

Tuesday, December 1, 2020—Romans 5-8

God hates sin. Sin is the absence of His holiness. Sin pursues those things that lead to darkness and death. God directs His wrath toward sin.

Those tainted by sin, therefore, are separated from God. They are rebels from His Kingdom. Their sin will lead to their shame and death.

Paul marveled at the work of Jesus. He bridged the gap between sinners and God. He removed the penalty of sin and appeased God's anger. Rebels could be children of God. Faith brought peace with God (5:1).

That peace with God—being in relationship with Him—brought the peace of God—endurance and confidence in the hardest of times. If Jesus was willing to die for sinners, Jesus will not leave His people in hard times. He will see them through the hard times to eternal life. This confidence produces humility and diligence to walk humbly and faithfully in a new way of life (6:4), living as slaves to His righteousness (6:18).

The Law describes the holiness of God, but the flesh rebels against those principles. Paul delighted in the holiness of the Law, but his body waged war against his mind. Only Jesus could set him free from the wages of sin that brought death (7:24). The Law could condemn but not set free. The indwelling Spirit brought life and removed condemnation (8:1).

This Spirit also intercedes for us and brings hope (8:26-27). Praise God for the freedom and peace of salvation and the power of His Spirit. Thank Him for His love and working all things for your good.

Monday, November 30, 2020—Acts 20:2, Romans 1-4

In his quest to make disciples and plant churches, Paul was a journeyman. He went from place to place, staying as long as God wanted and then traveling to the next. Sometimes he stayed for a day. Other times, more than a year. All the while, he was leading new people to faith and strengthening the faith of those disciples he already knew.

That strengthening process involved many letters to those congregations he helped or heard of. His greatest work, the letter to the Romans, came to Rome during Paul's third missionary journey. He always wanted to go to Rome (1:11), but his words arrived before he did.

Paul praised the Romans because their faith was known all over the world (1:8). They lived in a world where people had exchanged the glory of God for the glory of idols and self-fulfillment (1:23), and no one had an excuse for their sinfulness (2:1). God was going to judge everyone, and the unrepentant would experience His wrath and anger (2:8). No one was righteous (3:10), and God was going to hold all accountable (3:19-20).

In grace, God provided a way to righteousness. Faith in Jesus justified Jew and Gentile alike before God (3:25). His kindness leads people to repentance (2:4). The one with faith believes God can do what cannot be done in the body—fulfill the Law and pay sin's penalty (4:21).

No wonder Paul was not ashamed of this good news (1:16). God fulfilled the Law through the work of Jesus alone. Celebrate this today!

Sunday, November 29, 2020—2 Corinthians 10-13

There were many who were questioning Paul's authority and undermining his influence on the Corinthians in his absence, so Paul reminded the Corinthians of the truth of their relationship. God had done a powerful, spiritual work in them through Paul's ministry. They needed to remember that and boast about Christ (10:17) and keep their focus on the unseen, spiritual realm which was more real than the visible, physical realm.

Those undermining Paul were preaching a false gospel—teaching a trust in good works or some other path to salvation. They may have been eloquent, but they were deceived and deceiving (11:1-14). Paul could have boasted about his credentials and experiences, yet he continued to turn the attention to Jesus. He boasted in his weaknesses for the sake of Christ because those weaknesses highlighted Jesus' grace and strength. Paul wanted Jesus to remove his weaknesses, but, instead, Jesus told Paul His grace was sufficient in his weakness. Paul learned that when he was weak, Jesus was strong (12:10). This was the good news.

This good news transformed lives. This was the good news that moved Paul to call the Corinthians to holiness. He was coming for to visit them and expected them to have repented of the sins he exposed. Repentance was possible because of the power of the gospel. Paul commanded them to examine themselves to see whether they were living out the truth he taught and they proclaimed (13:5).

Thank God for the good news of Jesus which empowers repentance from sin and endurance in difficulty.

Saturday, November 28, 2020—2 Corinthians 7-9

God's salvation and sanctification guarantee the holiness of those who walk with Him. As a result, Paul said, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (7:1). They were not to "try and be good" to earn God's love and forgiveness. They already had the restoration and relationship. Paul called them to live it out.

His letter to them had confronted their sin. They were not living as if Jesus were significant to them. His words had convicted them and led them to repentance. Sorrow is feeling bad about being confronted. Godly sorrow leads to repenting from what the confrontation exposes.

Paul urged them to move forward in their holiness by giving an offering to the church in Jerusalem. The grace of giving is an act of growth in Christ (8:7). Many churches were contributing, and the Corinthians had originated the idea. Paul told them it was time to "put their money where their mouths were" and fulfill their promise.

The Corinthians had the opportunity to give out of their abundance to meet the needs of others just as God in His abundance had met the need of sinners. No wonder God loves cheerful givers (9:7). In giving, they are reflecting the heart of God Himself. He is faithful to meet the needs of the givers and to stir worship and fellowship as a result.

Thank God for the gift of salvation and the ability to grow in holiness and give to

others.

Friday, November 27, 2020—2 Corinthians 4-6

Paul was an expert in the Old Testament Law. If anyone could boast about knowing its content of fulfilling its requirements, Paul was that man. He realized he was condemned by the very Law he thought he had mastered. He was a sinner, and only Jesus' death could bring forgiveness. His Spirit brought life and a new ministry (4:1) through His mercy.

Their proclamation of the gospel would not always break through the darkness in the hearts and minds of their audience, but they were not deterred. Their ability to press on, no matter the circumstances or results, was the proof of His presence and power in their lives (4:7-18). After all, what was seen was temporary and empty compared to the eternal unseen.

Paul urged the Corinthians to live in confidence despite any suffering they experienced in the body (5:6). The body was like a tent—a temporary dwelling. One day, they would lay the tent down and be in the presence of God. Until that day, they lived each day to please God and plead with people, moved by Christ's love, to be reconciled to Him (5:1-21).

To live with resentment or with a lack of love was to waste the grace of God (6:1). Paul's words had been hard on them, but they were words of love. He wanted them to avoid any attachments to the world that would weaken them or disqualify their ministry (6:14).

Pray for a walk empowered by the love and mercy of Christ and for a church family that sharpens one another in grace and truth.

Thursday, November 26, 2020—Acts 19:11-20:1, 2 Corinthians 1-3

Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years and saw God do powerful things through his ministry. Seven sons of Sceva tried to replicate the healing ministry of Paul, but they did not have a personal relationship with Jesus and, therefore, the powerful presence of His Spirit. They were beaten and embarrassed by the spirits they tried to overpower (19:13-16).

The presence and power of God in Paul did not prevent hardships. His influence was a detriment to the worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana), and a riot broke out. The city officials quieted the crowd and told them to bring credible charges rather than acting foolishly. The sovereignty of God can make even a pagan government a friend of His people.

Paul began the final leg of his third journey and along the way wrote again to the Corinthians. Paul affirmed the comfort God had brought them during their times of great distress (1:9) and shared his plans to come see them on his journey toward home. Those plans had changed. He realized his coming to them would have been painful instead of joyful (2:1).

The Corinthians had processed the instructions from Paul's letter and worked on strengthening their church. Paul told them they were living proof of his calling and equipping from God as a church planter and disciple maker (3:1-6). The power of the Spirit to transform lives gave them all hope and boldness. The presence of the Spirit

gave them freedom. With his letter, Paul was highlighting things worth celebrating.

Thank God today for the transforming power of Jesus in you.

Wednesday, November 25, 2020—1 Corinthians 13-16

Paul had plenty to critique within the Corinthian church, and he did so lovingly yet boldly. They had to see the flaws that were hindering their walk with Jesus and their ability to glorify Him. Paul was also clear with the path forward for repentance and growth. He did not point out errors without also giving solutions—a second step many fail to take.

The Corinthian church was prone to division—lining up behind certain leaders or “circling the wagons” to form groups they thought were better than others. Paul wanted them to see the value of each member, so he closed 1 Corinthians 12 with the promise of a better way. What was that way? Paul said unconditional love was the hope for the church. Without their unconditional love for one another, the Corinthians were empty vessels, a useless Body in which Jesus could do little. It was time for the Corinthians to grow up, put self aside, and love one another.

With love as the foundation, they could use their spiritual gifts to honor Christ and enrich one another (14:1-40). Paul reminded them of the foundational place of love, and then he reminded them of the foundational truth of the gospel—Jesus died, and He rose again (15:1-4). Believers love one another not because it’s a good idea but because it’s an ability empowered by the resurrected God-in-the-flesh who lives within them. Without a risen Christ, sin remains, belief is in vain, and love is impossible.

Praise God for the love and power available in Jesus alone.