



OHBC MEMORY VERSE – WEEK #48

THIS WEEK'S VERSE: 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."

Why Galatians 2:20?

Because it teaches us the incredibly impacting reality that God doesn't want us to live for Him!

That's right! God doesn't want you to live for Him! That was the problem in the churches in Galatia. False teachers were propagating that after calling upon the Lord by faith to save you, there were still things that you needed to do to keep yourself saved and/or to make yourself spiritual. The fact is God is no more interested in "our righteousness" after we are saved, than He was before we were saved! Believe it or not, "our righteousnesses" are just as filthy and stinky on this side of salvation as they were on the other side of it (Isaiah 64:6)! That is why Paul exclaimed in Philippians 3:9 his desire to "be found in him, not have MINE OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness, which is of God by faith"! The reality is, not one thing happened to our flesh the day we got saved, and no amount of learning, growing or maturing will ever do one single thing to change our flesh! That is why Paul was so adamant in Romans 7:18 to get us to understand that in our flesh "dwelleth NO good thing"! In the very next chapter, Romans 8 and verses 19-23, Paul lets us know that our flesh is going to remain in that "incapable-of-righteousness" condition until the "redemption of our body." That is why God is not interested in US living FOR Him. The flesh simply doesn't have the power or the capability to live the Christian life we have been called to live!

That's what makes this week's memory verse so significant! Paul reveals to us in this verse the spiritual realities we need to know and put into operation that will unleash the real power through which the Christian life is to be lived.

Paul begins in Galatians 2:20 with the recognition of the present tense reality of the crucifixion in his life. The fact is, when we called upon the name of the Lord to save us, we were placed into His death, and spiritually, we died with Him. That death, however, has an on-going, present tense reality in all of our lives now. The way Paul worded it in Colossians 3:3 is, "For ye ARE (present tense) dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." In other words, we are DEAD, and yet we have LIFE, but it's not OUR life, it is actually Christ's life in us!

That's the same thing Paul is saying in Galatians 2:20. "I am crucified with Christ" – that's a spiritual reality. "Nevertheless I live" – that's a physical reality. "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" – there's the spiritual reality again. "And the life that I now live in the flesh" – back to the physical reality, "I live by the faith of the Son of God" – and now, back to the spiritual reality again.

The lesson is simply this. As believers in Christ, we must understand that we are "walking dead men." I think there was some two bit movie a few years back entitled, "The Night of the Living Dead." Based on Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3 and Romans 13:12, that's a great concisement of our lives! We are dead, but we live, but the power-source of our life is no longer the power of the flesh, but the power of Christ that now lives in us.

The key to victorious Christian living is allowing Christ's DEATH to be actualized in us, and yet at the same time, allowing Christ's LIFE to be actualized in us, so that we are out of the way (i.e. "crucified"), and it is Him living His life in and through our physical bodies.

Until our bodies have been redeemed, may hiding this verse in our hearts to be a constant reminder to us that God doesn't want us to live for Him. He wants to live His life through us!

DAY 238

TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 9-11

OVERVIEW:

The revelation of the righteousness of God rejected in Judaism (Chapters 9-11).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Today we move into the second half of this great doctrinal epistle of the Apostle Paul. Keep in mind that the purpose of the writing of Romans is to reveal the righteousness of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:16-17). In the first half of Romans, Paul identified a number of PRINCIPLES related to the righteousness we receive through the gospel:

- Sin is a universal reality. (Chapters 1-3)
- Salvation is a free gift. (Chapter 3)
- Salvation is received by faith. (Chapter 4)
- Salvation is secure and forever. (Chapter 5)
- Sanctification is from sin and the law. (Chapters 6-7)
- Sanctification is by the Spirit. (Chapter 8)

Beginning in chapter 9, Paul turns his attention to some of the PROBLEMS related to the righteousness we receive through the gospel; particularly, problems that related to the Jews.

The first problem had to do with the fact that at the time Paul wrote the Book of Romans, the Old Testament sacrifices were still being offered in the Temple at Jerusalem. The principles Paul laid out in Romans 1-8 have rendered those sacrifices completely MEANINGLESS.

The second problem was related to the reality that each time Paul preached in a Jewish synagogue, he knew that Judaism and Christianity could not co-exist. If Christianity continued to spread across the world, Judaism's fate was sealed. It was just that reality that caused Paul to so bitterly oppose Christianity prior to his conversion.

Finally, the greatest problem Paul faced was reconciling in people's minds the doctrines of the church with the covenants God had made to the Nation of Israel. The two questions that continually surfaced each time Paul preached in the presence of Jews were: "Are the promises of God to the Nation of Israel now null and void?" and "Where does the Jew stand in relationship to God in this dispensation?" The purpose of Romans 9, 10 and 11 is to provide answers to those questions. The Spirit of God obviously knew that these answers would blast Satan's attempts to pervert the gospel with the false teachings of the Judiazers.

Some have called chapters 9, 10 and 11 parentheses in the Book of Romans. A parenthesis is defined as a sentence or paragraph that provides the reader with an explanation. That's exactly what Romans 9, 10 and 11 do! They provide us with an explanation of how it is that God could set aside His chosen people for a period of time, and how it is that God will restore Israel at a future date, and fulfill all the promises He made to them in the Old Testament.

The three chapters of this parenthesis can be broken down as follows:

- In Romans 9, the emphasis is on Israel's PAST ELECTION.
- In Romans 10, the emphasis is on Israel's PRESENT REJECTION.
- In Romans 11, the emphasis is on Israel's FUTURE RESTORATION.

A couple of other side notes:

Don't let Romans 9:13 freak you out: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." The "as it is written" is a reference to Malachi 1:2-3, and the statement is made in reference to NATIONS, not INDIVIDUALS. "Esau" is representative of the Edomite nation. "Jacob" is representative of the Nation of Israel. Because of John 3:16 and countless other Scriptures, there is no way that the Bible teaches that God loves some sinners, and hates others.

Concerning the hardening of Pharaoh in 9:17-18, understand that God gives people what they want. Exodus 8:15 says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Then in Exodus 9:12, it says that God hardened

Pharaoh's heart. God simply gave Pharaoh what he wanted. It is the same principle that is repeated in II Thessalonians 2:8-12. There are people who have understood the truth and have had the opportunity to receive the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved (2:10). Rather than receive the truth, however, they "had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2:12), and, therefore, lied to themselves, and rejected the truth. The passage teaches that in the Tribulation Period when the Antichrist comes on the scene, God will say in effect, "You wanted a lie, so that's exactly what you'll get!" Verses 11 and 12 say that God Himself will "send them strong delusion" so that they will believe the lie of the Antichrist, and be forever damned.

In Pharaoh's case, God hardened Pharaoh's heart because Pharaoh hardened Pharaoh's heart. With those who miss the rapture because they lied to themselves when God presented them the truth, God will simply give them what they proved they wanted.

Is there anything you are communicating to God by your life that you want, that you don't really want God to give you?

DAY 239

TODAY'S READING: ROMANS 12-16

OVERVIEW:

The revelation of the righteousness of God reproduced in the church (chapters 12-16).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

After introducing his theme to the Book of Romans, the revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel of Christ (1:16,17), Paul walked us through eight chapters of PRINCIPLES related to that gospel. Then, beginning in chapter 9 and continuing through chapter 11, Paul identified and addressed the PROBLEMS of the gospel as they related to the Nation of Israel. We called this section a "parenthesis" because if you were to read from Romans 8:39 right into 12:1, it would make perfect sense! Check it out:

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come – (8:38). Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord – (8:39). I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." – (12:1).

Now beginning with Romans 12:1, we move into the third and final section of this great epistle. Having considered the PRINCIPLES and PROBLEMS of the gospel in the first 11 chapters, in these final five chapters (12-16), Paul takes us into an examination of the PRACTICE of the gospel. What he is doing in these chapters is a classic Pauline pattern that we will be able to observe in all of his writings. In each of the New Testament letters God inspired Paul to write, he always establishes the specific doctrines in the beginning of the Book. Each letter then concludes by providing the reader with a series of practical DUTIES which are based upon the DOCTRINES he's presented. Paul was aware of the danger in laying down PRINCIPLES without identifying how those PRINCIPLES were to affect the PRACTICE of our lives. As Bible believers, we must understand that DOCTRINE and DUTIES always go hand-in-hand. Each time we approach the Word of God, we must ask ourselves two very simple questions: "What is it that God wants me to BELIEVE?" and "How is it that God wants me to BEHAVE?" You see this pattern very clearly in the Book of Romans. For the first eight chapters Paul identifies the DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES related to the gospel; then in the final five chapters, he provides the PRACTICAL DUTIES based upon those principles.

Beginning in chapter 12 and continuing through chapter 14, Paul identifies the following relationships that have been dramatically affected by receiving the gospel. With each relationship he provides a corresponding responsibility:

- Our relationship to God... Offer reasonable service. (12:1-2)
- Our relationship to other believers... Minister our gifts. (12:3-16)
- Our relationship to our enemies... Overcome evil, with good. (12:17-21)
- Our relationship to rulers... Be subject. (13:1-7)
- Our relationship to our neighbors... Owe nothing but love. (13:8-14)
- Our relationship to weaker believers... Receive and edify. (14:1-23)

Realizing the benefit of an example when transitioning from theory to practice, in chapter 15, Paul provides three examples of people who ministered to others. He begins with the ministry of Christ and how He pleased and received others (15:1-13). Next, he provides himself as an example of one that forwarded God's message (15:14). Finally, he holds up the Gentile churches and their sacrificial giving to the impoverished saints at Jerusalem as an example (15:25-35).

In chapter 16, God finds an incredible way to teach us about the important keys to Paul's ministry. Paul sends his greetings to 26 individuals, two households, and several churches that are meeting in people's homes. That's a lot of relationships, considering they reside in a city that he's not yet been permitted to visit! As you read this list, you can't help but be impressed with the fact that Paul loved people. No doubt, many of these names represented people he had personally won to Christ in other places who now resided in Rome. It is more than apparent that Paul's ministry centered around two key things: the GREAT COMMANDMENT (Loving God and loving people), and the GREAT COMMISSION (Reproducing reproducers — i.e. Making disciples!) May each of our ministries reflect the same.

DAY 240

TODAY'S READING: I CORINTHIANS 1-6

OVERVIEW: An appeal for unity (chapter 1); the wisdom of God vs. the wisdom of this world (chapter 2); eternal building vs. temporary building (chapter 3); understanding our stewardship (chapter 4); dealing with unrepentant sin (chapter 5); dealing with conflict in the body (chapter 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The city of Corinth was located on one of the most important east-west trade and travel routes in the Roman Empire. It was a financial center especially noted for commerce, culture, and absolute perverted corruption. Corinth was also the headquarters for the worship of Venus and for some of the mystery cults from Egypt and Asia. It was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire.

The founding of the church at Corinth is detailed in Acts 18:1-17. The apostle Paul and his missionary team established this church and Paul actually spent a year and half teaching and preaching in this church. Yet, by the time Paul writes this letter, the church was totally operating in the flesh. In fact, Paul finds absolutely nothing whatsoever in the entire letter for which to commend them!

There is NOTHING this church was doing that should be used as a model. They are messed up on their relationships with each other, their attitude about sin, their teaching about marriage, their liberty in Christ, exercising their spiritual gifts and the resurrection, of all things! In spite of that fact, there is a whole movement – the Charismatic movement – that bases many of their beliefs and practices on things the Corinthian church had espoused. We will see that God's simple and clear instructions to this church are not followed by those proposing to be "filled with the Spirit". However, there are bigger problems with this church than their abuse of spiritual gifts. In fact, God chose to not even address their abuse of spiritual gifts until the end of the Book. This should raise a red flag when we think about problems in the body of Christ. I'd rather partner for the cause of Christ with a genuine brother who mistakenly believes tongues are still for today, than to try and partner with a brother that has his "dispensations" right, but his "disposition" wrong, as Vance Havner used to say.

One of the most amazing things to note about this letter, is that as Paul writes under the inspiration of the Spirit of God to address such an incredibly problematic church is how many times God clears off a spot to speak directly to the pastors or elders of the church at Corinth. We all certainly know that everything rises or falls on leadership, right? Surely it would be a quick fix to their problems to get the pastors to do what's right, so the rest of the church could simply follow their lead, wouldn't it? But do you know how many times Paul actually speaks to the pastors in this letter? ZERO! Does that mean that pastors do not have a key responsibility in the leadership of the church? Absolutely not! It simply reveals that we are all in this thing together. Make no mistake, a pastor will most certainly give an account to God for how he led God's people and how he provided oversight of the church (Heb. 13:17). However, each person will give an account for himself at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:12).

We're not going to be able pull out the "if my pastor would have just led/taught/preached/visited/prayed or whatever better I would have been different" card. The lesson of I Corinthians is that a church that is operating in the flesh or in the Spirit, is operating that way because of the members of the body, not just a

select few. We each need to examine and judge our own lives and what we are contributing or not contributing to the body.

The Corinthians had sent some questions to Paul they needed answered. However, before Paul begins to answer those questions beginning in chapter 7, there were other issues that the Spirit of God knew needed to be dealt with first. When you think about all the problems this church had, it is interesting that the first four chapters deal with one primary issue – division in the body. Many things are addressed in these first four chapters, but they ultimately come back to the principle of a united body versus a divided body. Chapter 1 and verse 10 is the clear statement of God's will for this church. It also tells us how this can be accomplished in a local body – “but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” How do you have the same mind and same judgment? Note four principles from I Corinthians 1-4:

1. Be a fool for Christ (1:18, 25; 4:9-10). We're going to be a fool for something or somebody! The Corinthians were consumed with not looking foolish to the world and in so doing, became fools. Are you concerned about what your unsaved friends and family think of you, or are you consumed with knowing Christ?
2. Trust the wisdom of God (Chapter 2) The Word of God (that which is spiritual) must be the basis for our decisions and choices in life.
3. Build with eternal materials (Chapter 3) Are you building your life with things that will withstand the fire of God and last for eternity, or are you consumed with things that will vanish away?
4. Be a faithful steward (Chapter 4) The responsibility of a steward is to use the resources he's been given for the purpose of the owner. Our Owner has told us to “lay up treasure in heaven” and “not to lay up treasure upon earth”. Our Owner has put us in trust with a message to proclaim to those who haven't believed. Are you being a faithful steward?

Do you see how simple God's plan is? If all of us in the local body of believers are consumed with Christ, it's easy to be of the “same mind and same judgment”. But when we become concerned about our reputation, our position, our way and everyone else in the body is doing the same, we're heading for big trouble! It's almost as simple as “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh”!

In chapter 5, God deals with this church regarding their lack of dealing with a sinning brother. Verse 1 reveals that there is a man in the church living in sin, and obviously allowing that sin to rule his life. In verse 2 God rebukes these believers for not dealing with this issue of sin. Notice that God's rebuke is first and foremost, that they did not mourn this sin. What is our reaction when we see a brother or sister allowing sin to rule their lives? Do we care? Do we sense some sort of satisfaction because we kind of thought they were like that? Do we think “I would never do that”? Or do we have the response God is looking for – mourning (5:2)? In verses 3-5, God instructs them to remove this man from the fellowship of their church. The reason for such seemingly harsh treatment however, is so he will be removed from the protection afforded him in the body of Christ, so he will see the importance of repenting, so that God can and will be glorified in his life. ! In fact, verse 5 says that the flesh may be destroyed, but the spirit will be saved. In verse 8, God mentions two types of leaven – malice and wickedness. One is an evil life, and one is an evil attitude. These are areas in which we must judge ourselves in daily. God also gives the remedy: sincerity and truth. You must have both. Sincerity without truth will do you no good. Many sincere people live a defeated life. However, truth without sincerity is not any better. The Pharisees had truth, but they didn't have sincerity. In verses 9-11, God clearly teaches that we are not to separate ourselves physically from this lost world. We should expect them to live in sin because they are lost, and we must reach them with the gospel! However, we are not to associate ourselves with believers whose lives are being lived according to the flesh.

Notice also the type of sin God talks about in 5:9-11. He talks about the ones in which we would easily agree– fornication, drunkenness, idolatry – but He also lists covetousness, extortion, and railing. God is showing that we may have our list of “bad sins” and “acceptable sins”, but He most certainly does not! Someone living in the flesh that never does anything immoral but is always talking negatively about people (railing), is just as overtaken in sin as the person in verse 1! Verses 12-13 teach us that God will judge the lost world, but our responsibility is to reach them.

One of the most obvious ways to see the division in the body was the way the Corinthian believers took each other to court. The key principle of chapter 6 is that believers should not take each other to court over civil matters. If someone believes they have been wronged, they need to allow the church to handle the matter. Sometimes this may take great faith. It also may not result in what one party regards as fair. The larger issue in all these problems is, are we seeking God's solution or simply relying on our own standard? May we seek to yield to the Spirit each day, and allow Him to control our thoughts and actions.

DAY 241

TODAY'S READING: I CORINTHIANS 7-11

OVERVIEW:

Marriage and divorce (chapter 7); Christian liberty (chapter 8); the purpose of our liberty (chapter 9); lessons from Israel (chapter 10); issues regarding communion (chapter 11).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

We now begin the section of I Corinthians in which Paul answers the questions the Corinthians had sent to him. The first issue he addresses is marriage. Apparently, the Corinthians were wondering if it was better for a man never to marry. In one sense it is. Verse 1 of chapter 7 says, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. In 7:8 Paul says he wishes all men were like him (single). 7:8 says it is good for the unmarried and widows to remain single. 7:27 advises men if they are loosed from a wife (single) not to seek a wife. The reason is found in 7:32-34. An unmarried person may give their service more wholly to the Lord. Everyone that is married understands the point, because there are restraints on our time, resources, and service because of our families. For example, it's more difficult for a husband/wife, father/mother to go on a six month or one year mission trip than it is for a single person. That is just common sense. What often happens, however, is singles sometimes mistakenly believe if they can just be spiritual enough, they can remain single for life. God makes clear in 7:7 that singleness is a gift, and that marriage is certainly good and honorable, and what is right for most.

Space does not allow for an exhaustive look at chapter 7, but there are some key principles God establishes in this chapter that need to be noted:

7:2-5

Intimacy is not an option in marriage. The husband and wife are to give themselves to each other. A marriage that lacks intimacy distorts the picture of Christ and the church revealed in Ephesians 5:25-33.

7:10-15

Do not seek divorce. If there is a split, God desires reconciliation. However, if an unbelieving spouse departs, the believer is free.

7:18-24

Learn to be content. If you can improve your circumstances, go for it, but learn to be content.

7:25-40

Realize your marriage requires time, effort, and care.

In chapter 8, the next question the Corinthians posed was about meat offered to idols. They were asking this question in a way to get the answer they wanted — almost an “It's okay to eat, right?” You can see by the development of the chapter that they already had their well-thought-through reasons it was okay, and were simply looking for Paul to agree with them, or condone their wishes. The Corinthians said, “We have knowledge! We know an idol is nothing”. God responds, “Knowledge is vain. It puffs up! The key is, do you have charity?” Chapter 8 is a redirecting of the question from, “Because we have knowledge and we know an idol is nothing we can eat this meat offered to idols even though it offends our brothers, right?” to “Do you love your brother enough not to eat it?” Notice the shift from, “What are my rights?” to “How can I care for my brother?” Yes, an idol is nothing, and no, there is nothing wrong in and of itself in eating meat offered to an idol. However, the overarching concern must be verse 9 – “Am I using my liberty in a way that causes others to stumble?” If so, I'm using my liberty as an occasion to the flesh and not only sinning against my brother, I am sinning against Christ (8:12).

In chapter 9, Paul illustrates from his own life, the principle of chapter 8. Verses 1-14 establish the authority and right that Paul and Barnabas had to be compensated for their work in the Lord. However,

they chose not to exercise this right for the sake of the gospel. Paul had the right to be compensated, but he chose not to do this so that nobody would or could ever accuse him of doing what he did for money, and thereby hurt the cause of Christ. Rather, 9:20-23 reveals he chose to live as others to try and reach them with the gospel. In fact, he brings himself under control that he might be an effective messenger of the gospel. The question we need to ask ourselves is, “Do I place the priority on being as an effective minister of the gospel as I can be?” or “Do I place the priority on my rights and liberty?”

In chapter 10, God illustrates why we all need to have the mindset Paul just described in chapter 9. The illustration comes from the Old Testament and has to do with the Nation of Israel. Verse 1-4 reveal that all Israel experienced the same supernatural deliverance from Egypt, in the same way every true believer has experienced supernatural deliverance from sin and the world. However, most of them were overthrown in the wilderness. They are an example to us. Five areas did them in: lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting God, and murmuring. Verse 12 gives us a solemn warning. Sometimes we think we’re immune to certain sins. God says we better constantly be taking heed to His Word lest we fall. 10:13 is a very popular verse, however, don’t forget the context. The temptations that are common to man are the very things he just listed that the Nation of Israel faced. We need to be on guard, taking heed to what God’s Word says about the five areas that caused most of Israel to be overthrown.

Then, Paul comes all the way back to dealing with the issue he started discussing in Chapter 8 – meat offered to idols. Verses 14-22 deal with actually participating in the religious experiences of those sacrificing to idols. Some Corinthians probably thought that since an idol is nothing what’s the big deal if I go to my neighbor’s religious service and participate with him. It’s no big deal, right? Wrong! False religious services are actually a worship of Satan. They certainly don’t look that way, but that is the spiritual reality. However, the meat that is sold afterwards is permissible to eat, just don’t defile your conscience or the conscience of your brother. The key principles to apply to our life are found in 10:23-24. I’m free to do what I want, but just because I’m free to do it doesn’t mean I should! There are other issues involved, not the least of which is regarding my brother and not just my own selfish wants. This is also the context for 10:31-33. The glory of God is what should be the motivation for all we do. However, we’re Laodiceans, and usually we are motivated by what profits us, not what profits others.

Think of the boldness of Paul to write verse 1 of chapter 11. This verse is often misquoted as if it says, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” He doesn’t say that. Paul says the very bold, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am [a follower] of Christ”. Notice the difference – “I’m a follower of Christ, you be a follower of me.” He was telling these immature believers to start following him. God understands we that sometimes need a model to follow. Young or immature believers need a mature Christian to follow. However, God’s desire is not for that to continue indefinitely. As a believer matures, they need to learn to stand (Gal. 5:1), and walk (Gal. 5:16) on their own two spiritual feet.

The next part, 11:2-16, is quite an interesting portion of scripture. Remember how the Corinthians asked that question to try and get the response they wanted? We typically do the same thing when we approach the issue of women wearing a covering on their head. We tend to approach this issue with the question, “Women don’t really have to wear something on their head when they pray, do they?” Isn’t it interesting how that is our first question. There are a couple of key points that help make this passage easier to understand. First, God is a God of order. That is clearly revealed in verses 3, 8-9. Second, Paul is dealing with a cultural issue. How do we know that? Let me answer that by asking another question – is hair the covering? Well, verse 15 says it is the covering given to a woman. But, is that the teaching of scripture? No, nature teaches us that. Is it wrong for a man to have long hair? Some say that it is because of verse 14. But again, keep in mind that that is a reference to nature, not to scripture. Different cultures have different customs. That brings us to the third point. Notice verse 16. Paul is not instituting any biblical requirement upon these people or upon us. So the answer is no, women don’t have to wear something on their head when they pray, unless, of course, the culture dictates it. Remember; don’t seek your own profit, but the profit of others.

As Paul continues on in chapter 11, he rebukes them for their abuse of the Lord’s Supper. They were using this time as a time to party and do what they wanted instead of remembering our Lord’s death. God uses this passage as a reminder of the purpose of communion, and shows us:

- This is a very important and meaningful time to God. (11:27)
- We should examine ourselves before participating. (11:28)
- There are extreme consequences to not judging ourselves. (11:30)

OVERVIEW:

The body of Christ (chapter 12); the priority of charity (chapter 13); the boundaries for spiritual gifts (chapter 14); the resurrection of the dead (chapter 15); structure for orderly giving (chapter 16).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapter 12, Paul begins to correct the ignorance of the Corinthians regarding spiritual gifts. Remember the context – they think they've got it all together (4:10). They certainly didn't think they were ignorant about spiritual gifts. I mean, they were using their gifts; they were having services where the "Spirit" was literally overwhelming people. The only problem was, it wasn't the Spirit of God! God actually uses sarcasm in the passages we will look at today to rebuke the Corinthians.

God establishes three keys to spiritual gifts in verses 4-6:

1. There are different gifts.
2. There are different ways to administer your gift.
3. There are different ways to operate your gift.

However, there is one overarching principle guiding spiritual gifts. Verse 7 states that the purpose of the gifts is to "profit withal". In other words, the purpose of your spiritual gift is not for your benefit; it is for the benefit of the whole body. God then illustrates this point by using the example of our human body. The purpose for our hand is not for the benefit of our hand, it is for the benefit of our whole body. Through this illustration, God also emphasizes the necessity of all believers within a local church. Every member is necessary. Sometime believers can get the idea, or live with the feeling, that they are not as important as other members of the body. But the point of the passage is that every member of Christ's body is just as vital as any member of our own human body is to us. Because of that fact, as a body we are to care about one another; we're to rejoice when others rejoice and weep with those in sorrow. Because we so often live with a preoccupation concerning ourselves (II Tim. 3:1-2), instead of caring about one another, we're often jealous and/or envious of one another (Gal. 5:26).

Pay close attention to 12:28-31. The obvious answer to the questions being asked is "No! We do not all have the same gifts. We each have different gifts." Also look back at 12: 7-11. Do we get to choose our gift? No, the Holy Spirit imparts our gifts to us as He chooses. Verse 31 is one of those sarcastic phrases Paul uses to rebuke the Corinthians. First, he states their ignorance, and then he reveals an example of their ignorance. These people were coveting certain gifts (the "showy" gifts) even though we have no say in our gift and it is imparted by the Holy Spirit at His will. God is using sarcasm to illustrate immaturity in coveting "the best gifts". God then reveals where their focus should be: not on what gifts I want to have, but rather, on a more excellent way. More excellent than what? More excellent than ignorantly trying to obtain different gifts or showing off the gift you do have!

The placement of chapter 13 is key to understanding spiritual gifts. Never lose sight of the context when studying scripture. Verses 1-3 of chapter 13 are a direct confrontation in the face of the Corinthians. They have the appearance of "spirituality" in their lives and in their church, but it is only an appearance. They're consumed with the show of spirituality. God reveals that it doesn't matter how much you speak in tongues, it doesn't matter how many gifts you have and how well you use them, it doesn't matter how much you give, if you don't have charity in your life, it is all WORTHLESS. Before we condemn the Corinthians, why don't we try to paraphrase this into something that is a little more applicable to us:

Though I am heavily involved in discipleship and even participate in the 365 Days of Pursuit, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I carry the correct Bible, and can divide it into the correct dispensations, and though I've gone through all of the layers and levels of training offered in my local church, if I don't have charity, I'm just full of information and knowledge. And though I discover my spiritual gift, and do all kinds of things so that everyone else in the church thinks I have it all together, if I don't have charity, I am really nothing more than a fat-headed Laodicean.

We can and do pursue a lot of things. Paul says that the excellent thing to pursue is charity. If we live our whole Christian life without ever really completely being able to identify our spiritual gifts, but we live a life of charity, we will have lived the life God wants us to live. God then describes what biblical charity



looks like. How does your life line up with verses 4-7? That is how we can really determine where we are spiritually.

God completes this chapter by again revealing that charity is superior to the gifts themselves. In fact, He says there's going to be a time when the "showy" gifts the Corinthians were so zealous for, will cease and disappear. We do not have the time in this tool to get into all the reasons the sign gifts have ceased. However, it is important for each of us to have a basic understanding of why this is true, and if you are sketchy on this issue, you would do well to study it for yourself and talk with your discipler, or your pastors about it. In a nutshell, there were miraculous gifts given as signs in the period of time before the N.T. had been completed, for the purpose of authenticating both the messenger and his message (See Heb. 2:3-4). After the N.T. was completed, they ceased to have a biblical purpose.

Chapter 14 is a chapter that is often lifted out of its context (chapters 12-13), along with individual verses that are lifted out to form a faulty doctrine. For example, we have all heard someone say that the gift of tongues is a heavenly language that draws a person closer to God. Where does this come from? Most will show you verse 2 (speaking to God) and then verse 4 (edifies himself). One question will help you understand this chapter in its proper context – What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Are they for the benefit of the individual, or for the benefit of the body? We have already clearly seen that God emphasizes that they are for the body, not for the individual. Paul again is using their arguments (i.e. "I just speak to God and edify myself.") in a sarcastic way to reveal their ignorance. Also, notice in verse 1 how God separates the term spiritual gifts from prophecy. There certainly is a spiritual gift of prophecy, but that is not what God is not talking about in this chapter. God is talking about the ability of every believer to prophesy (i.e. to proclaim the truth of God and His Word). Remember, does everyone have the gift of prophecy? No, but every believer can prophesy (proclaim the truth of God)! This is similar to the fact that there is a spiritual gift of giving and a gift of faith. However, every believer is called to give, as well as to exercise faith.

God spends the first half of chapter 14 showing the priority of speaking His truth in a manner in which people can understand, rather than trying to show off some spectacular gift. The second part of the chapter deals with the proper use of gifts within the body. The basic principle in verse 40 is that things are to be done decently and in order. Any church doing things in a crazy manner (most charismatic churches) are directly disobeying God's Word. Even at the time of the writing of I Corinthians when God was still using these sign gifts to authenticate the messenger and his message, there was a specific prescription they were to follow to maintain "decency" and "orderliness":

1. In a service, only two, or at the most three were permitted to speak in tongues. Also, they were to speak in turn, not at the same time. (14:27)
2. Someone was permitted to speak in tongues only if there was someone present with the gift of interpretation of tongues as well. Otherwise, tongues were forbidden. (14:27-28)
3. Prophesying was likewise to be one at a time, but there was no limit to the amount of people who could prophesy (proclaim the truth). (14:29-31)
4. Women are not permitted to speak in tongues or prophesy in the service. (14:34-35)

Because the N.T. is complete, the sign gifts are no longer necessary. But even if they were operative today, I know of no churches that follow the clear instructions given for their use in this chapter. Certainly there are churches that do, I'm just saying I know of none. It's one thing to believe all the gifts are still operating today. It's quite another not to follow God's clear instructions for their use.

But not only were the Corinthians messed up on spiritual gifts, in chapter 15, Paul shows that they were also messed up on the resurrection. This chapter clearly lays out the priority of Christ's resurrection. Everything we believe is predicated on the fact that Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead. If that did not happen, we are the most deceived, disillusioned, pitiful and miserable people on this planet.

The fact is, however, Christ did rise from the dead! And just as in Adam we were born sinners; in Christ we are born righteous. As in Adam all die; in Christ we are all made alive. As in Adam we were born in his image; in Christ we are born in Christ's image. As in Adam we were born with a body like his; in Christ we will receive a glorified body like Christ's.

The resurrection of Christ and its subsequent benefits and promises should be the motivation that keeps us continually abounding in the work of the Lord. Are you "abounding" in the work of the Lord, or have

you grown complacent and weary? If so, perhaps you have misplaced the importance and implications of the resurrection.

In chapter 16, God instructs the Corinthians concerning the best way to receive the offerings they were collecting to relieve the saints in the church at Jerusalem. Verse 9 reveals a truth we must always keep in mind: open doors and adversaries go hand-in-hand! Fulfilling our mission on this planet is not a walk in the park. It is a battle. Expect resistance. Expect difficulties. Expect adversaries, but, by all means, press on! Be strong in the Lord.

DAY 243

TODAY'S READING: II CORINTHIANS 1-7

OVERVIEW:

The comfort of God (chapter 1); instruction concerning forgiveness (chapter 2); the new covenant (chapter 3); the minister of the new covenant (chapter 4); the new covenant ministry (chapter 5); the new covenant temple (chapter 6); a restored church (chapter 7).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapter 1 reveals that God is not just the God of comfort, but the God of ALL comfort (1:3). We may not always feel His comfort. We may even wish He would speed up His comfort. But He is our God, and He will comfort us in our walk with Him. The question is, what will we do with that comfort? Will we just thank God and go about our way? Or, will we respond biblically and look for others who need the very comfort we have received. We need to be aware of the people God has placed around us, and comfort them when they need comfort.

Verse 12 of chapter one is a powerful verse regarding the life of the Apostle Paul. His rejoicing is in the fact that in good conscience and by God's grace, he has lived his life in simplicity and godly sincerity. Is that the testimony of our lives? Can we say with a clear conscience that we have lived a life of simplicity and godly sincerity toward God and others? We get so busy doing all kinds of different things, when in reality; only a few things really have eternal significance. Paul knew that, and lived his life accordingly.

Chapter 2 and verse 4 reveals the motive behind Paul writing the first letter to Corinth. He wasn't writing because he was mad at them or because they were embarrassing him. He wrote with a heavy heart because he loved them and wanted to see them walk in the truth. Apparently, they responded correctly and even dealt with the man living in sin in chapter 5 of I Corinthians. However, even though the man had repented, they weren't sure whether they should allow him back into their fellowship. God's instruction was to take back the repentant man. The goal of dealing with sin is always restoration. Even when someone has to be removed from the church, the goal is always for them to repent so they can be reconnected with the body. It also important to note, that this is also one of Satan's devices to gain control over us. Verse 11 reveals that not being willing to forgive opens up an opportunity for Satan to get a stronghold in our lives. How many believers have unknowingly allowed Satan to gain an advantage over them because they were unwilling to forgive? Have you?

In chapter 3, Paul declares that believers are actually living epistles that are known and read of all men. If you wanted to see what was important to the Apostle Paul, all you had to do was read his life. People were important. He spent his life investing the Word of God into the lives of people, whether they were saved or lost. Are there people in whom you have invested the Word of God that are now living epistles that can be read of all men? What is the direction and priority of our life? We have been made able ministers of the New Testament. Not because we're anything special in and of ourselves. It's because when God saved us, He put His Spirit in us and "made" us able ministers! You may not feel you have very many talents or gifts, but God says that if you are saved, you are an "able minister". Do you believe God? In fact, do you realize that you and I have a more glorious ministry than Moses had? Can you believe that? We don't realize that we are ministers of a more glorious covenant than what Moses had. We don't realize that, because we typically look at life from a human perspective, rather than a divine perspective. What God wants is found in verse 18. He wants us to behold Him through His Word, so that we can be changed into His image. Is that what you want?

In chapter 4, Paul teaches us that there is a price to be paid for being conformed into the image of Christ. Our lives will be troubled; we'll be perplexed; we'll be persecuted; we'll be cast down; death will work in us; our outward man will perish; we will have affliction. That's certainly a great recruiting tool, isn't it?

The fact is, there is a price to living a life surrendered to Christ, and allowing Him to minister through us. It's not something we bring on ourselves, but it will happen because this world system is against Christ.

Note however, that when we see with spiritual eyes, we see the other side. Though we are trouble, we won't be distressed. Though we are perplexed, we won't be in despair. Though we are persecuted, we won't be forsaken. Though we are cast down, we won't be destroyed. Though our outward man is perishing, our inward man will be renewed day by day. Though our lives are dying, the life of Christ will be revealed through our bodies. One perspective brings a life of eternal meaning, significance, and reward, while the other, though it may look and feel nice, is vanity.

Chapter 5 reveals that we will give an account of our service to the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is not a judgment of sin; that took place at Calvary. This is a judgment of our ministry after becoming believers. This is the same judgment talked about in I Corinthians 3. How often does the Judgment Seat of Christ come into your thinking? Paul said that it was one of the motivating factors in his life and ministry (5:10-11). Think about the context of this chapter. Chapter 3 talks about how God has made us able ministers of the New Testament. Chapter 4 talks about the life of God's minister. At the end of chapter 4, God reveals that we are His ambassadors and have been given the ministry of reconciliation. We have been made a minister, acting on God's authority, of bringing people into a right standing with God (reconciliation). Now, based on the context, what do you think is going to be the key issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ? While most believers are making sure they don't smoke, cuss, chew, drink, etc. (all important things), the real issue at the Judgment Seat is much larger than all of those things. The questions we need to be asking ourselves in preparation for that judgment are:

- How profitable am I in my ministry of reconciliation?
- How am I fulfilling my role as God's ambassador?
- Am I actually ministering as a New Testament minister?

How humbling a thought in chapter 6 and verse 1, that we can receive the grace of God in vain. Does that mean someone can lose their salvation? No. However, we can waste the grace that the Lord has bestowed upon us. How? The key is the context. Think about everything we have come through in chapters 3-5. When we neglect the ministry of reconciliation; when we don't walk as God's ambassadors and when we're not ministering as a New Testament minister, we are wasting the precious gift of God's grace. We should follow the example of the Apostle Paul in verses 4-13, and in all things, approve ourselves as the ministers of God.

Chapter 7 lets us know that the church at Corinth had repented when they received the first letter from Paul. In this context, God describes two kinds of sorrow. First, "godly sorrow" that brings about true repentance. Secondly, "worldly sorrow" that brings about death. Worldly sorrow is the type of sorrow that Judas had. He knew he had done wrong, but he never turned to Christ to deal with his sin, and ultimately, he killed himself. Godly sorrow is what the Corinthians had. It brought them to true repentance. They saw their sin the same way God saw it. That's the response God is looking for in us when we sin. Most people will feel bad when they do wrong. The question, however, is whether it is godly sorrow or worldly sorrow. Sadly, many times it is a sorrow that never causes us to turn from our sin and to seek God; we just don't commit that sin for awhile to appease our conscience. However, we've never really dealt with that sin biblically. How do we know when! it is godly sorrow and true repentance? Look at verse 11. True repentance will bring about carefulness, a clearing, and indignation against that sin, along with a fear of God, a vehement desire to follow God, and zeal to live differently.