Paul spoke specifically about peace with God available through the justifying work of Jesus (5:1). Before the atoning work of Christ, people had the wrath of God on their souls. They had no peace with God. After receiving forgiveness through Jesus, that wrath has been removed. Now, believers have peace with God, so they can have the peace of God—the hope and assurance of His continual presence, protection, and provision.

 This peace leads to joy, hope, and love (5:2-11). All of what Christmas celebrates is a result of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This powerful presence allows the believer to live a godly life, denying self and sin through the power of grace, not the law (6:14).

 Paul was aware of the continual struggle of the flesh and the spirit (7:7-25). The old nature, though dead, is ready to do evil at a moment’s notice. The joy, peace, hope, and love of God are only experienced when the believer continually, willingly choosing to walk in them. This spiritual life brings life to the body (8:11), and the Spirit Himself continually prays for the believer and helps him in his weakness (8:26-27).

 Thank God for the life, joy, hope, and peace He brings through the great expression of His love, sending His Son and His Spirit for us.

Saturday, December 2, 2017—Romans 9-11

 Paul began his ministry by spending time in the synagogue in the towns he visited. After determining the level of receptivity from the Jews, he would then turn his attention to the Gentiles. He saw much more fruit from the now-Jewish mission, but he never lost his fervor to see his own people know and follow Jesus just as he had.

 God’s word had not failed (9:6). God had always worked through His deliverance of promises and the people’s faith in His accomplishment of those promises. Though Israel had every promise available to them, many of them simply had not believed. The mercy of God was at work making belief possible and making known the riches of his glory, but many tried to achieve their righteousness rather than receiving it by faith.

 Paul wished he could be cut off from Christ in order for the Jews to believe (9:1), and he knew how zealous they were to be righteous (10:2), but they simply would not believe Jesus was the answer. Paul saw Old Testament promises from God that He would use those who were not His people to make His own people jealous (10:19-21). God had done everything He promised. His people simply needed to believe.

 Paul’s great hope came from the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. God would turn Jacob from godlessness and take away their sin (11:26-27). The wisdom of God to Paul was truly immeasurable, for all things were from Him, through Him, and to Him. With Paul, give praise to God for His great wisdom and mercy.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 48

Sunday, November 26, 2017—Acts 19:11-20:1, 2 Corinthians 1-3

 Paul spent two years in Ephesus building up the church, performing miracles, and developing rich relationships with those disciples. That warmth, however, was not shared by the entire community. The makers of idols saw him as a threat to their business, so they stirred up a riot. A local official quieted the mob, and Paul decided it was time to leave.

 Paul wrote again to the Corinthians and mentioned the hardships he and his companions experienced in Asia and says these were so difficult they despaired of life (1:8). They learned in these moments to trust in God rather than relying on themselves. God had given His Spirit as a seal of ownership and as a deposit, guaranteeing what was to come (1:22), so he knew they were securely in God’s hands no matter what came their way.

 Writing the Corinthians again was important but troubling because he had discussed difficult subjects previously and they wondered why he had not come to see them as promised. Paul addressed this but turned the focus elsewhere. Worth celebrating was the freedom they all had in Christ. They could focus on the issues which frustrated them, or they could revel in the glory of the new covenant God had made with Christians (3:7-18). Paul saw the powerful transformation God made in the Corinthians, and they were a living letter of reference for Christ and his ministry.

 Thank God for the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thank Him for those who shared the gospel with you. Pray to be a living letter.

Monday, November 27, 2017—1 Corinthians 4-6

 The Monday after Thanksgiving has become known as Cyber Monday, the day when shoppers spend massive amounts of money online, mostly in preparation for Christmas. They find a treasure or discover a great financial deal, and they make the purchase.

 Paul spoke of a greater treasure, the presence of the Spirit within their jars of human clay. God receives glory when simple people live extraordinary lives, demonstrating the surpassing power is from God and not man. Preaching Christ shines light into darkness. Enduring hardship illustrates the daily renewal possible through the indwelling Christ.

 Furthermore, the earthly tent in which they lived was simply a temporary home. God had something eternal waiting for their souls when the present body finished its task. Life is full of pain and groaning, but the presence and promise of Christ allows His followers to persevere and to look to a day when they will see Him in His fullness. Until then, they make pleasing Him their everyday goal (5:9). In line with that, they work to persuade those around them to be reconciled to this great Master.

 Having this treasure allowed Paul to endure great conflict and physical suffering. He prayed this treasure would allow the Corinthians to renew their love for one another and for him, and he challenged them to see this treasure as a reason to choose carefully a partner for marriage, the most Christ-reflective relationship on earth.

 Pray for a daily awareness of being the temple of the living God (6:16). Allow His presence to strengthen and give purpose.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017—2 Corinthians 7-9

 Paul begins 2 Corinthians 7 with a charge to all believers. Because God has promised to be a Father to those who become His children, there is no greater promise to trust or purpose for living. “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from every thing that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (7:1). God deserves our continual effort toward becoming like He is.

 To that end of increasing holiness God provides fellow believers to spur each other on toward love and good deeds. Paul had written harshly to the Corinthians about sinful practices they needed to abandon. Titus came to Paul in Macedonia and told him how Paul’s letter led the Corinthians to repentance. Paul did not write them simply to be mean. He wrote so they could abandon sin and perfect their holiness.

 Paul knew the myriad benefits of holiness. Knowing and enjoying God is the primary personal benefit, but when believers grow in holiness, the people around them benefit. Those growing in holiness have less concern for themselves and more concern for those around them, just as Jesus did. The churches Paul touched were growing in holiness and generosity, giving sacrificially to the Jerusalem church in great need. Paul hoped the Corinthians would join in that offering, just as they promised, because their holiness would compel them to do so. Giving, Paul said, was a gift from God. He hoped the Corinthians would excel in it (8:7).

 Praise God for making holiness and giving possible.

Wednesday, November 29, 2017—2 Corinthians 10-13

 During the Christmas season, children make wish lists and share with family and friends what they hope to receive for Christmas. These lists are often extravagant and without any hope of being completely fulfilled, yet the children, in their immaturity, often are shocked when they find their lists isn’t complete. Those who provide for them may find this endearing, but many are shocked or angered at the selfishness displayed.

 Paul was dealing with similarly raw emotions as he wrote to the Corinthians. There were hard feelings from a previous letter because he had discussed some uncomfortable situations, and some were claiming he was harsh in letters but weak in person. Some even doubted his apostolic authority and the validity of his ministry. Paul boldly addressed these issues and reminded the Corinthians of all he had suffered for the sake of Christ and for the effectiveness of the ministry he had with them (11:16-33).

 In fact, Paul boasted in the things which demonstrated his weakness because they showcased the strength and sufficiency of Jesus. His power is made perfect in weakness (12:9). Paul discovered that when he was weak, He was strong, so he was strong even in times of great suffering.

 Because of Jesus’ sufficiency, Paul was not afraid to deal with hard topics, even if it meant discomfort and grief. The Kingdom was too valuable to overlook sin. He urged them to aim for perfection and live in peace and unity (13:11). Maturing children ought to please the Father.

 Pray for faith satisfied in Him and diligent in growth.

Thursday, November 30, 2017—Acts 20:2, Romans 1-4

 Paul often wrote to churches which he helped found or churches with close connection to those congregations. Rome was a different situation. Paul had never been there but longed to visit. This body of believers functioned in the capital of the Roman Empire, so their potential for impact and for persecution was greater than anywhere else. Paul wrote his greatest work explaining clearly the gospel of Jesus Christ.

 Paul wanted to visit Rome so he could preach the gospel to them (1:15). Why would he preach the gospel to people who are already believers? The gospel revealed a righteousness through Christ that empowered the righteous to live by faith. The gospel is good news not only because God brings dead people to life but because God continues to show those now-living people how to walk daily with Him. Paul knew sin had separated man from a living relationship with the one true God. Jesus made it possible to know Him and grow in Him. That was good news.

 Knowing the cultural setting in which the Romans lived, Paul turned his discussion to the bad news—the wrath of God against mankind. The rampant sin surrounding the Romans was evidence of man’s rebellion against God’s design, and God had every right, then, to bring judgment against these heinous choices (1:18-2:16). Even God’s people, the Jews, would not escape His righteous judgment. The Law displays God’s holiness and man’s sinfulness but provides no means for salvation. Only faith can make a person right before God (3:22, 4:3).

 Thank God for the good news.

Friday, December 1, 2017—Romans 5-8

 During the weeks before Christmas, many Christians make intentional use of the days as Advent, a remembrance of the first-coming of Jesus and preparation for His second coming. Advent emphasizes a number of topics, most notably love, joy, hope, and peace.