul was writing them to point out how the old nature was overriding the new in a number of areas.

Their God-given desire for excellence was giving way to their old nature of selfishness. Instead of trying to outdo one another in serving each other, they were trying to outshine one another with their spiritual gifting. All of those gifts were useless, Paul told them, if they did not love one another unconditionally as Christ loved them. In the end, the gifts will disappear, but faith, hope, and love will remain (13:1-8).

God gave the gifts so His people could use them to build one another up, not be puffed up. Speaking in tongues was beneficial only to the speaker unless someone interpreted. Prophecy was beneficial to all who heard it. Both were useless if not used in love for God and people. Above all, when they worshiped, they were to do so in orderly fashion because God Himself is a God of order (14:33, 40).

Paul was captured by the resurrection of Jesus. God showed in Christ what His Kingdom on earth would be like with the resurrected King. Those who believed in Him can live with the hope of this same transformation and live boldly for Christ (15:51-58).

Pray for love for others and boldness in faith to glorify Jesus.

Thursday, November 28, 2019—1 Corinthians 9-12

Paul spent more than 18 months with the Corinthian believers, so they

knew one another well. He could not stay with them, however, because God had other assignments for him. In the time apart, some began to question Paul's authority and authenticity. Since Paul was not there in person to defend himself, he addressed this in his letter to them.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of their ministry together and Paul's conduct. He had every right from Scripture to expect financial support from them but never asked for it or received it. Paul was compelled by an inner calling from God that led him from place to place. He found pleasure not in payment but in watching the gospel change lives, so he willingly disciplined himself and went without certain comforts (9:1-27).

He urged the Corinthians to do the same. Fleeing from idolatry and temptation were a daily requirement in the Corinthian setting, and the Bible was full of examples of the devastation that awaited them if they did not. Everything they did was to bring glory to God (10:1-33).

Self-discipline was important in their daily lives among the pagans but also in their worship of Christ with one another. They needed discipline to bring order to their worship and humility to the Lord's Supper. Without discipline, they would turn the focus on self and off Christ (11:1-34). They were one body, with Christ as the head and with each of them serving as an important part of that body (12:1-31).

Praise God for the church family He has given you.

Wednesday, November 27, 2019—1 Corinthians 4-8

Paul had to address some difficult matters with the Corinthians. He was fully aware of his own weaknesses and flaws, so he was not writing to the Corinthians as a superior who had no struggles but as a spiritual father (4:15) who wanted the best for the people. Sin cannot go unchecked.

The Corinthians were allowing—even celebrating—sexual immorality within the church. They could not continue this and be the pure Bride that Christ deserved. He called on them to discipline the immoral member and bring holiness for everyone involved. They also were relying on earthly judges to settle lawsuits among them when they should have been able to settle these things through the

Spirit's leadership.

Corinth was a city full of idolatry and immorality, so the Corinthians understandably faced all kinds of temptation. Paul would not allow them to use that as an excuse. Their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit, so they had to honor Him with the way they used their bodies. Marriage, then, was the most valuable gift to honor God through sexual intimacy and purity. Those who were single could honor God as well through their holiness in sexual self-sacrifice and purity.

Paul told them knowledge puffs up but love builds up (8:1-2). They needed to realize their actions were not only viewed by Christ but by those around them trying to follow Christ. Freedom in Christ was not the permission to do what they wanted but the power to do what they ought.

Praise God for the Spirit who leads us to holy living.

Tuesday, November 26, 2019—1 Corinthians 1-3

Coaches, teachers, mentors, and the like have the privilege of shaping lives for a season and then sending those people into the next season of life without them. Their desire, naturally, is for the lessons they taught to make a long-term difference. They hope growth continues.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, with whom he spent about 18 months, while he was spending about two years with the Ephesian church. He reminded the Corinthians that God had made them holy (1:2), and Paul saw the richness of gifting God had distributed among them (1:4-5). He was blessed by what God had done through his ministry. What troubled Paul was the division that had developed with the people (1:10-15).

The people were taking sides and losing the awe of Jesus Himself. God had used the foolish things of the world to demonstrate His wisdom. His Spirit had revealed the truth to the hearts of believers, so those who remained condemned could not understand what God was doing.

Paul had fed them the simple “milk” of the gospel to bring them into maturity. Their jealousies and quarreling were evidence that they had not grown up as he prayed they would. Instead of rallying behind the majesty of Jesus, they

were siding with different earthly teachers. Paul wanted them to build a life and ministry of eternal value, but what they were doing was going to prove worthless if they did not repent. They needed to repent of their partisan nature and unite once again.

Pray for unity and maturity in you yourself and your church family.