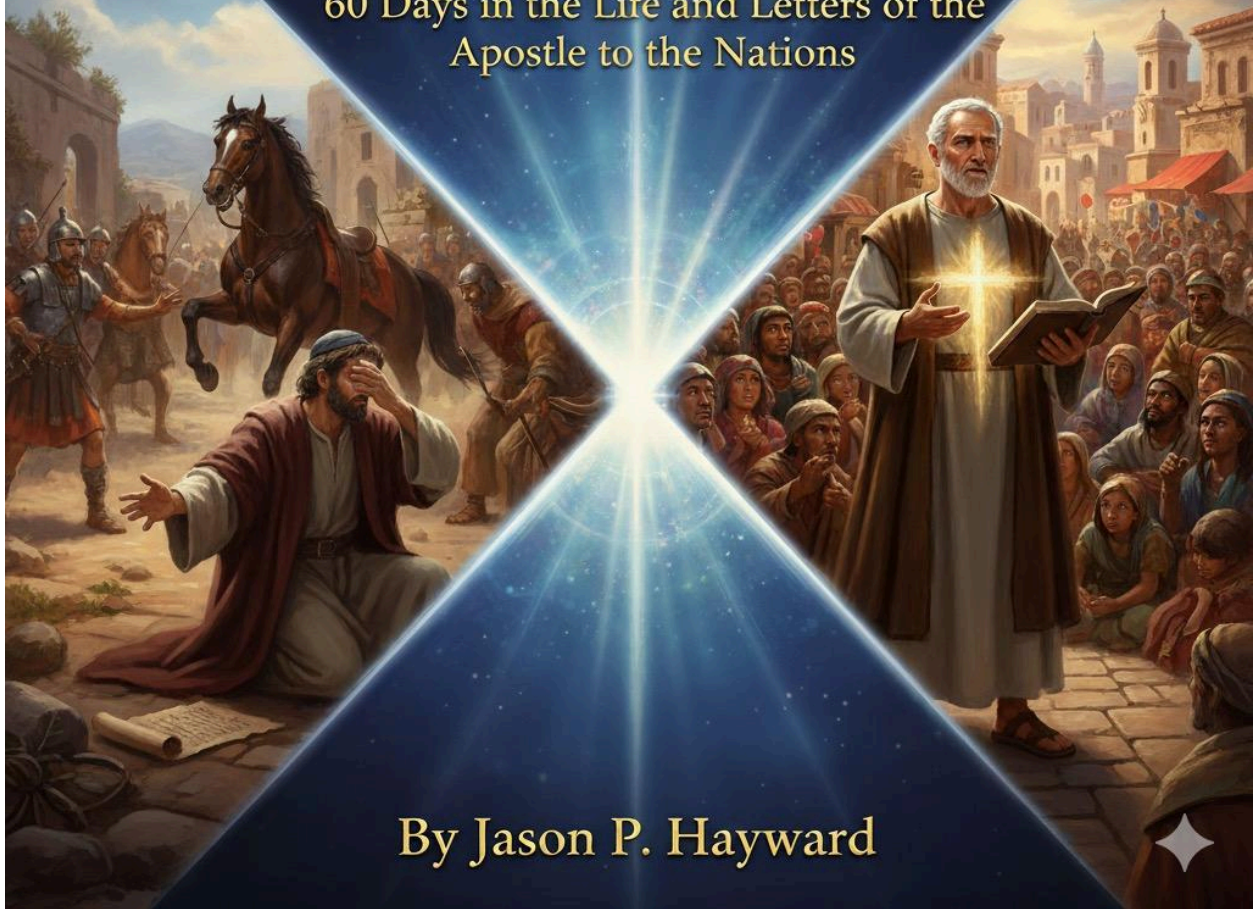


"for there is no respect of persons with God."



EXPERIENCING CHRIST IN PAUL

60 Days in the Life and Letters of the
Apostle to the Nations



By Jason P. Hayward

- To all who have joined themselves to God in Christ Jesus

Table of Contents

Introduction

Day 1: Saul

Day 2: Saul's conversion

Day 3: Saul begins to preach the faith he once tried to destroy

Day 4: Saul is brought to teach the church in Antioch

Day 5: Paul stops the interference of a false prophet in Cyprus

Day 6: Paul is mistaken for a god after he heals a crippled man

Day 7: Paul's resurrection and determination

Selah: Paul's words on following Christ from Romans

Day 8: Paul reports on his first missionary journey then leaves for his second

Day 9: God frees Paul and Silas from prison in Philippi

Day 10: Crucified with Christ

Day 11: Paul exhorts the church to live by the Spirit

Day 12: Paul completes his second missionary journey

Day 13: Paul's letters to the Thessalonian churches

Day 14: Paul's stay in Ephesus during his third missionary journey

Day 15: God's wisdom in Christ

Day 16: The mind of Christ

Day 17: God's temple, fellow worker, and steward

Day 18: Paul's teachings on communion and spiritual gifts

Day 19: Love is at the center of God and the building up of His church

Day 20: Suffering, healing, and the promises of God

Day 21: God, in Christ, leads us in triumphal procession

Day 22: The Spirit gives life and freedom

Day 23: Treasure in jars of clay

Day 24: Ambassadors entrusted with God's ministry of reconciliation

Day 25: Christ followers are the temple of the living God

Day 26: The sowing of the cheerful giver

Day 27: The last of Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church

Day 28: Salvation and righteousness through faith

Day 29: The faith of Abraham

Day 30: Life in the Spirit

Day 31: Proclaiming salvation through confession in faith

Day 32: The higher Christian life

Day 33: The law of love and the kingdom of God

Day 34: Paul visits Asia on his third missionary journey

Day 35: Paul goes to Jerusalem to meet the church and face persecution

Day 36: Paul shipwrecked while sailing to Rome

Day 37: Paul testifies about Jesus in Malta and Rome

Day 38: Christ in you, the hope of glory

Day 39: Alive together with Christ

[Day 40: Your life is hidden in Christ with God](#)
[Day 41: Blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places](#)
[Day 42: Created in Christ Jesus for good works](#)
[Day 43: Filled with all of the fullness of God](#)
[Day 44: Growing up in every way into Christ](#)
[Day 45: Be filled with the Spirit](#)
[Day 46: Put on the whole armor of God](#)
[Day 47: Stand firm in one spirit, with one mind](#)
[Day 48: Christ's interests, humility and authority](#)
[Day 49: That we may know Him and the power of His resurrection](#)
[Day 50: Supply from the riches in glory in Christ Jesus](#)
[Day 51: The aim of our charge is love](#)
[Day 52: The Holy Spirit was poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior](#)
[Day 53: Christ is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature](#)
[Day 54: Let us with confidence draw near the throne of grace](#)
[Day 55: Examples of faith](#)
[Day 56: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever](#)
[Day 57: Fan into flame the gift of God](#)
[Day 58: A good soldier of Jesus Christ](#)
[Day 59: A contrast between knowing about God and believing God](#)
[Day 60: Fulfill your ministry](#)
[Conclusion](#)
[Topical summary of Paul's teachings and practices](#)
[Paul's life in my view](#)

Last revised: 11/9/2025

Introduction

“for there is no respect of persons with God.”

Romans 2:11 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/rom.2.11.KJV>

The Apostle Paul, the writer of the book of Romans, stated that God is no respecter of persons. He shows no partiality. God uses anyone, each of us like a jar of clay, able to hold the treasure of God (2 Corinthians 4:7), Christ in us (Colossians 1:27)!

God uses the Peters and the Pauls. Peter was an uneducated commoner, while Paul was a Jewish scholar that persecuted Christians! Jesus changed their names and made them new creations for God’s use when they yielded to Him. As the Apostle Peter brought the gospel and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles for the first time (most of us), he said the same thing that Paul did to the Roman church: “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34, KJV).

God uses the Marys. He greatly used Mary, the mother of Jesus, a commoner from Nazareth, who said “let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38, ESV), and Mary Magdalene, who followed and loved Jesus along with the other disciples, a supporter of his ministry (Luke 8:2-3). The latter was the first to witness His resurrection (John 20:1), and they were both in Jerusalem with the believers when the believers received the promised Holy Spirit for the first time (Acts 1:14). Ever countercultural, Jesus was a champion of women, seeing them as equal in the family of God: “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matthew 12:50).

Jesus taught all of His followers, all of them considered family, to see everyone the same. His brother James said of the prophet Elijah “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17).

God can use you! He shows no partiality to any now or any that have come before. You are made in the image and likeness of God!

The Apostle Paul may be the most shocking example in Scripture of one who can be used by God, showing that if God could use him, he can also use you.

As discussed in this book, Paul was turned from one who excelled in Jewish law and persecution of the cult of Jesus, as he saw it, to one who excelled in the building up of God’s church even unto his own death.

The living Jesus took this hater of Christians and, when yielded to Him, caused the Holy Spirit to shed love abroad in his heart for the church (Romans 5:5, KJV). As Jesus said, “...with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). God redirected Paul’s intensity to do good and to bring freedom and life to much of the known world at the time, as Jesus had done in Judea.

This book describes selected parts of the Apostle Paul’s life and writings from the Bible, separated into 60 days of content. In it, we will follow the supernatural life and the passionate

thoughts of this unlikely disciple of Christ, one filled to overflowing with God's Spirit, the author of much of the New Testament.

As we journey together with Paul, seeing him perhaps as we've not seen him before, my prayer is that we will see more of what God has in mind for us as those in whom Christ dwells, His beloved church.

Day 1: Saul

In Acts 22, Luke the physician turned evangelist recorded Saul's words about his past. Luke is thought to be a disciple of Saul, who called him a "fellow worker" (Philemon 1:24). Saul also wrote about it in Phillipians 3:5-6.

Born in Tarsus in Cilicia to the tribe of Benjamin, Saul was educated by the great teacher Gamaliel, later able to call himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews" and a Pharisee.

The highest thing a young Jewish man could aspire to was to be educated by an esteemed teacher of the law as a disciple. Saul had scored! His education made him la crème de la crème, setting him up for leadership among his people, and he took the opportunity.

As a leader of the Jews, cooperating with the high priest and the council of elders, Saul was zealous for God and His righteousness. He saw himself as righteous because of his adherence to the law of the Old Testament. Saul said of himself, "And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers."

Galatians 1:14 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.1.14.ESV>

Saul's confidence and zeal led him to persecute the people of the Way, or those who were later called Christians. The council saw them as a cult. Saul said, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women."

And this is exactly where Saul is inserted into the narrative of the Bible by Luke, as one who stood by condoning the murder of the first apostle of Jesus circa 30-33 AD. The apostle was Stephen, who was described as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5), "full of grace and power, ... doing great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8).

For his faith, Stephen was seized and brought before the council because "they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" (Acts 6:10). Here is the end of the account of Stephen speaking before the council, where he was prompted to rebuke the leaders of the Jews, Saul included:

" "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried

out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Acts 7:51-60 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.7.51-60.ESV>

Such was the young Saul's zeal. Having come near enough to the site where Stephen was stoned that the stone throwers could keep their outer garments with him, Saul was a murderer of this man full of God's Spirit who represented the Righteous One, Jesus. Saul didn't stop there:

"And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."

Acts 8:1-3 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.8.1-3.ESV>

Saul became a leader (or the leader) of the persecutor of Jesus' followers! This intense Jewish council member literally dragged off the men and women of Jesus' church in order to attempt to quell what was actually the movement of the Spirit of God.

Later in his life, Paul testified:

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities."

Acts 26:9-11 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.26.9-11.ESV>

Clearly, it's not possible to stop God's work. His word and His will will be done. God had something very special in store for Saul, who would later call himself "one abnormally born".

Prayer: Lord, You can do all things, and no purpose of Yours can be thwarted, not even because of death. I praise You for the riches of Your goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not wanting anyone to be destroyed, desiring instead that all come to repentance.

- Based on Job 42:2, Romans 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9

Day 2: Saul's conversion

"But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus."

Acts 9:1-19 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.9.1-19.ESV>

Paul later testified about his vision:

““As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’ And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’ “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get

out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

Acts 22:6-21 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.22.6-21.ESV>

Paul testified a second time about it:

““In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”

Acts 26:12-18 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.26.12-18.ESV>

Sometime circa 33-36 AD, Saul sought the permission of the chief priests through letters to the synagogues in Damascus to travel there in order to continue his persecution of the Way. He planned to capture and bind followers of Jesus, leading them back to Jerusalem to imprison them. Saul obtained permission and left with an entourage of force.

As Saul approached Damascus, Jesus appeared to him in a vision. This appearance was accompanied by a bright, blinding light, as if the Jewish men were staring into the sun, and they all fell to the ground as the living Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), spoke. Saul was blinded except for the vision of Jesus, and the others with him heard Jesus speaking but didn't see Him.

Jesus confronted Saul, speaking to him by name, “Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Jesus used an agricultural term with which Saul was familiar, a pointy, iron, ox goad that prodded the oxen to plow and would be driven further into their flesh if they were to try to resist by kicking at it.

When Saul asked who was speaking to him, Jesus identified Himself as “Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.” At this moment, Saul must have been shocked. Jesus continued, “But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending

you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Saul replied to Jesus, “What shall I do, Lord?”

He was instructed to go into Damascus. Now blind, Saul had to be led in by his companions. They found shelter at the home of a man named Judas. Saul had to wait for 3 days for Ananias to show up, directed by God. Able only to replay his humbling experience in his mind, Saul neither ate nor drank. Instead, he prayed.

When Ananias received instruction from the Lord by way of a vision to go to Saul to fulfill another vision given to Saul about Ananias coming to him to restore his sight, Ananias resisted. Saul had a reputation, and Ananias knew Saul had come to Damascus to put Christians like him in prison. God changed his mind by sharing His purpose for Saul with Ananias: “...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Ananias obeyed God, going to Saul and laying hands on him, and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit... Brother Saul, receive your sight.” The Spirit of God in Ananias filled Saul, now a brother in Christ, at Ananias’ command and touch, healing him from blindness at the same time. Something like scales fell from his eyes, and within the hour Saul received his sight.

Ananias said to Paul, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

Obedient to this man of God, Saul rose and was baptized. Taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he stayed with the followers of Jesus at Damascus, now one of Jesus’ disciples, as one abnormally born. He had called on the name of the Lord Jesus in faith (Romans 10:9-13), and his sins were washed away.

When Saul returned to Jerusalem, he had yet another vision while praying in the temple. This time, he fell into a trance and saw Jesus saying to him, “Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.”

Paul replied, “Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.”

Jesus replied, “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”

Prayer: I praise You that you relentlessly pursue us, Lord, as a shepherd does a lost sheep, giving each of us a testimony of your pursuit of us and your work within us. You have changed my heart and mind, Lord, by Your Spirit, and I am fully yours.

-Based on Matthew 18:12-14

Day 3: Saul begins to preach the faith he once tried to destroy

Saul wrote the following about what he did after his conversion:

“But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”

Galatians 1:15-17 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.1.15-17.ESV>

In Damascus, Luke recorded the following about Saul:

“And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.”

Acts 9:20-23, 25 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.9.20-25.ESV>

Saul wrote about what happened next:

“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.”

Galatians 1:18-19 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.1.18-19.ESV>

Luke wrote about Saul’s return to Jerusalem:

“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”

Acts 9:26-31 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.9.26-31.ESV>

About this time, Saul wrote:

“Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, “He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they glorified God because of me.”

Galatians 1:21-24 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.1.21-24.ESV>

Saul left for Arabia, located east of Jerusalem and Damascus, after Jesus told him to leave Jerusalem. It's unclear how long he was there nor what he did while he was there, although it could have been a few years before he returned to Damascus.

In Damascus, Saul preached Jesus as the Son of God. This created confusion, for it was known that he had recently come there to capture those in the Way, taking them into captivity in Jerusalem. Instead, he taught about how Jesus was the Messiah. After some number of days, he became very unpopular with the Jews in Damascus because of his boldness. When the Christians at Damascus learned of the plans of the Jews to kill Saul, they helped him to escape at night.

Three years after his conversion, Saul went back down to Jerusalem, where he was not well accepted among the disciples of Christ. Most of them thought Saul was trying to trick them, although Barnabus advocated for Saul. Peter accepted him, and Saul spent 15 days with him, also visiting with James, Jesus' brother. This is the writer of the book of James, another leader of the church in Jerusalem. It would be interesting to know how those discussions among the three apostles— Saul, Peter and James— started and how they progressed.

After Saul began preaching in Jerusalem, he was unable to stay, coming out and going back in. His clashes were particularly significant with the Hellenists, those who had adopted Greek culture. The believers sent Saul to his home city, Tarsus.

In any case, Saul had become part of the building up of the church of Jesus, and the word about this was spreading throughout the region, causing the Christians to glorify God: "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy"!

That's right. Nothing is too difficult for God! He is glorified in doing the impossible, and the change in the life of Saul is one of the most beautiful testimonies of what God is all about: life change!

Prayer: I praise You, Lord, for nothing is too difficult for You. Your ways are higher than mine, Lord, as are Your thoughts. Blessed be Your Name. Thank You, Spirit of God, for fellowship in Your church that builds us up, and for giving us words to speak when we step out in faith.

- Based on Jeremiah 32:17, Isaiah 55:8-9, Job 1:21, Luke 12:12

Day 4: Saul is brought to teach the church in Antioch

“Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”

Acts 11:19-26 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.11.19-26.ESV>

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

Acts 13:1-3 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.13.1-3.ESV>

The persecution of those in the Way by the Jewish authorities, Saul included, caused them to be scattered to cities north of Israel. God grew His church in those places.

Barnabus, who Saul had met in Jerusalem, known to be full of the Holy Spirit and faith, was sent to Antioch. What he saw there caused great excitement. After encouraging the believers there, he went to Tarsus (within Cilicia) to look for Saul to join him.

Barnabus brought Saul back from Tarsus as a companion with which to minister to the church in Antioch, Syria. For a year, they had fellowship with and taught this church.

It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians, and the name has persisted to this day.

This is the church from which Saul was sent out on his first missionary journey, by the instruction of the Holy Spirit to the church. Saul and Barnabus had built up this church, and the Holy Spirit wanted them to go. This church started the tradition of laying hands on those who would be sent out.

Prayer: I praise You for establishing Your church, Lord, on faith in Jesus Christ, including the faith of Your apostles. Thank You for the way You lead us in Your church, Holy Spirit. I ask to be

part of Your work to build up Your church, both where You have placed me now and wherever you lead me.

- Based on Matthew 16:18, 1 Corinthians 14:12

Day 5: Paul stops the interference of a false prophet in Cyprus

“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”

Acts 13:4-12 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.13.4-12.ESV>

When Saul was sent out on his missionary journey, Luke, the author of Acts, started referring to him as Paul. Luke said that Paul is what he was also called. It was not uncommon for those who had been made new through faith in God to change their names. Paul is derived from the Latin adjective paulus, small. Perhaps this name referred to his humble position as a bondservant (doulos) of the Lord. The Mosaic law allowed an indentured servant to become a bondservant voluntarily (Exodus 21:5-6), and so Paul had done this with the Lord.

In Cyprus, Barnabus and Paul were summoned by Sergius Paulus, who wanted to hear the word of the Lord from them. A son of peace (Luke 10:6), he was open to the gospel message. While speaking with Sergius Paulus, a governor for Rome, they were opposed by one called Bar-Jesus, a magician, who spoke against their message.

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at Bar-Jesus, discerning him as sent by the enemy. He spoke, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”

Paul would see that the Righteous One would be victorious in this situation, so he continued, “And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.”

Immediately mist and darkness fell upon Bar-Jesus, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.

Seeing this sign that confirmed the gospel message, Sergius Paulus believed, astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Paul, who had been blinded by Jesus because of his opposition to the gospel, had, in turn, caused blindness to another that opposed the gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit in him.

Paul, after asking, “will you not stop...?” then stopped the opposition. This could also be the cause of Paul’s name change at this time, for the Greek verb *pauō* (G3973) means to stop. Further, the Hebrew verb *palâl* (H6419) means to discern, which Paul did, showing he was extraordinary (which is *pâlâ’* in Hebrew, H6381).

Paul was extraordinary in his ability to propagate a call for support (Hebrew verb *pa’a*) for the gospel from mind to mind. There are many possible reasons that Paul’s new name took hold; it very well could have been associated with this first recorded supernatural act of God through Paul, which became known among the disciples, including Luke.

This act is somewhat reminiscent of Peter’s first recorded miraculous act after his infilling by the Holy Spirit: “And Peter directed his gaze at [a lame man], as did John, and said, “Look at us.” And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!””

Acts 3:4-6 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.3.4-6.ESV>

They looked intently at those put on their hearts by the Spirit and spoke a command in faith by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20, KJV). The Lord worked with these apostles and confirmed the message by accompanying signs (Mark 16:20).

As previously mentioned, Paul had spent a solid 15 days with Peter, and he also traveled with John. In turn, Peter and John had the in-person example of Jesus, and they had learned to do as He did (e.g., Luke 9:1-12,37-43, Luke 10:1-24), first having the Holy Spirit with them as Helper. Then the Holy Spirit was in them (John 14:16-17), as the Spirit was also in Paul.

After his time in Cyprus, Paul preached and taught in the synagogue at Antioch. He taught them that in Jesus everyone who believes is freed from everything from which they could not be freed by the law of Moses (Acts 13:39). Led by the Spirit, Paul drew quite a crowd (Acts 13:44). When he was rejected by teachers of the law, he preached to the Gentiles, and many believed (Acts 13:48). More opposition arose, which resulted in joy and further filling with the Holy Spirit among the disciples (Acts 13:52).

Paul had become to God like David, “a man after my heart, who will do all my will” (Acts 13:22), and so he was able to recognize it in David.

Prayer: God, let me be a person after Your heart, who will do all Your will. Slay what is left of me by the cross of Christ. Identified fully with You, Jesus, I seek to take on Your faith. Lead me to join You in building Your church where You send me. In Christ, I will be victorious.

- Based on Acts 13:22, Galatians 2:20, 1 Corinthians 14:12, 2 Corinthians 2:14

Day 6: Paul is mistaken for a god after he heals a crippled man

'Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel. Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. '

Acts 14:1-18

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.14.1-18>

"Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed."

In modern-day Turkey, Paul and Barnabus preached and taught in the Jewish synagogue to both Jews and Greeks. In this, he was following in Jesus' steps, who said, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret" (John 18:20).

"...But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers..."

The Spirit of God spoke through them, and so a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. As the real battle is for hearts and minds, which are closely related, the unbelievers sought to poison the minds against the gospel message. Paul and Barnabus were determined to carry out his mission there though, and so they made themselves available and spoke with boldness.

"...So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands..."

Paul and Barnabus were doing God's will as God's fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9), and God confirmed Paul's message with signs and wonders done by their hands. We can expect that this included physical healing, miracles, and other characteristic works of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, KJV), the Helper of Christ's apostles (John 14:26). Paul demonstrated in Iconium that God's power had been given to the church. Signs like healing open the doors to people's hearts, leading them to seek salvation. They are among Jesus' weapons to carry out His mission, as He described in Mark 16:15-20.

In this battle, the disciples felt it necessary eventually to flee to the area of Lycaonia to avoid physical harm from the mob of opposition they were facing at Iconium. The prevalence of real threats of violence are consistent also with the ministry of Jesus, who said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). Jesus' warfare against the violence was preaching, teaching, and signs and wonders to demonstrate the victory of God's kingdom, as he showed after John the Baptist was imprisoning and after he was murdered. This was Jesus' battle for hearts and minds, taking away territory from His enemy, the Righteous One making things right. As such, Paul and the disciples continued to preach the gospel where they went.

"...Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet..."

At Lystra, Paul noticed a man crippled from birth who was listening intently to him as he preached the gospel message. By knowledge from the Spirit of God, Christ in him, Paul knew that the man had saving faith. Paul knew that this salvation (sōzō, G4982), the work finished by Christ (as described in Isaiah 53), should include physical healing, so he looked intently at him and spoke loudly to him, "Stand upright on your feet!" In a way very reminiscent of Peter's first recorded miracle after he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 3:4-6), the crippled man sprang up and began walking. The Spirit of God had immediately healed him at the moment Paul spoke to that mountain, telling it to be removed, and believed it would be done for God's glory (Mark 11:22-24, John 14:13, John 15:16). Paul believed God's word and acted on it.

Considering the audience, worshippers of the Greek gods, this amazing miracle wrought by Paul had an unintended effect. They decided that Barnabus and Paul were the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes, walking and doing the miraculous among them! In response, the people prepared to offer a sacrifice to the gods at the gates of Lystra!

Hearing of the plans, Paul and Barnabus ran to the city gates to plead with the people. Rushing into the crowd, they made a scene, tearing their garments in outrage, and spoke against what was unfolding. They exclaimed, "We are also men, or like nature as you!" And they pleaded with the crowd to turn from idolatry to the living God, the Creator and source of all good. It was a small victory, enough to prevent the sacrifice.

Prayer: Thank You for choosing me as one of Your ambassadors, God, in Christ's stead. Thank You for the righteousness of Jesus Christ given to me. The confidence You have in me and Your church gives me boldness. I praise You for Your ways which are higher than mine. I abide in You, desiring to bring You glory. I praise You that Your word does not return to You empty,

instead accomplishing its purpose. At Your work, Creator God, the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

- Based on 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, Isaiah 55:8-12, John 15:7

Day 7: Paul's resurrection and determination

' But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples.'

Acts 14:19-28

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.14.19-28>

The violent crowd from the places Paul was building the church followed Paul to Lystra, and they persuaded the crowds that Paul was an enemy deserving death.

God had said about Paul at the time of his conversion (see Day 2), "...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

At Lystra, this prophecy began to come to pass. Even as Stephen was dragged from Jerusalem and stoned for being a follower of Jesus, Paul helping to lead the charge, the same was done to him at Lystra by his enemies.

There should be little doubt that Paul died a brutal death when he was stoned by the angry mob brought together by the enemy of Jesus Christ, the accuser of men. But when Barnabus and the other disciples gathered around Paul, the Spirit of Life and the faith of the Son of God within them, Paul was resurrected by this Spirit, of which he later wrote,

'But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.'

Romans 8:10-11

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.8.10-11>

The same Spirit that raised up Jesus also raised Paul and healed him completely. God wasn't nearly done with Paul yet.

Paul didn't flee this time in the face of persecution, fearing suffering or death. Determined to finish His mission, led by the Spirit of God, he went right back into Lystra that night. Then he

preached the gospel in the local area of Galatia, and he returned to all the places his murderers had come from, building up the church there! (Galatia included Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.) Following the command of Christ (Matthew 5:43-48), he loved and blessed his enemies in practice. The Spirit of God was making him perfect in sanctification, even as the heavenly Father is perfect. The fear left Paul, and it was replaced by the love of God.

Through Paul's witness, the church in Galatia learned what it was to love unselfishly and to suffer for their faith. The enemies of the church there learned that they were unable to defeat Paul and his God; not even killing Paul would stop him.

After Paul finished the ministry in Galatia and Pamphylia (including the cities of Perga and Attalia), he sailed back across the Mediterranean to his sending church in Antioch, Syria.

At Antioch, the missionaries gave testimonies of the great work the Lord had done. (Can you imagine being present for those testimonies?) They stayed there for some time for fellowship with the saints.

Prayer: Spirit of God, resurrection life is in you. I thank You that You are alive in me. I invite You into all of my life. I am fully Yours. Father, Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the face of any opposition, You make me bold. Be glorified.

- Based on John 14:6, Matthew 6:10

Selah: Paul's words on following Christ from Romans

The Apostle Paul wrote the following about the human problem:

"...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ..."

Romans 3:10, 23 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.3.10-23.ESV>

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 6:23 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.6.23.ESV>

Righteousness is right standing with God. Since all have broken God's law, none is righteous and all are deserving of condemnation and death. Yet, God made a way for us to abundant life (zoe) with Him through belief in Jesus Christ as Lord.

Paul also wrote the following about humanity's hope in Christ:

"...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.5.8.ESV>

God's provision was motivated by His great love for us. He loved us enough to restore us to Himself through the sacrifice and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote the following about what the response of each sinner should be:

"...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved... For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Romans 10:9-10, 13, 17 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.10.9-17.ESV>

If you have faith in God to believe that the promise of God in Jesus Christ is for you—that you can be identified with the death and resurrection of Jesus to be born of the Spirit of God—and you are willing to commit to make Him the Lord over your life in an enduring, covenant relationship, you can confess a prayer like the following one (out loud):

Heavenly Father, I come to You admitting that I am a sinner. Right now, I choose to turn away from sin, and I ask You to cleanse me of all unrighteousness. I believe that Your Son, Jesus, died on the cross to take away my sins. I also believe that He rose again from the dead so that I would be forgiven of my sins and made righteous through faith in Him. I call upon the name of Jesus Christ to be the Savior and Lord of my life. Jesus, I choose to follow You and ask that You fill me with the power of the Holy Spirit. I declare that right now I am a child of God. I am free from sin and full of the righteousness of God. I am saved in Jesus' name. Amen.

(Prayer by HC)

This confession leads to the full salvation of God including eternal life. Your spirit is changed from dead to alive, and you are joined to God.

Paul wrote the following about the results of God's full salvation:

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Romans 5:1-2 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.5.1-2.ESV>

"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Romans 6:6,11 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.6.6-11.ESV>

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death... But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you... And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Romans 8:1-2, 10-11, 28-29, 37 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.8.1-37.ESV>

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans 12:1-2 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.12.1-2.ESV>

"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."

Romans 7:4 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.7.4.ESV>

Because of salvation, an act of God's grace in response to your confession in faith, you are now no longer under condemnation. Instead, you have been crucified with Christ, set free from sin

and all of its effects, including death. You are righteous to God as Christ is righteous, free from sin.

Hidden in Christ, you are connected to God as Jesus is connected to Him, and so You now have access to approach God.

Not only is Your spirit made alive, connected to the Holy Spirit, but you can also let that resurrection life (zōē) of the Spirit of God flow into your mind and into Your body, setting you free from any effect of sin and death. You can know and experience the abundant life in Jesus Christ as the Apostle Paul did.

When you choose to die to yourself and your old life and put on Christ, choosing to cooperate with God's Spirit to renew your mind by trusting in God's word as truth, you will be filled with peace and hope.

As you learn to steadfastly love God and do His will, He will work all things together for your good. This does not mean life will be easy; but it will be good. God is in you, with you, and for you. Believe the best about Him.

As you cooperate with God's work in your life, God will conform you into the image of His Son, causing you to overflow out of the life God has filled you with. This Christlikeness and fruitfulness brings glory to God. It will also bring you joy.

In Christ, you will become victorious—more than a conqueror. You will become motivated to do what brings God glory and learn to work with God and to persist until God is glorified. God is not defeated by evil; Christ has conquered it.

There is a cost to this new life in Christ, a cost to following Him. The old you is dead, and you will never be the same. It is time to stop pursuing what brings death, instead embracing the new, which leads to life and blessing.

Prayer: God, thank You for new life in Christ as a gift from you. Thank You for Your mercy and Your love. I give all of myself for all of You, desiring to know You and Your goodness in fullness. I let go of my old life and habits that brought death and defeat, seeking to become more like You day by day and to bring Your glory by doing all of Your will.

Day 8: Paul reports on his first missionary journey then leaves for his second

“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them... And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles... Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas... They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ...men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

Acts 15:1-4, 12, 22, 26, 35-41 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.15.1-41.ESV>

At the time of Paul’s ministry, God was doing a completely new thing in His new covenant. It’s not surprising that the Jews tried to hold onto the traditions of the old covenant. The church still gets very focused on its own traditions, and some are still quite focused on God’s ways under the old covenant. In His ministry, Jesus spoke out quite harshly against such legalistic focus on the traditions of men: “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!” (Mark 7:9)

It was this very issue that brought Paul and Barnabus down to Jerusalem. On their way, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling the churches there about their missionary journey where many Gentiles came to faith in Jesus. When they arrived to meet the church in Jerusalem, they continued to tell of all God had done with them. While the church debated about tradition, they could not help from speaking about what God had done. Their testimonies included the signs and wonders God had done among them (see Days 5, 6 and 7), as they were impressed about the ways in which God had confirmed their message (Mark 16:20).

Following their testimonies, the church at Jerusalem thought it appropriate to send two mission-minded leaders, Barsabbas and Silas, along with them for their upcoming journeys. They had already risked their lives for the sake of the gospel, so they were seen as mature in

the faith and well suited to join Paul and Barnabus. After spending some more time in Antioch, Syria, their sending church, Paul and Barnabus decided to head back to the cities where they had started churches.

Paul thought Mark should not travel with them this time because he had abandoned them early in their first missionary journey, leaving them at Perga to head to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Barnabus disagreed and took Mark with him by boat on his own missionary journey, while Paul left with Silas toward Cilicia to strengthen the churches he had started with Barnabus.

Prayer: Thank You for Your work in the church, Lord. I praise You for the way You choose to work with us, confirming our preaching and teaching about Your kingdom and Your ways by the work of Your Holy Spirit. I choose to set my mind on things that are above and on the people that You love, rather than on traditions of men.

- Based on Mark 16:20, Colossians 3:1-3

Day 9: God frees Paul and Silas from prison in Philippi

'Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek... And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days... As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. '

Acts 16:1-3,6-12,16-33

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.16.1-3.6-12,16-33>

In this passage, it is explained how Paul met Timothy in Galatia, which is in modern day Turkey. In order not to hinder their message in these times, Paul saw to it that Timothy was circumcised, for he was half Greek. One may wonder whether he gave a similar argument to Timothy about this matter compared to what he later said to the Corinthian church:

'For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. '

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1CO.9.19-23>

In this case, Timothy took one for the team, so to speak.

"...And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia..."

The Holy Spirit communicated with the evangelists, forbidding them to speak the word of God in Asia (or western Turkey in the modern day), as that was not God's plan for them at this specific time. It's not clear how God spoke to the believers here, but we know from Jesus' teaching that as sheep (those in the church), we should hear God's voice (John 10:29). It could have been intuition from the Spirit of God to their spirit, or it could have been a vision, a dream, or a thought that they knew was from God. As Paul communicated to the Corinthian church, "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

When they traveled up toward the region of Bithynia near the Marmara sea (where modern day Istanbul is located), the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go in, so they headed West. Perhaps this was through a vision, or perhaps this is just another name used for the Holy Spirit, Christ in us, which connects us through our spirit to God. So they made their way westward toward Troas, which borders the Aegean Sea. It was there that God gave them a vision of a man of Macedonia asking for help. Obedient to God, they sailed in Macedonia in modern-day Greece.

Of note from Paul's many writings, most often (or perhaps exclusively) when he speaks of doing things if God wills it, he's talking about whether he will visit certain believers and churches in person in the future. This is likely because as an evangelist cooperating with God on mission, he was quite literally directed by the Spirit of God regarding where he would go. Regarding many things that pertain to living as a Christ follower, Paul knew what God's good will was, so he just did it with confidence, boldness, and determination. If God has already given us instructions about what to do as believers, such as obeying the great commission where we are now or doing other things that Jesus commanded His followers to do, He just wants us to be doers of His word (James 1:22). God's will is good! Jesus came to do good (Acts 10:38). Is there anything good you wanted to do, where you had wondered if it was God's will, that you should just do?

'...Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour...'

While God can give words of wisdom to His people that show His future purpose, there are evil spirits that tell the future to some as well. (King Saul consulted such a medium in 1 Samuel 28, for example.) Paul ran into such a person during his ministry, and he had the gift of discernment

to know that a spirit was behind her behavior, causing interference in his ministry of the gospel. Using the instruction (Mark 11:22-25) and repeated example of Jesus to His disciples, Paul used the faith of the Son of God that was in him (Galatians 2:20, KJV) to command the spirit to come out of her, and it did. We should also notice that Paul and Jesus did not make a big deal about evil, because Jesus had it defeated. Note also that Paul didn't seek to find out whether it was God's will to free this woman; he knew it was God's will to bring freedom to her (Luke 4:18, Acts 10:38, 2 Corinthians 3:17).

“...The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods...”

As a result of their ministry of the gospel, Paul and Silas suffered persecution, including severe beating and imprisonment. God's words to Ananias continued to be fulfilled (Day 2). This was part of the cost of following Jesus for these faithful believers.

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken...”

In the face of adversity, Paul and Silas rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus, just as the apostles did in Jerusalem (Acts 5:41). They stirred up the Spirit of God within them, igniting the Spirit by their faith by boldly singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19) in the presence of the other prisoners. The move of the Spirit in response to the faith and boldness of these believers was enough to cause an earthquake, similar to the earlier event recorded in Acts 4:31. This was a powerful testimony, to say the least. God would not allow His work to be hindered, and so the prison doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened, nearly just as it happened for the Apostle Peter (see Acts 12:6-10). The power of God quite literally set them free. The Spirit of God is about bringing freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). Further, Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that those who are persecuted and reviled for Jesus and for righteousness' sake are blessed. When this happens, we should rejoice and be glad, as Paul and Silas were, because our reward for this is great in heaven (Matthew 5:10-12). The response of those joined to the kingdom of God (and the Spirit of God) is upside down; it is completely counter cultural.

'Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.'

The faith of Paul and Timothy stirred the Holy Spirit to act, and the power of God brought the jailer to a point of crisis in his life. Everything changed for him because that's what Jesus does when we see Him as He is: [Jesus changes everything!](#) So this man and his whole household submitted to Christ as Lord, demonstrating their profession of faith through immediate baptism. For Paul and Silas, this was the power of the Lord working with them, confirming their message by accompanying signs (Mark 16:20). This is God's way of advancing His kingdom.

Prayer: Spirit of God, I praise You for setting me free. I submit myself to You for Your work, Lord, willing to become as others are in order to win them over to Your love. I will listen for Your leading, Spirit of God, and, meanwhile, I will do Your word. Thank You for giving me Your faith, Jesus, as I abide in You. God, you and Your Word are always victorious. I will rejoice and praise You in all circumstances, especially in any persecution that comes my way for following You. Be glorified. I seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness.

Day 10: Crucified with Christ

It is thought that Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian churches (in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch at Pisidia) after his time in Philippi, as early as c. 47-48 AD.

Here are some selected passages from this first letter of his to the churches:

“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.”

Galatians 2:20 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/gal.2.20.KJV>

“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Galatians 3:25-29 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.3.25-29.ESV>

“I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

Galatians 4:1-7 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.4.1-7.ESV>

“I have been crucified with Christ...”

In faith, God spoke words that created the world and everyone who has lived in it. When God speaks, He creates, He gives Life, and His words come to pass (Romans 4:17). By faith, you spoke to identify yourself with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10). By faith, you believed that God made you a new creation (born again of His Spirit) at this confession, eternally His by way of a sacrificial act that Jesus accomplished 2000 years ago.

The great evangelist Charles Spurgeon encouraged Jesus’ followers to “be great believers! Little faith will bring your souls to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your souls.” Jesus was ever teaching His disciples to stir up their faith in God. Being born again was just the beginning; it was just a foundation to build upon.

As His disciples, our faith in God is everything. Without faith, we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). The entire Bible is about lessons in faith, showing how God responds to faithfulness or

faithlessness. Faith is the channel to the abundant goodness of God; so seek to open it wide! Faith activates God's Spirit within us.

The Apostle Paul said that when by faith He was crucified with Christ, the Spirit of Christ came to live in him and through him. He had died, and so he lived by the faith of the Son of God. Connected to God in Christ, Paul was able to draw upon Christ's own faith. This brought heaven to his soul and to the non-Jewish world.

Insofar as we hold onto our own lives, we cannot be conformed into the beautiful image of Christ, led by God's Spirit. If you have been born again of the Spirit, Jesus Christ is in your spirit, waiting to be let out. It is God's will to conform you to the image of the Son of God as sons and daughters of His (Romans 8:29).

According to Jesus, having steadfast faith in God moves great obstacles (He called them mountains) and causes our prayers to be answered (Mark 11:22-24). This is the faith Christ has; He is in us and we are in Him. In living by the faith of the Son of God, we come to will what God wills, seeking to make things right—the way He wants to make them right (Matthew 6:10). We seek to turn every situation into glory to God. This is the way Paul lived.

“...in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith...”

In living by the faith of the Son of God, we take up our identity as sons and daughters of God (kings) and loving servants of mankind (priests). We abandon our passions, dreams, and stories to pursue God's passions, dreams, and story. This is what it means to follow Christ. This is the adventure that we seek and the only way we can find satisfaction. We pursue the life of God, the liberty of God, and to make Him happy, knowing it's not about us at all.

The term sons was used in Scripture, because, at that time, the sons were the heirs. At the time of this writing, the radical thing about the description of the family of God, as presented here, is that all were considered as equals in Christ — Jew or Gentile, man or woman, slave or free. In Christ, we have not only all the blessings of the Old Testament promised to the Jewish people, but we also have the promises of God in the New Testament, according to His Word, which cannot be broken.

“...I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything...”

Slave is the Greek word *doulos*, also translated as bond servant. Paul used this term many times in his letters. It suggests that he willingly became a servant of all of mankind on behalf of Jesus, just as Jesus did and taught his disciples to do during His ministry. In salvation, we are crucified with Christ. In choosing to make Jesus Lord, we choose to put off our old selves, which were dead and enslaved to sin, to become servants of mankind and heirs. Made eternally alive in Christ, we enter an intimate covenant relationship with God the Father, as Jesus did when He was a man by means of the Spirit of God in Him. In this intimate covenant relationship, it is even appropriate for us to affectionately call Him “Abba” or Daddy. He is a good, good Father, loving

us and expecting love to be at our center, and so, living in Christ, we can be comfortable with this type of familiarity.

In Christ, everything changes, starting with our thoughts. Our willingness opens the door from the spirit to the soul; this door is our heart. Once we were enslaved to the elementary principles of this world, thinking like men and women who were carnal, living lives to please ourselves; and soulish, thinking about how to take advantage for ourselves and our families. We did not intrinsically have value, so we thought we needed to create value by some means. In Christ, the Son of God, we have the value of children of God—sons and daughters—made in God's image and likeness, designed to be conformed to Christ, the perfect image of God (Romans 8:29). In Christ, we have the Spirit of God that has made our spirits new creations, willing to cooperate with us to make us fully new. We can choose to be transformed into the image of Christ, as Paul did. When we choose to put on Christ, as Paul taught (Ephesians 4:22-23), we begin to think in new ways. We choose to think differently about our identity, believing what the word of God says about us. We choose to think differently about who God is, believing what the word of God says about Him. We choose to think differently about what God wants us to do with our days, believing what the word of God says about our purpose and mission. We choose to think differently about the people we encounter on a daily basis, believing what the word of God says about the way God sees them. God sees what redemption has made possible for each one. Christ in you changes everything, as He did in Paul.

If that weren't good enough, we are made heirs "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). The Spirit we have been given— Christ in us— and all that He can unfold through His Spirit in this life, with our cooperation by faith, is simply a foretaste of the goodness of God we can expect to experience later.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for your provision for me in Christ Jesus to make me fully new, righteous before You and united with You. I am complete in Jesus. Life in Christ has brought me peace and joy. By Your Spirit, I put off what is left of my old self, and I live by the faith of the Son of God. Abba, thank You for pursuing me in Your great love and making me both a servant of mankind and an heir.

- Based on Romans 14:17, Galatians 2:20, 3:26-27 (today's passages)

Day 11: Paul exhorts the church to live by the Spirit

Here are some excerpts from the latter part of Paul's letter to the Galatian churches:

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love... For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ...But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."

Galatians 5:1, 6, 13-14, 16-26 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.5.1-26.ESV>

"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Galatians 6:7-8 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.6.7-8.ESV>

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery..."

By our profession of faith in Jesus Christ, God makes us new creations in our spirits, now eternally alive (Romans 10:8-10, John 3:6, 2 Corinthians 5:17). Connected to God (1 Corinthians 6:17), we have the righteousness of Jesus Christ and we are set free from sin and all of its effects, if we know the fullness of God's salvation in Jesus Christ and expect that it applies to us (2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 8:1-2).

In our freedom, we must stand firm in faith, knowing the truth of Christ's finished work for us. Each of us are spirit, soul and body. Cooperating with the work of the Spirit of God, we must choose to put off the old self (Ephesians 4:22-23), including all remnants of carnality (wherein we allow our own desires to drive us) and soulishness (wherein we choose our own way apart from God's way or allow our intellect or emotions to drive us). When we allow ourselves to be driven in these ways, we submit again to slavery and death, resisting the leadership of the Spirit of God. Paul names the fruits of such choices wherein our impure thoughts lead to words and other actions, including: sexual immortality, idolatry, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, divisions, envy, and drunkenness.

“...Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption...”

If these sins are the fruits of our lives, we are not rooted in Christ by faith. We have not been made alive by identification with Christ. Instead, we sow death and bondage, and that is what we reap.

As Jesus taught, a tree is known by its fruit (Luke 6:43-45). He also compared believers to branches connected to Himself, the true vine (John 15:1-11). Jesus said His Father is the vinedresser; every branch in Christ that does not bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. If anyone does not abide in Christ he is thrown away like a branch and withers.

“...But I say, walk by the Spirit...”

If we choose to belong to Jesus Christ by faith, we stand firm as new creations, cooperating with the Spirit of God to allow His resurrection life to flow into us and to flow through us to others.

This is abiding in Christ. The Spirit of God lives in us,

thinking in us,

changing our thought patterns,

changing our habits,

changing what we care about,

changing our desires and emotions,

talking through us,

walking in us,

doing good through us,

is life.

Our contribution is to continue in steadfast faith, to cooperate with the work of the Spirit of God as a lifestyle. By faith, we come to think in a new way, with renewed minds. By faith, we see God as He is, One who seeks to do good and make things right, driven by His generous, merciful love for all men and women. By faith, we see what the redemption of Jesus Christ has made possible for ourselves and for others. By faith, we understand that which brings freedom and life, and we continually choose it, always turning away from sin, which leads only to bondage and death, first as a toehold, then a foothold, then a stronghold. By faith, we are empowered in Christ by His own righteousness that dwells in our spirits. His righteousness is victorious in every situation. Choosing to be led by the Spirit, we put on Christ.

“...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”

The fruit of putting on Christ is to exhibit the attributes of God's nature, as perfectly shown in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is His love (agapē), the love of God, having good will toward all.

It is His joy, the joy of the Holy Spirit stemming from our spirit, which emanates from a Spirit-led life. It does not depend upon circumstances.

It is His peace (shâlôm, H7965), a peace that passes understanding, also not dependent on circumstance. Shalom also suggests wholeness, as only the consciousness of being united to God can make one whole.

It is His patience and longsuffering, a love that is not easily angered. It waits, hopes, forgives.

It is His loving kindness. Jesus showed He is a friend of sinners. Sinners knew His love for them.

It is His goodness. We will to do good to all people just as Jesus' set about to do good and to bring freedom (Acts 10:34).

It is His faith and His faithfulness (pistis, G4102). We make take on Christ's faith (Galatians 2:20). Our love is steadfast like that of the covenant-keeping, merciful Creator.

It is His gentleness. God showed the beautiful tenderness of His love in the person of Jesus.

It is self-control or temperance. It is careful to do right rather than giving in to any carnal passion, desiring to please God and to choose life and freedom over death and bondage. It loves the Giver exceedingly more than any of His good gifts.

Having put on Christ, we are able to sow good and reap the good works that God has prepared in advance for us (Ephesians 2:10). In Christ, this makes us a channel of God's blessing to those we encounter in the world, which will result in praise, thanksgiving and glory given to God (2 Corinthians 4:15).

Prayer: Father, I thank You for freedom through Jesus Christ! Holy Spirit, I honor You. Thank You for living in me, bringing me peace and joy, conforming me to the beautiful image of Christ. I submit myself to Your lead, desiring Your fullness for myself and for others.

- Based on today's passages

Day 12: Paul completes his second missionary journey

We now proceed back to Paul's travel on his second missionary journey:

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women... The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men... Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there... And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ...So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 16-17, 19, 22-25 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.17.1-25.ESV>

"After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks... Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them... After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch."

Acts 18:1-4, 8-11, 18-22 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.18.1-22.ESV>

“...they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures...”

It was Paul’s custom when he came to a new city to speak openly in the synagogue. Both Jews and Greeks, men and women would come to hear him there. Many were persuaded that Jesus is the Christ there, including “not a few of the leading women.” Paul built the church at Thessalonica, to whom he would soon write two letters which became part of the Bible. His method of outreach was reason and persuasion, as he would later write,

'For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, '

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.10.4-5>

As a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3), Paul waged war for hearts and minds.

“...Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men...”

At Berea, those who became believers were seen as more noble because of their eagerness to receive the word of God and to examine the Scriptures. They were people of peace (Luke 10:6). Paul would later encourage the church in Thessalonica to be more like the believers he found in Berea:

'Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. '

1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1TH.5.20-21>

Paul encouraged all believers to examine the Scriptures and to consider what was true. When one is made alive in Christ through faith, the Spirit of God shows truth to them, according to Jesus’ promise (John 16:13, 1 John 2:27). The believers included many women as well, who were clearly valued by the church as children of God. In Christ, they are co-heirs of Christ just as men are; there is no difference in God’s eyes.

“...Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue...”

The Spirit of God inside of Paul gave him dissatisfaction in Athens: things were not right there. The people there worshiped idols when they could know the true God and the way to Him through Christ Jesus.

“...he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

Paul sought to right this wrong through speaking about the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). It is clear in this account how Paul’s soul had been affected by His life in Christ: Paul thought the way God thinks (mind), felt the way He feels (emotions), and was determined to pursue these people out of love (will). So he spoke to them of God, who is life itself. The Spirit of God gives life (zōē) in every way.

“...After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth...”

At Corinth, Paul met a married couple named Aquila and Priscilla who would become co-laborers with him for the gospel. He also shared the same trade with them—Paul supported himself as a tent maker. The man responsible for evangelizing much of the Gentile world and writing much of the Bible, worked for a living too. Busy as he kept himself at all times, his rest was found in Christ and he stayed free of distraction. The life of Christ in us makes it possible to be very busy and yet undistracted, for distraction is a device of the devil.

“...And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath..”

While Paul worked at Corinth, he reasoned in the synagogue at least every Sabbath, working to build the church there. He appealed to hearts and minds, trying to convince them to yield their will to Jesus as the Christ. As a result, many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized. Encouraged by Jesus in a vision one night, Paul stayed a year and a half to disciple those in the Corinthian church during this visit.

“...After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila...”

From Corinth (which is still called Corinth in Greece), Paul decided to head back by ship to his sending church in Antioch, Syria. He took with him Priscilla and Aquila, stopping at Ephesus, which was located across the Aegean Sea around what is now Kusadasi, Turkey. He stayed long enough to reason in the synagogue there before leaving for Syria, while Priscilla and Aquila stayed to build up the church at Ephesus. Paul clearly operated on directions from the Spirit of God regarding where he was supposed to go next, taking it one day at a time.

Prayer: Lord, I am fully Yours, spirit, soul and body. I desire to be part of Your work to bring life through changing hearts and minds to know You and love You. Thank You for allowing me to give as You give. Thank You also for the fellowship of my brothers and sisters in the church, Your own beloved family. Spirit of God, keep me free from distraction.

Day 13: Paul's letters to the Thessalonian churches

Thessalonica, located in Macedonia (present day Thessaloniki, Greece), was one of Paul's many stops on his second missionary journey. Here are some selections from his letters written to the church he started there:

"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

1 Thessalonians 1:2-7 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1th.1.2-7.ESV>

"...but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts."

1 Thessalonians 2:4 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1th.2.4.ESV>

"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1th.5.12-24.ESV>

"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/2th.1.11-12.ESV>

"As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good... Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all."

2 Thessalonians 3:13, 16 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/2th.3.13-16.ESV>

“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers...”

Paul truly fell in love with those in the churches he planted. Paul loved them deeply just as God did, constantly mentioning them in prayer to God. Surely he was bringing them before the throne of God, asking that they would become mature in faith and in likeness to Jesus. Those in the church had already come to a place of faith, hope, and love. Paul viewed the signs and wonders that the Spirit of God did in power, confirming his preaching of the kingdom and the word of God (Mark 16:17-20, Acts 4:29,33), as evidence that they were loved and chosen by God.

“...You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord...”

The young believers in the church were to imitate those who were mature in the faith, Paul included, as they imitated Jesus Christ. According to Paul, all believers are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus (Romans 8:29). It's first helpful (or perhaps necessary) to see Jesus, the Anointed One, in a man (human) though. Because Paul was a good example of Jesus living within a man, perhaps they could see Jesus in themselves. Further, Paul desired that they would become such an example to others in nearby churches. The affliction that the Thessalonians experienced very likely had to do with resistance they encountered from others in Thessalonica, Jews included, just as Paul experienced resistance everywhere he went.

“...but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.”

Paul's understanding was that those who are in Christ, himself included, were Christ's ambassadors, entrusted by Him to carry on His own ministry in multiplied form (2 Corinthians 5:20). They were not to concern themselves with pleasing anyone around them, but instead were to seek in all things to please God. Paul saw his daily choices as tests from God. The same is true for us; do our choices reflect that we mainly aim to please God, ourselves, or others? (Philippians 2:4,13,21) This life is a test (e.g., see Matthew 25:34-46).

“...We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you...”

Paul's comments here were directed to build up the church, encourage unity, and spur on the church to follow Christ in doing good (Acts 10:38). He expected them to exhibit fruits of the Spirit's work in their character: love, peace, patience, goodness.

“...Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you...”

God's will for those in the church is that they abide in Christ, exhibiting the fruits of the overflow of the Spirit of God in their lives, in their community, and through their good works. In Christ, they are connected directly to God, prompting continual prayer. Christ's life was characterized by continual prayer, and followers of Jesus are to grow up into Him (Romans 8:29). In Christ, those in the church have the joy of the Holy Spirit, prompting continual rejoicing in God and

thanksgiving to Him in all circumstances. Their prayers should also be characterized by praise and thanks.

In Christ, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit are at work within the church community (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Prophecy is a gift of inspiration from God meant for exhortation of those in the church. Since the minds of those who would prophecy can be affected by their own thoughts or other spirits, Paul asked the church to test prophecies, holding onto what is good. Really he asked them to test everything, applying the knowledge and discernment God gave through the word of God and the Spirit of God alive in them. If they were careful to abide in Christ rather than living for themselves, and also careful to speak good and speak out of faith rather than unbelief, they would not quench the Spirit. As followers of Christ, this required giving all of their lives to God—every part, not holding anything back. This applies to everyone in Christ. The Anointed One lives in us (1 John 2:5-6,20,24,27)!

“...Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

Given over to Him, He makes every part of us sacred: spirit, soul and body. The three parts of us are united with the three parts of God.

Spirit. The Spirit of God dwells in us as a habitation! We are in Christ, seated in Him (Ephesians 2:6), and He is in the Father. We should let the Spirit of Christ out of our spirits, inviting the Spirit into every part of us.

Soul. We can invite the Spirit into our soul. Although God renews our spirit at the new birth, our minds are not renewed which entirely explains the problem among identifying believers in the world today. Our minds can remain unrenewed, leaving us in bondage, or they can become partly renewed. Yet, the Spirit wants all of us. In God's work of sanctification, which is God's will for each of us, we can cooperate with the Spirit of God to renew our minds (Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:22-23, Colossians 3:9-10), conforming our minds to the mind of Christ in us (1 Corinthians 2:16). According to John Wesley, sanctification is to have the mind of Christ and all of that mind. It represents that best we could have. Yet, God will not force us to do what is actually best for us. When God renews our minds with our cooperation, we become led by the Spirit through our spirit (Romans 8:14), rather than being led through our own soul (mind, will, emotions) or our body (flesh). We also take on the emotions that the Spirit of God does, loving what and whom God loves, being grieved by what grieves God, rejoicing with those who rejoice, or even experiencing righteous anger as Christ did on occasion. Cooperating with the Spirit, we experience in our soul the peace and joy that God has placed in our spirit at our new birth (Romans 8:6,14:17).

Body. We can invite the Spirit of Christ into our bodies, becoming members of His body (the Greek word is *sōma*, G4983), of His flesh (*sarx*, G4561), and of His bones (*osteon* *ostoun*, G3747) (Ephesians 5:30 KJV). We can invite the indwelling Christ to be our healer (Romans 8:11,26). Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, is life and healing to every part of us (Proverbs 4:22). We should not submit to the bondage of sin that brings death if we have been freed by sin and its effects by the living God (Romans 8:2). That is, if we desire to follow Christ, make disciples as He has commanded, we can expect God to give us the health and vitality to do so

unhindered until the time comes for us to die. The Spirit is life and strength to us. Further, as we seek to preach the gospel and make disciples in obedience to Christ's words, expanding His body and enabling its growth, we can also bring this life to others.

“...To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power...”

Paul prayed for the Spirit God to work in power through every one of the works of faith that those in the Thessalonian church attempted in their resolve to do good. What kind of works require the power of the Holy Spirit? It's especially those that continue the ministry of Jesus Christ, as described by Peter: “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

Acts 10:38 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.10.38.ESV>

Again, Paul continued Jesus' ministry as an ambassador, as though in Christ's stead, and he also expected those in the church to do so (1 Thessalonians 2:4, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20). He saw believers as jars of clay that carried the power and message of God in them, “so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:7,15). God's power confirmed the message they spoke through signs and wonders, the Lord working with them (Mark 16:17-20).

“...As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good...”

Paul saw it as his mission and the mission of the whole church, Christ in them, to do good as Christ did good (Acts 10:38), yet in multiplied form. After his glorification, Christ has a new body that is able to do more good across the whole earth. Paul prayed for God to give this body of Christ peace (shâlôm) in every way. Shalom also implies wholeness, completeness, harmony, prosperity, welfare, security and tranquility. It stems from God's perfection and divine grace.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for inviting me to be a coworker with You. I am humbled by Your confidence in me and desire to bring You glory. I rejoice in Your love for me and Your goodness to me. Thank You for sharing with me what is Yours, including the mind of Christ and Your peace. Jesus, I receive what You give, including Your healing. My trust is fully in You, creator, giver and sustainer of life. I pray for those You have caused me to know in Your church, that for them You may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by Your power. Be glorified.

Day 14: Paul's stay in Ephesus during his third missionary journey

The following passages describe parts of the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey:

"After spending some time there [at Antioch, Syria], he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples."

Acts 18:23 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.18.23.ESV>

"And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while."

Acts 19:1-22 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.19.1-22.ESV>

"After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the

Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas,”

Acts 20:1-5 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/act.20.1-5.ESV>

‘And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” ...’

At Ephesus, Paul baptized some believers into the new covenant, sharing with them the message of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as Peter had done in Samaria (Acts 8:17) and Caesarea (Acts 10:34-48). In Caesarea, the Holy Spirit came upon those gathered at Cornelius’ home as Peter was preaching and teaching the gospel message. These Gentiles were speaking in tongues and extolling God. At Ephesus, the infilling of the Holy Spirit occurred as Paul laid hands on the new believers. This caused them to speak in tongues and prophecy. It’s likely that Luke, the writer of Acts, didn’t record every similar incident that the Holy Spirit manifested through tongues and prophecy as the apostles traveled to spread the gospel.

“...And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God...”

Paul stayed for years in the port city of Ephesus, preaching about the kingdom of God and teaching the word of the Lord. At this time of Roman rule, it had become a major center of trade and culture, perhaps second to that of Rome.

“...And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.”

The apostle Paul continued the ministry of Jesus, preaching, teaching, healing, bringing freedom and doing good to many. The source of Paul’s power, confirming the gospel message he spoke, was that of Jesus’ finished work on the cross, ‘that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: “He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.”’
Matthew 8:17 NKJV

<https://bible.com/bible/114/mat.8.17.NKJV>

Moreover, Jesus had told His disciples to expect such extraordinary miracles in their ministry: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

John 14:12-13 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jhn.14.12-13.ESV>

Not only was the life of God in Paul healing and delivering those he ministered to in person, but he was able to put that life into pieces to fabric so that other believers could use them to minister to those who needed it. As Paul had freely received from Christ, he freely gave (Matthew 10:8, KJV).

‘...Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.’

The miraculous works of Paul became well known. Some Jews watching what he did started to try to use his main method, invoking the name of Jesus. Peter had also described the source of the power to a Jewish crowd: “And his name—by faith in his name.” Peter was referring to “the Author of life,” Jesus Christ (Acts 3:15-16), who was in him. Peter and Paul both knew they were anointed of God when they received the Holy Spirit and they had received power through that baptism (Acts 1:8). Further, they were obedient to the command of Jesus to all disciples recorded in Mark 16:15-18. Jesus had told them what they would do in His name when they proclaimed the gospel, which included casting out demons and healing the sick. These apostles were bold, and they expected God to confirm the message they spoke by accompanying signs.

‘But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them...’

Jesus gave authority to use His name in His stead to His followers (John 14:13-14). The sons of Sceva were not His followers, so at least on this occasion an evil spirit caused a man to resist, overpower them, and harm them. This incident became known all over Ephesus. The spirit knew Jesus Christ, to whom all authority had been given. The spirit recognized Paul and knew it would have to submit to him, yet these men had no authority nor protection. This event caused the fear of God to come on the people, particularly those who practiced magic.

“...So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”

The word of God is sown into people’s lives as seed when they hear the truth of the gospel. When it is sown in good soil and watered, the imperishable seed grows, according to the ways of the kingdom of heaven. The implanted word must be received (or taken; *lambanō*, G2983), believed, and held onto, although the devil will try to take it (Mark 4:15). When held onto, it prevails mightily, as the tree that grew from the mustard seed (Matthew 13:32). The growth of the church experienced at Ephesus was powerfully enabled by God. When the word of God is preached and the power of God is evident to all, there is explosive growth. This is God’s pattern. The word is God’s blueprint to make things right on earth as they are in heaven. God continues to almost exclusively use His followers to sow the seed of the word of God, as He did in the time of Paul.

“Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him...”

Paul made disciples in part through taking with him on his missionary journey people from the churches he had planted in Macedonia, Galatia, and Asia. The followers of Christ were willing to go.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the resurrection life that is in me from Your indwelling Holy Spirit. Thank You for the responsibility and authority You have given me as a believer in Christ Jesus. Your Word never fails to carry out what it is sent to do. You make everything right. Jesus, You are the Author of Life, and Your name is above every name in heaven, on earth and under the earth. Blessed be Your Name.

Day 15: God's wisdom in Christ

Next we begin a detailed look at Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, starting in 1 Corinthians: "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.""

1 Corinthians 1:1-31 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1co.1.1-31.ESV>

"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus..."

Paul called himself an apostle, one who starts and builds churches, which he certainly was. It appears Sosthenes was traveling with him when he wrote this letter. This is probably the same Sosthenes from Corinth that is referred to in Acts 18:17. He was the ruler of the synagogue at

Corinth before he was won over to Christ. Paul called all members of Jesus' church saints. Paul said a blessing of God's grace and peace over the church to start his letter to them; as part of Christ's body, he believed he could direct more of the rich, godly resources of the body, including grace (charis, G5485) and peace (eirēnē, G1515), to other members of the body, through his prayers. From the Greek (per Thayer's Lexicon), God's grace brings with it joy, God's good will, His loving kindness, strength, increase in faith, maturity and bounty. God's peace includes tranquility, safety, prosperity, contentment. Paul disciplined them and encouraged them toward sanctification, not just salvation.

"...I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus..."

Paul was thankful for these believers having received life in Christ. In Christ, they had what is Christ's through the Holy Spirit, including the gifts that Paul described more in Chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians. One thing God gives to believers is knowledge, both natural knowledge and supernatural knowledge from the mind of the Spirit. God also enriches their speech for the proclamation of the gospel, as with Peter once he was filled with the Holy Spirit (beginning in Acts 2). For example, Luke recorded that the ruling Jewish council in Jerusalem was impressed with Peter's speech in his defense to them: "Now when [the council] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished" (Acts 4:13). This clearly didn't happen as a result of Peter's education; it was of God.

'...I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you...'

As Christians, we can have the same mind, the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), which is the mind of the indwelling Spirit of God. This is what Christ wants for His new body that operates throughout the world; it is God's will. The young believers in the Corinthian church instead were divided, each following their own minds and their own wills. Focused on individualism rather than oneness, they found reasons for difference instead of reasons to come together as one body that functions together to God's glory. They became divided according to those who brought them to know Christ; yet, Paul wrote to them that this did not matter. It is the presence of the example of the one living Christ in these men that mattered. All of the Corinthians believers were saved and baptized *in Christ*, and they were each to put on *Christ*. The church needs to focus on lifting Jesus up, doing the word of God, and cooperating in an effort to please God. Christ's body in the world cannot function effectively to do the word and the will of God when it's divided. Instead, the Spirit of God is pleased to work mightily when there is unity. Let us cooperate with the Spirit of God to put on Christ's mind, to align our will with God's will, to align our emotions with God's emotions. As members of His body, this is to become one with Christ in soul. It is completely unnatural and counter-cultural, but so is Jesus Christ. We are predestined to be conformed to Jesus Christ in every regard (Romans 8:29).

"...For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power..."

The Greeks, including those who lived in Corinth, greatly prized wisdom and eloquent speech. Paul did not regard himself as someone who spoke eloquently. It is quite likely that he spoke

openly to the masses without preparation, instead relying on the Spirit in him to speak. Paul had already filled himself with God's word, and the indwelling Spirit is to bring everything to our remembrance (John 14:26). Based on these words of Paul to the Corinthians, it seems he would have discouraged any practice of "sermon tasting" or any effort to appeal to such an audience. Instead, he taught that the word of God and the cross of Christ have power on their own; they need no embellishment to appeal further to intellectualism or any soulishness. The gospel will be rejected by the perishing and it will be embraced by people of peace, or those who have been made receptive to the implantation of God's word in their lives.

'...For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? ...'

Paul's high regard for the authority of God's written word is conveyed in his words, "...it is written." Paul spoke against the wisdom that was prized among the Greeks, teaching it is truly wise to view our lives from an eternal perspective. God has all wisdom. A proper understanding that God is the One who will judge us is the beginning of true wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). An understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundation of wisdom upon which one can build anything that lasts beyond this brief life. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to a passage from Isaiah 29 about some that honor God with their lips yet whose hearts are far from Him (v. 13) because they live in sin and do not believe God sees them (v. 15). They do not understand their position in the created world: God is the potter, having all understanding, and they are the clay (v. 16). In the day of God's judgment, any who are not made righteous through their faith will perish along with the wisdom and discernment they think they have.

"...but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God..."

Those who are called in these times of the New Testament will understand the truth of the atonement of Jesus Christ when they hear it. Christ Jesus' finished work is the central event of all time in our world created by God, all of history having led up to this moment of victory. Faith in Christ's finished work channels the power of God to make everything right.

"...But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise..."

God, the potter, has always purposely used jars of clay to accomplish His purposes. Clay is easily breakable, and it is a common material of low intrinsic value. Without God, we can do nothing of significance. God's design is that all glory is to go to Him. God has used anyone willing, and He will use anyone; He is no respecter of persons. It is our faith in the good intent of God, the word of God, and our oneness with God in Christ that sets us apart.

'...And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God...'

In God's wisdom, His plan after the fall had always been to make a perfect way back to a full relationship with Him (Genesis 3:15, Genesis 22:17-18, Ezekiel 16:63). Any that are in Christ are connected to God, made alive in Christ through His resurrection. In Christ, they have what He made available to all heirs of God, including redemption, righteousness, and sanctification. The first two are immediate from the act of confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. Sanctification is a

process whereby what is made available in our spirits at the new birth—sanctification in Christ—is worked out in cooperation with the Holy Spirit in us (Ephesians 4:13,22-23, Romans 8:28-29).

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the treasure of life with you in Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, I cooperate with You to be formed into the image of Jesus Christ, according to Your will for me. God, thank You for the opportunity for oneness with You. Jesus, thank You for Your finished work for Your church that made this possible. I will love Your church as You love it and seek to build it up to bring You glory. I will join You in building it up to function as one body with one mind.

Day 16: The mind of Christ

Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church continued:

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 2:1-16 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1co.2.1-16.ESV>

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom...”

As in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul again stated that he made no effort to impress or entertain the church with lofty speech or wisdom. Instead, he lifted up Jesus Christ and the power of the gospel, centered around the cross of Christ. Paul did not put on a false front (as an actor or “hypocrite”), but he was transparent and authentic with them. Paul was not about lofty talk when it came to sharing the gospel, but, instead, he *demonstrated* the power of the gospel through the Holy Spirit, consistent with Jesus' command in the great commission (Mark 16:15-20) and consistent with the way the apostles before him were sharing the gospel (e.g., Acts 4:29-33). By faith in Jesus' name, the demonstration of the gospel included healing the sick (Day 6, Day 14) and other miracles (Day 5, Day 7, Day 9) that showed God's love and goodness in tangible ways to His beloved. God's way from the beginning of New Testament times has been the simple proclamation and teaching of the gospel along with demonstrations of His power. This is what Paul and Barnabus told the churches about when they returned from their first missionary journey (Day 8), and it is what led to the explosive growth of the church from the time of Jesus' ministry through the end of the accounts in Scripture. It is God's pattern for sharing the gospel with the world in order to reconcile it with Him (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:1), since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). God is still the Great I AM (Exodus 3:14).

“...Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age...”

Paul spoke here of two types of wisdom, the natural wisdom of mankind and the wisdom of the Almighty, all-knowing God. Through the ages up until the time of Christ Jesus, the wisdom of God had been hidden. Bits of His plan in Jesus had been uttered by the prophets in “words” of wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:8, KJV), but no one really understood what God had planned, including any rulers of the Jews and Romans at the time of Jesus.

‘...But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit...’

The section of Scripture Paul quoted here is from Isaiah 64, which begins, “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down.” In Christ, God has done just this! We need not ask God to do it again! Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit of God would no longer be with them but it would be *in them* after He went to the right hand of the Father (John 14:17). The Apostle Peter said this promise is for all believers, including those who were far off (Acts 2:39). In Christ, we are connected directly to God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit! This is the wisdom of God already made manifest. This same Spirit of God that is in us is also in Christ and in God the Father. Meanwhile, as a lover of threes, God created each human as tripartite as well: spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Each part of us is sacred to God. Each of our spirits, connected to God and made alive in Christ, is invisible and undetectable, yet it searches our thoughts, just as God’s Spirit accesses His thoughts. This suggests a spirit-mind connection both in us and in our Creator. Our mind is not the same as our brain; rather, it makes use of our brain, somewhat similar to the way the software operates together with the hardware in a computer. Yet, our minds and brains are much more sophisticated than any software or computer ever made by man.

“...Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God...”

Having the Spirit of God in us, we are taught about and understand the things freely given to us in Christ by God. In Christ, we have in our spirit, which has been made fully alive by the resurrection life of Christ, His very nature and characteristics. I wrote about what has been made ours (as the church) in Christ in my book [*Identity in Christ: 33 Characteristics of His Church*](#). What God has given to us as partakers of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) includes life (zoe), righteousness, faith, wisdom, love, grace, mercy, peace, joy, humility, power, strength, authority and hope. What He has given, we are to take in faith as ours. Taking it as ours, we are to put it on in cooperation with God’s Spirit. As good trees, are we to exhibit this fruit of the Spirit, the characteristics of God’s own nature, showing that we are His. Furthermore, God is the Giver; He has made us to be givers. In Christ, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and we are to freely and generously give in every way as we have freely and richly received (Matthew 10:8, KJV, 2 Corinthians 9:11).

“...The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him...”

As Paul later wrote to the church at Corinth, the god of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot hear, see and understand (2 Corinthians 4:4). Instead, when the gospel and Christ are preached and taught, these unseen things are regarded as folly.

‘...The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.’

God gives all of Himself when we give Him all of ourselves. We are made one with God in Christ according to God’s will. This is one more thing God has freely given through the gift of His Spirit living in us: the mind of Christ. The very mind of Christ! The mind of Christ is the mind of the Spirit; we are able to plug into the Spirit’s mind. God gives it to us in sanctification insofar as we have put on Christ (out of our spirit, putting it into our soul) and our minds are renewed (Ephesians 4:22-23, Romans 12:1-2). Our minds are each renewed insofar as we believe and act on the word of God. The Apostle John said that the anointing that we received from God abides in us and teaches us about everything, if we abide in Him (1 John 2:27). This mind allows us to test and discern what God’s will is. God’s word is His will, and Jesus Christ, God’s Word made flesh, came to show how to do His word. He also came to live in us in order to renew our minds and to empower us to do His word just as He did it.

As Christians who have been born again of the Spirit of God, it’s also possible for us to live without renewed minds; just because we are born again with all the parts of God (given this side of heaven) does not mean we ever mature and learn how to use them. An infant also has all the parts— fingers, arms, toes, etc.— but needs to grow up. Even so, we can remain carnal or soulish (led by the desires of our own body or soul) rather than choosing to grow up into the image of Jesus Christ. Or we can give part of ourselves to sanctification, becoming partly renewed. This is to be double-minded (Matthew 6:24, 2 Corinthians 11:3, Colossians 2:8, James 1:8,4:8). Even Jesus’ disciples were double-minded before they were filled with the Spirit of God and they chose to abide in God. This persistent state of a double-mind explains Jesus’ frequent rebuke and expression of frustration with His disciples (e.g., Mark 4:40; 6:37,50; 8:33, 9:19; 10:38; 11:22-24;14:30,37-38; 16:14).

The commitment we make in salvation to make Christ Lord should be seen instead as a commitment to cooperate with the Spirit of God to have our minds renewed. It’s the only way to make Christ Lord and to love God with all of our soul (mind, emotions, will) and strength. It is by renewing our mind to the mind of Christ that Christians are transformed to do the work of God in the world. Yet, mind renewal takes consecration, just as following Christ despite the costs takes consecration. It’s rare. Let’s be rare! It will bring heaven to our souls and those of others.

Prayer: I praise You, God, for Your great wisdom and plans. Thank You for loving me so much that You desire intimate connection with me in covenant relationship. Thank You for sharing with me what is Yours, even Your thoughts and Your mind. Thank You for making me such an integral part of Your loving mission to the world to unite men and women with You in relationship. I give myself fully to You and Your work.

Day 17: God's temple, fellow worker, and steward

Paul continued his letter:

“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.”

1 Corinthians 3:1-2, 4-23 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1co.3.1-23.ESV>

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful...Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God...Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.”

1 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5, 18-20 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1co.4.1-20.ESV>

““Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is

joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

1 Corinthians 6:13-20 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1co.6.13-20.ESV>

In these three chapters, Paul said that we in Christ’s church are God’s temple, God’s fellow worker, and God’s steward. If you are in Christ, you are God’s steward, God’s fellow worker, and God’s temple.

God’s steward

“...This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful...”

A steward is a servant that manages all of the affairs and property of another in their absence. Paul suggested that since God has shown us truth through the Spirit of God, we are stewards of what God has shown us. It’s not meant to be kept to ourselves. Christ commanded all of His disciples to go and make disciples as His witnesses. Though Jesus passed off this great responsibility, He said that He would be with them always; they would have the presence and power of God from the indwelling Holy Spirit as a sacred trust (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). The trust is for everyone whom the Lord calls to Himself (Acts 2:39). As stewards, the gospel and the Holy Spirit aren’t the only things entrusted to us by God, but they are the greatest. Every good and every perfect thing is from God (James 1:17). This includes our time, energy, effort, attention and resources. What will we do with all that God has entrusted to us?

God’s fellow worker

“...So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one...”

From the account of the Great Commission in Mark 16:20, the disciples understood themselves to be God’s fellow workers: “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.” The accounts of the apostles’ ministries in the book of Acts, including Peter and Paul, show the continuation of the church’s work together with the Lord.

It is not just the apostles that were God’s fellow workers, but the entire church, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For we are God’s fellow workers.” According to Paul, our work as the church is to cooperate together in obedience to God to do His word. Some of us plant the imperishable seed of the word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Some of us water it. God causes the word to grow. In this, we each play a major role in the sowing and reaping that brings the growth of God’s kingdom of heaven in the world. Note that the action that enables the growth to happen is entrusted to us who have been connected to God in Christ. With renewed minds regarding who we are and what is our responsibility, we are to pray to the Father as Jesus led us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Then we are to play our part in

that work by cooperating together in action, meanwhile expecting God to be faithful to do what He said He would do.

“...For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ...”

Paul also compared our work in the Spirit to that of building upon a foundation. For any life that we build into as a good work of God, new life in Jesus Christ is the foundation. Discipleship unto maturity in Christ is a major effort, and God most often uses different believers to invest in new believers along the way. This is our main spiritual work: to build upon the foundation of God’s saving work in the lives of others.

Yet, aside from this work, we may build things into people that are not eternal as we influence them. Aside from this work, we tend to spend time building kingdoms of our own, unrelated to the building of God’s kingdom. Aside from this work, we tend to each pursue our own purpose, plans, objectives, dreams, agenda, mission, priorities, ideas, vision and will, rather than God’s. Will we choose to take on and advance God’s interests and His kingdom, building on the foundation He has laid at great cost?

“...each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it...”

The Day where God judges believers will disclose the kind of investments we have made with our time, energy, effort, attention and resources. All will be brought into the light, and the purposes of our heart will be disclosed. Everything that is not built on Jesus Christ, the Chief Cornerstone and the incarnate Word of God—God’s imperishable kingdom seed, will be burned up. What we have done in obedience to God, according to His will and His kingdom purposes, will affect our commendation from God and our reward. These are the wages that Paul spoke of for our labor as God’s fellow workers.

“...I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power...”

For this important kingdom work, we as fellow workers have been made stewards of God’s Spirit, our Helper (John 14:26, John 16:7), and, therefore, stewards of His power (dunamis in Greek, G1411). Regarding this power, Paul said, “For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.” God’s Spirit in us is stirred up to work with us by our acts of faith in obedience to God’s word and the Spirit’s leading; our faith is the Spirit’s catalyst. As such, Paul expected that God’s fellow workers could be discerned not by what they said, i.e., their message, but by how God confirmed the message they chose to speak, while expecting His power and accompanying signs to follow. Paul was speaking to a church where many were immature (Paul called them carnal, or of the flesh). They were only speaking as if they were mature. Paul later prophesied that we could expect the same in “the last days,” for there would be many “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).

God’s temple

“...Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?...”

While the Pharisees saw healing of people’s bodies on the Sabbath, their most sacred day, as transgression, and even Christ’s disciples waited until the Sabbath was over to bring people to

Him for their bodies to be freed and healed (Mark 1:32), Christ did not hesitate to free and heal people at any time on the Sabbath. Our bodies are created by God in His own image and likeness; they are sacred to Him. Your body is sacred.

When we are made alive in Christ through our profession in faith to follow Jesus, Christ comes to live in us. The presence of Christ in us causes not only our spirit and our soul to be sacred, but also our body. God's will in Christ's atonement is to make all of us who are steadfastly committed to love Him at-one with God, our bodies included.

As fellow workers obedient to God's will to go make disciples, Christ's atonement also makes us victorious over sickness (Matthew 8:17). The Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead dwells in us, so He will quicken our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11)! Jesus came to give us resurrection life and for it to be abundant (John 10:10). The living God wants to fill your body with life and strength.

"...he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him..."

When we choose in faith to join ourselves to the Lord in covenant relationship through identification with Jesus Christ and His finished work, we are joined to the Lord as one spirit with Him! One spirit with God! Connected to God, we are in Him and He is in us! We are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). This is your position in the spiritual world right now, i.e., the real, eternal world, as seen with eyes of faith (2 Corinthians 4:18).

"...You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

In Christ our Redeemer, we have no right to ourselves, nor a right to continue in sin (1 John 3:6-10). Our faith is to be in our Creator and Savior. God has called us to be holy as He is holy. As we have already been made righteous in Christ, we are ever empowered through the Spirit of God to be victorious, including victory over any temptation to sin. Having been set free from the slavery of sin and from death (Romans 8:2), we are empowered in cooperation with the Spirit of God to put off the old self (Ephesians 4:22-24). As Paul also did, we seek to turn every situation into glory to God.

Prayer: I praise You, God, that You have set me free from sin and death, replacing this with Your overflowing life. God, thank You for Your sacred trust in me as a steward of all You have given and entrusted to me. I praise You for Your goodness to have also made me a fellow worker with You, the Almighty God and Creator of every good and perfect thing. I thank You for Your great love for me, that You have sought to make me one with You forever, sharing with me what is Yours. I seek to bring You glory in all things.

Day 18: Paul's teachings on communion and spiritual gifts

Paul continued his first letter to the church in Corinth:

'For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.'

1 Corinthians 11:23-34 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1co.11.23-34.ESV>

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many... But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body... And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."

1 Corinthians 12:4-14, 18-20, 26-31 NKJV

<https://bible.com/bible/114/1co.12.4-31.NKJV>

Communion

Jesus taught the following regarding communion before it came to His first communion with the disciples:

'So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." '

John 6:53-58

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/JHN.6.53-58>

In communion, the bread Jesus blessed represented His body that was broken for them, the bread of life. Jesus taught there is eternal life in it.

About this body, Peter wrote:

'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. '

1 Peter 2:24

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1PE.2.24>

The wine represented Jesus' blood that was shed, the blood of the new covenant, the New Testament, that changed everything for humanity.

"...Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner..."

Paul taught that we should examine and judge ourselves in communion with the Lord, and that the body, the bread of life, should be discerned, as it impacts our health in this world: "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." It is hard to take this statement any other way than Paul wrote it. Regarding this body of Christ, His first body in the world, that bore our sins on a tree, Peter taught, "By his wounds you have been healed." This is a work that was finished because of Christ's wounds (Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 8:16-17). Jesus Christ regularly healed people as part of His ministry; at one time He referred to this as the children's bread (Matthew 15:22-28). The Apostle Peter regularly healed people in demonstration of the gospel in order to build the church and make disciples, just as Paul did (e.g., see Day 6, Day 14). (For more on Peter's life, see my book [Experiencing Jesus through Peter](#).) Discerning Christ's body, any who are in Christ, having become children of God, are able to stand in faith on the benefits of Christ's finished work for them, taking it as done. We can take God at His word (Romans 4:16-24).

Regarding Christ's new, glorified body in the world, Paul wrote, "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased." Let us also discern this body of Christ! If you are in Christ, you are part of Christ's glorified body. Whomever God has joined to

Himself in Christ, let us never try to separate from His body. God loves the unity of His church; Christ died so all of His family members might live in Him and with Him! As Christ commanded, let us never hold anything against a brother or sister, but instead pursue peace (Matthew 5:9,21-26,43-48). Jesus Christ desires that His body be healthy, and His sacrifice enabled this to happen, empowered by the indwelling Spirit of God.

Communion is also to be taken as means of intimacy, of abiding in Christ: "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." He is the True Vine, His followers are the branches, and the Father is the vinedresser (John 15:1-5). In the kingdom of God which has come upon us in Christ, it continues the intimacy Christ had with His followers in the upper room. The kingdom is no longer near; instead, it has come with the new covenant of His blood, "the fruit of the vine," shed for us. In Christ, God makes us intimately at one with Him in covenant relationship, generously giving to us what is His. This is consistent with what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "For all things are yours...all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (Day 17).

Spiritual gifts

"...There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord..."

God has all power and all miraculous ability, yet in this life He chooses to manifest Himself and His power in certain ways. The ways of the Spirit haven't changed significantly between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the present time. Some in the church are hesitant to (or insistent not to) put focus on supernatural works or gifts of the Spirit through believers because there have been many related abuses by Christians and those who would call themselves Christians in the past decades. Just because some have misrepresented Christ though does not mean we should try to throw out the practice of the Spirit's supernatural working altogether. God gives these manifestations of His Spirit for the building up of His church, and Christ's body should be welcomed to function as God would have it to function. It's also noteworthy that the Bible only refers to these functions of the Spirit of God in a believer as gifts in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, and the Corinthian church was not well functioning.

"...for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit...to another discerning of spirits..."

God gives not only diversities of natural knowledge and wisdom to believers but also pieces, or words, of supernatural revelations of wisdom, knowledge and discernment to them. When any of God's servants, including Isaiah, prophesied about the future, foretelling what was to come, it was the Spirit of God who gave them wisdom about what was to come. In a number of his letters, Paul also foretold what would happen in the last days (e.g., 1 Timothy 4:1). When God's servants were given knowledge of things present through intuition from God, such as Elisha's knowledge of the plans of the Syrians (2 Kings 6:12), it was through words of knowledge. When Paul showed the ability to discern spirits, such as the spirit in Elymas the magician (Day 5) or the one that told the future in the woman who followed Paul around (Day 9), this discernment was given to him through the Holy Spirit. All of these revelations are given to God's servants—

those who have taken on God's will as their own. We might also refer to them as sons and daughters rather than servants; they are of the family of God, doers of His word (Luke 8:21).

“...to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles...”

When they lived by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20, KJV), the Spirit of God worked through the apostles, Paul included, in power. Having the kind of faith Jesus has is a work of the Spirit of God in the life of a believer. This kind of bold faith protected Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:17-25) and Daniel in the den of lions (Daniel 6:10-23). It was by Paul and Silas' faith that they were freed from prison (Day 9). It was by the faith of the apostles that Paul was raised up after he was stoned— and also healed (Day 7). It was by faith that Paul was protected when he was bit by the viper (Acts 28:3-6). It was through faith in Jesus' name that Paul healed the crippled man (Day 6) and so many at Ephesus (Day 14). It was by the miraculous power of the Spirit that Paul caused Elymas to be stricken blind for a time, causing the governor to believe that the gospel was true (Day 5). It was also miraculous that Paul was present in spirit with the Corinthian church at a time when he was not physically present (1 Corinthians 5:3-5).

“...to another prophecy, ...to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues...”

God gives these spiritual functions of inspiration—prophecy, tongues, and interpretation of tongues— for the building up of the church in love. The Spirit of God causes believers to speak out of their spirits in poetry of a different language than they know, and the Spirit causes them to understand the tongues spoken from the spirit of others through their own spirits. Tongues are for the worship of God and for the spiritual edification of the believer. With interpretation (i.e., when understood by a hearer), tongues can also be a sign for unbelievers. Tongues are the only new manifestation of the Spirit in the New Testament, as Jesus told His disciples before He left that those who believe “will speak in new tongues” (Mark 16:17). Referring back to Paul's description of the work of the Spirit in believers, in such tongues or in their own language they may prophecy. Prophecy might be viewed as speaking in tongues with interpretation. Functions of prophecy may include edification, exhortation, and comfort, the speaking of truth, or foretelling. As part of prophecy, the Spirit of God may provide revelation through words of knowledge or words of wisdom. Prophecy should be judged according to Scripture (1 Corinthians 14:29).

“...But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills...”

The Spirit of God was manifested fully in Jesus Christ during His ministry. Through the Spirit, Jesus had revelation from God, including the Spirit's wisdom, knowledge, and discernment; power, including acts of faith, healing, and miracles; and inspiration, including prophecy. The Apostle John wrote that “For from his fullness we have received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16). Thus, those who are in Christ may receive the fullness of His Spirit as well. Paul is one example of this, having demonstrated all of what he labels here to the Corinthian church as the gifts of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who distributes these gifts among the members of Christ's body. The

commonality among believers that have the Spirit of God is that Christ is their head, and they are seated in Him in heavenly places, all connected directly to God. We exist in two places at once, connected by the Spirit of God.

“...For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

In Christ, the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 has been fulfilled, God’s Spirit having been poured out on all flesh: sons and daughters, old and young, even on the male and female servants. The body of Christ is meant to be united and to function together, each member a vessel of equal value that carries the treasure of God. The Spirit of God is channeled into all of us, just as pictured in Zechariah’s vision of the church as a golden lampstand, burning brightly (Zechariah 4:2-14). Our connection to God was there represented by golden oil pouring from the two olive trees, representing the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. (For more on this or on Joel’s prophecy, see the introduction to my book [God’s Love Plan in Jesus and the Church: 40 Days in the Old Testament](#).) In Christ, we are united by the love of God and also, in sanctification, by His other character attributes, the fruits of the Spirit, that God has shared with us. Partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), we were born again for great things! Whomever God has joined to Himself within the body of Christ, His beloved bride, let man not separate (Mark 10:9).

“...And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues...”

An apostle is someone who, like Paul, starts new churches, making disciples of Christ there. Prophets edify, exhort, and comfort those in the churches that are built, contributing to God’s will to make disciples. Teachers sow God’s word, also contributing to this same purpose. Others in Christ’s body are also important to its functioning together, including those God has provided to help and to administer. Paul says that we should covet or earnestly desire the “better” manifestations of the Spirit of God. It’s not really about what we get from God though; Paul was about to point to the most excellent way, which is God’s love.

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for body bruised for me and Your blood shed for me so that I could abide in fullness of life (zōē) within You. Thank You, Father, for loving me so much that You drew me to intimate connection directly to You in Christ. Thank You for generously giving me what is Yours through Your own Spirit. I honor You, Spirit of God, and submit to Your leading, that Your will may be done through me and Your beloved church, according to Your ways. Praise be to You, my God, three in One.

Day 19: Love is at the center of God and the building up of His church

In the midst of a discussion of manifestations of the Spirit of God in the church in Chapters 12 and 14, Paul wrote the following:

'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.'

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1CO.13.1-13>

Paul's discussion of manifestations of the Spirit continued:

'Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church... So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.'

1 Corinthians 14:1-4,12-19

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1CO.14.1-4,12-19>

Paul next moved to prophesying:

'Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet... Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.'

1 Corinthians 15:24-25,45,57-58

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1CO.15.24-25,45,57-58>

Near the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote:

“Let all that you do be done in love.”

1 Corinthians 16:14

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1CO.16.14>

“... Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast...”

1 Corinthians 13, often read at weddings, is the clearest expression in the Bible of Godlike love (agapē, G26). The chapter starts by considering the motivation for the good works that we do. If they do not originate out of Godlike love, none of our good works for God matter, even if done through God’s Spirit (see Day 18 for a discussion of spiritual gifts). God seeks that His benevolent love would move to the core of who we are, how we respond to Him, and how we respond to others. In this, we would come to truly reflect God’s own image and nature; we are His glory.

The Spirit of God spoke through Paul to describe God’s unending love within a person the following way: rejoicing with the truth, kind, patient, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things. God’s love in a person does not envy, boast, or rejoice in wrongdoing. It does not act arrogantly or rudely. It does not become irritated or resentful.

Do you want to be loved this way?

Do you love others this way?

Everybody wants to be loved this way: to know the love of God for them and to have it expressed by others to them.

Only our cooperation with the sanctifying work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, our Helper (John 15:26), can cause us to love the way Jesus Christ loves. Jesus didn’t just love His family and His disciples—those closest to Him; He saw and He loved the multitudes, and, because of His love, He took responsibility for them and He did good to them. He went about showing us how to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. He gave of all that He had available from the Spirit of God that dwelled in Him, connecting Him to the Father.

When we are new creations in Christ, our will is our own, and we may still submit to be led by our spirit, our soul (mind), or our body. Godlike love is what the Spirit of God has put into our spirit in our new creation. It is not soulish, so it is not motivated by fear, reciprocity, reason, nor self-interest. It is not just a love between equals nor even the natural love of a parent for a child. It does not stem from passion or need (eros), which is not steadfast. We can only truly love when we know it’s not about us at all.

When we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in us to grow in benevolent love (agapē), we take on more and more of God's divine nature of good will toward all. We come to think of others the way God does, *considering what redemption has made possible for them*, knowing God may change them even as He is changing us. So we do not think poorly of others, nor do we take offense at them, no matter what they may do to us or those we love. Our old self that would have taken offense was crucified with Christ and no longer lives. Christ now lives in us, and so we come to genuinely desire God's best for them; we do for them what we would want done for ourselves. This is His command— to love *as He has loved*.

“...For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away...”

This world we find ourselves in contains a mix of good and evil, the result of God and of Satan and their kingdoms. (Let us not deny the existence of Satan nor the effects of sin. To do so would attribute the evil to God and deny the truth of Scripture.) God in His perfection is the source of all of the good, and, by His Spirit, He has revealed glimpses of truth at times (as discussed on Day 18). In these times where the Holy Spirit has already been poured out on all who are in Christ, much of His story has been written and revealed to us, showing us the depth of the wisdom and the love of God.

Each of us is fully known by our Creator God, made in God's perfect image and likeness. When we were children, we did not know this; even when mature in faith, we only see, through faith in God's word, part of what God has in store for us in His plan. Our faith has eyes to see who we are and what we are to do today, and we hope in the promises of God for tomorrow, knowing how good God is. With faith in God's word as truth, we are enabled to see ourselves as God sees us. Knowing who we are and what God has for us to do, we as the church are able to reflect God to the world around us. Knowing it is love (agapē) at the core of His image, we are primarily supposed to reflect that love in everything we say and everything we do. God meant for His church to meet the needs of the world.

“...Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy....”

We are not to ignore the way the Spirit of God desires to work in the world because we think it is weird, because some people have abused it for their own gain, because we have agreed with others who have said God does not work that way anymore, or because we do not want to live the kind of consecrated life that welcomes the Holy Spirit to become manifest. Manifestations of God's Spirit in His church are the supernatural means provided through God's Spirit in us to share His love, presence, and power with unbelievers and to build the church up in love. There is something in each one of us that is excited about and that welcomes the supernatural. The Spirit's ways are God's ways, and God is passionate about building His church. God wants His Spirit in His church, Christ's new, glorified body, in fullness, just as the Spirit was in Christ in fullness during His earthly ministry (John 1:16, Acts 10:38, Ephesians 1:23, Ephesians 4:13, Colossians 1:19). Thus, we are both to pursue (agapē) love *and* to earnestly desire these manifestations of the Spirit of God among us.

“...So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church...”

We are to pursue more of the fullness of God in ourselves, as it is His will to conform us more and more into the perfect image bearer, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:19,29). While we pursue this, we are to get up and use the abilities and the spiritual gifts God has given us, seeking *above all else* to excel in building up God’s beloved church. Aligning ourselves with God’s purposes and plans, this is where God wants us to principally put our time, attention, energy, and resources. He has made His will for us clear through His Word. In doing this, we please God and we invest in what is eternal. We participate together in building God’s kingdom for His glory. We are faithful to God’s command to go and make disciples. Christ’s glorified body in the world continues to do what He did before, yet in multiplied form.

Have you come to love God’s church like He loves it?

“...Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful...”

This counsel from Paul reinforces his teaching to the Thessalonian church of the separation between spirit and soul (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Paul also understood and experienced within his spirit a processing center other than the conventional one associated with one’s soul: the mind. It is the spirit. The mind and the spirit can operate independently, or they can operate at the same time, one not interfering with the other. Tongues and prophecy originate from our spirits, which are connected to the living God. Out of our spirits, we can pray or sing praise. Paul had conscious choice regarding what he would do in his spirit, just as he had with his mind. He spoke in tongues more than the rest of the Corinthian church, which was a source of edification and strength to him. It set him apart.

Regarding the interplay of our soul and spirit, Paul taught that believers can fan into flame, or stir up, the gift of God that is in us, the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:6). Notice that He did not teach we were to wait for the Spirit of God to stir us up, or to wait for the Spirit of God to fall. Paul fanned into flame that gift of God *that dwelled continually in him*, perhaps principally by speaking in tongues more than all of the Corinthians. If you are in Christ, the Spirit of God dwells in you continuously! Paul also taught that it was necessary for us in the church to choose to cooperate with the Spirit of God to put on Christ, intentionally taking out of our spirit that which God has put there in His new creation within us (2 Corinthians 5:17), taking off and replacing our old self with the new (Ephesians 4:22-23, Romans 12:1-2).

“...Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet...”

Paul prophesied that the plan of God the Father is for Jesus Christ to continue to reign with authority at God’s right hand, bringing freedom and doing good to destroy the works of the devil (Genesis 3:15, Acts 10:38, 1 John 3:8), until all of Satan’s kingdom is under His feet. Jesus Christ does this through the authority given to Him by the Father based on His finished work, which empowered the church in Paul’s day and continues to empower God’s church today. We

are in His body, and, in Christ, every rule, authority, and power is under Christ's feet, or it is soon to be put there.

'...Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit...'

While we were in submission to Satan (along with his world system) and self, our spirits were dead. Yet, Jesus Christ became a life-giving spirit that overcame Satan in every rule, authority and power. When we identify with Jesus Christ on His terms, we receive the resurrection life of God (zōē, G2222) that restores our direct connection to Him, that restores our position as sons and daughters of God, and that is able to conquer any effect of sin and death. We are the royalty of God, His own family. We are in Christ's body, having become one Spirit with Him, enabled to plug into His own soul (mind, will and emotions)!

"...But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Paul encouraged all of the church to be steadfast in the faith of Jesus and to be about the work that Jesus and His disciples had to date been about. In Christ, set about to do all of God's will and His word, we can expect to be victorious, just as the seventy disciples were when they returned from what Jesus sent them out to do (Luke 10:1-24). And they didn't yet have God's Spirit living in them as we do!

"...Let all that you do be done in love..."

Near the end of Paul's letter, he reminded the church to align themselves with God's heart as shown best through Jesus: "Let all that you do be done in love." This starts with thinking on God's steadfast, committed, covenant love and forming thought patterns that start from God's love. It is enhanced by daily prayer wherein we can seek to be infused by God's own love and compassion. As part of the answer to our prayers, we then need to speak out of love and act out of love, rather than our own prejudices or negative behaviors, seeking to actualize God's love plan in the lives of others. As Christ's body in the world, we are the stewards and the ambassadors of God's love. We are to continue His ministry to demonstrate God's love. His love is to become our consuming passion.

Prayer: I praise You, Lord God, for love is at Your core and You love so completely. Your perfect love is what I need. It is what everyone needs. As I abide in You, I pray that You would perfect me in Your love and perfect my church in Your love. Cooperating with Your Spirit, I seek to build up Your beloved church. Help me, Spirit of God, to reflect Your kind of love to everyone that You have put around me. Be glorified.

Day 20: Suffering, healing, and the promises of God

Thus begins Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth:

'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many... I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.'

2 Corinthians 1:1-11,16-24

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.1.1-11,16-24>

"...Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth..."

Paul, identifying himself as an apostle, or church builder, wrote this second letter with his traveling companion Timothy (from Lystra, Galatia in present day Turkey) rather than with Sosthenes (from Corinth, Achaia in present day Greece). He wrote to all the saints in Achaia that he visited during his second missionary journey. Drawing on resources available to all in Christ's body, he first blessed the readers and hearers of his message, a cherished part of the body, with the grace and peace of God from the Father and the Son. He did not ask God to give them grace and peace; instead, as a steward, Paul gave it on behalf of God, knowing it was in His will.

“...Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction...”

Paul's expectation was that those who had publicly identified themselves with Christ would share in Christ's sufferings, as Paul had, and would also receive the comfort of the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort. The affliction and suffering Paul spoke of related to their rejection and persecution as believers. This suffering is a result of the will of unbelievers toward followers of Christ, and God does not usually force those made in His image and likeness to change their will. As such, today there is always some cost in following Jesus. In certain parts of the world, Christ followers tend to experience much more persecution, in ways similar to that experienced by Christians in Paul's time. In any case, Jesus called believers to rejoice in the persecution they receive (Matthew 5:9-12). God comforts us in this suffering, drawing us near to Him. Stimulated by our faith, God may also deliver us and shield us from some effects of persecution (Isaiah 54:19, Luke 10:19, Ephesians 6:16).

“...For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself...”

The affliction that Paul spoke of next was different: Paul and some of his traveling companions became sick while traveling in Asia, despairing of life and feeling as if they received a death sentence that was beyond their strength to endure. This infirmity caused them to depend upon God, the One who raises the dead. Paul, in particular, had consecrated himself to God in a threefold manner: spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). He had encouraged other believers to do the same.

Trusting in God as their healer (Exodus 15:26), Jehovah Rapha delivered them from their deadly sickness. Paul suggested here that believers are to set their hope on Him and expect such deliverance. The believers prayed for them at the time of their sickness, also expecting God to deliver them. The result of God's mercy and faithfulness in answering prayers to heal is to be thanksgiving. We depend upon God, and He is faithful.

While God does not necessarily deliver believers from all suffering or affliction related to persecution from their obedience as followers of Jesus Christ, it is His will to deliver believers from suffering and affliction due to sickness or disease. Trusting in Jesus as our deliverer and our healer, we can expect to recover. We can know it is not finished until what is written has come to pass: “by His wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

“...For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus [Silas] and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him...”

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brought the fulfillment of all of the promises of God to God's people. In the new covenant, God's people changed from the faith-filled, who had been mostly among the people of Israel, to any who would put their faith in and choose to follow Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham:

'I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.'

Genesis 22:17-18

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/GEN.22.17-18>

Through Jesus, all nations of the earth are blessed, as all of them will contain parts of God's church. Since in Christ, the church possesses the gate of God's enemies (Matthew 16:18), which attempt to withhold good from people, they now have access to all of the goodness that God desires to unleash to His people (Colossians 2:13-15). In Christ, we in the church have all of the promises of God that are received by faith. The Apostle Peter put it the following way: 'His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.'

2 Peter 1:3-4

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2PE.1.3-4>

Through God's promises, we become partakers of the divine nature of God, and we are given *all things* that pertain to life (zōē, G2222) and godliness. It is God's will that as we seek to be made like Jesus Christ in all things, cooperating with the Spirit of God, God will conform us to His image, and we (in the church) will take on His characteristics, including His own kind of love (Romans 8:29). These characteristics are the fruit pleasing to God.

In Christ, we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), made as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17)! In Christ, we may trust that our prayers of faith are answered, saying Amen, or "so be it." Abiding in Christ, we trust His words: 'Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.'

John 14:13-14

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/JHN.14.13-14>

and

'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full... You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.'

John 15:7-8,11,16

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/JHN.15.7-8,11,16>

Four times in close succession, Jesus said we will receive from Him whatever we ask (aiteo)! Aiteo is translated as ask, desire, beg, require, crave, or call for. Everything we desire or crave

for God's glory, we shall receive, when believing that it is ours in Christ, according to His word. This makes our joy full.

If it's in His word, it is His will. It is settled. Let us hold onto His word, knowing what the end result will be, until He performs it.

"...And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee..."

In Christ, the entire church is anointed of God. Thus, we in the church need not seek any other anointing. We need not wait for a feeling; but rather, we need to step out in faith, believing God's word: "May it be unto me according to Your word" (Luke 1:38). We are heirs of God, having what He has. As our proof here, we have been given the Spirit of God as a guarantee, or as an earnest. An earnest was in past times embodied as some soil from a plot of land that had just been purchased. This is what the Spirit of God is to us: a taste of things to come as heirs. As previously mentioned (see Day 18), the taste includes "words" of revelation: wisdom, knowledge, discernment; the power of God in faith, healing and miracles; inspiration from God in prophecy, tongues, and its interpretation.

Prayer: Glory to You, God, for the breadth and depth of Your goodness to us in Christ Jesus. Thank You for connecting us to You that we may share in the fullness of life with You, as You have planned. Thank You for the richness of the gift of Your Holy Spirit. I depend on You for all things, my God, my deliverer and my healer. Thank You, Jesus, for Your finished work. Thank You, God, for the opportunity here to join and be identified with Christ in all things, even in persecution.

Day 21: God, in Christ, leads us in triumphal procession

An excerpt from Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth:

'When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.'

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.2.12-17>

“When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there...”

Here Paul spoke of a time on his second missionary journey where he was forbidden by the Spirit to preach in Asia and Bithynia (Day 9). In Troas, Asia, where he was called to preach in Macedonia, he felt in his spirit a door opened for him and an urging to go to Macedonia, where he built churches in Philippi (Day 9), Thessalonica and Berea (Day 12). Paul certainly followed the Spirit of God when it came to where he should minister on any given day.

“...But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere...”

As God's stewards, God speaks through our lips. Yet, we are not peddlers of (or those who corrupt) God's word and the gospel, trying to alter it in such a way as to sell life in God as one sells some product. In fact, most of the ministry that Christ has for us to do cannot be done from behind the pulpit or from social media posts.

In the risen, regnant Christ, we have been made the righteousness of God. Christ's righteousness was characterized by a lifestyle that produced victory in every situation, and He is our example. Since His sacrifice was a triumph rather than a failure, Christ, who Himself was led by the indwelling Spirit of God that connected Him to the Father, also makes such victory possible for us, led by His indwelling Spirit, which connects us to Christ and the Father. Christ has always been victorious over evil, sin, sickness and death. Christ is now enthroned with all power and authority, and we are alive *in Him*.

Recreated with and in Jesus Christ—and having taken on His own ministry as members of His body, we are *always* led in triumphal procession! Christ dwells in us, never leaving us. Christ touches with our hands, walks with our feet, embraces with our arms, hears with our ears, and sees with our eyes. In Christ, our tread is the march of the conqueror—we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37) because our God fights for us when we act on our faith. In Christ, our song is the song of victory. In Christ, our crown is the crown of glory.

In Christ, we need not even fight, but only to enforce His victory in all things on the basis of His finished work. It is legally finished on the basis of His bruised body at the whipping post and His blood shed for us on the cross. In Christ, we should expect to overcome, and we should not allow any opportunities to demonstrate the love of God pass us up. Christ didn't let any such opportunities pass Him up. Following Christ's lead, we do unto others as we would have it done unto us (Matthew 7:12). He showed us what that looked like in His ministry; He taught the disciples to do just as He did, never suggesting they could do less.

Having already been anointed by the earnest of God's Spirit that dwells in us (Day 20), we are all commissioned and empowered by God to carry on Christ's work as ministers with the Spirit of God as our absolute guide. We don't need a special leading from God to obey His commandments. Instead, if we desire to join God in His work and to see Him manifest His presence, we need to line up with His commission and keep His commandments. This is our spiritual worship and reasonable service; it's on His terms.

"...as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ."

First, our words in and of themselves are actions based on choice; we speak out of the abundance of what is in our soul and our character (Matthew 12:34). Regarding our soul, the thought patterns and strongholds we have built up in our minds have been built up by our choices.

Second, our spoken words are powerful. We see this from the examples of Jesus' life, Peter's life, Paul's life, considering what was accomplished by their spoken word (e.g., Matthew 17:18-20).

Third, our words are spoken in the presence of spiritual beings, including God, who will judge us according to what we have spoken (Matthew 12:36-37, Acts 3:4-6, Acts 14:8-10).

Fourth, as children of God, stewards of what is His, and representatives of His in this world, we speak and we act on God's behalf.

With our mouths, we can bless (praise) God and bless others. We can speak love (agapē, G26), light (phōs G5457), and life (zōē, G2222) from God's word. (See my book [Jesus' words of love, light and life](#).) With our mouths, we can sow good, from which we will reap good, or we can sow what is bad, from which we will reap what is bad. With our mouths, we can speak what is in our unrenewed minds or we can speak from the mind of Christ; we have been made one with the Lord (1 Corinthians 2:16, 6:17). With our mouths, we can speak from unbelief, or we can speak from faith. We can forbid and we can permit (Matthew 16:19). We can choose to say things that wound ourselves, wound others, and grieve the Spirit of God that dwells in us. The Holy Spirit chooses not to act against our will, so we may quench the Spirit by what we choose to say (1 Thessalonians 5:19), which at times expresses our will and our belief about what is to happen.

Since we are all in Christ and are commissioned by God to go and make disciples, carrying on Christ's own ministry until He comes again, we should be careful about what we choose to say, speaking what is in accordance with God's word, His nature, and His report (Isaiah 53:1, Romans 10:16), speaking of the triumph of God rather than the defeat, in all of its forms, that was characteristic of our lives before we were in Christ.

Prayer: Jesus, I thank You for Your triumph in Your life and ministry, in Your death, in Your resurrection, and in Your glorification. Father, thank You for who You have made me in the glorified body of Christ Jesus. Thank You for making me righteous. I seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness. Spirit of God, I submit myself to Your leading. Spirit, I honor You and I trust in You for spiritual results— for victory after victory. Christ, I will follow You always in Your triumphal procession until everything is put under Your feet.

Day 22: The Spirit gives life and freedom

Paul continued his second letter to the church in Corinth:

' Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.'

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.3.1-18>

“...You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all...”

Paul wrote that the disciples we make in cooperation with the Spirit of the living God are our letter of recommendation before God and mankind. The making of disciples of Christ is eternal. On the Day that our work becomes manifest, revealed by fire, this work of obedience to our commission from God, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, will survive, resulting in reward (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Furthermore, when the Spirit of God transforms us in the church of His New Testament in Jesus Christ, He transforms our hearts and minds. Foremost of all, He writes His law of love onto our hearts, in fulfillment of prophecy (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 11:19-20, Ezekiel 36:26-27, John 15:12), so that we take on His own love. This is described further in [God's Love Plan in Jesus and the Church: 40 Days in the Old Testament](#).

“...Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves...”

Here Paul compared the old and new covenants of God, where the new is so much better than the old. In the new covenant, we are directly connected to God in Christ. The veil to the Holy of Holies is torn, and the Spirit of God lives in us, continually dwelling in us! We, therefore, have

confidence to boldly approach the throne of grace in time of need, where we are *already seated in Christ*, part of His glorified body. (Since we are already seated with Him, it's not much of an approach.) We are able to take and receive anything given to us in Christ to the glory of God; it's already in the body of Christ where we also are. It's already in our spirit, for we have been made one spirit with the Lord Jesus at our new birth (1 Corinthians 6:17). While the law of the old covenant brings death, in that no one outside of steadfast faith in God (which causes God to see a son or daughter as righteous) has been able to meet its requirements, in the new covenant the Spirit of God gives resurrection life (zōē) to all that identify themselves with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection by choosing to confess Him as Lord and abide in Him. This has always been the function of the Spirit of God through the imperishable Word of God: to quicken. In Christ, the Spirit of God makes each of us (in His church) able ministers of God's message of reconciliation, as though we were right now in Jesus' place in this world. As ministers, we carry with us the resurrection life, the light, and the loving-kindness of God. Under the new covenant, we have been already returned to a position of sons or daughters of God, beloved ones, His glory. The Greek word glory (doxa, G1391) conveys the current exalted, majestic position of Christ at the right hand of the Father; the splendor and the exceeding brightness of the moon, sun, and stars; and, finally, personal excellency, preeminence, magnificence, dignity, and grace. In the new covenant, each one of us who is in Christ has become a heavenly place (Ephesians 2:6).

"...Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory..."

As such, there is much more glory in the new covenant of Christ than in the old covenant of the law of Moses. Under the old covenant, God's Spirit was with a very limited number of faithful ones, including Moses. One of the signs of the glory of the old covenant was the way Moses' face would appear to be radiant after speaking with God (Exodus 34:29). Yet, under the old covenant, the kingdom of God had not come near in Jesus, the fulfillment of prophecy, even as Jesus said to His seventy-two disciples after they returned from doing His word: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Luke 10:23-24

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/LUK.10.23-24>

The seventy-two experienced Jesus' own teaching and ministry of righteousness. They got to share in the glory of His ministry through the power and presence of God that went with them as ambassadors of the kingdom of God. As ambassadors, they spoke on behalf of Jesus (Luke 10:16). And yet God, through *Christ in us*, had even more glory in store for His church:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

John 14:16-17,20

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/JHN.14.16-17.20>

Compared to the glory that Moses experienced, this glory that we have in Christ greatly surpasses it, as we understand both through the example of Paul's life and through the words

the Spirit of God spoke through him to us, God's church. In Christ, we have the Spirit of God in us as a Helper working with us to do God's word, carrying out His will on earth as it is in heaven! Through Christ's finished work, we are made at-one with God. This is our position of glory in Christ: we know the Spirit of God who dwells in us, causing us to be in Christ and Christ in us, making us also in the Father as Christ is in Him (John 17:10-11,20-23). We are at-one with God. We do not realize what our environment is in the Spirit. Furthermore, in Christ, God has more glory in store for us as His royal family in the future (Ephesians 2:7,3:19-21).

"...Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face ...But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed..."

In Christ, we have been made the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21) and co-heirs with Him (Romans 8:17), and, therefore, we may be as bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1), just as Paul became bold in Christ. In His ministry, Paul, having been made righteous, exhibited the same kind of boldness wherever he went that Jesus did (John 18:20), for Christ was in him. This Spirit is not a spirit of fear but of power (2 Timothy 1:7). Giving ourselves over to the indwelling Spirit of God does make us bold, changing us even as Peter was changed from one who denied Christ three times to one that boldly proclaimed Him (Acts 4:13).

"...Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom..."

The Spirit of the Lord brings freedom in every way. This has been Christ's ministry in the Spirit, in fulfillment of prophecy:

' "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." '

Luke 4:18-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/LUK.4.18-21>

God's purpose in Christ is to set mankind free from any captivity, even as the Apostle Peter testified:

'how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. '

Acts 10:38

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.10.38>

The Apostle John testified to the same:

"...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

1 John 3:8

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1JN.3.8>

The righteous Jesus has made a way for the resurrection life (zoe) of the Spirit, whereby we share in God's victory over evil in our freedom from sin, sickness and death. Wherever the Spirit of God has His way, there is freedom. It is this same Spirit, *Christ in us*, that, with our consent to His refining, transforms us from glory to glory into the fullness of Christ. Jesus, "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3), did not have some gifts of

the Spirit of God like the immature Corinthian church did. Fully man, He also had all of God's Spirit, the earnest of the heavenly inheritance. This inheritance is still in Him, and it is still in us. It is the fulfillment of God's will for us in the church to be transformed into the fullness of Christ's image (John 1:16, Romans 8:29), both individually and as the church, Christ's own body. We are members of His body, predestined to become fully free, mature, and functioning. God has made His purpose for our lives quite clear in His Word, His righteous blueprint, and it is glorious.

Prayer: I praise You, indwelling Spirit of God, for Your very nature is freedom, resurrection life, light, and love! Have your way in me and in my church. I praise You, Father, for Your way in Christ to transform me and to transform Your church into Your glory, reflecting Your own glory. Your purpose from the creation of the world is being accomplished, for You are good and Your word does come to pass. Thanks for making me one with You in Christ to do good, to give of Your life, to shine Your brilliant light, to demonstrate your generous love, and to bring freedom. I rejoice in who You are and give You thanks. Be glorified in the unfolding of Your love story.

Day 23: Treasure in jars of clay

Paul continued his second letter to the church in Corinth:

'Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.'

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.4.1-18>

"...And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing..."

Jesus did not object to the truth of Satan's claim when Satan told Him that the kingdoms of the world and their glory were under his authority to be given to Jesus (Matthew 4:8-10), and He later referred to Satan as the ruler or prince of this world (John 12:31,14:30,16:11). Satan took legal authority away from mankind at creation through deceit, getting them to doubt God, causing their spirits to die, cut off from communication with God. Mankind received Satan's nature rather than God's at that point. As the father of lies (John 8:44), Satan has continued to perpetuate and create deception to cause people to disbelieve the goodness and the word of God. As long as any do not have faith in God and His word, they belong to the devil and are perishing. The veil to truth consists of the many lies people may believe that keep them from knowing and believing the truth of the gospel. This veil keeps the light of the gospel and the glory of God from entering in.

"...For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake..."

Following our saving faith, the Creator God made us completely new creations by way of our identification with the death, resurrection life, and glorification of Jesus. God has quickened our spirits, giving not only new life but also light via the Word of God. By faith, we must receive that light, taking it into our souls (mind, emotions, will). Through speaking, believing, and acting in faith, we must put on (bind) the new and put off (loose) the old, bringing the old out of the darkness to be exposed in the light, where it may die.

Our bodies and souls that hold the treasure of God in our spirits are considered as jars of clay. They are just simple, breakable vessels. This to make it clear that the glory in us is of God.

“...We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair...”

The Apostle Paul and those active in the church experienced serious persecution, especially from Jews and Romans. He described this also as being afflicted, perplexed, and struck down, and so he was. Yet God preserved his life, delivered him, and was with him. In carrying around Jesus with him, the resurrection life of Jesus was manifested in him. Just as Jesus gave life to people through his in-person ministry— complete life for spirit, soul and body— the disciples of Jesus continued this ministry through power from the Spirit of God, bringing the kingdom of God near.

‘...Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak...’

How did they minister the life of God? Through believing and speaking. Their faith was taken on from their new life in Christ. As Paul said to the Galatian church, “...Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God...” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). As Jesus, connected to the Father, believed, spoke, brought freedom, brought life, and went about doing good, so did Paul. Their power was the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:10-11).

The quote that Paul used here, “I believed, and so I spoke,” was from Psalm 116, one of David’s psalms. Like this psalm, many of David’s psalms spoke of physical healing from God. David certainly believed in God as his healer, consistent with God’s revelation to the Israelites: “I am the Lord, your healer” (Exodus 15:26). In Psalm 116, David expressed his great love for God, called on Him for deliverance and healing, praised God, thanked Him, and expected an answer consistent with His promise and His character: gracious, righteous, merciful. David’s faith was exemplary, as was Paul’s. Neither of them asked if it was God’s will to heal because they knew it was, just as it is God’s will that everyone receives His free gift of salvation (Psalm 103:2-3, Mark 1:41, 2:9, John 3:16).

“...For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God...”

Grace is the nature of God, just as life, love, and righteousness are. God’s desire is to extend grace to everyone that will receive it by way of His church. People do not know of God’s grace unless it is shared with them and shown to them.

How can you show the depth of God's grace to those God loves? Who are the ones you know or the ones you may pass by that need to learn of God's grace? Need to experience it? When it's understood and experienced, it is received.

Paul showed God's grace in many of the same ways that Jesus did. For every one that receives God's grace, thanksgiving is given and it brings glory to God, for God is ever seeking to build His family.

"...So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day..."

Abiding *in Christ*, we can draw both strength and life from the Spirit of God to do God's kingdom work, even as we draw in everything that is of the divine nature. In Christ, we are free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), so we can draw in Christ's resurrection life via the Holy Spirit, allowing us to persevere in serving God's purposes even in the face of resistance and persecution. We are members of Christ's body, and we are to draw strength from it, as Jesus taught: "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

John 6:55-57 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jhn.6.55-57.ESV>

As already discussed (Day 18), Paul believed that life and strength could be drawn from feeding on Christ:

"For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died."

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/1co.11.29-30.ESV>

"...For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen..."

The motivation to work in service of God's will and mission, even through difficulty, is to please Him and bring Him glory. A reward has been promised based on good work that has been done in obedience to God's word. All of this requires faith, which recognizes that the things of God are real and lasting while what we see and experience with our senses will rapidly pass away. Without such faith we cannot hope to please God.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for translating me from darkness into light. Thank You for enduing me with Your life, strength, and faith. You are full of grace, Father. Lead me, Spirit of God, in sharing Your grace with others so that more glory may come to You. I consecrate myself to You.

Day 24: Ambassadors entrusted with God's ministry of reconciliation

Paul continued his second letter to the Corinthians:

"For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we

are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 5:1-21 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/2co.5.1-21.ESV>

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens...”

Paul, a tentmaker by trade, compared the mortal bodies that we live in to tents. Tents are a means of temporary housing that may rather easily be destroyed. Paul expressed a longing that some have to experience the resurrection life that comes from God in our bodies, looking forward to the heavenly bodies that are promised to God’s people for the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21).

“...He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee...”

Paul explained that the Spirit of God was given to us as an earnest of these heavenly bodies (like a handful of dirt from the heavenly land that is our inheritance in Christ). The Spirit of God is a foretaste of the greatness to come that we get to experience now. It’s given to us when we enter a covenant relationship with God. The Spirit of God is able to quicken our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11) and also fill us with the life of Christ, allowing us to partake of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), including the fruits of the Spirit (God’s characteristics such as His love) and the

gifts of the Spirit (each ability a foretaste of the divine nature is ours now and that will be more fully ours later).

“...So we are always of good courage...”

Paul encouraged the believers to be confident about what was true, walking by faith. They were not to rely mainly on the knowledge that came from their senses.

“...For the love of Christ controls us...”

Paul described the result of sanctification brought about by our identification with Christ and abiding in Him: the love of Christ comes to control us. If Christ lives in us, and His core characteristic is love, then His love lives in us and is expressed through us. God’s love is not a selfish love, and so we will no longer be selfish, but giving instead.

“...From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh...”

Paul encouraged the believers to look not at the body and the externals but instead to what controls a person. For those who do not belong to Christ, they are controlled by their souls or bodies, and their spirits are dead. They belong to Satan and have his nature (John 8:38-44). But those who are in Christ have been made new creations. In their spirit, they are born of God, partakers of his divine nature. Crucified with Christ, their old life has been cut off. It is over its own grave that all the fruits of the new life must grow.

“...All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...”

God has given us as the church Christ’s own ministry of reconciling people with God! His plan is that we go *in His place* to accomplish the kingdom work He started, multiplying grace and peace. This is quite a trust, as the men and women to whom we will minister are God’s family and His glory. Is it quite a trust to be appointed to carry on Jesus’ work in His place, even as He said, “It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ’

Mark 13:34

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/MRK.13.34>

Are you inspired by His confidence in us as agents of His grace and compassion? Do you find yourself grateful for being chosen as a partner with the Father in His mission to reconcile humanity to Himself out of His love for us? Jesus asked all of his disciples to continue today what He began during His earthly ministry: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12) He continued: “...I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away...” (John 16:7)

Do you believe Him? Do you want to give of your best to accomplish His purpose among people? Has His plan become Your consuming passion?

“...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

We are not only sent in Christ's place, we are also seen in His place. When we identify with Jesus, we are hid in Christ (Colossians 3:3). God and the devil are caused to see us as the same sinless person. We have become the righteousness of God. We are able to be in His presence. We are right with God as Jesus is right with Him. We are made heirs: sons and daughters. We are made co-workers, partakers of His divine nature, and we have what He has, or we will have it.

Prayer: I praise You, God, for Your great love by which You made a way to make me Yours, generously giving to me Your righteousness, Your Holy Spirit, Your love, and Your ministry that reconciles others to You and Your goodness forever. Inspired by Your confidence in me as a partner in Your precious work, I ask that Your passionate, giving love would control me.

Day 25: Christ followers are the temple of the living God

Paul continued his second letter to the Corinthians:

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.””

2 Corinthians 6:1-18 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/2co.6.1-18.ESV>

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

2 Corinthians 7:1 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/2co.7.1.ESV>

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain...”

As Christ ambassadors in His stead (Day 24), we are co-laborers or co-workers with God. To receive God’s grace in vain would be not to acknowledge that we have been made both heirs and workers with Him, as the apostles were. Jesus sent out the twelve with His Spirit (Luke 9:1-9), having trained them as co-workers to make more disciples; sent out the seventy-two with His Spirit to further multiply (Luke 10:1-24); and later put His Spirit in His church (John 14:17) to restore the dominion that God described at the time of His creation of men and women made in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). We have ever been purposed to be God’s family members, one in Spirit with the Lord, co-workers with God. This is God’s agenda; it is His will for us to join Him as His beloved children. To choose to live for ourselves or for the gifts rather than the Giver is to abandon God’s redemption and generosity.

‘...For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation...’

Christ’s finished work at the cross brought in the day of salvation, a new dispensation that continues evermore. The time is always now for God’s full salvation (sōzō, G4982) purchased by the blood of His beloved Son for His beloved family.

“...We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way...”

The ways of God’s kingdom are opposite the ways of worldly kingdoms. Its leaders among men and women are servants of all, as modeled by the Son of the Almighty King. Rather than putting anything in the way, servants remove obstacles that may prevent people from desiring to freely join God’s kingdom. Servants for God need great endurance, for they cannot expect to escape persecution. They can expect to take abuse as Jesus did. Yet, in reliance on Him, they are strengthened by the Spirit of God. This Spirit gives these servants His nature and characteristics, also working with them to accomplish God’s purposes to make things right according to God’s supernatural ways. While the apostles that poured into the church in Corinth had hearts wide open, the church there was limited by its love. They were not loving others as God loves.

“...Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ...”

When it comes to very close relationships including marriage partners and business partnerships, we are not to yoke ourselves with any who are not followers of Jesus Christ. Bound together by a yoke, two oxen worked together to plow a field. Believers are alive in Jesus Christ, children of God, able to be led by the Spirit of God. Unbelievers are dead in their spirits, children of Satan (John 8:44), led by their souls, bodies, or by unclean spirits. Any yoke between a Christ follower and an unbeliever would be unequal, and there is strong potential for the believer to be drawn to unrighteousness and hindered in their service for God. If you are yoked to an unbeliever, headed in the direction they are going, how can you also follow Christ, heading where Christ is going?

In Christ, our souls and bodies are made dwelling places of the living God. We have been made righteous with the righteousness of Christ. We are not to purposely make inroads for darkness to diminish our light. Instead, our souls and bodies are sacred and are to be set apart for holiness and godliness. We as the church were bought at the price of Jesus’ blood for God’s glory.

‘...as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them...”’

Paul cited promises of God from various parts of the Scriptures, including Leviticus and Hosea. The promises of God have all found their yes in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). God not only walked among us in Christ, but He also walks in and through us by way of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Our hands even become as His righteous hands to others. God has made us a people for

Himself, sons and daughters of the Almighty God with a full inheritance. By the Spirit of God, we are empowered to have victory in all things, including personal holiness. God makes us fully His in the process of sanctification in order that we may be blessed more richly as channels of His life and goodness.

Prayer: I praise, You, God, for Your full salvation in Jesus Christ that made us sons and daughters of You, the temple where You live, servants of mankind, co-workers with You, heirs of all of Your promises for Your beloved family. You are good! Blessed be Your Name!

Day 26: The sowing of the cheerful giver

Paul continued his second letter to the church in Corinth:

“Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them... The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”

2 Corinthians 9:1-2, 6-15 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/2co.9.1-15.ESV>

“...whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully...”

Paul talked here about giving financially to the work of God, yet he also referred to more than this. Sowing and reaping are described in a number of places throughout Scripture. The law of sowing and reaping is a law designed by God for the natural and spiritual world. One may sow to meet physical and material needs and expect to reap. One may sow the word of God and expect to reap spiritual results—righteousness and the growth and demonstration of God’s kingdom, bringing rightness. Love that is of God is selfless (1 Corinthians 13:5) and generous, and so the Giver loves a cheerful giver.

What has God given and entrusted to us that we may give? The list is long!

‘...And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work...’

It’s quite clear here the discussion from Paul here was no longer mainly about financial support. Through the Spirit of God, God is able to give us all things. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3) so that we are fully equipped for good works, just as Jesus Christ and His apostles were. Christ has freely given so that we also may freely give in ministry to others as He did (Matthew 10:8, KJV). Sharing in God’s generosity to all, God’s grace abounds and His righteousness is made visible.

“...He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness...”

The Giver of everything has seed to sow for every purpose to make things right in the world, even as Christ started to do in His earthly ministry. If we are faithful to sow that seed, following the example of Christ and the apostles, God will cause a harvest to spring up that meets needs and makes wrong things right. In sowing and in giving, we receive more to give, often but not always of the same kind. (The more we give, the more we get to give. Some have said that the principle of sowing and reaping suggests that whatever it is that you want, that is what you give.) The meeting of needs and the rightness that manifests as a result of ministering on behalf of God brings thanksgiving and glory to God. As Paul said, if we desire more manifestations of the Spirit, we should strive to excel in building up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12). This is the purpose of our generosity and our sowing of all that is needed to bring God's righteousness: to build up God's beloved church.

"...For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God..."

The surpassing grace of God refers to all of God's richness that He has shared with His beloved church in Jesus Christ. In Christ, believers are enabled to share with others just as Christ shared and served them and just as He served others. As His ministry resulted in an overflowing of thanksgiving to God, so can the continued ministry in Christ by the church result in such an overflow. We have been made to give as He gives, partaking in His divine nature. What a gift! This is why Christ taught us to freely give to all who ask (Luke 6:30) and as we see need (Matthew 10:8). It is so much more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)!

Prayer: I praise You, God, for the generosity of Your giving. Your grace is truly amazing. I give myself fully to You. I thank You that I am watered when I water others. I thank You that You have made me a channel of Your life and goodness. Spirit of God, flow through me and through Your church. I give myself fully to those You love.

Day 27: The last of Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church

Selections are made from the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians:

' I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. '

2 Corinthians 10:1-8

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.10.1-8>

'For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. '

2 Corinthians 11:20-28

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.11.20-28>

'The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.'

2 Corinthians 12:12

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.12.12>

'Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!'

2 Corinthians 13:5

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2CO.13.5>

“...For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh...”

Those mature in Christ are led by the Spirit through their spirits. The battle between kingdoms is not a physical one, but it is instead a battle for the hearts and the minds of those subject to the law of sin and death and its lord (2 Timothy 2:26, Romans 8:1-2).

People are always taking in information from the world during the course of their days; it is most everything, if not everything, that we take in (Matthew 7:13). We can even take in information contrary to God's truth and righteousness at church and from other Christians (Mark 7:7-9, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, 12:20). So much of what we take in does not line up with God's nature and God's word; God has made us partakers of His own divine nature, and His word is the divine blueprint for the way things are to be. In opposition to the information we take in that plants seeds of unbelief, it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that presents the truth about God and how we may be set free from condemnation under that law and the effects of sin by taking Christ as our savior and Lord. The true message presents God in truth: compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving of sin, desiring to bring freedom, abundant life, healing, peace, wholeness, belonging and hope. The true message presents born again believers in truth: beloved sons and daughters of God, servants of all of mankind, predestined to be conformed to the image and likeness of God in Jesus Christ. The true message presents our purpose as Christ followers in truth: to do the will and the word of God for the glory of God.

When in faith the truth is recognized and believed, this destroys the lies of the devil and associated unbelief. Victory over Satan's darkness and blinding begins with right thinking and right belief, bringing one into the light. Satan, who is powerless without human cooperation, accomplishes his purposes through unbelief, theft, slander, lies, and accusation. Satan's lies may suggest that God is not good, that He has held back good from them or done them wrong, that they have a record of debt that is beyond help or forgiveness, that following God would take away their fun or pleasures in life, or that truth cannot be known. Even in believers, Satan, the thief, tries to secure a position in our lives that he does not have (in the born again) through wrong thinking and belief, starting with a toehold, then moving to a foothold, and, finally, developing a stronghold. Whatever we come to believe most strongly is a stronghold, whether it is connected to faith in God or in opposition to it.

After we are made alive in Christ, the victory is won when one is made into the image of Christ through the process of sanctification. In sanctification, we cooperate with the Spirit of God to be refined by way of the renewing of our minds (Ephesians 4:22-23, Hebrews 12:1-2). Abiding in Christ, we give all of ourselves to God, meanwhile learning to take every thought captive to obey Christ until we grow up in every way into Christ, maturing to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13,15).

To fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12) is to persuade people about Christ, as the Apostle Paul did, delivering them from the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13). In this, he was always made to triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14), disarming principalities and powers and making a public spectacle of them (Colossians 2:15).

“...For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed...The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”

The authority Paul and the other disciples were given in Christ (Luke 9:1-43,57-62, Luke 10:1-24, Matthew 28:18-20) was for the building up of the churches, including the Corinthian church. As disciples of Christ, God's Spirit is also ours (Acts 2:39), and so our commission is to speak the truth of the gospel and the kingdom of God, expecting that the Spirit of God will cooperate with us to confirm God's message. Stirred up by faith, God's Spirit does this through signs, wonders and mighty works (Mark 16:15-20, Acts 4:29-33). If we desire to see more of the working of God's Spirit, we should strive to excel in building up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

“...Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death...”

Paul was a great example of one who strove to excel in building up the church, even in the face of suffering. The perfection of the love of God for the church was firmly rooted in Him. Paul had been infused by this selfless love. He had absorbed the Lord's compassion and been baptized in His emotions until his heartbeat was in obedience with God's plan to love. In obedience to Christ, Paul's was love for even enemies (Matthew 5:43-44), a love that turned its cheek (Matthew 5:39), a love that did not take offense (Matthew 5:9), a love that bore all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). As Christ commanded, Paul rejoiced and was glad in the persecution he experienced for his obedience (Matthew 5:11-12). He experienced resistance from Satan and counted it as joy. As of the time of its writing in the midst of Paul's third missionary journey, Paul had been beaten countless times, three times with rods and five times having received 39 lashes, leaving him often near death. Once he was stoned (Day 7). He was often hungry and had been imprisoned. Three times he was shipwrecked! He was often in discomfort and in danger. Meanwhile, this apostle experienced the burden of the responsibility he took on for all of the churches he had started. An active agent of God's grace and compassion, Paul was driven by love and energized by the Holy Spirit. He was grateful to have been chosen by God as a partner in His mission to the world. He was determined to continue the ministry on earth that Jesus had begun; this loving service was his agenda and his consuming passion.

“...Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

Paul encouraged the church to examine their faith, whether Jesus Christ was living in them. Although Paul did not mention what this test was, I submit that it is about whether the love of God is in them and growing. This is the main fruit born by a good tree rooted in Christ, even as Paul described (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Prayer: Thank You, God, for making me an agent of Your grace and compassion in Jesus Christ. God, I thank You for Your message of truth with the divine power to demolish strongholds. With Your help, Spirit of God, I take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. You have made me bold and determined. Thank You for working with me to build up Your

church. Perfect Your love in me, Spirit of God. Thank You for the energy and endurance I need to do Your work.

Day 28: Salvation and righteousness through faith

During his third missionary journey, the Apostle Paul wrote to the church that had been established at Rome by some other believer:

'Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.'

Romans 1:1-32

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.1.1-32>

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...”

Paul found his identity as a bondservant and an apostle through Jesus Christ. He saw it as the responsibility of all followers of Christ, God’s beloved, the saints, that they would make disciples of all nations, bringing about obedience of faith. This obedience is empowered by the Spirit of holiness that empowered Jesus Christ and raised Him from the dead. Paul was obedient to Christ’s commission to all disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). To his hearers, Paul blessed them with grace and peace from God.

“...First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world...”

The church established at Rome had already reached a certain level of maturity, and, as a fellow worker of God, Paul wanted to be part of God’s work there— the work of sowing, watering and reaping— to grow up and strengthen the church into the fullness of the image of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:6-9, Ephesians 4:13). Faith, the love of God, and obedience to do the word of God are the measure of maturity. Paul treated the church as his family, for he had taken responsibility for the family of God, as a father for a child, and He loved them with God’s giving type of love. Paul showed the maturity of one who was led by the Spirit out of his spirit (Romans 8:14). He often drank from this Spirit, being infused by God’s love and compassion. He was looking to give this growing body something they didn’t yet have— some spiritual gift to strengthen them. Paul described nine spiritual gifts to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:7-11): gifts of revelation, power, and inspiration from God. We also know that Paul experienced the transfer of the Spirit of God through him to others by the laying on of his hands (Acts 19:6, 2 Timothy 1:6). This same Spirit directed Paul on his travels to build up the churches; here Paul claimed to have been so far prevented from coming to the Roman church by the Spirit. Paul spoke to God about his ideas, concepts, and plans, then attuned his spirit to God’s Spirit and Word in order to line up His agenda and will with God’s guidance, agenda, and will. After aligning his plans with God’s plans, he acted on the fulfillment of God’s will. Yielded fully to God, God dwelled in Paul, walked in him, spoke through him, loved through him, and built up the church through him.

“...I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians [non-Greeks], both to the wise and to the foolish...”

Taking responsibility for others is a measure of maturity in faith. For example, the prophet Daniel took responsibility for the exiled nation of Judah in Babylon (Daniel 9:1-19). Jesus Christ took responsibility for everyone he encountered who came to Him to experience the work and the Word of God (Matthew 15:30-32, Luke 4:40-44). Paul had taken responsibility for all that he encountered and the churches that were built up under his leadership. Like Jesus, he was eager to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God to all. He recognized the gospel as the power of God for a full salvation (sōzō), meeting the spiritual and physical needs of any who would hear

and decide to follow Christ. God's salvation in Christ has the power to make believers whole, spirit, soul and body.

'...For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith [or beginning and ending in faith], as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." [or the one who by faith is righteous shall live]...'

The KJV version translates the phrase "from faith for faith" as "from faith to faith." In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed that leads to victory for sinners and to freedom for all that are held captive. When we are saved through faith by way of identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this makes us as righteous as Christ is righteous. Legally, we are made sinless as He is, having been hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:13-15, 3:3). Yet, this saving faith through which we are born spiritually (our spirit made alive and in union with God through Christ) and made new creations (as babes made able to grow into the fullness of the image of Christ) is just the beginning of our journey. Having the righteousness of Christ means we are enabled through the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ to lead a lifestyle that produces victory in every situation, including but not limited to victory over sin. It is through ever increasing faith that we are enabled by the Spirit of God to grow up (from infancy in faith) into the image of Christ (and the faith of the Son of God, Galatians 2:20). In our journey of faith in Christ, we start in new life (zōē) and move on to be filled up to overflowing with the life of God (2 Corinthians 9:6-12). This is the abundant life Jesus promised (John 10:10). It is man being made right with God in union with Him.

"...For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth..."

The Roman church was growing in a difficult, especially worldly environment. Paul called it ungodly and unrighteous. Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul had written that the god of this world had blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus taught that people loved darkness rather than light because their works were evil; everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not want to come into the light, lest his works be exposed (John 3:19-20). Similarly, Paul wrote here that by their unrighteousness, men suppress the truth. Paul argued that the power and divine nature of God are shown to them through the work of creation, and this should cause them to seek God as He has revealed Himself. This argument makes sense, as men and women naturally seek a god to worship and will always end up worshiping something or someone. All must choose what they will put their faith in. God has built this into the human soul. Therefore, those that suppress the truth in order to continue to pursue their own ways, interests, and wants are without excuse.

"...For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened..."

Jesus said that those who would worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:4). Unless one is born again through submitting to Christ's Lordship and identifying themselves with His finished work, their spirits are dead (John 3:3-6, 14-16, 20-21), so they cannot worship Him in spirit. Any that reject the revealed Word of God do not know God in truth, so they cannot

worship Him in truth. Mankind has forever created God in some image other than the One God revealed Himself to be in the fullness of Jesus Christ. We tend to give the god we fashion for ourselves the attributes we want Him to have and disbelieve the parts of God that we do not like or the ones that would cause us to need to change our lives or what we want. The Pharisees and Sadducees created a god of their traditions that did not resemble God. During Jesus' ministry, the Apostle Peter and some of the disciples had fashioned for themselves some Messiah who would immediately deliver Israel from captivity. On one recorded occasion, when Jesus told the disciples that he must suffer and die, Peter foolishly took Jesus aside and rebuked Him because this didn't conform to Peter's image of the Messiah. In response, Jesus rebuked Peter, telling him, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Matthew 16:21-23) Peter had made God into some image of what he wanted him to be, and all of mankind tends to do the same.

"...Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity..."

Any who do not receive God's mercy in redemption through Jesus Christ on God's terms still belong to the god of this world. They worship something or someone created instead of God. They may even worship a Jesus they have created in their minds. They are still under the law of sin and death and its condemnation (Romans 8:1-2). Instead of exhibiting all of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24) because they belong to God, they will tend to exhibit all of the opposites of these things because they belong to the devil. As Jesus said, a tree is known by its fruit (Luke 6:43-45). In place of the love of God, there is lust, malice, and hate for God. In place of joy and peace, there is strife and envy. Instead of speaking the truth in love, there is gossip, slander, deceit and boasting.

Prayer: I praise You, Almighty God, for Your magnificent creation that clearly shows me Your eternal power and divine nature. Thank You, gracious God, for making a way of salvation for me through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Thank You for making me righteous and for leading me in my walk of faith by way of Your Holy Spirit that lives in me, strengthens me, and causes me to bear fruit. Thank You for the grace and peace that You have brought me. I pray for opportunities to boldly share Your grace and to see others come to faith for the sake of Your name. Be glorified, God.

Day 29: The faith of Abraham

Paul's first major theme of Romans is righteousness through faith. He continued to discuss this theme in the following excerpt from Romans 4:

'For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." ...For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.'

Romans 4:3,13-25

<https://my.bible.com/bible/114/ROM.4.3.13-25>

"...And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb..."

Abram grew in faith during the time he knew God. At the time God promised Abram that he would become the father of many nations, he believed God at His word, not wavering, and gave him glory. He believed God despite the seeming impossibility and took on a new name, Abraham, the father of many nations, although it would be years until he saw a son and he would never see, while on earth, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. Surely this new name, given its meaning, was a source of ridicule for him among his peers, just as Noah was certainly ridiculed for building an ark in obedience to God's word to him.

"...Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness ...Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us..."

Faith is the essential principle of the kingdom of God! Through lack of trust in God and His word, mankind entered into sin and death under the authority of the god of this world. By trusting in Jesus Christ, men and women enter into a covenant relationship with God, being made as righteous.

Faith is the gateway of salvation, and it is also the gateway of prayer. Jesus taught believing prayer to His disciples (Mark 11:22-24), instructing them about the kind of faith God has that speaks and expects what He has spoken to be done. One of Paul's contemporaries, the Apostle

James, taught this kind of steadfast faith in prayer to young believers in the church (James 1:6-8, 5:13-18), saying that we should fervently ask and believe without doubting as Elijah did. Paul taught that when we are made righteous, we have every promise of God that is for the righteous; the promises are all Yes and Amen in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20-21)!

When considering these passages, it improves our understanding to note that the Greek word for ask, *aitéō*, also means to demand, and the Greek word for receive, *lambanō*, also means to take. In faith, when we have asked (*aitéō*) for something that we believe to be according to God's will, we should count it as done and give thanks to God (John 11:41-44, John 14:13-15, John 15:7,16). Jesus didn't ask for things He knew to be God's will; He spoke them into being, believed they were done, and they were done. Paul and Peter followed this example.

“...God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did...”

Paul wrote here about the faith of God, who quickens the dead and speaks things into existence—believing in the efficacy of His command without hesitation. Paul encouraged Roman believers toward this type of faith, even as he did the Corinthian church: ‘Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak... so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God’ (2 Corinthians 4:13,15). He also encouraged the Galatian church toward receiving and acting on this kind of faith: “... the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God...” (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

In Christ, we have all things that pertain to life and godliness, including God's kind of faith, and, through His righteousness imputed to us, we have the great promises of God, making us partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4)! This faith that receives (*lambanō*, G2983) what God has already made to be ours makes us effective and fruitful in Christ (2 Peter 1:8). The Almighty God is outside of time, and so in Christ, we are now as we will be in Him (Ephesians 2:6, 1 John 4:17). To God, there is no difference if what He commands is instantly accomplished or ultimately accomplished; His Word is settled (Psalm 119:89-91,KJV). We are to believe God and His word, rooted in and built up in Christ to be made into His image in fullness (Ephesians 4:13-15,23-24, Colossians 2:6-10).

Prayer: I praise You for Your plan of redemption to make me righteous through faith according to Your promise to Abraham. I am fully convinced Your Word is true and You are good. Thank You in Christ for rooting me and building me up from faith to faith. I pray for ever increasing faith so that I may bring more glory and thanksgiving to You.

Day 30: Life in the Spirit

After Paul described the troubles of life in the flesh in Romans 7, he described life in the Spirit next:

'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus

is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

Romans 8:1-39

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.8.1-39>

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death...”

In Chapter 7, Paul described life under the law of sin and death, where one is led by the god of the world, living according to one’s flesh and soul (i.e., one’s natural thoughts and feelings). Without Christ, we were under the condemnation of the accuser, who rightfully may claim that none are righteous. When God saves us, he makes us righteous in the court of heaven (Colossians 2:13-15), and we are set free from the law of sin and death, as well as from our bodies of death (Romans 7:24). Translated from the power of darkness to the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13), we now live according to the law of the Spirit of life (zōē). Claiming the promise of God, nothing is the same. Taking hold of the full salvation offered to us in Christ, our spirits are made eternally alive in Christ, and our souls and bodies are no longer subject to the things to which original sin had bound us. Instead, we are capable of being made fully alive in Christ, quickened to overflowing by the Holy Spirit. In Christ, we have become the righteousness of God, so we have victory over sin, sickness and death. He makes everything right.

“...For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do...”

Set free from sin, we are made sinless in Christ, and we are no longer bound to sin as slaves to our own flesh and desires. With the indwelling Spirit of Christ, we can walk as sons and daughters (heirs) of God led by the Spirit of God.

“...For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit...”

Without Christ, one lives directed by their flesh, or soulishly; living this way, one cannot please God. In Christ, we are empowered to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to have our minds renewed (Romans 12:1-2) and to live directed by our spirits, connected directly to God by the Spirit. Hidden in Christ, we can choose to think on things that are above, where we are seated *in Christ* at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1-3, Ephesians 2:6, 1 John 4:17). We are empowered to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Our thought life is very important, as dwelling on thoughts forms more thoughts. Our thought life affects what we want, what we say, what we choose to do, and, ultimately, our character. This is why Jesus elevated the teachings of the Ten Commandments in His Sermon on the Mount, teaching, for example, that one should not even look at a member of the opposite sex

with lustful intent; this is to have already committed adultery with them in the heart (Matthew 5:27-30). Jesus also changed right thinking regarding retaliation, treatment of enemies (Matthew 5:38-48), anxiety (Matthew 6:25-34), and many other things.

In Christ, we are given life and peace, and we are empowered and expected to form godly character attributes. Principally, we should be known through having the love of God within us (John 15:12). Our character affects what we choose to say and do, and those with godly character will do God's word and God's will.

“...You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him...”

When we are made new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), born again of the Spirit (John 3:3-8), we are connected to God in Christ (John 15:1-8), and His Spirit dwells within us. In Christ, we are made eternal, infused with resurrection life (zōē), and made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21), or in right standing before God, as if we were sinless. In Christ, the veil has been torn (Matthew 27:51), and so we become a heavenly place, a temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17), united to the Holy of Holies. We should let our old self die, for there is no life (zōē) in it, just bondage and death.

“...If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you...”

The Spirit of God is fundamentally life (zōē). This is the Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. It is the Spirit that anointed and empowered Jesus' ministry (Acts 10:38), healing and raising the dead. In Christ, that Spirit of Life dwells in us! When welcomed to do so, the Spirit quickens our mortal bodies, bringing life where it is needed. This life is able to make us healthy and provide strength to our souls (mind, emotions, will) and our bodies. The Spirit of Jesus is our healer and our fountain of life. In Christ, this life can also be made to overflow from us as channels of God's rivers of living water (John 7:38-39). This is God's chosen way of bringing His life to the world (Mark 16:17-20), multiplying His grace and peace (2 Peter 1:2-8).

“...So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh...”

Having been adopted into God's own family, we are debtors not to the flesh but to Christ Jesus, who redeemed us at the cost of His suffering and death—with the blood of God's own (Acts 20:28)! We should live as those redeemed from death and given abundant life (zōē), not seeking to return to bondage and death!

Do we understand the life that was given to us and where it leads? Do we understand that every good thing is in Christ Jesus (James 1:17)? Satan only steals, kills and destroys (John 10:10); why would we make choices that lead back to slavery and destruction?

Empowered by the Spirit of God, we should always choose life and to put on (to bind to ourselves) Christ; we should cooperate with the Spirit of God in the slaying and putting off of (being loosed from) our old self that brings only bondage and death. Choosing to be led by

God's Spirit that resides in us, we are children of God—heirs! (At the time of this writing, it was only the sons who were heirs.) In Christ, we have what God has. We are the royalty of God.

“...For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”...”

Having been adopted by God as children and heirs in Christ, God has been made our Father in intimate relationship such that we can call him Abba and we sense in our spirit that He is such. The Holy, Almighty God has become our Father! Jesus used this term for Him when teaching His disciples how to pray the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9). He also used it in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). We are identified *fully* with Jesus Christ as He is now, glorified. We have received the Spirit of God to live in us as Jesus did when the Spirit descended from heaven on Him like a dove and remained on Him. At that moment, Abba said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17, John 1:32).

“...For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us...”

Paul spoke here both of what we have at present and what we would have in the future. In Christ, we have already been set free from bondage to corruption and obtained the freedom of the glory of the children of God. This liberty is for the taking (Iambanō, G2983). We are set free from fear and every evil that beset us from the devil. We can speak words that loose us (luō, G3089) and stand firm (histēmi, G2476) on Christ's finished work (Matthew 16:19, Luke 13:12, Ephesians 6:13). In Christ, we have been given the firstfruits of the Spirit of God, as an earnest of our inheritance. We have been made partakers of the divine nature, enabled to be like Him in many ways. In Christ, we have inherited all the promises here that are for the righteous (2 Peter 1:3-8). In the future, the fullness of God's plan for His children will be revealed. We are God's glory, and we will live as sons, or heirs, of God with redeemed bodies.

“...Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience...”

Both faith and hope are associated with what we do not see and what has not yet manifested. In Christ, it may be ours in the spiritual world—we are members of His body, connected by God's Spirit, able to have what He has made available—according to what Christ has accomplished for us and what we have chosen to receive in faith, but it is not yet made physical. In faith and in hope, we wait for the promise of God with patience.

Next, Paul moved to describe some of the work of the Spirit of God within our spirit, connecting us to God's Spirit. This Spirit knows God's mind and will; likewise, the Spirit knows our mind and heart. When we lack relevant knowledge or wisdom from God, the Spirit of God may intercede for us in tongues through the spirit according to God's will.

“...And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose...”

This verse is commonly misunderstood. This promise is for those who love God in covenant relationship on His terms (John 15:1-14). For those who love God, all things work together for

good, just as God's purpose in Christ has been to do good (Acts 10:38, Ephesians 2:10). This pertains to us aligning ourselves with God's purposes, ideas, concepts, plans, goals, objectives, agenda, dreams, mission, kingdom and will—not our own.

“...For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers...”

This is God's will for every believer! We should not wonder what His will is for us. The Spirit of God spoke through Paul here to tell us. We are to be conformed now to the image of Jesus Christ in every way possible by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, our Helper. We are not to remain as born again infants in Christ. Instead, already members of His body and connected to God's Spirit, we are to put on Jesus Christ, “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3), until we grow up into Him in fullness (Ephesians 4:13,15,24, Colossians 1:19,2:9-10,19), made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). God's purpose in Christ is to make a family in which He glories, a family composed of children of God that are righteous, full of life and tenderhearted love, and beautiful like Jesus Christ.

“...What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...”

Paul paused to rejoice in the astoundingly good news of life in the Spirit. The Almighty God is for us, having given His dear and perfect Son as a sacrifice out of His love for us, and we are identified with Him in all things. And so God has given us all things in Christ, who is interceding for us at God's right hand. Satan has no ground to stand on when making accusations against us because we are hidden in Christ. Jesus Christ has shown the depth of the love of God, and this love for the world can be made fully ours in Christ.

“...Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...”

Believers in Paul's day, Paul included, suffered significantly in their obedience to follow Christ and walk in His steps. The perception of human worth was not much in these days, and the lives of those who were baptized in Christ were counted as less. They were regarded as sheep to be slaughtered by some unbelievers that persecuted them.

Yet, in having the love of God in Christ Jesus, we as believers have all things. The finished work of Christ makes way for victory after victory over evil and anything having to do with evil, and it opens wide the channel of life and blessing from God. In fighting the good fight of faith, we are more than conquerors because we need not even fight; we need only to enforce Christ's victory. The battle has already been won. Christ always causes us to triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14). He has disarmed principalities and powers; He has made a show of them openly, triumphing over them, and we can always give thanks to Christ for this (Colossians 2:14-15).

Prayer: I praise You, Father God, for Your design for me of life in the Spirit, conforming me to the image of Jesus. Thank You for this earnest of my inheritance in Christ. In You, there is abundant life and continual victory. Thank You for making me a child of God and an heir. Spirit of God, I submit myself fully to Your leading, I assimilate Your love, and I align my plans and my agenda with Yours.

Day 31: Proclaiming salvation through confession in faith

In his letter to the Romans, Paul goes on to describe salvation:

'But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.'

Romans 10:6-17

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.10.6-17>

'...The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)...

The word of God is proclaimed by disciples of Christ and planted in minds and hearts. The heart is the interface of the mind and the spirit. When in faith it is believed and acted upon by confessing out loud that Jesus is Lord, with the intention to make Him Lord, it results in salvation (sōzō). It brings to the believer the benefits of salvation (sōzō) that are understood, professed, and trusted. It is commonly understood that God's salvation includes justification for sins when a believer takes God at His word that they are forgiven. Salvation also includes righteousness before God, conferring the promises of God meant for the righteous children of God (2 Corinthians 1:20). We are able to receive the Holy Spirit and the Christlikeness the Spirit brings. The implanted word as an imperishable seed also means that our spirit is made alive and eternal, born again from the Spirit when we identify ourselves with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our spirits are made one with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17). Yet, God's salvation is not only for our spirits. It is complete; it is for spirit, soul and body. We should receive and take God at His word for all that His full salvation confers. We begin as spiritual infants; Christ is an eternal foundation on which to build. As children and heirs of God, we are predestined to be formed into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). We are also to proclaim this word of faith to others; as we water others, we are watered to grow up (Proverbs 11:25). What we sow, we reap (2 Corinthians 9:6,10).

'...For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."...

God is no respecter of persons, for all are created in His image and likeness. The church at Antioch, Paul's home base, recognized this well. God's will is to bestow His riches made available through Christ's salvation (sōzō) on any who call on Him. Paul later wrote that the Father "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3) and "seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). This is done for those who are saved. The riches are unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8). Every believer is made into a heavenly place, each one connected directly to God, a temple of God, a dwelling place of God. Connected to God, His riches may flow into us and through us. We are each a divine channel. Through His riches, He shall supply every need of those who are in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

'...How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?...'

As the church in Antioch sent Paul and other apostles to the world to preach the gospel, so must other believers be sent. The word of God is sown through hearing. One cannot believe without having heard. God has entrusted believers in Christ as His ambassadors. We are to go in His place. He has entrusted us as the church to continue Christ's own ministry of preaching, teaching and demonstration of the kingdom of God. This is not for some but for all believers. Without it, one cannot mature appropriately in the faith according to God's design. Even so, some must be sent out to those who have not heard the gospel. This is a high priority, for Jesus said that "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Have we made it a high priority for this gospel of the kingdom to be proclaimed as a testimony to all nations? God wants people to know Him, His name, and what He has done.

God sees the feet of the ones who bring His good news of salvation as beautiful (Isaiah 52:6-7). They are the peacemakers who shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9). They are fully obedient to do God's word. They are able to put on the whole armor of God because they are willing to go in Jesus' place (Ephesians 6:15). As the church, we are *all* meant to go, and we are all meant to send or be sent out.

'...But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.'

We have been commanded by Christ to make *disciples* (of all nations), not to make spiritual infants that fail to grow up (Matthew 28:19-20). As Christ's body, we are to work together to teach new Christ followers to obey the gospel, just as we are to obey all of it. The family of God is comprised of the doers of God's word, according to Jesus (Luke 8:21). We are not only to hear it, but we are also to do it, or we are not part of His family. Hearing the word of Christ can result in faith, and faith is the gateway not only to salvation but to answered prayer and to all blessing and riches from God in Christ.

Prayer: I praise You, Lord Jesus, for my salvation that You paid for. You quicken me, spirit, soul and body. I praise You, God, for Your Word that has brought me abundant life. I trust You and

take You at Your word. I will profess my faith in Your gospel. I will do Your word. I will declare Your gospel of the kingdom and expect in faith for You to demonstrate it. I will bring Your peace (shalom) to others out of Your great love for them. Obedient to your call, I will go myself to those nations that have not heard or I will make it a priority to enable others to go. Thank You, Spirit of God, for growing me into the image of Jesus; I will also make disciples of Christ where you send me.

Day 32: The higher Christian life

In the remainder of Paul's letter to the Romans, he continued to describe the higher Christian life, a life led by the Spirit of God:

'For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.'

Romans 11:32-36

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.11.32-36>

' I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'

Romans 12:1-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.12.1-21>

"For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! ..."

God's legal system decreed that Satan, the Father of lies, would become the ruler of this world at the fall of Adam and Eve. At this moment, the God of mercy and all wisdom had already envisioned how their offspring would legally be translated back to His kingdom and His family (Genesis 3:15,19; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26). God's purpose at creation would be restored despite mankind's betrayal and loss of faith in His goodness.

“...For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?...”

As he did in his discussion of God’s wisdom in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to the quoted passage in Isaiah 40:13:

“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.’

1 Corinthians 2:16

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1CO.2.16>

God’s mind is a mind of all wisdom and knowledge. This mind God has shared with us in Christ. We may put off our own minds to take on Christ’s mind as part of His own body.

“...I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship...”

Here Paul revealed God’s way to grow us, as members of Christ’s body, up into the fullness of Christ, our High Priest (Hebrews 14:14), as priests unto our God (Revelation 1:6). In Christ, we must voluntarily sanctify and consecrate ourselves as God’s anointed, even as His priests did (Exodus 30:29-30), cooperating with God’s Spirit to be transformed from infants in the new creation to mature, Christlike adults. Unlike the temple of the old covenant, in Christ our bodies instead have become God’s temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), like unto the outer courts. Our souls are like unto the Holy Place. Our spirits are like unto the Holy of Holies, joined directly to God (1 Corinthians 6:17). The worship God requires is that we present all of ourselves to Him, even our bodies; we are to hold nothing back. This is consecration. The transformation about which Paul wrote requires the continual action of our mind and our will, choosing to put off (having been loosed from) the old, shackled, oppressed, dead self in order to cooperate with God’s Spirit to put on (to bind) the new creation in its fullness. It’s an action of the heart that takes what is ours in Christ from our spirit made alive in Jesus Christ, recognizing that freedom, life, and all blessings (everything good) come from God. We reject lies and the Father of Lies, the Tempter, the Ruler of this World, to instead welcome truth and the Author of Life. We believe God’s word. We choose to think rightly and act on what is right and true. We cooperate to be transformed into the image of Christ, as God has predestined that we would be (Romans 8:29). We acknowledge that we have the mind of Christ and all of that mind, and we act on it. This is sanctification. This process transforms us, as if removing the dross to produce pure gold (1 Peter 1:7). When we have the mind of Christ, we understand God’s good will and strive to do all of His will. We do good, as Jesus was anointed to do good in His ministry (Acts 10:38). Growing up into Christ, we grow into the perfection of God’s image (Ephesians 4:13, Colossians 1:9-10, Hebrews 1:3).

“...For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned...”

To function as the body of Christ, it is important to have humility as Christ demonstrated, remembering that God is not a respecter of persons, but instead that He designed those in Christ to be of high and equal value. The parts of the body are to function together as one body. God desires a spirit of unity to pervade.

“...Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...”

Paul encouraged the believers to faithfully and joyfully use their God-given abilities and the gifts given them by God’s main gift to Christ followers, the indwelling Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), for the building up of the church, motivated by God’s agape love. For those that generously use their gifts and abilities to build up God’s church, the Spirit may add to what they are able to give (1 Corinthians 14:12).

“...Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good...”

The compassion that moved Jesus Christ to action in the world was twofold; He deeply hated the evil that bound and afflicted, and He loved people deeply enough to do something about their bondage, affliction and need. His work of love was to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8), setting at liberty the oppressed (Luke 4:18). This compassion came with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He commissioned His followers to carry on this work in His place once they had received the anointing of the same Spirit (Mark 16:15-18, John 14:12), knowing it would be more impactful if we could each be moved with compassion as the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ are. Obedient to Christ, we are to persevere, holding fast to good, expecting Him to lead in triumphal procession that brings glory to God (2 Corinthians 2:14). And so we do unto others as we would have done unto us, seeking their good, fervently and zealously serving the Lord.

“...Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer...”

Abiding in the Vine and cooperating with the Spirit in the renewing of our minds causes us to be changed into God’s image and likeness, bearing the fruits of joy, patience, steadfastness, passion, generosity, hospitality, love for enemies, compassion, tenderness, mercy, peace, the spirit of unity, humility, longsuffering, and grace. We become like the Spirit-filled Jesus in whom we abide, overflowing with life (zōē) as He is. Cooperating with God, we shine as lights on a hill, burning brightly (Matthew 5:13-16). For more on these characteristics, see my book [*Identity in Christ: 33 Characteristics of His Church*](#).

“...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Rather than choosing to be led by the Spirit, as new creations of the Spirit that still have our own will, we are able to choose to act according to our old, fleshly, soulish nature. Temptations will continue to come during this life, which is a test. In all things, we can choose to be formed into the image of Christ or to regress.

The righteous Christ also had His own will, yet He was always victorious over sin, evil and its effects. Having Christ in us, we are always capable of overcoming evil with good. We have the

mind of Christ! Let us choose to operate according to that blessed mind. Let us be bold, compassionate and determined as He was during His ministry on earth. It is God's will that we should continue the ministry of Jesus Christ, overcoming evil with good.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. So be it.

- Based on Matthew 6:9-13

Day 33: The law of love and the kingdom of God

Paul's final chapters to the Roman church address the law of love and the kingdom of God: 'Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. ...But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.'

Romans 13:8-10,14

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.13.8-10,14>

'One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.'

Romans 14:5,10-11,13,15,17,19,23

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.14.5,10-11,13,15,17,19,23>

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another... For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.'

Romans 15:13-14,18-29

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.15.13-14,18-29>

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law...”

In Christ, God has elevated the law of “thou shalt not” to that of the love of God for others, and He has given us the Holy Spirit that sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

“...But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires...”

In order to exhibit the love of God toward others and the other beautiful characteristics of Jesus Christ, we must choose to put off the self and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This work of sanctification is a conscious effort in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. It is expected of us by God that we do not choose death and bondage again but choose the newness of life (zōē) and freedom made ours at the new creation. In Christ, we have every promise of God’s word for the righteous, as we have been made righteous as He. Abiding in Christ, we bear fruit, the very characteristics of the nature of God. God expects we will come to have at our core His very love. This love replaces the lust of the flesh that was part of the old self.

“...One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind...”

With the love of God at our core, we will cease from passing judgment on others, seeking instead their good. It is God’s place to judge, not ours, and God is filled with good will toward all men and women, desiring that all should come to repentance, so we should look at all others in consideration of what redemption has made possible for them. God also loves the unity of His family and desires that we put on a spirit of unity, which is part of His godly nature. We must understand that the body of Christ is made of the immature and the more mature within the new creation. As such, we can expect there to be differences of thought and belief, and we should embrace them as we do the differences among family members. Let us lift up Jesus Christ together! Each of us has been given our own mind, and we should use it to become fully convinced about what we believe, what we think we should do, and follow through on doing it. The different members of the body have different functions, but let us be united in our purpose to lift up Christ together. We should also seek to put on the mind of Christ and to grow up fully into His image. We should especially consider how tenderly He treated others, knowing what it looks like to be like Him.

“...For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...”

The kingdom of God has united mankind and God in Jesus Christ by way of the Holy Spirit, who now continually dwells in those identified with Christ. When the Spirit of Christ takes up residence in a life, the Spirit brings the characteristics of God’s nature into their spirit: life (zōē), righteousness, peace, joy, the love of God, a spirit of unity, the power of God. From their place in our spirit, we must cooperate with the Spirit to put them on. The Spirit is stirred up by our trust and faith in Him, His good nature, and His Word. The Spirit is stirred up by action based on faith

and also by the unity of the church. In fact, whatever does not proceed from faith is sin, for faith is the essential principle of the kingdom of God. Through lack of trust in God and His word, mankind entered into sin and death under the authority of the god of this world. By trusting in Jesus Christ, men and women enter into a covenant relationship with God, being made as righteous. From faith to faith, we are transformed from glory to glory into God's image and likeness. Let us cooperate with the Spirit of God rather than work against the Spirit.

"...May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope..."

In Christ, the Spirit of God also puts into our spirits the hope, goodness and knowledge that comes from God's nature. Putting on that which God has freely given, we may abound in hope, goodness and knowledge. Filled with God's goodness, we do good. Filled with God's knowledge, we teach others and share hope.

"...For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ..."

Having received the Spirit of God as a Helper to continue Christ's ministry (John 14:12-16), His power is with us to confirm His word as we preach and teach it (Mark 16:20, Acts 4:29-33). In this ministry of reconciliation, we cooperate with the Spirit of God to minister in word and deed. By deed, the Apostle Paul certainly refers to deeds that include the power of the Spirit's signs and wonders. They include demonstrations of the kingdom of God by the power the Spirit: Paul's healing of others (Day 6 and Day 14), casting out spirits (Day 9 and Day 14), being raised up after being stoned to death (Day 7), making a man temporarily blind (Day 5), being set free from prison (Day 9), and conferring the Holy Spirit to others accompanied by tongues and prophesying (Day 14). Paul knew how to use his gifts for the benefit of others, meanwhile pointing them toward Christ, in order to make disciples. He brought the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed over the expanse of his whole ministry from Jerusalem to Illyricum, which was a Roman province above Macedonia (the province of Philippi and Thessalonica), across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. Anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, Paul fulfilled his ministry in both word and deed, walking in Jesus' steps to do good and heal many who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

'...and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." ...'

In the passage quoted by Paul, the prophet Isaiah foretold that the news of Jesus' atonement for them would startle the nations when this message was brought to them. Jesus told His followers to fulfill Scripture: to make disciples of those in the nations that had not yet heard the message (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). The Spirit directed Paul to do just that, leading him in where he was to go next, thereby hindering him from coming to Rome where the church was already being built by another. Paul recognized that the Spirit was leading him into areas of the

unreached, where Christ had not yet been lifted up as the Messiah—the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6).

Reaching the unreached is God's priority. Is this also the modern day church's priority? Is it yours?

“...But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while...”

Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church while on his second missionary journey, which ended at Jerusalem, where he had intended to bring aid to the church. He had already passed through Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea (all in Macedonia), and Corinth (in Achaia), where the believers made contributions to go to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. It was Paul's opinion that the Gentiles owed the poor Jews financial support on account of the fact that God had grafted them into the family of God, which started with the Jews, and their associated spiritual blessings. Paul's plan was to visit the Roman church on his way to Spain, but it seems that Paul may not have made it to Spain.

Prayer: God, thank You for uniting me with You in Christ, making me an heir of Your kingdom with all the benefits thereof. Thank You for the indwelling Spirit that is an earnest of this inheritance. Spirit of God, I choose to step out in faith today and to cooperate with You to put on what has been made mine in Christ. I put on Your love, the faith of the Son of God, Your goodness, Your knowledge, and Your hope. I thank You that I can count on You to confirm Your Word and to lead me as I seek to do all of Your will. May my life, my words, and my deeds bring glory to You.

Day 34: Paul visits Asia on his third missionary journey

The book of Acts records events that followed in Paul's third missionary journey:

'but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days. On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted. But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.'

Acts 20:6-28,32-38

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.20.6-28,32-38>

“...but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days...”

It took 5 days for Paul and company to cross the Aegean Sea, transiting from Macedonia to Troas, Asia, which is on the western side of modern day Turkey. Paul met with and broke bread with believers in a well lit, upper room there. He went on a monologue until midnight, and some poor young soul perched in a window fell into a deep sleep as Paul droned on. The young man, Eutychus, fell to his death! Yet, Paul knew what he had within him: the same Spirit that raised Christ Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11). Paul also had the faith of the Son of God to stimulate the Spirit into action to do what was good and right. Paul bent over him and took the man in his arms, life (zōē) from Paul flowing into the dead body of Eutychus as Paul decidedly pushed it in. He knew what God was doing, so he comforted the believers and spoke life, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.” And so resurrection life returned to Eutychus. Paul rested in God’s work, returning to break bread with the believers and continue talking with them all night. This was the way of fellowship in church meetings. The believers were greatly comforted at God’s resurrection of their companion, and the word about it spread.

“...But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there...”

Luke the physician, the author of Acts, was narrating here, having separated from Paul for a time.

“...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Paul recounted to the Ephesian elders his time with them. Paul had invested time telling them anything he thought would be profitable to them regarding growth in the Christian faith. He had preached the message of salvation, teaching the Christian faith openly in public, typically in the synagogues, as Christ did. In fact, the word church (ekklēsia) means to be called out into public places. Paul also went house to house in Ephesus to teach; this was probably his typical practice in ministry wherever he went. Churches often met in peoples’ homes.

“...And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me...”

Paul was constrained by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He always followed the Spirit’s direction regarding where to go next. The Holy Spirit also testified to him to get him ready for imprisonment and afflictions that awaited him at any location. Paul no longer counted his life precious because he had died to himself (Galatians 2:20). The life he lived, he lived in Christ for the purpose of continuing His ministry.

“...And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again...”

The presence of the Spirit in Paul’s life included all of the “gifts” of the Spirit, as Paul had called them in his first letter to the Corinthian church (see Day 18). Obedient to the commission of

Jesus and every prompting of the Holy Spirit, it was the fullness of Christ that Paul had received. The Holy Spirit is given to the obedient (Acts 5:32). By the wisdom of the Spirit, Paul knew he would not see the Ephesian elders again. (In the prophecy of the Holy Spirit, there is foretelling; see Day 18).

When the message of God gets rooted in a life, one comes to understand their responsibility for others before God, just as Daniel did (Daniel 9:1-19). We are to take responsibility for others just as Ezekiel did as a watchman for Israel (Ezekiel 3:16-21). Similarly, Paul had taken responsibility for everyone he encountered, declaring on the rooftops what God whispered to him in private (Matthew 10:27), so toward the end of his life he could proclaim his innocence of the blood of all. Passionate about having been chosen by God as His ambassador, Paul held nothing back. In Christ, we are also Christ's ambassadors, trusted to go and proclaim the gospel in His stead.

“...Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood...”

Connected to God in Christ, Paul's heart had become aligned with the heart of God! He came to care deeply about what God cared about, taking on God's own emotions. *The most precious thing to God is His church, which he obtained with the blood of His own.* This is His family. It is His glory, as a bride is to a loving husband. Each believer that will spend eternity with Him is a precious jewel in His diadems (Isaiah 62:3-5, Revelation 19:12). In rhythm with God's own heartbeat, Paul came to desire God's glory.

“...And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified...”

God is *the* Giver; giving is His very nature. Filled with God's Spirit, Christ came to give of Himself and give His life for His beloved church. Jesus taught His followers it was “more blessed to give than to receive.” *By God's own design, the secret of living is giving.* We have been made to give! First we must give *all* of ourselves to God in covenant relationship, holding nothing back. Then, following in Christ's steps, we should give ourselves to others as servants of all, pouring ourselves out. When Jesus sent out his twelve disciples, training them to take on His own ministry, He instructed them,

'And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. '

Matthew 10:7-8

<https://my.bible.com/bible/1/MAT.10.7-8>

This is the way Christ generously gave; the fullness of His atonement brought healing, freedom and resurrection life. It was the way Peter and Paul gave during their ministries, all the way to their bodily deaths. Empowered by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11) that dwells continuously in us, this kind of generous living is clearly the pattern for Christ's disciples.

“...And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping...”

In this last section, we witness the depth of the tender love of God that Paul had for the church and them for him. Having put on the fullness of Christ, Paul was passionate just as Jesus is. This is the most remarkable characteristic of Jesus and those who come to belong fully to Him: His tender love.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for Your tender love for me and Your beloved church. I praise You for Your finished work where I was purchased with the blood of Your own! Thank You for the resurrection life that You have placed in me. Thank You for making me to give generously as You have given. I do give myself fully to You and to Your beloved. I give all of me for all of You.

Day 35: Paul goes to Jerusalem to meet the church and face persecution

At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul headed toward Jerusalem:

'On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done." After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.'

Acts 21:8-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.21.8-21>

' The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome." '

Acts 23:11

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.23.11>

Among those in the church, there were prophets among both men and women. This is consistent with the prophecy of Joel about what would happen once the Lord had poured out His Spirit on all at Jerusalem (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:1-21,39). Philip the evangelist, who much earlier had been picked as one of seven full of the Holy Spirit to minister the word of God (Acts 6:3-7), lived in Caesarea with his daughters. Philip had proclaimed Christ in Samaria (Acts 8:4-8,12-13) and shared the gospel with an Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) who, according to tradition, brought the gospel into Africa. It was recorded that Philip even traveled in the Spirit as he evangelized (Acts 8:39-40). Philip's daughters were all prophets. It seems like Philip's place was a hangout for prophets not unlike earlier times in Naioth in Rama (1 Samuel 19:18-24), Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2 Kings 2:4,15), and Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), for Agabus the prophet came up to them there from Judea.

Prophecy is a gift for the building up of the church. It always edifies and sometimes it can include foretelling from God's sharing of His wisdom. In this case, Agabus showed Paul how he would be bound at Jerusalem, using Paul's belt on himself to show the chains that would soon

bind his feet and those that would soon bind his hands. This caused alarm, pleading, and even weeping on the part of the believers at Caesarea, for they did not want to see him walk into danger and suffer at Jerusalem.

This response of love broke Paul's heart, but he was resolved to continue to follow the leading of the Spirit, Christ in him, saying, "I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." The people resolved after Paul's response that it was God's will for him. Some of them traveled with Paul.

At Jerusalem, they first had fellowship with the church there, including the Apostle James and the elders. As they had done previously at Antioch (Day 7), Paul related one by one the things God had done on his missionary journeys. Testimony to God's goodness and His work was given. This brought glory to God.

The believers proceeded to tell Paul why the Jews in Jerusalem were incensed with him: they heard about how he had gone against their traditions. The leaders of the Jews were deeply committed to their traditions, as Jesus recognized:

'And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God) — then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do." '

Mark 7:6-13

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/MRK.7.6-13>

The Jews were so committed to the traditions of their fathers that they made void the word of God, disobeyed His commandments, their hearts were far from God, and they worshiped Him in vain.

While we may be quick to identify with what Jesus said about them, we will likely not recognize how we in our individual church and family traditions, established over tens, hundreds, and thousands of years, may be similar to them. In order to follow Jesus as Lord, we must forsake any traditions that interfere with us becoming doers of His word (Luke 6:46, Luke 8:19-21, John 13:17, James 1:22).

How divided are our churches from each other in the world, stuck to their own understandings and traditions? How different is the practice of our following of Jesus compared to that taught by Jesus and seen in the early church? How often do we try to explain the teaching of Jesus' words to perhaps mean something than they actually say? What do we think of believers who are different from us?

We do not know precisely how God thinks of us, what we believe, what we practice, and how God receives our attempts at worship. We do not know how He will judge unbelievers or believers. We need to think again about our beliefs in the traditions of men and our belief in (and action upon) the words we have from God. We need more humility and a deeper reverence for God.

Prayer: I humble myself before You, Righteous God. I repent of my upholding and practicing of traditions of men that are not honoring You. Reveal them all to me, bringing them into the light of Your truth. I repent for speaking words that undervalue others compared to the way You value them, for speaking words that sow division, and for not pursuing the unity that You seek in Your church. Instead, I will speak of the good that You have done in my life, lifting up Jesus and bringing You glory. I will seek to know Your word, do Your word, and build up Your beloved church. I will seek to worship You not as I would like to, but as You desire it. I commit myself and consecrate myself to You again. May my heart be broken by the things that break Your heart, Spirit of God. I embrace You and all of the ways You choose to work among Your church.

Day 36: Paul shipwrecked while sailing to Rome

Since Paul had appealed to Caesar while being put on trial for his faith in Jesus Christ, he was placed on a ship to sail to Rome:

'And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica... Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said... But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along... Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned. Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island."... As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.'

Acts 27:1-2,9-11,14-15,18-26,33-44

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.27.1-2,9-11,14-15,18-26,33-44>

'...Paul advised them, saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." ...'

Having sailed about half way across the Mediterranean Sea from Syria to Italy, Paul perceived danger through his spirit about the voyage ahead. What he heard from God, he shared with his Roman captors, but it was ignored, and they sailed on toward Italy.

‘...Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss...’

Paul heard from God while on the ship by way of an angel who gave a very specific message. When angels appear, they very frequently tell the hearer not to be afraid; further, their presence is startling. The angel told Paul he would stand before Caesar. It was God’s will that he should testify to the truth of Jesus Christ to this ruler. God also set his mind at ease by letting him know that all of those with him would survive when they ran aground together on some island; this word of divine wisdom to Paul would also be a sign to those on the ship. This allowed Paul to tell them to “take heart,” even as Jesus told His disciples in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee when He walked to them on the water (Matthew 14:27). As Jesus had urged his disciples to have faith in God, so Paul told those on the ship to trust God. Note also that Paul referred to God as the One to whom he belonged and worshiped. Paul’s consecration was ever on his mind; as a bondservant of God, he had been bought at a price. He was not his own.

“...Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you...”

After 14 days of being tossed by the storm, Paul urged the 276 people onboard to take some food. Trusting God, he reassured all of them, “not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.” Paul had become the leader, confident in the storm. To them he was as Jesus, who had before taught His disciples, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Luke 12:6-7

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/LUK.12.6-7>

Similarly, Paul, having Christ in him, reassured these hundreds not to fear, letting them know that the hand of the God who made them was with them. As Christ did with His disciples, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God in their presence, and ate with them. As a coworker with God, Paul became Christ to them in the midst of trial and uncertainty. Paul’s purpose was what God had commanded in Christ: to make disciples.

“...But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf...”

There was an influential centurion with whom Paul had gained favor, and he was used to carry out God’s will and word. He ensured that Paul and the people were protected, as God had said they would be. God can use anyone to carry out His purposes. This man was influenced through Paul’s witness. They all safely made it to land.

Prayer: Thank You, God, that I am connected directly to You. Praise be to You, God, for Your purposes always prevail. Thank You for Your purpose to make us co-workers with You, Your

ambassadors in Christ's stead, Your agents of Your grace and compassion. Thank You, God, that You have not given me a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind, despite my circumstances. I will trust You and hope in You, whatever may come my way. I will speak Your words and carry out Your purposes.

Day 37: Paul testifies about Jesus in Malta and Rome

Paul's journey continued when he landed at Malta, after which he spoke to local leaders of the Jews in Rome:

'After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed... When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved... He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.'

Acts 28:1-10,23-24,30-31

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.28.1-10,23-24,30-31>

"...He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm..."

This protection that Paul experienced is the result of Paul's obedience to Jesus' words and Paul's taking on of Jesus' faith:

'And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." '

Mark 16:15-18

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/MRK.16.15-18>

and

'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. '

Galatians 2:20

<https://my.bible.com/bible/1/GAL.2.20>

This faith, described by Paul as a gift (1 Corinthians 12:9), saved Him. Although he had quite literally picked up a deadly serpent with his hand, Paul trusted Jesus' words and he trusted Jesus as His healer, not fearing, not wavering. Paul was protected by the resurrection life of Christ in him because his work to go and proclaim the gospel was not done.

“...They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead...”

The opinion that Paul must be a murderer when he was bitten by a viper changed rapidly to that of a god when he proved immune to the snake's venom. This occasion at Malta was the second recorded time in his missionary travels that Paul was mistaken as a god. The first time was at Lystra in Galatia on the occasion that he had healed a crippled man. This is a possibility when ministering to others in Jesus' name— that God's supernatural work confers attention or fame to the believer.

“...It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery...”

Paul used the same resurrection life (zōē) that saved him from the snake to heal the sick at Malta, starting with the sick father of the chief of the island. When Paul encountered sickness, he knew that he was present to make it right; just as in Jesus' ministry, there was never any question of God's will in the matter. The work is finished in Jesus Christ (Matthew 8:17, 1 Peter 2:24) and God's will toward all is good (Matthew 8:3). Paul continued Jesus' ministry in His stead, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power to do good and free all from the oppression of the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10:38). Paul had died, and he lived by the faith of the Son of God—Christ, who lived in him. He knew his identity and his purpose. Paul's method was to believe, to go in person, to think of his connection to God, and then to place his hands on the sick person, meanwhile pushing the Spirit of God into them. God's resurrection life filled them and made them whole—every one of them. It was also made clear that such healing in Paul's ministry was widespread, at least during his time at Ephesus (Day 14). Like Jesus and like the Apostle Peter, all who came to him were healed. This is God's way of demonstrating the reality of the gospel and the kingdom of heaven, the Holy Spirit being an earnest (2 Corinthians 1:20-22) that gives a foretaste of the future salvation of our bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). The salvation paid for by Christ is full; it is for spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17), soul (1 Corinthians 2:16), and body (Ephesians 5:30, KJV).

“...They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed...”

Paul's spirit of generosity shared with the people at Malta resulted in generosity that returned to them. Paul taught the believers at Corinth that such generosity is a natural outflow of Christ in us (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). At Malta, Paul was generous in every way, producing an overflow of thanksgiving to God.

“...From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them...”

At Rome, Paul testified before the leaders of the Jews to the kingdom of God from morning to evening. He presented what he knew in a systematic way, connecting his teaching to what they knew from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Having been disciplined first by Gamaliel

(Acts 22:3), Paul knew the Scriptures well! Incidentally, this was also the method by which Jesus revealed truth to the Apostle Peter:

'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. '

Luke 24:27

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/LUK.24.27>

Paul sowed the word of God and let the Spirit of God work. Some believed at that time and were added to the church in Rome.

"...He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance..."

As Paul had done in Ephesus, he stayed for a few years in Rome to make disciples. Christ in him, Paul welcomed all who came to him, just as Jesus did. Paul was obedient to Jesus' commands to welcome all (Matthew 25:35, Luke 14:13). He was obedient to the commands of Jesus to proclaim the kingdom of God (Matthew 24:14, Mark 6:7-11, Mark 13:10, Mark 16:15, Luke 9:1-2,60, Luke 10:9, Acts 1:8) and to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). Made righteous and not inhibited by fear (Proverbs 28:1, 2 Timothy 1:7), Paul lived and spoke openly with all boldness, energized by the Spirit of God within.

Prayer: Thanks be to you, God, for Your inexpressibly generous gift of Jesus Christ and His finished work! You have given me even the faith of Your Son and even His own ministry to carry out in cooperation with You. I praise You for the ways You confirm the truth of Your kingdom and word that is preached and taught. Thank You for Your protection that is mine while I go in Your name.

Day 38: Christ in you, the hope of glory

From Rome, Paul wrote to the church at Colossae in Asia, where he had ministered in nearby cities during his second and third missionary journeys:

'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.'

Colossians 1:1-29

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/COL.1.1-29>

“...Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing...”

The word of God about Christ's finished work is the imperishable seed (1 Peter 1:23) of the kingdom of God. Planted in good soil (Matthew 13:8,23), the kingdom seed bears fruit and increases (Matthew 13:31-32). Epaphras was a fellow servant and a minister of Christ, probably a Gentile, who made disciples in Colossae.

"...we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding..."

Paul and Epaphras prayed for the believers at Colossae according to God's will for them. God's will is that Christ followers be filled with all knowledge of His will as Christ was during His ministry. It is to receive through the Spirit of God wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that allows them to walk as Jesus did during His ministry, bearing the fruit of the nature of Christ, the perfect image bearer of God's nature, and abounding accordingly in good works.

"...being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy..."

Paul prayed God's will for the believers: that through the indwelling Spirit which connected them directly to God, that they would receive the strength, power, patience, longsuffering, and joy of God.

"...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light..."

Paul prayed God's will for the believers: that through the indwelling Spirit they would ever abound in thanksgiving to the Father. Believers are fellow heirs of the promises of God with Christ Jesus, who has made them righteous, the very children of God (Romans 8:14-17)! In Christ, we are delivered from the kingdom of Satan to God's kingdom. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

"...He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation..."

The person of Christ Jesus shows not only the beauty of the character of God that was understood in the Old Testament revelation, but also new revelation of the nature of God's tender love, compassion, generosity, grace, passion, determination and life. Christ was with the Father, actively participating in the creation of all things. As the very Word of God incarnate and as Life itself, in Christ all things hold together. As the Beloved of the Father, all things are for Him.

"...And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent..."

Christ is forever the head of the body of Christ, the church. In Him, the church holds together. And so we remain in unity only by lifting up Christ as our focus. As the head, all authority is from Him, sitting at the right hand of the Father. As the head, our direct connection to God comes from abiding in Him, the Vine. Resurrection life comes from abiding in Him, the firstborn from the dead.

"...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell..."

Jesus Christ is our revelation of God's fullness in man, showing us God's will for mankind in the new covenant, where we have been made partakers of the divine nature through Him (2 Peter 1:3-4), predestined to be conformed into His image (Romans 8:29). Christ came that we may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10 NIV).

"...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross..."

Jesus Christ is God's Way to bring wholeness (shalom) to all things in creation that were alienated from Him and His good purposes. Our means to connect with God and His Life is a covenant relationship in Christ, where our faith opens the throttle on what we receive from Him, catalyzing the work of the Holy Spirit.

"...and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake..."

Every Christ follower is called to be a minister of Christ. We are stewards of the gospel, each called to let our light shine, making God's word fully known. This light comes naturally from our connection to God in Christ and the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:2-14). We are each called to follow in Jesus' steps, counting any cost (Luke 9:23,60, 1 Peter 2:19-21). The Apostle Paul experienced much suffering as a cost of following Christ and doing all of the will of God.

"...the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory..."

The mystery of God that was hidden for ages, God's means of sharing His glory and riches with those He made in His image and likeness, overcoming the separation of sin and death, is "Christ in you." The prophets of the Old Testament had seen shadows of what was to come in Christ. Jesus told His disciples with regard to the Helper, the Spirit of truth: "You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:17). In Christ, our spirits are made alive, directly connected to God through the indwelling Holy Spirit; "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16); and "we are members of His body, His flesh, and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:30). This is Christ in us for a full salvation. He saves us: spirit, soul, and body. Christ in us, we "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18 KJV).

"...Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ..."

Paul's work was to make disciples of Christ, from proclaiming the gospel to teaching with all wisdom given to him by God. His goal was to present everyone mature in Christ. This striving for depth of Christlike character in his disciples was a huge job considering the breadth of Paul's ministry across the world. For this task, Paul breathed in energy from the Spirit of God and relied on His power.

Prayer: Father God, I praise You for Your goodness to share Your glory with me by way of salvation and connection to You in Jesus Christ. I pray that I and those to whom I minister would

grow up into His fullness— spirit, soul and body— and bear much fruit, showing ourselves to be His disciples and bringing You glory.

Day 39: Alive together with Christ

Paul continued his letter to the Colossian church:

'For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. '

Colossians 2:1-19

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/COL.2.1-19>

“...to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...”

Paul continued to describe God's mystery of “Christ in you,” which he thought important for all believers to have a full understanding of and a full assurance of, especially those he hadn't taught in person. Apparently, this is a principle he made sure that those he disciplined understood. Without full assurance in faith of our identity in Christ, the treasure God has hidden within it isn't of full use nor of full benefit to us. In Christ, God has hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge for us, even as Paul experienced. We have everything of divine nature, everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4), that we are meant to have on this side of heaven by way of the earnest of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22). For more on this, see my book [Identity in Christ: 33 Characteristics of His Church](#).

“...For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ...”

Paul made a similar statement as he wrote to the Corinthian church while he was away from them: “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; as and if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ...” (1 Corinthians 5:3-4)

The best interpretation of these passages is that Paul through the power of the Spirit of God had the miraculous capability that the Roman Catholic church describes as bilocation. Paul used this ability in order to stay knowledgeable about what was happening in growing churches. While Paul saw in spirit the immaturity of the Corinthian church, he was encouraged to observe firmness of faith in the Colossian church. This caused Paul to take on a different tone in his letter to the Colossians than he did in his letter to the Corinthians.

“...as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving...”

Continuing to describe to the church their life with Christ in them, Paul used a couple different types of imagery. The first image was that of walking in Christ along the path that He walked. We are to continue His own ministry as His church—as His new body in the world. He showed us just how He wanted us to walk. The second, more fully developed, was that of a growing tree, rooted, built up, and established in the foundation of faith in Christ Jesus. In each case, we receive the sense of steadfastness and strength that is received from a life committed to Christ. In the latter image of the tree, it is also conveyed that the result of having grown up is fruitfulness, including abounding in thanksgiving. In general, the fruit is in our yielding of the characteristics of Christ, which are, in turn, the characteristics of God, for Christ is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3).

“...I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments... See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ...”

As members of His own body, the most crucial part of our growing up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15) is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, thereby taking on the mind of Christ. As such, Paul warned the believers regarding right thinking, for thinking is the start of how we rightly align ourselves with Christ, or how we wrongly align ourselves with the devil and his world (Romans 12:1-2). The narrow path is the way of following Christ, the Truth, and being conformed into His image with His mind and all of that mind (1 Corinthians 2:16); this is sanctification, which is part of God’s will for each believer. John Wesley described it this way: “It is to have ‘the mind which was in Christ’ and to ‘walk as He walked’: to have all the mind that was in Him and always to walk as He walked”.

The wide path to beware is the path of the world, along with its diversity of plausible, yet untrue, arguments; its multitude of philosophies; the empty deceit of elemental spirits of this world, and ultimately, the father of lies, Satan; and all of human tradition. We must beware especially the traditions of men, for the traditions that oppose the truth of God’s world even pervade into

common beliefs of those in the church throughout its ages. In His time on earth, Christ described this in Matthew 15:1-9 and Mark 7:1-13. We must not make void the word of God and what God has designed it to yield with our own traditions. We are taken captive by what we give ourselves to believe, which affects our motivations, how we think, what we choose to do, and, thereby, how God may work in and through us. Since Satan, the thief (John 10:10), has no right to those who are saved by faith, he must enter the house, so to speak (or perhaps, even better, the outer courts of the temple of God that we are), illegally, through our wrong thinking, which does not proceed from faith (Romans 14:23). We must each daily choose our foundation, our roots, that which will build us up, and that by which we will become established. To grow up and become established in Christ always leads to righteousness, holiness, and being set apart as one always becoming like Christ in all things, from glory to glory. It leads to thinking like Christ thinks and, therefore, acting like He acts, or, said another way, walking as He walked.

“...For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority...”

In the resurrected Christ, as He is, ascended and seated at the right hand of God, the head of all rule and authority, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Our position as believers is that we are in Christ, in His body, seated in Him, connected directly to God. This is true of us—spirit, soul and body—insofar as we trust it to be true. With Christ as our foundation, rooted and built up in His resurrection life, we are filled in Him. Connected to God through the Vine (John 15:1), we can be filled to fullness and overflowing with His life (John 7:38-39).

“...In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...”

Paul described salvation in this text. In our sins and in our flesh, our spirits are dead. By placing our faith in Christ and His finished work for us, salvation resurrects our spirits just as Christ was raised up, joining us to God in Christ; and it empowers us to put off (loose, *luō*) the body of the flesh while putting on (binding, *deō*) Christ. Baptism is a symbol of what God did for us in Christ, where being dunked under the water is a symbol of our identification with Jesus, when he died and was buried, and being raised up out of the water is a symbol of our identification with Jesus, when He was raised bodily from death by the power of the Spirit of God. We are literally fused together with Christ, hidden in Him; this is our true position due to salvation.

“..having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him...”

Paul shared here the legal details of Christ’s finished work from the knowledge of God. Our sin, that in us which does not proceed from faith (Romans 14:23), creates a record of debt against us with legal demands regarding that record, thereby arming spiritual rulers and authorities that would keep us in bondage and do us harm. Satan deceives, accuses, steals, kills and destroys. Christ made a way for anyone’s record of debt to be nailed to the cross, canceled along with its legal demands. In this work, Christ disarmed those rulers and authorities, triumphed over them, and put them to open shame in their defeat. Anyone who is unaware of this victory or who does

not believe it is unable to make use of it. Anyone unaware or unconvinced of the full extent of the victory is unable to take full benefit from it.

“...Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath...”

Paul argued that the substance of things of come belongs to Christ, so we should not get wrapped up in details about food, drink, traditions, and religious practices that are as “shadows” compared to the real thing.

“...from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.”

Instead, we should hold up Jesus Christ, the Head of the body of Christ, which always continues to multiply and grow the connected members of the body with a growth that is from God. We should seek unity, not giving attention to the “shadows” but in doing God’s word and His will. If we aren’t joined to the body of Christ that holds up Jesus as the Head and is growing in only way God can grow things, it’s not of God. Let’s connect ourselves to Jesus Christ and God’s kingdom, dropping other things.

Prayer: I praise You, God, for the life You have designed for me in Christ, canceling my record of debt. It is freedom, it is life, it is good, and it is more than enough. I will not believe the lies of the world that conflict with the truth of Your word, nor will I seek lesser things than the fullness that is in Christ. Instead, I will overflow with thanksgiving and with Your life, seeking to excel to multiply and build up Your body and to do all of Your will.

Day 40: Your life is hidden in Christ with God

Paul continued his letter to the Colossian church:

' If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.'

Colossians 3:1-25

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/COL.3.1-25>

'Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. '

Colossians 4:1-6

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/COL.4.1-6>

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God...”

Paul continued his conversation with the Colossian church, which had experienced some buying into philosophies and traditions of the world and some focusing on unimportant matters which

Paul called “shadows” of that which is important and real. In response, Paul urged the church to seek and to set their minds on the spiritual things “above” that are real and true, rather than on what they take in from the world and their five created senses. The things that are real are those that form our true identity, our real position, and which last forever, whether or not they can be perceived with our five senses. In Christ, the reality is that we were dead men and women walking until we were hidden with Christ, seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6) at the right hand of God the Father, our spirits made alive and made one with His, our bodies part of His own body, our minds made capable to receive communication from God and even to be made of one mind with Christ.

“...When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory...”

Christ is our life. He is resurrection life, and we are seated in Him. When He appears again on the earth in His second coming, believers will appear with Him in glory. This is consistent with what Paul prophesied to the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonian 4:15-17).

“...Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry...”

Paul argued that since Christ has made us free and alive, able to bear the fruit of a good tree—the fruits of the Spirit of God alive in us, we should put to death the old life of bondage and death, along with the fruits that come from bad trees. The former is of righteousness while the latter is of unrighteousness, inviting God’s wrath. Jesus taught that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” and “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matthew 12:34,36).

“...seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator...”

Paul taught that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, choosing to put off the old self and put on the new self. This is an action of the will whereby we bring in through our hearts what God has made available through Christ by way of our spirit. Cooperating with the Spirit, we are renewed in knowledge, being made into the image of God.

“...Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all...”

In Christ, all are children of God and there is no respect of persons. God shows no partiality. It was difficult for many Jews to welcome such change, yet this is the change that God had in store through Christ, consistent with the prophecies of the Old Testament. Further, due to Christian belief of the equality of all people in Christ, societies where Christian teachings and practice are widespread (or have been at one time) have been blessed.

“...Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another...”

Next, Paul described the good fruit that comes from good trees. These are the characteristics of being made alive in and abiding in Christ. The choice to continue to abide in Christ leads to

sanctification, wherein one takes on the mind of Christ. This yields Christlikeness and obedience to Jesus' teachings.

“...And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony...”

To “put on” is to make the choice of the will to translate what God has placed in our spirits at our new birth into our mind and into practice. We are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), yet we begin as infants in the new birth (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), according to God's design. Love is the essential characteristic of the fruitfulness of a good tree, showing that one actually abides in Christ. There are also so many characteristics of identity in Christ that fundamentally tie into love, including: compassion, tenderness, attention, generosity, grace, mercy, longsuffering, patience, passion, joy, humility, determination.

“...And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful...”

Peace and a spirit of unity also tie into love for others, while thankfulness stems from love for God. Furthermore, peace (shalom) also suggests wholeness. Christ taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). By this he meant messengers of the gospel, led by the Spirit of God. We take on the characteristics of Christ when we submit to God's Spirit to lead us in our daily lives.

“...Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God...”

Christ is the Word of God, and He spoke the word of God, the imperishable seed of the kingdom of God that yields resurrection life and gives light. Each of us could be compared to some type of soil with regard to the word of Christ, and, as soil, we can allow this word to dwell in us, abiding in Christ, the Word. We are encouraged by Paul to allow it to dwell in us richly, making an extremely hospitable spiritual environment for it to grow, multiply, and to burn brightly. Ways to let God's word dwell in us richly include speaking it and singing it. It can be regularly spoken in conversation, and it can be taught. This is similar to the way the Jews kept the word of God ever before them, following the command of God in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:5-9): teaching it diligently to their children, talking of it always, posting it everywhere. Paul gave an example of letting the word dwell richly in him through singing hymns while imprisoned for his faith at Philippi with Silas. While the other prisoners listened to their singing, the Spirit responded by breaking everyone out of prison, opening every door and unloosing everyone's bonds (Day 9).

“...And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him...”

Thanksgiving in all things is a result of being Spirit-filled. Thanks for what is requested from God in prayer is also a way to recognize that God, faithful to His word, has answered the prayers that are prayed for His glory. Paul's mention of word and deed here also brings to remembrance his discussion of it recorded in his letter to the Roman church: “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to

obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:18-19). Paul expected that the Christ followers in the church in Colossae would be living as He lived: to bring others to obedience to the gospel by word and by deed. Everything a Christ follower does is to be focused on the ministry of Christ and should be done in His name, in His place, with His authority. In faith, we are able to expect God to confirm His word as we speak His word (Mark 16:20, Acts 4:29-30,33), even as Paul did (e.g., Acts 14:3,9, Acts 19:8,11-12,20). We can expect His word to increase and prevail mightily. With this in mind, Paul prayed for the church “that God would fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in” them (2 Thessalonians 1:11); this should also be our prayer for our brothers and sisters.

“...Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives... Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven...”

The Apostle Paul encouraged submission to and love for each other, as well as justice and fairness in all relationships, remembering that we are all under a Master in heaven to whom we must give account. We can expect God to judge all abuses that have occurred in this regard, meanwhile exalting those who have followed His law of love. Are you known by God’s kind of benevolent, giving love being shed abroad by all you say and do?

“...Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward... there is no partiality...”

The Apostle Paul made it clear to the church at Corinth that “no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” and “...each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward” (1 Corinthians 3:11,13-14). Having made Christ our Lord, we serve Him and should look to please our God. It is only the work built on the foundation of Christ that matters. For any that are not made righteous through identification with Christ, they will be judged with the unbelievers and be eternally separated from God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

“...Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving...”

Our covenant relationship with God is to be one that is steadfast in communication with Him. In prayer, we are watchful, perceiving that which is from God and that which is not. In prayer, we continually offer thanksgiving for every good thing. In prayer, we request opportunities from God to sow His word; He will open doors. When we get chances to speak about Jesus Christ, we should aim to do so clearly. As believers, we can expect resistance and persecution, not always being free to speak the word of God. Like Paul, some of us will be imprisoned to be inhibited from freely speaking about the gospel. In such treatment, Jesus said we should “rejoice and be glad” (Matthew 5:12).

“...Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

When it comes to relationships with those outside of the body of Christ's followers, Paul exhorted the church to walk in wisdom, making the best use of time. There are so many ways one could spend time with unbelievers. Our time is our life. We can expect wisdom from God to inform us how to speak to those we encounter and also about those with whom we should spend more of our time. Jesus commanded His followers to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). We are to do good as Jesus did good since Christ is in us. Since Christ is in us, our speech should be gracious, as Jesus is grace-filled. It should convey the divine outflowing of the very nature of our loving, tender God who lives within us. We should speak of our hope with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15), being careful not to take offense at what outsiders may say or do (Matthew 5:9,44). Considering our time, we should also remember that Jesus commanded His disciples when He sent them out to spend time with those who were worthy, people of peace, people who received them and heard them (Matthew 10:13-14, Luke 9:5, Luke 10:5-10,16). We must all choose with whom to spend our time, even as Jesus had to do given His three years of ministry. God has prepared good works in advance for us (Ephesians 2:10), and we should seek to get to them; they are for particular people that we know and that we will encounter.

Prayer: I praise You, God, for having hidden me in Christ, the source of my righteousness, life, godliness, peace, joy, and every good thing. Your goodness causes me to sing a new song to You. Jesus, Word of God, thank You for dwelling in me richly. Holy Spirit, I cooperate with You to renew my mind and to put on all of the new self, desiring to be salt and light to the world. I pray for doors open to sharing your word, so that I may declare the mystery of Christ.

Day 41: Blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places

While imprisoned in Rome, Paul started his letter to the Ephesian church:

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 1:1-23 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.1.1-23.ESV>

“...To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...”

Paul’s letter and his blessing of grace and peace were directed to the steadfast among the church God had used him to build in Ephesus, where he had stayed for two years during his third missionary journey (Day 14).

“...Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...”

Before the foundation of the world, God in His wisdom designed all of creation, humanity included, knowing what would happen and that He would build His church through faith in Him and in His Son Jesus Christ. Our position is that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places, each of us connected directly in spirit to God through the Spirit, each of us having taken on the

very righteousness of Jesus Christ, each of us a temple of the Spirit of God—a heavenly place! Since as co-heirs we have what Christ has, we are already blessed with every spiritual blessing, whether or not these blessings have manifested in the physical world. Jesus said, “According to your faith be it done to you.” (Matthew 9:29), and so many times He instructed His disciples with words like, “whatever you ask [aiteō] in prayer, believe that you have received [lambanō] it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24).

“...In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved...”

God out of His great love planned a large family for Himself. Together this family is God’s Beloved. Blessed be His name.

“...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose...”

God’s plan in Christ has been to unite things in heaven and on earth. This explains Jesus’ teaching to pray God’s will: “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Jesus’ ministry on earth connected with a multitude of people, causing many to become united to God in covenant relationship (1 Corinthians 6:17) and causing God’s will to be done there on earth as it is in heaven. Peter’s ministry continued Jesus’ ministry to do the same. So did Paul’s! This is God’s pattern for you as well, Christ follower, expanding Jesus’ ministry in multiplied form—and whatever God unites to Him, let man not separate.

“...In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...”

Our inheritance in Christ is *every spiritual blessing*. God’s Beloved is His glory. To call the gospel good news is an understatement.

“...In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory...”

When we believe in Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit that Christ promised to His disciples (John 14:16-17). The Holy Spirit is the guarantee, or the earnest, of our inheritance in Christ until we acquire possession of the inheritance in fullness. The Spirit is the person of God with us, the Spirit of Christ in us. The Holy Spirit is a downpayment of what is to come. The Spirit is a part of Beulah (Isaiah 62:4) that we have already received. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter and our Helper. The Holy Spirit is the way to the greater works that Christ promised for us as His followers (John 14:12). The Spirit gives bits of revelation from God at a time, power from God for Christ’s continued ministry through us, and inspiration from God—in all of the ways seen in the New Testament Scriptures, including Paul’s life.

“...For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers...”

Paul stayed in prayer for all of the churches he started, based upon what he heard from others or learned in the Spirit. He was especially encouraged in prayer when he heard of the faith and the love within local bodies of believers; this caused him to pray for even greater depths of Christlikeness for these churches. As Charles H. Spurgeon said, “Little faith will bring your souls to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your souls.” This is what Paul wanted for his disciples and for God’s church. This is what God makes possible through the earnest of the Spirit that has been given to us. Salvation isn’t just about experiencing God’s goodness later.

“... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened...”

Paul prayed for more revelation from God, including more wisdom and knowledge through the Spirit for the Ephesian believers. This would bring more of heaven to the souls of the believers and to the ministry of the church.

“...that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead...”

Paul prayed the believers would have a greater understanding of the riches that were theirs in Christ, including the greatness of God’s power by way of the same Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). God’s power toward believers is immeasurable; Paul was an example of how that power could be brought to bear for ministry, and He taught about it in His writings, as we have examined. From generation to generation, even to the present time, our God is the great I AM.

“... and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet...”

Here Paul spoke of Christ’s authority above every name that is named across all ages, seated at the right of the Father in heavenly places. And we are hidden in Christ, who always leads us in triumphal procession (2 Corinthians 2:14). He will do so until such time that every enemy is put under Christ’s feet (1 Corinthians 15:25). In Christ, we are also expected to take authority, following Jesus’ commands as His disciples did (Matthew 10:1,7-8, Matthew 16:18-19, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 9:1-2, Luke 10:9,19, Acts 1:8).

“...and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

God also made Christ the head of His family, the church. God made the church into Christ’s body, which is filled with the Holy Spirit, apportioned to each member of the body as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). In Christ, there is the fullness of the divine nature. In the composite body of

Christ, there is the same fullness. In some individual members of the church who have consecrated themselves, giving themselves fully to God's word and will, including Peter and Paul, there has been the same fullness.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for blessing me with what is Yours in Christ, and for Your great love to adopt me into Your family as a beloved child. As the heavenly place that You have made me in Christ, I welcome You, Spirit of God. May your will be done on earth through me and Your church.

Day 42: Created in Christ Jesus for good works

Paul continued his letter to the Ephesians:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:1-10, 13-22 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.2.1-22.ESV>

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...”

Under the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), our natural state, we carried out the desires of our mind and body. This is to be fleshly or soulish, the way of the wide road of the world. Often not knowing it, we all followed a spirit, the prince of the power of the air, Satan (Matthew 4:8-9, John 12:31), as our father, leading us on some route of disobedience toward God (John 8:44). The only course of obedience is to be led by the Spirit through our spirits (Romans 8:14, John 3:3-6, 1 Corinthians 14:14-15).

“...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved...”

There may be no better summation of the gospel in the Bible than in these verses in Ephesians. Grace, mercy, longsuffering, goodness, steadfast love, and faithfulness are in God’s nature (Exodus 34:6). He has loved His children deeply despite our sin. By faith in Christ, we are saved

from the law of sin and death to which we were subject, made alive together with Christ by the grace of God—the very outflow of His beautiful nature.

“— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus...”

In our identification with Jesus Christ that is a result of faith, our spirits are *resurrected with Christ* by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. Our spirits are not only resurrected but they are fully identified with Christ to be seated with Him in the heavenly places. Connected to God in Christ, who tore the veil of the temple that separated us from God, He makes us heavenly places that comprise the temple of God! He made us co-heirs with Him at salvation in order that He might (legally be able to) be as good and kind to us as He has always intended to be to His family of sons and daughters created in His image and likeness. God’s plan has always been to share His immeasurable riches with His family.

“...For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast...”

Salvation in its fullness is a gift that flows from God’s very nature in its fullness. As Jesus said, “According to your faith be it done to you” (Matthew 9:29) and “All things are possible for one who believes” (Mark 9:23). This is the gift of God, starting with the most miraculous gift of the new birth of our spirit by the Spirit (John 3:3-6), which is catalyzed by our faith. Salvation is not by our works.

“...For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

God created and chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), to be made of spirit by the Spirit, in order to carry out good works as a part of the church. This way, the church multiplies the good works which Jesus began during His ministry on earth (Acts 10:38, John 14:12-14, John 16:7). “For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them...’” (2 Corinthians 6:16). The indwelling Spirit of God walks in us to do good as He walked in Christ (Acts 10:38).

“...But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ....”

Christ’s blood is the means of the new covenant, having made us righteous before God.

“...For he himself is our peace...”

In Christ, His body took the place of our body. In Christ, there is one new man who is righteous and, therefore, at peace with the righteous God, set free by the law of the Spirit of life from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), a record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands (Colossians 2:14).

“...And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father...”

The gospel is the message of peace (shâlôm) made by the Prince of Peace. We are at-one with God as Christ is because God's indwelling Spirit now connects us.

"...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God..."

Paul also wrote to the Corinthian church about Christ being a foundation on which we could build as God's fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9,11), which was just before he first introduced the teaching that believers in Christ are God's temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells (v.16-17). He taught the Ephesians that they were being joined together into such a temple and dwelling place. Perhaps in each case Paul was not talking about believers individually but believers together. This would align well with Jesus' teaching "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them" (Matthew 18:20).

Prayer: I praise You, God, for Your goodness, as shown in Your plan created in love for all who are in Christ. Thank You for raising me up with Christ and seating me in Him next to You. Thank You for my brothers and sisters in Your church.

Day 43: Filled with all of the fullness of God

Paul continued his letter to the Ephesian church:

'For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.'

Ephesians 3:1-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/EPH.3.1-21>

“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles....”

Paul was made a prisoner because he excelled in the building of God's church, which faces resistance in the world. He understood himself and all believers as stewards of God's message of grace. What the Spirit shared with Him, he taught and wrote about to the churches. As he did with the Colossian church, Paul wrote to the Ephesian church about the mystery of Christ.

“...This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel...”

The mystery revealed is Christ in you (Colossians 1:27), a direct connection with God, including a promise, a rich inheritance, and responsibility from God to be received. God has identified the entire believing church of all peoples with the body of Christ, having made them all righteous just as Christ is.

“...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places...”

By God's design, Satan's kingdom, including its rulers and authorities, has to watch the revelation of God unfold through the church, showing God's manifold wisdom. When Paul refers to God's wisdom (e.g., 1 Corinthians 2:6-13, 1 Corinthians 12:8), he refers to future events that God has planned.

"...This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him..."

The atonement in Christ is clearly the pinnacle of the unfolding of God's redemptive plan for the world He created. Having been made righteous and having been hidden in Christ, we can approach God's throne of grace with confidence for help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Every promise in God's word is yes and amen in Christ, which gives us boldness (2 Corinthians 1:20), as do Christ's own words: "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

John 14:13-14 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jhn.14.13-14.ESV>

"And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.""

Matthew 21:21-22 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/mat.21.21-22.ESV>

Further, Jesus' brother clarified:

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

James 1:6-8 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jas.1.6-8.ESV>

"...So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory..."

Paul bowed his knees when he made requests to God in prayer, drawing from the riches of the glory of God given to the church in Christ, as if directing resources within the body of Christ to the place where it was needed. Here Paul requested that those in the Ephesian church would receive strength and power in their spirits through the Holy Spirit, believing they would for it was in God's will for them.

"...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God..."

Paul also prayed that the Holy Spirit would shed God's love abroad in the Ephesian church, such that it would be their life—that they would be rooted in it, grounded in it, made strong in it, and be filled with all of the fullness of God in Christ. Fundamentally, resurrection life (zōē) and agapē love are the two strongest characteristics of the nature and essence of God. His life and love are each multifaceted and are unsurpassable in their dimensions. (For the words Jesus

spoke on love and life, see my book [Jesus' words on love, light, and life.](#)) Christ represents the perfection of that fullness embodied, showing what is it to be made in God's image and likeness, reflecting His glory. Paul prayed for this richness from God in Christ to be directed toward the Ephesian church, trusting God to answer this prayer in alignment with His will. As Christ is now, so are we in this world (1 John 4:17) when we abide in Him, His life, and His love.

“...Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

The power (dunamis) of God at work in us as members of Christ is abundantly life-giving, even invincible, accessing parts of the riches of our inheritance in Christ (that are accessible in this life) by way of the earnest of the Holy Spirit— as understood through the manifestation of God's power recorded within the Scriptures, and even more abundantly than we may think. The living Jesus (as He has been since His ascension) is the same throughout all generations (Hebrews 13:8).

Prayer: Thank You, God, for making me part of Christ's living body and for filling me with all of Your fullness through faith in Christ. Thank You for centering me in Your love. Holy Spirit, lead me to work with Your church to meet the needs of the world as a faithful steward of Your grace. Thank You for the confidence to ask for what I need in Christ, and thank You for supplying every need, making my joy complete.

Day 44: Growing up in every way into Christ

Paul continued his letter to the Ephesians:

'I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.'

Ephesians 4:1-32

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/EPH.4.1-32>

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called..."

To live in a life worthy of our calling is to come to live by the Spirit as a son of God (Romans 8:14), having the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and walking and He walked (1 John 2:6).

Living this way in cooperation with the indwelling Spirit, we have become good trees that exhibit the fruits of the Spirit (Matthew 17:17), including humility, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, and a spirit of unity. Partakers of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), we live not for ourselves but for God and His church.

“...There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God ...”

All three persons of the Trinity love the church and the unity of the church. The Father is over all; He is through all by His Spirit; He is in all by way of Christ in us. We are to act and function as one body, as Paul taught the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) and the Roman church (Romans 12:4-18). Moreover, Jesus prayed to the Father that we may be one: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

John 17:20-23

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/JHN.17.20-23>

“...But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” ...”

The KJV more clearly translates Paul’s reference here to Psalm 68:

‘Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; Yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord GOD might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. ’

Psalm 68:18-19

<https://my.bible.com/bible/1/PSA.68.18-19>

David, a prophet, was speaking of Christ, according to Paul. In the atonement, Jesus led Satan’s kingdom captive, and from the Father, in His ascended position, He received gifts of the Spirit to be given to mankind (which Paul also taught about in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, see Day 18), that He might convey to His body the fullness that He had received from the Father (see Ephesians 1:23).

...“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves...”

Here Paul taught about roles within the ministry of the Body of Christ that are essential to building it up and equipping the body for ministry. Through Paul, the Spirit of God taught that each Christ follower is to be a minister of the gospel of the kingdom. Apostles plant churches. Prophets build up and edify. Shepherds lead and care for local churches, while teachers

contribute to the making of mature disciples. This has been called the five-fold ministry of the church. Like Christ, Paul showed himself to be a complete five-fold minister: an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a shepherd, and a teacher. Paul modeled the fullness of Christ, thereby able to instruct the church, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, KJV). Those in the church were able to yoke themselves to Paul because he was indeed yoked to Jesus Christ, walking as He walked.

More often, a Christ follower may take on one of these church-equipping roles, or at least start by taking on one of them. As everyone takes up appropriate responsibility in ministry, matures in faith, and cooperates with the Holy Spirit unto the renewing of their minds, the church grows up from its infancy in the birth of the Spirit into the fullness of Christ. To mature in faith, one must understand the word of God, embrace it, trust it, and act on it, meanwhile rejecting the lies of the world within culture and human traditions: winds of doctrine, human cunning, deceitful schemes. This victory can only be had in Christ. To mature to faith as small as a mustard seed is rare (Matthew 17:14-21, James 1:6-8), as even many (or all) of Jesus’ twelve disciples did not have this maturity before they were filled with the Spirit of God.

“...Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ...”

In all of the aforementioned ministry roles, speaking the truth in love to other believers is essential. The more mature are used by God to develop the less mature, sharing what God gave them to give. A spirit of charity (Godly love) underpins all kingdom work, for it is the very nature of God; without it, we are unable to act on His behalf. The body of Christ is meant to grow up in every way into Christ—into His fullness. (If it be nourished in the good soil of our lives, this is the natural result of the planting of the imperishable seed of the Word of God within.) Sometimes we also see that apostles like Paul may grow up in every way into Christ’s fullness. Paul taught that he was not special in this regard; God is no respecter of persons. He expected those in the church to grow up even as he did, in cooperation with the indwelling Spirit. The body of Christ is designed to work together properly, directed by Christ as its mind and the Spirit as its spirit, just as God designed human bodies to normally function, directed by the mind. This means we must not each try to keep our own mind, our own will, and our old life.

“...Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds...”

Paul’s discussion here about the unrighteous is similar to what he taught the Roman church in more detail (Romans 1:18-32, see Day 28). The unrighteous have known God’s invisible attributes, including God’s eternal power and divine nature, by what has been made, but they have chosen not to honor or thank God. This has led to futile thinking, darkened understanding, hardness of heart, selfishness, impurity, and alienation from God. In stark contrast, Christ is the Righteous One, and through faith in Him we have died to the old life of bondage to live free in Christ from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

“...as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your

minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness...

In unrighteousness, we were led by our soulish or fleshly nature rather than by the Spirit through our spirit. This was life in bondage under the law of sin and death, making us miserable, leaving us unsatisfied, with Satan the accuser and thief as our father (John 8:38). We are commanded to put off and lay aside that old self, as there is only bondage and death in it for us. Instead, we are commanded to seek life by cooperating with the Spirit of God to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, putting on the new self that is of the likeness of God, as shown in Christ. We are to be loosed of the old and bind to ourselves that which is our to take by way of our rich inheritance in Christ. What an inheritance in ours! What a gift to have God's own Spirit for ourselves, directly connecting us to God! What beauty to be able to take on Christ's own mind. The kingdom of God has come near to us.

"...Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil..."

When we give ourselves to the Spirit's work to conform us into the image of Christ, our nature becomes more like His and less like the devil's. We speak truth in love rather than lie. We do not hold onto anger, refusing to give place for evil to grow to have its way in us. Satan's ways are slight so that we do not take notice: first a toehold, next a foothold, building to a stronghold. This is all of the mind.

As new creations, the nature of the righteousness of Christ in us gives us power to live victorious with respect to sin. Our moral choices are always making us more or less like Christ. We are not to give any place to the enemy; instead, we take responsibility to take territory for the kingdom of God. We seek to please Him that made us His ambassadors, giving us such privilege and authority—first a toehold, next a foothold, and finally a stronghold for Christ and His church. We seek to add precious jewels to the diadems of the Lord of Lords and our bridegroom (Revelation 19:12). God be glorified.

"...Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need..."

Similarly, we must become givers rather than takers, for God is a gracious giver while Satan is a thief. We also choose to build up with our words considering God's attitude of good will toward all, while Satan seeks to destroy men and women made in God's image. We seek to show that we belong to God based upon the fruit of our speech.

"...And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption..."

The Holy Spirit is grieved when we reject the gift of connection to God in us, Christ in us, the Spirit's indwelling presence, choosing instead the old way of sin, bondage and death. As those capable to bless, to build up, and to speak God's word, we are to be especially careful about the words we choose to speak.

“...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice...”

These are fruits of bad trees rooted in the world whose foundation is Satan, having the life that God gave stolen, sucked out and chained up.

“...Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Tenderness is a word that conveys astonishingly well our God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The tenderness of Jesus is one of the main reasons so many who have heard of Jesus love Him—or at least love the idea of Him. Also, His teachings on forgiveness convey the depth of the love and the mercy in the heart of God.

Christ in us, we are capable of and, therefore, expected to be of the same attitude. Has God made you tenderhearted toward all of those He loves? God expects us to be loving, giving, and merciful as He is.

Prayer: I praise You, God, for the love and goodness that are at the essence of who You are and for who You have made me to be in Your image. Thank You for the tenderness You have shown me in Christ Jesus and for the gifts You gave us through Him. Lead me and those with whom I fellowship, Spirit of God, to grow up in every way into to Your fullness. I pray for the unity of Your body. Be glorified.

Day 45: Be filled with the Spirit

Paul continued his letter to the Ephesians:

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Ephesians 5:15-21, 25-32 NKJV

<https://bible.com/bible/114/eph.5.15-32.NKJV>

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil...”

Paul encouraged the church to be intentional regarding how they chose to live their lives because God has only given us so much time to be about doing God’s will as Jesus was during His short years of ministry. Jesus, our example, declared His purpose at Nazareth and then went about doing it (Luke 4:18-19).

“...And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...”

Paul warned against the squandering of our energy and the resources that God has given us. If we are to have anything affect our reason and senses, it should only be the filling of the Spirit, which enhances our ability to carry out God’s will, rather than taking away from this ability. While drunkenness leads to more sin and its fruits, Spirit-led living leads to its fruits, including steadfast, overflowing life; praise; thanksgiving; joy; and humility. These good fruits should refresh us and others throughout our days.

“...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church...”

Let’s focus here not on the instructions to husbands, as is typically done, but rather the underlying and *more important* message of loving, covenant relationship. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her with the expectation of a loving, covenant relationship that would flow both ways between God and mankind. God is faithful to us considering His word and His promises that are ours in Christ, having shown us love (agapē, God’s perfect love) as He loves Christ. Christ gave His life in love for us as a substitute for us to make us righteous in our

Spirit birth, to make a way for our sanctification so we may stay righteous, and, thereby, to make God's promises for the righteous ours. This act of Christ shows the nature of God's generous, self sacrificing, humble love. This capability to love all people like God does is shared with us in Christ.

Further, it sets not only the standard but also the expectation for the type of love that marriage partners should steadfastly give when they enter a covenant relationship with each other. God has many good purposes for marriage, not the least of which are to convey to us an understanding of covenant relationship with Him, the riches of His love in this relationship, and His excitement regarding the big day when we will be fully His. Being made into Christ's likeness through sanctification not only fills us with overflowing life and brings heaven to earth here; it pleases our loving, gracious God, and it will lead to greater reward for us later (1 Corinthians 3:14), for our character does not change without us doing the good works that God prepared for us in advanced to do (Ephesians 2:10). Our Christlikeness is a thing of beauty to our righteous, holy God. Just as we may delight in the way our children are like us, the God who created parenthood is glorified when we become like Him.

"...So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself..."

Typically we know how to please and care for ourselves well, and, given the time and the resources, we will do it. The Lord Jesus meets the needs and wants of the church this way, as if it were His own cherished body. Indeed, it is! This again sets the standard, and, again, even the expectation for how covenant marriage partners should meet each other's needs and wants. In Christ and by faith in God's word, we have the resources to meet every need—and every want that brings glory to God. Let us not doubt God's faithfulness, goodness, love, and provision. Let us draw deeply from all that He has made ours in Christ that we may not merely be satisfied ourselves, but that we may also be a wide and deep channel to share God's grace and overflowing life with our beloved and with His.

"...For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones..."

We are in Christ, that is to say, in His ascended, enthroned body (Ephesians 2:6, Colossians 1-3:3), and He is in us. He is in our flesh, our blood, our bones, our brain, our heart—every structure, every cell, right to all of our DNA. He is our very life (zōē). He is the Author of Life (Acts 3:15). In Him and in God's Spirit, which is His to give, we are in resurrection life. His body is healthy; we are in Him, so can we also be in health for the accomplishment of our Father's work, His word, His will on earth as it's done in heaven. His body was bruised (striped) so that we are healed (Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 8:17, 1 Peter 2:24). We hold onto His word, believing; it is true. It is unbreakable.

"...For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church..."

Again Paul is not speaking mainly of marriage here but instead of God's covenant relationship with the church and its members, His own cherished, beloved body. It is Christ's own body. We

have become one flesh with Him! It's a great mystery since it is beyond our five senses, this oneness with God in body. Paul's teaching has also made it clear that we have been made one with God in spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17) and that Christ provides for us also to be made one in soul with God, as He is. Cooperating with the Spirit of God in sanctification, we may be made of one mind with Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), and so our will likewise may be attuned to His will (John 4:34, Matthew 6:10), and our emotions may be made in Christ to follow those of our God. What God has joined, let no man separate. Having been made one so completely with Him, we may indeed walk as He walked—and as He is now walking.

Prayer: I praise You, Father God, for the beauty of Your wisdom and Your mysteries that have been revealed in Christ. I praise You that Your Word allows me to see everything clearly. You have made us one in spirit, soul, and body! Thank You for Your faithful, sacrificial, love that You also allow me to give to others and to receive from others. I pray that my passion for the church would be as Yours is, Jesus. I give myself to Your purposes, plan, and agenda for me so that I may be a blessing to all.

Day 46: Put on the whole armor of God

Paul concluded his letter to the Ephesians with exhortation and blessing:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak... Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”
Ephesians 6:10-20, 23-24 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.6.10-24.ESV>

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might...”

This is a command to the church to by faith draw strength from the Spirit of God in Christ for its kingdom work. In Christ, we are able, believing, to receive, or to breathe in, what is needed to sustain us for God’s victorious work. We are directly connected to the Almighty God and to Christ’s own body, and He has all dominion and ability.

“...Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil...”

Any missing piece of armor leaves a warrior susceptible to harm or death. We must put on all of the armor that Paul described in order to stand firm against the devil’s schemes to harm us. The devil does intend to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10), though he has no authority over Christ followers. In Christ, our record of debt was nailed to the cross such that the rulers and authorities of Satan have been disarmed and put to open shame (Colossians 2:14-15). This does not currently stop the accuser and thief from scheming and from working to steal what isn’t his to take. Yet, Christ came to destroy (luō) the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). (The Greek word luō is also translated as to loose, to break, to dissolve, or to put off.) In Christ, we must know what is true and stand on it, being of a steadfast mind.

“...For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places....”

People are not the enemy. We should adapt our perception for each person we know to consider what God has made possible for them through Christ’s redemption and treat them accordingly. Saul was a formidable opponent of those following Jesus’ Way because of the way

he chose to live his life (based on what he wrongly thought was pleasing to God), and look what God did with him when Christ redeemed him! Christ led Saul to think in a completely new way. Christ taught His followers to love their enemies and pray for those that persecute them (Matthew 5:44). When it comes to forces of evil, we must adapt our perception of them to the defeated foes that they are because of the finished work of Christ. Christ's victory though must be enforced, for Satan still seeks to steal, accuse, sow confusion and doubt, and scheme in other ways against God and His image bearers. In Christ, the Spirit of God fights for us so we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37), able to follow Christ's lead in triumphal procession (2 Corinthians 2:14). Jesus told His followers to speak to the mountain, and it would move (Mark 11:22-24); Paul, who lived by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20), is an example of such overcoming on a repeated basis, as we have seen. God has given authority to His church, built on the type of faith in Christ that Peter had, to bind (deō) and to loose (luō), and the gates of hell shall not prevail against us (Matthew 16:18-20). (The Greek word deō also suggests to forbid, prohibit, or to declare to be illicit per Thayer's Lexicon.) God's word is true, it is unbreakable, and speaking it causes spiritual forces of evil to flee (Psalm 119:89,160, Matthew 4:10-11, John 10:35, James 4:7).

"...Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm..."

Here Paul clarifies that the whole armor is especially to stand firm at a time that the onslaught of evil is especially significant. Christ said that we as His disciples would experience resistance as He did if we stood firm for Christ and for righteousness (e.g., Matthew 5:10-11). Paul certainly experienced strong resistance from the enemy as He worked to take kingdom territory from him, and Paul stood firm as he did so, so he spoke from experience. Paul lived what Jesus had proclaimed and done: 'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.'

Matthew 11:12

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/MAT.11.12>

The "taking by force" that Jesus spoke of was going into the world, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, teaching about the same to make disciples, doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38). Christ was bold, compassionate, and determined, having a militant attitude when it came to the evil that oppressed His Father's beloved image bearers (e.g., Luke 10:9,18-19). Part of Christ's compassion for people was hating the evil that affected them enough to cut it out of their lives. Christ in him, Paul followed this pattern of Christ exactly, as did the Apostle Peter. As they did so, they were protected until the time of their ministry on earth was complete.

"...Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth..."

The reality of the kingdom of heaven is that nothing is as it seems, i.e., based on what we come to understand from our five senses and from the information coming to us in the world.

Everything is upside down. It is solely the revelation of the Word of God, including the words of Jesus, that informs us as to what is true about God, true of ourselves, true about evil and the world we live in, and true about what we are to do. If we hope to stand, we must recognize what is real and what is true. We come to recognize the truth only through cooperating with the Spirit

of God unto the renewing of our minds, as Paul taught the Roman church (Romans 12:1-2, Day 32), the Ephesian church (Ephesians 4:23-24, Day 44), and the Colossian church (Colossians 3:9-10). Our work is to put off the old self and put on the new, receiving the mind of Christ that God put into our spirit at new birth (1 Corinthians 2:16).

“...having put on the breastplate of righteousness...”

Identified with Christ at the new birth of our spirit by the Spirit, we receive Jesus Christ’s own righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21), and we are hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). While abiding there in Him, we look to the enemy as Jesus does. We are protected!

“...as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace...”

All of Christ’s disciples must be obedient to go where He has called them, and God has at least called all to go as witnesses to the people they know and to the community that surrounds them (Acts 1:8). None of us are to live a life of rest, to seek comfort, or to focus on making preparations for our retirement; this wasn’t Jesus’ example to us!

Our Sabbath every moment is having Christ Himself indwelling us (Matthew 11:28-29, John 4:34, John 7:38-39, John 14:17), connecting us directly to our God that provides every resource and need from His riches (Ephesians 1:3). As Paul taught the Corinthian church, we are each ambassadors of Christ that are to go in His place (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are each as runners in a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). This is God’s pattern for everyone: to go. As members of God’s family, we are to each obey God’s words (Luke 8:21). If we are not to be sent out to other places where people have not heard of Christ, we are to support those who are sent out (Romans 10:14-17). This is the very heart of God—that those who have not heard the *unbelievably* good news would hear it. And we are to take on His very heart, with His very emotions, which He made accessible to us in Christ (2 Peter 1:3-4). Paul was one who showed us the way, and he said over and over again to the churches that God is no respecter of persons; we are each to follow Christ, and we are each purposed to become like Him in this life (Romans 8:29).

Will it be our priority to go and to send so others may hear the gospel of peace as we have? Will we obey Christ’s command to do unto others as we would have done unto us?

“...In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one...”

Through steadfast faith in the promises of God in His word to protect us, we are indeed protected to go in Christ’s place, standing firm against the enemy as we go. I suggest it is no mistake that Christ’s words of protection, including “nothing shall hurt you,” to the seventy-two disciples that went out to heal and to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom at His command were very much like those in Moses’ ninety first psalm. The words of both speak of protection even over serpents and convey the sense of protection by God in all things; this is by faith. Because of their faith, Moses knew God’s protection, as did Daniel. (For more on such passages in the Old Testament, see my book [*God’s Love Plan in Jesus and the Church: 40 Days in the Old*](#)

Testament.) Christ spoke similar words of protection against serpents and poison in His great commission to all His disciples, as recorded in Mark 16:15-20.

Paul lived by this faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20), and he was protected as he went, taking on Christ's ministry as an ambassador, so he spoke from experience. It's already been discussed, for example, how he was rescued from harm by fellow Christ followers (Day 3), directed by the Spirit of God away from certain harmful situations (Day 2), set free from prison by the Spirit (Day 9), healed of sickness that seemed would lead to death (Day 20), and even raised from the dead to perfect health following being stoned by those that opposed Christ (Day 7). Paul explained to the Corinthian church that this kind of faith came from the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:9).

“...and take the helmet of salvation...”

This statement pertains to our thinking according to the mind of Christ, and especially to knowing the fullness of God's salvation by way of Christ's finished work. Christ's atoning work is complete, saving one from sin and all of its effects, including sickness, death, and any evil. As Paul taught the Colossian church, our identification with Jesus Christ has canceled “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.” God has set it aside, “nailing it to the cross,” having “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in” Christ (Colossians 2:14-15). Our salvation means the enemy has nothing on us, and, hidden in Christ, we are able to claim full victory.

“...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication...”

Jesus taught about the sword of the Spirit as He responded to the devil when tempted, “it is written” (Matthew 4:4,7,10). The word of God cannot be broken (John 10:35). As Jesus did, we can repeat God's words directly from Scripture. Jesus, filled with the Spirit of God (John 1:32), also spoke God's words, and, therefore, as God's servants (Isaiah 55:11), they were done. Jesus said, “the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63).

Likewise, Paul directs the believers to pray in the Spirit, for Christ has given His disciples the Spirit of God to be in them (John 14:17). Paul directed the Thessalonian church to pray without ceasing, which was God's will for them, telling them also not to quench the Spirit or to despise prophecies (1 Thessalonians 5:17-21). Paul taught the Corinthian church to pray in the Spirit as he did (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). Paul followed the instructions of Jesus in prayer, believing that he had what he asked for (Mark 11:22-25) and using prayer to overcome (Luke 10:2, Luke 11:2,5-13, Luke 18:1-8, John 14:13-14, John 16:24).

“...To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly...”

Jesus instructed His disciples on certain occasions to watch and to be ready, telling them to be vigilant, not letting their guards down. The thief is ever looking for an opportunity to take ground (Matthew 11:12), to steal, to kill, and to destroy (John 10:10). As Paul taught the church at Corinth and at Colossae, watchfulness is needed to perceive the schemes of the devil, which

are often subtle, designed to invade our thinking: arguments, opinions, philosophy, and human tradition raised up against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5, Colossians 2:8).

Yet, we are to take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5); we are not to be overcome by evil, but instead to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21), as Christ did (Acts 10:38, 1 John 3:8). Paul's main way to overcome evil was to boldly proclaim the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16); it is also our way. We should pray for others in the church, that God would enable them to speak His words and to overcome. This is the way we take ground in the world for God's church, building God's own strongholds throughout the world.

"...Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible."

When Paul blessed others in the church that loved God, he directed the resources of God in the body of Christ toward them, believing that God had blessed them in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). He was channeling the peace (shâlôm), the love (agapē) and the grace (charis) of God in fuller measure to the Ephesian church, a part of the body, almost as the body itself channels blood and nutrients to all of its parts. Those worthy of Paul's blessing were those who not only made Jesus Christ their Lord, but those who loved Him faithfully in covenant relationship.

Prayer: God, I commit to put on Your whole armor, not leaving off any piece, that I may stand strong in the Spirit against the enemy to bring freedom and to do good in Christ Jesus. I thank You that You have already defeated the devil in the atonement of Jesus Christ. I thank You for showing me what is true that I may not be deceived, and I praise You for the weapon of Your Word. In Your strength, power, boldness, and protection, I will go, both where You have placed me and anywhere You send me. Spirit of God, lead me, both as I pray to overcome, and in every word I speak.

Day 47: Stand firm in one spirit, with one mind

While imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote to the Philippian church he had started and built up during his second and third missionary journeys:

'Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear... What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.'

Philippians 1:1-14,18-30

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/PHP.1.1-14,18-30>

“...I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel...”

The churches were dear to Paul; the family of God was His family, bringing him joy. He saw all saints as partners in the gospel. This is also how God sees us.

“...And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ...”

The King James Version translates the last part as “will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” To perform (epiteleō) means to bring to an end, accomplish, perfect, execute or complete per Thayer’s Lexicon. The good work begins in a believer in Christ at the moment they are made new in salvation by trusting in Jesus’ finished work and committing to His Lordship. Paul described how God would sanctify us, conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ, until the time that Jesus Christ returns. In salvation, a foundation is laid for us in Christ. This is only the beginning. We must cooperate with the Spirit of God to sanctify us, perfecting us by His power.

“...It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart... I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus...”

Paul came to love the church as Christ loves the church. Paul had been made into the image of Jesus, becoming an example of what it looks like to be sanctified by God. It changes our character and our love. Paul came to have the tenderness of Jesus.

“...And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge...”

It is God’s will for each follower of Christ to shed His own love abroad in their hearts by way of the Spirit of God living in them (Romans 5:5). Paul knew what this was like—for God to make his love abound more and then even more, and he wanted it for the churches he had started. This love (agapē) is goodwill and affection that acts. It is not feeling but rather doing good, finding ways to be benevolent, until there exists a feast of love (Thayer Lexicon). It is wanting our brothers and sisters to be full of God because this is the best thing for them, as it is for us. God has allowed us to partake of His nature by way of the earnest of the Spirit, which produces in us all of the fruits of the Spirit. God has made us righteous, pure, blameless, and it is life, freedom, and blessing to live as such—and to bear any fruit that is of the Spirit. God causes us to think right and to act right. He has shared with the body of Christ revelation by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8,10), and part of His fullness is to have such open communication of the things of God to us. Most of all though, we are blessed to be able to love as God loves.

“...I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...”

Persecution often does make fellow believers more bold and causes faith in Christ to spread even more rapidly. When our faith does not cost us anything, we should wonder whether we have stepped out in faith or whether we should step our further. As God perfects love (agapē) in us, this love casts out fear (1 John 4:17-18). Our love becomes as His love is.

“...Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance...For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ...But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account...”

During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul considered whether he would go soon to be with the Lord or whether he should continue his ministry, which is thought to have lasted around 30 years. They were some difficult years! But they were good! At the time Paul wrote Philippians, it had been about 10 years since he wrote to the Galatians, “...Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God...” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). Writing to the Philippians, Paul felt the same way: “to live is Christ.” It had been about 5 years since this

tentmaker had written to the Corinthians about the tent of the body, “For we know that if the tent that we live in that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling...” (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). Paul knew that to die was gain, and he felt like going to be with Jesus; yet, he still felt some responsibility to the churches to stay in order to continue ministering to them.

“...Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit...”

We were bought at a price— the blood of God’s own (Acts 20:28). Accordingly, the following characteristics describe the manner of life worthy of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf: unity, steadfastness, action, boldness.

Unity. It pleases God for His body, the very body of Jesus Christ, to be of one spirit and one mind. This is to be one with God as God has designed for us in Christ, and as He has made possible for those who choose the Lordship of Christ, cooperating with the indwelling Spirit. Let us be careful about the words we choose to speak.

Steadfastness. The love God requires from us is the type of steadfast love that He exhibits for us in covenant relationship.

Action. Love that doesn’t cooperate with Christ’s body to do good is not God’s love; love acts to carry out God’s good will for all of those who are made in God’s image.

Boldness. God did not give us a spirit of fear, so it is not worthy of God’s sacrifice for us. We are to instead cooperate with the Spirit to be renewed in the spirit of our minds (Ephesians 4:23), such that our fear will be replaced by love, power, and the those things characteristic of the mind of Christ (2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Corinthians 2:16).

“...For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had...”

As believers, we are all called to what persecution and suffering comes from following Christ as Lord, being obedient to the whole will of God as Christ was (John 4:34, John 6:38, John 18:11).

Prayer: Thank You, God, for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for me and for performing Your good work in me. I pray that I would live a life worthy of Christ’s sacrifice: pursuing unity in lifting up Jesus and doing good; boldly proclaiming the gospel; loving You steadfastly, the way You want to be loved; seeking first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, including righteous spiritual results; counting the cost to follow You. I pray this also for my church and the local churches in my area. I take responsibility for all that You have entrusted to me and those You have given me to love, and I cooperate with You to bear the fruit of righteousness. Be glorified in my life and in the fullness of Your body as it carries out all of Your will.

Day 48: Christ’s interests, humility and authority

Paul continued his letter to the Philippian church:

‘So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility

count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. '

Philippians 2:1-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/PHP.2.1-21>

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind...”

Paul had taken on the mind of Christ, thinking about the body of Christ as God does. The church, God's family, was Paul's family. It is God's will that His body be unified, having the mind of Christ, one mind; having the same love, God's (agapē) love; being in full accord, having the spirit of unity. These things come from our choice to live by the indwelling Spirit of God which Christ gave to us when we became His. We will live by the Spirit when we submit to the Lordship of Christ, which we commit to do at our new birth in the Spirit.

Are we faithful to our commitment? Do we love the unity of the church as God loves it (John 17:21-23)? Do we seek this unity which pleases God?

“...Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests...”

Any who do not live by the Spirit, but who instead are soulish or carnal, as those who are not born again, are focused on themselves, their own interests, their families, their advancement, and their things. This is the fruit a bad tree (Luke 6:42-43). When we are led by the Spirit, our minds are renewed (Romans 12:1-2). We put off the old self and put on Christ's nature (Ephesians 4:22-23, Colossians 3:9-10,12) that God has put in our spirit at our new birth. We show the fruit of a good tree, including humility and love that is not self-seeking. This is God's kind of love for all others, especially those in the body of Christ, not just love for our own

families. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ in all things in this life (Romans 8:29). This is Christ's interest for you: that you be conformed to His image, taking on His nature. God redeemed you from death with the blood of His own (Acts 20:28), not that you should live for yourself and seek life in the old life that always brings bondage and death, but instead that you might truly be free and live.

"...Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped..."

Submitting to Christ's Lordship, Paul instructed the church that we are to put on His mind. This mind is ours in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:16); it is part of our newborn spirit (John 3:6). Paul then proceeded to explain the humility of Christ. Christ, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-16). Yet, Christ emptied himself of His godly nature, taking on the form of a helpless human infant born in an animal feeding trough to poor parents. In order to take on God's full nature, Christ had to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:13-17, John 1:32-33, Acts 10:38), as He then enabled us to do (John 14:16, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:38-39). Though Christ was in the form of God, He emptied Himself, truly being born in the likeness of men. He limited Himself to do only what a person filled with and living by God's Spirit can do. He showed us what it looked like to live by the Spirit that He later gave us, going about doing God's good will to all. As children of God, God's will for us in this life is to serve all, to humble ourselves, and to obey our Father God in all things. Jesus Christ served everyone, going around meeting the needs of all during His ministry and commanding His disciples to do the same. Jesus served, feeding the hungry, healing every sick person, welcoming strangers and all marginalized persons. He showed His disciples to serve as the lowliest person by washing their dirty feet, even the feet of His enemy, Judas (John 13:1-17). Next, he humbled himself in obedience to God, becoming a curse for them, and for all who would believe in Him, through His death on a cross (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). In this finished work, Christ showed us what it looked like to live by the Spirit that He later gave us, opening up a channel for the free flow of God's good will to all.

"...Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..."

Before Christ's victory for us, authority *on earth* belonged to the devil (Matthew 4:8-9, John 12:31). Before Christ's victory in us, we belonged to and followed the devil (Ephesians 2:1-3). In Christ, God disarmed the rulers and authorities of the devil, putting them to open shame, legally triumphing over them for all time (Colossians 2:15). God then raised up Jesus Christ in bodily form and seated Him at His right hand with all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18, Colossians 3:1). Jesus' name is above everything that has a name on heaven, on earth, and under the earth, in every age to come (Ephesians 1:20-22). He has authority over all spirits and all people (which have spirits that give them their life). All must submit to the authority of Jesus Christ. Christ exercised this authority even during His ministry to destroy (*luō*) the works of the devil, healing and making whole all who were oppressed of the devil (Matthew 8:16-17, 1 John

3:8, Acts 10:38). Paul prophesied that any who do not willingly confess that Jesus is Lord and submit to Him will one day be made to confess it and submit to Him, giving glory to the Father.

“...Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation ...”

Our salvation (sōtēria) is broader than the single event of our new birth, crucial as it may be. Per the Thayer Lexicon, salvation is the present possession of all who belong to the beloved family of God. It includes deliverance and preservation from any onslaught of the enemy, which does not stop although we belong to Jesus Christ; instead, it may be expected to intensify as we obey the Spirit of God, bringing defeat to Satan’s kingdom. It also includes the sum of benefits and blessings that we receive from the point of our new birth onward; in Christ, all spiritual blessings are ours to be appropriated (Ephesians 1:3). The word fear (phobos) suggests the reverence one has for a husband, as we are in covenant relationship with the One who freely gave us salvation. Fear and trembling (tromos) describes the anxiety of one who distrusts their own ability to completely meet all requirements of God (Matthew 19:26), yet one does their utmost to fulfil one’s duty (Matthew 5:48). The suggestion is that full salvation is not something we may have on our own, but instead we must will to cooperate with the Spirit of God who works in us, since God expects us to cooperate with His Spirit to build upon the foundation of (1 Corinthians 3:9-11) and the authority of Christ in us in order to bring salvation to fullness in our lives (Ephesians 1:19-23), grace upon grace (John 1:16). Working with the Spirit of God in us, we are empowered to be delivered from every onslaught of the enemy, including temptation, sickness, and any hindrance—just as Christ was in His earthly ministry (Acts 10:38). Cooperating with God, we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, taking on the characteristics of God’s nature, the fruit of being led by the Spirit (Colossians 3:9-17). He has already given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Cooperating with the indwelling God, we take on the mind of Christ, coming to desire His good will to be done and acting on it (Romans 12:1-2), walking as He walked. Acting on it, we do the word of God along with the family of God (Luke 8:21). The indwelling Spirit changes our will to His will (thelō ehtelō). We resolve to do good works motivated by love, becoming a blessing to those we encounter (Ephesians 2:10), thereby bringing glory to God. It becomes our delight to see that God is glorified in every situation. Paul followed this very pattern for His life, teaching that it was expected of all Christ followers.

“...Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish...”

Co-heirs in Christ, God calls us to a life of sinlessness empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit that makes us like Jesus Christ. Connected directly to God, with God flowing through us, we were made as lamps to burn brightly in the midst of darkness (Zechariah 4:2-14, Matthew 2:14-16, John 3:19-21). Trusted to carry on Christ’s own ministry (2 Corinthians 4:4-7, 5:18-20), we are to do nothing that will affect our witness. As channels of the living God, we shine as lights by having a hold upon, giving attention to, and holding forth the Word of God, which is both light and life (zōē). Obedient to Christ’s command (Matthew 28:18-20), Paul’s work was not just to bring saving faith to people, but to make fully devoted disciples of them. This is the pattern for all followers of God.

“...Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all...”

Paul was pleased to be able to serve the Philippian church, God having called His followers to serve all and to build His church. God has made us all priests. We should delight not only in our opportunity for service but also in those whom God has given to serve us.

“...I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”

Paul says of most, including those that were in the church: “they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.” This is a stark contrast to the will of God for our lives that Paul had just expressed.

With all that God has entrusted to us, do we seek the interests of Jesus Christ? Or do we primarily seek our own interests? Have you cooperated with God to be sanctified such that You are genuinely concerned about what Jesus is?

Paul and Timothy were genuinely concerned for the welfare of God’s beloved church. God loves His family, whom He has purchased with the blood of His own (Acts 20:28). We are called to follow in Jesus’ steps, proclaiming the gospel, freeing captives, making disciples, serving as Christ did, loving as Christ does, building up Christ’s body, and seeking the unity of His body. These are Christ’s interests.

What are our interests? The interests of our local church?

Prayer: God, I repent for having sought after my own interests and the interests of my loved ones rather than the interests of Jesus Christ, my Redeemer. Holy Spirit, slay what’s left of me, that Christ, who gave Himself for me, may live in me and through me. I offer up all of me for all of You, Spirit of God. Renew my mind, Spirit of God, that I may love all of those You love and seek their best. Connection to You and fullness of life in You is what’s best for them. Thank You for the sacrifice and the example of Christ Jesus for me and for them. I praise You, Lord Jesus, for Your name is above every name in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. I submit to Your leading, seeking to do the whole will of God.

Day 49: That we may know Him and the power of His resurrection

Paul continued his letter to the Philippians:

‘For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain

Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.'

Philippians 3:3-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/PHP.3.3-21>

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...”

When Paul called the church the circumcision, he referred to our separation from the unclean multitude and true consecration to God. We know God in truth and have the Spirit of God by the new birth and are, thus, able to worship God in spirit and truth as He wants to be worshiped (John 4:24). Confident in God, we put no confidence in the flesh or in worldly systems of advancement and kingdom building that depend on the traditions of men. Under the Jewish system, Paul had attained righteousness in the eyes of his peers; meanwhile, he had rebelled against God, persecuting God’s beloved church.

“...But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus...”

In following Christ, we forsake our old lives, our position and reputation in that life, and the advancement we sought there. Paul claimed there was nothing better than to know Christ Jesus as Lord. To know Christ as Lord has worth surpassing all.

“...For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him...”

When Christ revealed Himself to Paul and called him to be a servant and a witness to Jews and Gentiles in order that he might expand the kingdom of God (Day 2), Paul threw away his old life and the kingdom he had built, counting it as rubbish or dung. As Christ taught, the kingdoms we build that are not in obedience to God’s word are like homes built on sand; they will fall (Matthew 27:26-27). We are to build upon Christ’s words with our foundation being faith in Christ. Only new life in Christ brings righteousness before God. Identified with Christ, He gives of what God the Father has given to Him.

“— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...”

In gaining Christ, Paul came to know Him and the power (dunamis) of His resurrection. Paul came to know God’s nature and His will in Christ, which completely changed His life and His purpose. Paul came to have the Spirit of Christ live within him (Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:9, Philippians 1:19), leading and directing him. Paul saw “Christ in you” as the great mystery of God hidden throughout the ages (Colossians 1:27), making us fellow heirs with Christ (Ephesians 3:6) and members of His own body (Ephesians 5:30-32), and he was able both to experience it firsthand and also teach the world about it. Paul also came to know the power of God in Christ—the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lived in Him (Romans 8:10-11). That resurrection life gave life to his mortal body, healing him from sickness (Day 20) and raising him from the dead (Day 7). That resurrection power flowed through him to heal many others (Day 6, Day 14, Day 37) and to raise the dead (Day 34). The power of God stopped interference in his ministry (Day 5, Day 9) and freed him from prison (Day 9). Further, Paul taught the identification with Christ in sufferings, in death, in resurrection, and in His resurrected body. Paul certainly shared in Jesus’ sufferings, as have many other Christ followers that have come after Paul. Paul identified also with the death of Christ, for he counted himself, his old life, and his old way of thinking crucified with Christ so that instead Christ could live in him (Galatians 2:20).

“...Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own...”

Paul knew it was God’s purpose for him and other Christ followers to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29), empowered by the Spirit of God to obey Christ’s command to be perfect, or made complete, as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). As Paul directed the church at Thessalonica, we are to be wholly sanctified, spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Paul said he had not achieved this, but he pressed on to make it his own, working out his salvation, while knowing that God also worked in him to will and do good works (Philippians 2:12-13). Paul did this because Christ had made Paul His own, redeeming Him with His own blood, calling Paul to Himself, and giving Paul the Spirit of God to enable Him to be victorious in all things.

Paul forgot the life that was behind because it was of no help. Only the devil reminds us of our past, trying to convince us we are not worthy of what Christ has done for us or who He has made us in Him, instead attempting to keep us in chains, pulling us toward death, rather than have us walk forth in freedom and in life, directly connected to God. Notice that the language Paul uses of “press on” and “strain toward” suggests a fight between two kingdoms; there is always resistance. Focused though on doing the will and the word of God, Paul strained forward toward what God had for him ahead. The upward call of Christ Jesus is the prize on which we should set our sights. From faith to faith (Romans 1:17) and from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), Paul was made into the image of Jesus Christ, receiving what was His as a co-heir with Him. This was also for the Philippian church, as it is also for us in Christ.

“...Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you...”

Paul had just told the Philippians to be of one mind (Philippians 2:2), the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Paul was of that mind, and He knew it was the Spirit of God that brought him to that point. He knew the spirit would also work in others who were willing to have their minds renewed (Colossians 3:9-10). Paul exhorted the growing believers to press on, not to regress. If we aren't growing in Christ, becoming more like Him in cooperation with the Spirit, we are backsliding. We backslide when we don't provide a hospitable environment, good soil for the Word of God to grow in us; as Jesus taught, “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

“...Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many... walk as enemies of the cross of Christ...” Instead, we should imitate Christ and those who follow Christ with renewed minds. The Philippian church was to imitate Paul and the apostles, who sought to do God's word and do all of God's will, rather than those who had sought after the cares of the world, their own glory, and their own interests and satisfaction, becoming enemies of the cross of Christ. Paul showed the emotions of the Spirit of God toward these enemies, weeping as he thought of them.

Paul called the believers to follow him as He followed Christ. When we need to grow in our faith, it is especially helpful to be able to truly see Christ alive in and working through another person we know, so we can yoke ourselves to them and follow them as they walk the narrow road, following Christ as Lord, walking as He walked. Does God want to raise you up to make you to be this person to others? We are all called to make disciples.

“...But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Paul reminded the believers that in Christ their citizenship is in heaven, so they should set their minds on the things that are above (Colossians 3:1). Their hope should be in Christ and God's promises for them who have been made righteous in Christ. Christ will one day glorify our bodies as sons of God (Romans 8:23), co-heirs with Him, just as His body is glorified at the right hand of God as the Son of God.

Prayer: Thank you, Father God, for my righteousness and life in Christ, and for enabling me to know and experience both Christ and the power of His resurrection. I count what I pursued before Christ as rubbish. Spirit of God, transform me more fully into the image of Christ. Seeking to be of one mind with You, I set my interests as Your interests, my will as Your will, and I set my hope on Your precious promises.

Day 50: Supply from the riches in glory in Christ Jesus

Paul concluded his letter to the Philippian church:

'Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.'

Philippians 4:1-23

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/PHP.4.1-23>

“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved...”

As previously stated, Paul had come to love the family of God as God loved them. The church was not only Paul's joy, it was his crown. Paul had spoken to the Corinthian church about running a race to obtain an imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:24-25), and he also thought of the church as that crown, as prophesied by Isaiah, “You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God” (Isaiah 63:3). Paul knew that God rejoices over His church, His bride, and he came to feel the same way that God feels about it.

“...I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord...”

Paul saw women as coworkers together with him and with the Lord. In Christ, all are beloved children, co-heirs with Christ.

“...Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice...”

Twice Paul directed the church to rejoice in the Lord always. There are so many reasons to rejoice in God's goodness. We are to rejoice despite circumstance. In prison for his faith, Paul and Silas still found cause to rejoice (Day 9). They let their good nature be known to fellow prisoners and the jailer, providing a strong witness and bringing glory to God.

“...The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God...”

In Christ, we are connected directly to God and His kingdom. Knowing this, we should not fear or worry. If we seek God's glory in what we ask for, we can ask for anything in Jesus' name and expect to receive it because God keeps His word (John 14:13-14). Thus we should consider our prayers answered when we ask and *thank God in advance of seeing the result*, following Christ's example (John 6:11-15, John 11:41-43). Satisfied in God and wanting for nothing, we are filled with the peace of God which none can take away. (Shâlôm in the Hebrew has similar meaning to eirēnē in the Greek).

“...Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things....practice these things...”

God's peace comes from cooperating with the Spirit of God unto the renewing of our mind. This renewal starts with right thinking and must include putting our right thinking into practice, becoming doers of God's word. The Spirit abides with only those who are obedient to do God's word (Acts 5:32, John 14:15-18).

“...Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content... I can do all things through him who strengthens me...”

As a member of Christ's own body, Paul had learned how to draw on God's strength as a resource at any time. This enabled him to continue the Lord's work without pause, which would have been impossible in his own strength. If you are in Christ, you are also part of His body and can draw from the same resources as Paul, believing and giving thanks.

“...And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus...”

The Philippians were obedient to God's leading to meet Paul's needs as a missionary. Just as God provided for Paul's needs, he told them God would supply all of their needs. God supplies the needs of the church through all that has been given to Christ. We need only to ask, believing and giving thanks.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for supplying all of our needs according to Christ's riches in glory. Thank You for Your indwelling Spirit through which You share Your mind, thoughts, and peace. Thank You for supplying strength to accomplish Your good works. I will rejoice always in Your goodness.

Day 51: The aim of our charge is love

The Apostle Paul wrote two letters to his traveling companion, Timothy. Here are selections from his first letter, which was written from Macedonia after Paul had been freed from prison in Rome: 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith... I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, “

1 Timothy 1:1-5,12-18

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1TI.1.1-5.12-18>

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

1 Timothy 2:1-6

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1TI.2.1-6>

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord...”

Paul was commanded by Jesus that he would be a servant and a witness, sent to Jews and Gentiles to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive both forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:12-18). Paul was to make not only converts, but disciples. Timothy was one of these disciples (Day 9), having become an evangelist who traveled with Paul. Paul opened up his letter with a blessing, channeling the grace, mercy and peace of God and Jesus Christ to Timothy, who was ministering at Ephesus. These fruits are part of the riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

“...As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine...”

Paul thought it important enough to stay for two years at the major city of Ephesus to build the church there. Paul also visited Ephesus on his third missionary journey. When Paul moved on toward Macedonia, he left Timothy, asking him to ensure that wrong doctrines did not creep into the church.

“...The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith...”

Godly love (agapē) was the chief end of Paul’s charge and gospel proclamation. The love of God and man is the chief characteristic of the mature godliness that comes from salvation and sanctification. Such love comes forth from a heart made pure by God, from true faith in God, from a mind renewed. To the Corinthian church, Paul called this love greater than even faith (1 Corinthians 13:13), which is the essential principle of the kingdom of God (Day 29).

“...I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service...”

As Paul told the Philippian church, he drew strength from Jesus for service as part of His body (Philippians 4:13). Because of God’s longsuffering, mercy, and grace, Paul could forget about what lay behind him—his history as a blasphemer, persecutor of the church, and opponent of God’s work—and strain forward to what lay ahead, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:14-15). Paul’s story shows God’s amazing grace and also what it looks like to take on the very faith and love of Jesus after having been made a new creation in Christ. God’s change in a life yielded to Him in Christ is completely transforming, showing what it looks like to be delivered from the power of darkness and translated into His kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

“...To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen...”

Paul paused to praise God for who He is, giving us an example of rejoicing always (Philippians 4:4).

“...This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ...”

Later in the same letter, Paul referred again to these prophecies: “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”

1 Timothy 4:14

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1Ti.4.14>

These passages refer back to a time where a council of church elders, probably at Ephesus (Acts 20:17), laid hands on Timothy, prophesied about his ministry, and the Holy Spirit was imparted to him for use in his ministry. This reinforces that there may be a transfer of presence, resurrection life (zōē), and blessing from the Spirit of God during physical contact by one who or more who are Spirit-filled; this is one of the ways God has worked even since Old Testament times, and even more so in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 19:5-7), wherein the Spirit of God is in believers, not just with them (John 14:16-17, Acts 2:38-39). The deposit of the

Holy Spirit and the elders' prophecies better prepared Timothy for the ministry of God's kingdom. Paul connected the prophecies and gift of the Spirit back to their main charge: the love of God. This is reminiscent of Paul's discourse to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 12-14; while Paul explained the gifts of the Spirit to the Corinthian church, prophecy included, he highlighted in Chapter 13 that it's all to be motivated by the love of God (charity) placed in us by His Spirit.

"...First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions..."

Even in a time of great persecution of the church, the warfare Paul encouraged was never warfare against the standing government. Paul didn't concern himself with such affairs, knowing that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but instead against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). Paul's main method to fight was to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God boldly (Acts 28:30-31, Ephesians 6:12), which turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), and to allow God to confirm His message by the power of His Spirit (Acts 19:8-12,20, Romans 15:18-19). When it came to government officials, Paul urged prayer, including supplication and thanksgiving, for them. He did not oppose them publicly, even as Jesus did not oppose the Roman government during His ministry (Mark 12:17). Instead, as peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), any who are to minister for Christ are to show a godly witness to all.

"... who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth..."

Christ came out of God's love to save the world (John 3:16-17) and to teach truth (John 18:36-38), making a way to be made righteous for all people through faith in Christ's finished work, including government officials. As such, we are to adapt our perception of all people to what His redemption has made possible for them. Paul did this because of the way God transformed him in Christ. This change in perception will make us treat other people very differently than they would be treated by any that do not follow Christ.

Prayer: God, thank You for Your patience with me and for the great gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, given for all. I praise You for Your loving kindness, mercy and grace. Spirit of God, shed Your love abroad in my heart that I may see and treat others as Christ would treat them. Thank You for the deposit of Your Holy Spirit and the ability You give me for ministry through Your Spirit. I pray for and I take the very faith and tenderhearted love that are in Christ Jesus, and I thank You for it.

Day 52: The Holy Spirit was poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior

The following is an excerpt of a letter Paul wrote to Titus, a close traveling companion of his, while in prison at Rome:

'Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.'

Titus 3:1-15

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/TIT.3.1-15>

Titus, a Gentile (Galatians 2:3) who was led to faith in Christ by Paul (Titus 1:4), was one whose heart God had transformed to have the same earnest care for the church that Paul had (2 Corinthians 8:16) and Timothy had (Philippians 2:19-21). This came from the same indwelling Spirit of God.

“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle...”

Similar to his discourse to the Ephesian church (Ephesians 4), Paul exhorted Titus to remind the believers to put on godly character (Ephesians 4:22-23) as fruits of the Spirit and also to be ready. We are to have the same mind as Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16, Philippians 2:2-5). As Paul did in his first letter to Timothy (Day 51), Paul taught submission to earthly rulers and authorities in this letter to Titus. Our fight is not against them. Nor is it against other people. As such, our speech, which comes forth from our heart (Luke 6:43-45), is always to be gentle and courteous. We are to avoid arguments and only speak good of people, never evil, acting in line with our Father (in the new self), not the devil (as in the old self). Our mouth is to line up with His Word. As coworkers together with God, we are to stay ready for every good work that He has prepared in advance for us (Ephesians 2:10). In Titus 2:14, Paul wrote that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are *zealous for good works* [italics mine].” Readiness for good works comes in staying pure

and clean and in putting on the mind of Christ. Infused by God's love, we are to contemplate His plan and His good will for people, then act in accordance with God's plan and will for them. The love of God shed abroad by His Spirit is zealous, and it acts to fulfill God's good will.

"...For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, ..."

In response to God's grace (Titus 2:11-12), we are to put off the old fleshly and soulish self with its practices and put on the new, led by the Spirit to live righteously. We are hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:2-3,9-10) — our God, whose nature has always been goodness, loving kindness, and mercy (Exodus 34:6). Cooperating with the Spirit of God, the Spirit poured out on us richly, makes us new in stages, washing, regenerating and renewing us. Cooperating in this process grows us up in maturity into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). As sons of God, we are co-heirs with Jesus in Christ (Romans 8:14-17).

"...The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works..."

Paul insisted that all believers are to be zealous for good works and careful to devote themselves to good works, a natural outflow of trusting God. Paul encouraged Titus and believers toward good works a third time in close succession in Titus 3:14, which reads "And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful." Paul expected all believers in the church to be devoted to act in Christ's stead, even in cases of urgent need, and he expected all connected to Christ, the true Vine (John 15:1), to be fruitful (Matthew 7:17,20, Matthew 12:33, Mark 4:20, Luke 8:15, John 15:5-8,16). Without pursuit of good works, we cannot grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15), who was about doing the good will of His Father. Jesus, the Word of God in the flesh (John 1:14), was a doer of the word. Christ is in us, the body of Christ, the doers of His word (Luke 4:21).

"...But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless..."

Distraction comes from the devil; it is his very nature. Bad fruit comes from bad trees and from those giving themselves back over to the devil by their choices. Division within the body of Christ is not acceptable, as we are not to divide what God has joined (Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:9, Ephesians 5:31-32). We are to have nothing to do with anyone in the church that continues to stir up division despite warnings; this spirit must be put out of the church. The fruit of the spirit includes the spirit of unity in God's church. Let us be led by the Spirit.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, I have put off my old self and the chains associated with it in cooperation with You. I praise You, Lord God, for the fullness of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ for me and for preparing good works in advance for me to do. I choose to live devoted to walking in them, Lord, as I walk in You. I will also pursue peace and pursue the unity of Your body. Lord, I seek to bear much fruit, living a Spirit-led life that is fully pleasing to You.

Day 53: Christ is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature

The Apostle Paul is the most likely author of the book of Hebrews, which was probably addressed to the Jews in the Jerusalem church during a time of persecution of the church. It begins:

'Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end." And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?'

Hebrews 1:1-14

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/HEB.1.1-14>

'Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers... '

Hebrews 2:1-11

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/HEB.2.1-11>

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”

Paul began this letter to the Jews by outlining different periods of God’s dispensation concerning God’s relationship to us. Before Christ, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, including David, by way of His Spirit that was with them. The time of Jesus Christ began a new dispensation during which God spoke directly to us by his Son Jesus, in whom His Holy Spirit dwelled. As taught in Paul’s prior letters, Jesus, the Author of life (Acts 3:15), both created the world (1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-17) and has been appointed by God the Father as heir of all things (e.g., Romans 8:17).

“...He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power...”

In a manner similar to Paul’s address to the Colossian church, Paul called Jesus the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all things are held together (Colossians 1:15-17). Jesus is the exact imprint of the Father’s nature, an additional revelation of what the Father is like when dwelling among us. Jesus, the pinnacle of the Father’s glory, is radiant light in darkness (John 1:4-5) and the Word of God incarnate (John 1:14). As the Word of God that went out to create it, Christ upholds the world. Christ, seated at God’s right hand in fulfillment of prophecy (Psalm 110:1), has been given all power and authority (Matthew 28:18). The name of Jesus Christ is superior to every other name in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Philippians 2:9-10, Ephesians 1:21). Faith in His name confers authority to believers in whom the Holy Spirit dwells (Acts 3:16, Acts 14:10, Acts 16:18).

‘...For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”?...’

Teaching that Jesus was the promised Son of God to His Jewish brothers, Paul first quoted Psalm 2:7 that was attributed in Acts 4:25 to David, who spoke by the Holy Spirit. He then quoted God’s word to Nathan the prophet about Jesus Christ and His eternal kingdom that is recorded in 2 Samuel 7:14 and 1 Chronicles 17:13. Paul then went on to describe other prophecies that pertained to Christ’s supremacy.

‘...And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? ...’

Jesus attributed this Scripture from Psalm 110:1, a prophecy of David, to Christ while speaking to the Sadducees (Luke 20:41-43). Paul interpreted it to the Corinthian church, prophesying that Christ would deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power, putting all His enemies under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:24-25). In contrast to Him who has received all authority in heaven and on earth, angels are assigned to serve the children of God that are saved by faith.

“...It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will...”

The gospel of the kingdom was taught first by Christ Himself and then by His disciples. In each case, God confirmed the gospel through works of the Holy Spirit: His signs, wonders, miracles and gifts. God's ways are unchanging just as God Himself is. Paul's preaching of the gospel of the kingdom was filled with these works of the Spirit of God: works of revelation, power, and inspiration (Acts 14:3, Romans 15:18-19, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). The Spirit of God is given to them that obey God (Acts 5:32), people after God's own heart that seek to do all of His will (Acts 13:22).

'...For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control...'

Paul referred here to Psalm 8 of David, where David wrote that God had made mankind a little lower than 'elôhîm, which could be translated as angels, which is only done once in the Bible, or God Himself, as it is translated 2,346 times. God had crowned mankind, made in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27), with glory and honor, giving Him dominion (râdâh) over the earth and everything on it (Genesis 1:26). Paul commented that God left nothing outside of man's control. This dominion which was stolen by the devil (Matthew 4:8-9, John 12:31) was restored by faith in Jesus Christ and by faith in His name (Mark 11:22-24, Luke 10:19, Acts 1:8, Acts 3:16, Acts 14:8-9, Acts 16:18, 1 John 3:8). Like the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul knew how to exercise the dominion of Jesus Christ. He did it and he taught it, imparting faith to so many of his hearers; or rather, teaching them to draw on the faith of the Son of God as he did (Galatians 2:20). Paul knew and taught that God gives us the Holy Spirit as Helper to use for God (John 14:12-17). As such, he knew that one must use what God has given them to bless others in order to be given more. And he did! Paul sowed generously and reaped generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). It worked for him, and so he taught it to the church to build it up (1 Corinthians 14:12).

"...At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him..."

Jesus' suffering of death restored those identified with Him to mankind's position of glory and honor. The Word of God made flesh did this, making many who would believe in Him righteous, thereby restoring them to glory as co-heirs with Him.

"...For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers..."

In Christ, we have been directly connected to God (1 Corinthians 6:17) and given the Spirit of God to sanctify us, conforming us into Christ's image as children of God, if we will consecrate ourselves and cooperate with the work of the Spirit. This text addressed to the Jews is very similar to the one Paul wrote to the Romans about life in the Spirit (Day 30): "For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:29). God's purpose for us in Christ is to grow up in every way into His fullness (Ephesians 4:13-15).

Prayer: God, I praise You for the beauty of Your creation and for making me in Your image and likeness, crowned with glory and honor by You. Thank You for Jesus Christ that has restored me to be recreated into this image and to a position of dominion over all things on earth. Jesus Christ, Word of God, radiance of God's glory, I thank You for Your suffering of death for me. Holy Spirit, complete Your work within me. I am fully Yours, God. As Christ did, I give myself over to do all of Your will.

Day 54: Let us with confidence draw near the throne of grace

Paul continued his letter to the church:

'Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. '

Hebrews 3:12-14

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/HEB.3.12-14>

'Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'

Hebrews 4:11-16

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/HEB.4.11-16>

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart...”

Just because we have been made new creations when we put our faith in Christ, believing that He died and was raised for us, this does not mean God grows us up. As new Christians, we may not know what God is like and may not know His word. We may make for ourselves some image of who Jesus is and what God wants that does not represent truth. If we know God's word, we may not believe it, or we may not act on it. We may still want to choose our own way rather than follow Christ or make Him Lord. (To make Him Lord means we surrender our will to do all of the will of God.) We may believe we need to act in our own interest in order to make things turn out well for ourselves, rather than obey God's word to all Christ followers. Any action that does not stem from faith, trusting in God's goodness and the truth of His word to us and acting on it, is sin (Romans 14:23). Inhabited by God's own Spirit, Christ has empowered us to live free from sin just as He did! In the new covenant, God elevated what is possible for mankind, Christ living in us, and expects us to follow Christ and serve His interests, not live for ourselves. Do we really believe God desires to do good to us and that Christ's way is the way of freedom and life? Jesus continued to instruct His own disciples in faith throughout His time on earth, as they struggled with unbelief; are we seeking to grow up in Christ from faith to faith (Romans 1:17)? Do we seek His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33), expecting God will be faithful to His nature and His word?

“...For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...”

The word of God enables us to renew our minds in cooperation with God's indwelling Spirit to be conformed into the image of Christ according to God's purpose for each one of us (Romans

12:1-2, Ephesians 4:22-23, Colossians 3:2,9-10,12,16). The word of God is His righteous blueprint for what should be, leading things of earth to be conformed to the perfection of heaven and God's good intent (Matthew 6:10). When the imperishable word of God dwells in us (1 Peter 1:21) and we have kept the soil right (Matthew 13:18-23), it identifies any unbelief, separating it out, bringing it into the light. Meanwhile, the word of the devil is also sown as seed all day long by those in the world (who are not born again or who do not have renewed minds). This seed of the devil competes to gain strongholds in our mind that are set up against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) and the righteous blueprint laid out in His word. The word of God allows us to understand the thoughts of God which come from the mind of Christ that has been put in our spirit at our new birth (1 Corinthians 2:16), and it enables us to separate out those thoughts that are not of God (Matthew 5:22-23,28,44,48, Matthew 6:22-23,25). The thoughts coming from the old self (that served and was subject to the bondage of the devil rather than God as father) should be separated from us, rebuked as not coming from God (e.g., Matthew 5:27-30), and removed as dross. We should choose not to act on these thoughts. Meanwhile, God's revealed truth, living and active in us, is able to show us what should be kept, what we should continue to think on, forming good thought patterns and habits, and what we should act on to do good and to do right. We must step out and use what we have from God, putting His word into practice, and it will grow according to His kingdom ways. This is the way of victory that Jesus showed, the way of living rightly with God's indwelling Spirit. This way, God makes us from glory to glory into pure gold (1 Peter 1:7), doers of His word and His will (Matthew 12:50, Luke 8:21).

"...And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account..."

Those who do not follow Christ and we who do follow Christ will be judged (Matthew 25:31-33, Romans 14:10-12, 2 Corinthians 5:10). None are hidden from God's judgment. We will be judged according to the words we speak (Matthew 12:35-37), which are actions that stem from our thoughts, and the rest of our actions (Matthew 25:34-46). We will be judged according to our conscience, given to each by God (Romans 1:18-20), and according to God's word revealed to us.

"...Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession..."

In Christ, Jesus is our high priest, seated at God's right hand, a mediator between us and God the Father. He has made us righteous for all time, connecting us directly to God through our association with Him and through the Spirit that dwells in us. We are each connected to Him, body (1 Corinthians 3:16), soul (1 Corinthians 2:16) and spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:23). We have been made co-heirs with Him. We have been made partakers of the divine nature by Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3-4), the Word of God made flesh; glorified; and given all authority over everything that has a name (Philippians 2:9-10).

So let us hold fast to our confession of the Word of God. We are to hold fast to salvation in Christ and identification with Him and everything that is ours in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3, Ephesians 3:19-20). Believing the Word of God, we are to hold on to every precious promise as ours. Every promise in the Word of God meant for the righteous is yes and amen in Jesus, who

has made us righteous (2 Corinthians 1:20). We must hold fast to the word of God to us, trusting the report of God over everything else, as Abraham did (Romans 4:17-22) and as Paul did. We must count it as finished even when we do not see it. Our spirit of faith and our belief in God's trustworthiness to confirm His word can lead us to speak life and grace and expect to see it (2 Corinthians 4:13-15), or speak to a mountain and expect it to move (Mark 11:22-24).

"...Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

God has made us righteous, and so we are bold (Proverbs 28:1). We are confident in our unchanging God, His grace-filled and merciful nature, His unbreakable word, and our intimate connection to God in Jesus Christ. God is good and wants to give to us when we ask (Matthew 7:11). Therefore, we can ask (aiteō) for anything in Jesus' name for the glory of God and expect Jesus, who has been given authority, to do it (John 14:13-14). Aiteō is also translated as "call for" or "require." Only let us not doubt the goodness of God, the willingness of God, nor the power of God. Let us not doubt the fact that He will confirm His word when we ask believing, expecting, taking—holding onto His word, not giving up until we see it manifest. We can and should thank God before we see the answer (John 6:11, John 11:41, Philippians 4:6). We can praise Him first before He delivers us (Psalm 13:5-6, Acts 16:25-26).

Prayer: Thank You, God, for my connection to You and for Your Word that lives in me. Thank You for the precious promises in Your Word that have been made mine in Christ. I pray that Your Word would dwell richly in me. Holy Spirit, rid my mind of any unbelief; any clinging to my old, dead life; all distraction. Jesus, Word of God, I draw in Your faith. I receive all that You have to give me, and I trust You to answer my prayers according to Your Word. Holy Spirit, work in me to put on Christ and to do all of Your Word.

Day 55: Examples of faith

In Hebrews, Paul described examples of faith that pleased God:

'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were

disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.'

Hebrews 11:1-40

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/HEB.11.1-40>

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.'

Hebrews 12:1-2

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/HEB.12.1-2>

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...”

Faith is trusting (hupostasis) the truth of things (pragma) not known by our five senses; it forms what we perceive to be reality. Per Thayer's Lexicon, hupostasis refers to that which has foundation, a substantial quality, a nature, and also to steadfastness of mind, courage, firm trust, and resolution. Pragma refers to that which is being accomplished, that which has been done, that which is or exists, or an accomplished fact.

Before Christ, Paul trusted in the teachings of Gamaliel and his brotherhood of Pharisees (Day 1). This created a reality for him wherein Jesus and the people of the way were an enemy to be eliminated. The appearance of Jesus Christ to Paul completely changed his life by changing his perception of reality (Day 2). As Paul himself grew up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15), the things that should have been his in Christ in fact did become his. Paul not only preached the good news of the kingdom of God, he also chose to live by faith like He was in that kingdom— because he was. Christ in him, the kingdom was within him, and everything he did was geared toward the kingdom. Living this way, Paul became like Jesus in character (fruit of the Spirit), in spiritual ability (giftings of the Spirit), and in exercise of God's power (dunamis) in his ministry by faith (through the faith of the Son of God). Further, Paul took on a ministry of making disciples similar to that of Christ. What he came to hope for as babe in Christ became reality as, step by step, from faith to faith, he believed God, got up, took what God gave him and used it. There is no education in faith like seeing God do the thing (e.g., Day 5, Day 6, Day 7, Day 9). When Paul

used what God gave him, God gave him more, growing him up more fully as a son of God into the image of Christ. Paul taught the Romans that this is what the created world was earnestly, persistently waiting for: the manifestation of the sons of God (Romans 8:19, KJV) from within God's church. Even so, Paul knew that certain things were only to be hoped for in this life, while certain promises of God pertained to the future (e.g., Day 24, Day 30).

“...For by it the people of old received their commendation...”

Faith, the essential principle of the kingdom of God (Day 29), has always been the thing that pleases God. All of the histories recorded in the Bible are examples of men and women that showed either growth in faith or made mistakes from lack of faith. For us, the Bible is God's revelation to us, a manual in faith. In this chapter of Hebrews, Paul highlighted positive examples of faith from the time prior to the life and death of Jesus Christ.

“...By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible...”

The Almighty God creates by faith, by His spoken word quickening the dead and calling those things that be not as though they were (Romans 4:16, Day 29), and they come to be manifest as part of our reality in His allotted timing. Yet when God speaks things to be, they are already real though they at first may not be manifest. In His ministry on earth, the Son of God, the incarnate Word of God, while indwelt by the Holy Spirit, created and spoke things into existence as well (so that they became manifest). These things included food to feed multitudes, wholeness for bodies, and quickening for the dead. Christ believed it was so, and it came to be manifest. Similarly, Paul believed and spoke into existence both healing and resurrection life (Day 6, Day 34, Day 37). Further, Paul taught that as sons of God who live by the Spirit (Romans 8:14), we have a spirit of faith that is similarly able to believe, then speak in existence things that exhibit God's grace, that we may increase thanksgiving and bring glory to God (2 Corinthians 4:13-15). This is consistent with Jesus' many teachings on faith, speaking, and prayer to his own disciples (e.g., Mark 6:7-13,37-44, Mark 9:23, Mark 11:22-24, John 14:12-14).

“...And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him...”

Without faith in Christ's finished work that identifies us with Him, we cannot be born of the Spirit, be made righteous, or come to know God in truth. Therefore, without saving faith, or faith at its lowest level, it is impossible for us to please God. Though we were created having intrinsic value in God's image and likeness, God, though He loves us, is displeased by us in our natural state, living in sin rather than according to faith, following after our father the devil (John 8:44). Only in faith, believing that God is real though we do not experience Him with our five senses, will we draw near to Him. We will only intimately draw near to God as He desires, worshiping Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), if we are born of the Spirit and we believe it will be of benefit to diligently seek Him.

“...By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark...”

Noah, described as “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (Genesis 6:9), took God at His word. He “did all that God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22). He did it despite the fact that no one had ever seen rain before and despite the ridicule he must have received from his neighbors while building the ark. He believed God had good in mind for him and that his complete obedience would bring about that good. The secret of faith is not to care about your reputation—not to be afraid to lose anything.

“...By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance...”

Though Abram was seventy-five years old and Sarai was barren when God told Abram to follow Him to a new land and promised to make of him a great nation and a blessing to all families of the earth, Abram believed God at His word and went (Genesis 11:30-12:4). He believed God wanted to do good to him and that his obedience would bring about that good. He didn't know how it was going to happen, nor did he need to know. In faith, he trusted God for the outcome.

“...By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised...”

Sarah had to wait for the promise of God until its fulfillment seemed impossible. She and Abraham were so old when they had Isaac that she considered it laughable (Genesis 18:10-15, Genesis 21:6-7). Yet “the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised” (Genesis 21:1). The only limits there are on what God will do in our lives are those we place on Him.

“...By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...”

This was truly amazing faith on the part of a father. God tested Abraham, and He also tests our faith in this life. Though God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son of promise, God chose to sacrifice His own Son in order that Abraham may receive “the things promised” and that He might obtain for Himself the family He desired. Faith is the courage to step out when everybody else wants to run the other way.

“...By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau...”

According to his spirit of faith, Isaac spoke in faith, believing God, when he blessed his sons, expecting that it would be as he said (Genesis 27:27-40). He believed and so he spoke (2 Corinthians 4:13).

“...By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff...”

According to the spirit of faith, Jacob spoke in faith, believing God, when he blessed his own sons (Genesis 49). Jacob was also a prophet.

“...By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones...”

Joseph, also a prophet, spoke by the spirit of faith when he told his brothers, “God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Genesis 50:24). He believed God.

“...By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict...”

This has to do with the faith of Moses’ Levite parents, who hid Moses for three months to defy the evil order of a fearful Pharaoh that all male babies should be thrown into the Nile. This murder of babies and the enslavement of Israel in Egypt came from the influence of Satan, trying to stop God’s word from being fulfilled. Trusting God, the mother then put Moses into a basket and floated him down the Nile. When Moses ended up with Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses’ mother was paid by her to take care of him! For those who love God and are called according to His purpose, all things work together for good (Romans 8:28). God’s purpose cannot be thwarted.

“...By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin...”

Moses identified with his people and their burdens as a young man (Exodus 2:11). When Moses was older, by faith he obeyed God’s call to return to Egypt to free God’s people. Faith believes the Lord and acts on His word. As Moses acted in obedience to God’s word to him, his faith strengthened.

“...By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them...”

Acting in obedience to God’s word, Moses and his people continued to be protected from harm as God worked out their freedom. This strengthened Moses’ faith for protection and deliverance, as reflected in his writing of Psalm 91, which describes God’s protection from “the deadly pestilence”, “the terror of the night”, “the pestilence that stalks in darkness” (v. 3-6). Of the faithful it is written, “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.” (v. 14).

“...By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned...”

God gave His word to Moses, who in turn gave it to the Hebrews. By obedience to God’s word, they were protected, the Lord working through the hand of Moses to deliver them to freedom (Exodus 14:13-29). This is God’s pattern for faith— to work through the action of the obedient while He exercises power and signs. Paul told the Corinthian church, “we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9) and “workers together with him” (2 Corinthians 6:1). As Paul described to the Roman church, he lived by this same pattern: “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; ...”

Romans 15:18-19

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ROM.15.18-19>

“...By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days...”

God gave His word to Joshua, who in turn gave it to the Hebrews (Joshua 6:2-20). Following a week of obedience to His word, they experienced victory in God’s supernatural way and received God’s promise to them.

“...By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies...”

Rahab understood God as Lord of heaven and earth (Joshua 2:11), knowing He would have victory, and she decided to put herself and her family on the side of victory. Her firm belief led her to action; she disobeyed her king to protect the spies that came to her, and so she and her family were delivered.

“...And what more shall I say?...”

God works in the world to accomplish His purposes by means of men and women who trust in Him and His word. While in some cases faith led to the miraculous or to clear victory, not all of those faithful, looking forward to the future promises of God, were saved from suffering and death. Suffering for God’s name is often among God’s plans for his faithful (Matthew 5:10-12); the Son of God was not above such suffering.

“...And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect...”

The promise is Christ. God’s body of the faithful are incomplete without those who are in Christ, His church. The bride of Christ is completed by all of the faithful, all sons and daughters, all of those who represent the image and likeness of God, the family of God. To them is imparted the righteousness of Christ to make the bride glorious, holy, not having spot, wrinkle, or blemish (Ephesians 5:27).

“...Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus...”

Jesus taught of our Father, “He is not God of the dead, but of the living,” explaining what God introduced Himself of Moses as “the God of Abraham, and the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob” (Mark 12:26). Our spirits are what give us life, and they continue to live as spirits “like the angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25). In this passage, Paul called all of these who have come before us a great cloud of witnesses, implying that they see our lives, which he compared to a race set before us. In order to run our race well, Paul encouraged the Hebrew church to lay aside every burden and encumbrance, and anything that does not proceed from faith, which is sin (Romans 14:23). Sin and hindrance clings closely, becoming a part of us, so it is difficult to cast off. Yet, the indwelling Word of God, living and active, can separate it out for removal (Hebrews 4:12). By faith, our steadfast focus on Jesus Christ, who lives in us, and, by faith, the ability to draw on His resources enables us to run our race with constancy. Let us look to Jesus in order to persevere in faith, bringing glory to God.

“...Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, is the author of our faith. The Word of God created us, dwells richly in us, and works in us, affecting both our will and our actions, conforming them to those of God, making us perfect as He is perfect. Jesus Christ endured the shame of the cross for the joy set before Him in us, His beloved, faithful church (Acts 20:28). As a result of His faithfulness to the Father, He was promoted in position, connected even more firmly to the Father after His resurrection, given all authority in heaven, on earth and under the earth. He connected us directly to God the Father and the Spirit of God as members of His own body.

Prayer: Thank You for creating me, God, for saving me in Christ, for uniting me with Yourself, for building up my faith to this point through the indwelling Word of God. Thank You for the examples of faith that have come before me that allow me to understand how faith works, what pleases You, and how to grow up into Christ, my Head, in all things. I hold nothing back from You. I commit to doing all of Your will.

Day 56: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever

The following is taken from the last chapter of Paul's letter to the Hebrews:

'Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever... Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God... Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. '

Hebrews 13:1-8,13-16,20-21

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/HFB.13.1-8.13-16.20-21>

"Let brotherly love continue..."

Paul commanded the believers to cherish each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord. They were to let the love from the Spirit abide in their community.

"...Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers..."

Jesus commanded believers to welcome strangers and visit prisoners, saying that whatever you do for the least of these, you do to Christ (Matthew 25:35-40). Paul echoed Jesus' teaching here. Paul also suggested that sometimes angels appeared as strangers, as they did to Abraham and Lot (Genesis 18:1-19:3). Further, believers were to closely identify with any within the body of Christ who were mistreated.

"...Let marriage be held in honor among all..."

In marriage God makes man and woman one flesh, not to be separated. Their union together is holy, a reflection of God's created order and goodness, their intimacy an analogue for Christ's union with His church. It's a means to multiply the family of God for His glory. It's a means to grow people up out of selfishness. It's a means by which God's family members may be cared for in love. It's a means by which God brings community and shares His goodness.

"...Keep your life free from love of money..."

The ultimate good comes from our direct connection to God in Christ, through which we have already received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). The blessings of living in the Spirit include God's own love and peace. We cannot love God nor what God

loves when we love money. It's also a poor replacement for the blessings that come to us as we grow up in faith in Christ, taking what He has made ours.

“...Remember your leaders...and imitate their faith...”

We all need to see Jesus as He is in the Bible. Next we need to see Him within a human being in our world. Then we can see Christ in us and begin to live it out, doing the word of God. We need at least one leader of mature faith to imitate, yoking ourselves to them as they follow Christ.

“...Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever...”

Jesus Christ is the same in intent, nature, and character as the man we see described in the Scriptures. Yet, He's been promoted to a new office where He has authority over all things in heaven, on earth and under the earth. We need to know that what He does for one He will do for another; He hasn't changed, just as God, the Great I AM, does not change! Now, however, His goodness is expressed through His body, the church, to whom He has given His own ministry of reconciliation along with authority over the devil.

Will we clearly represent His intent, nature, character, ministry and authority?

“...For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come...”

Christ followers are to live as citizens of a city that is to come, our future and our hope. Meanwhile, while we are here, we are to seek the welfare of the cities where we live, praying to the Lord on its behalf (Jeremiah 29:7,11). We are to publicly acknowledge the name of Jesus as our Lord and praise to our God, whatever reproach may come to us. Christ in us, we are to go about doing good according to God's word and will.

“...Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...”

Just as Paul was, in Christ we as the church have been equipped with everything good to do all of God's will. We are equipped by the same Spirit of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). We are stewards of the gospel, the power for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16), brought about by the stripes and the blood of Jesus.

Prayer: I praise You, Lord, for Your beautiful, unchanging character and nature. Thank You, God, for sharing it with us in Jesus Christ, making us partakers of Your divine nature. Having given us all things, equip us with the same, Spirit of God. Thank You for making us coworkers together with You to do Your good will. Be pleased and be glorified forever and ever.

Day 57: Fan into flame the gift of God

Paul's last letter in the Bible was written to Timothy. It begins with the following:

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."

2 Timothy 1:1-14

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2Ti.1.1-14>

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life in Christ Jesus..."

The will of God included making Paul an Apostle and the giving of resurrection life in Christ Jesus, the Word of God. Jesus Christ lived in Paul, genuine, active, and vigorous, giving absolute fullness of life to the church through his hand and through his teaching. Part of that abundant, multiplying life was the making of disciples like Timothy, in whom Christ also lived and made disciples. To Timothy, a member of the same body, Paul used his words to bless, directing spiritual resources of God's grace, mercy and peace his way. The beloved Timothy was always in Paul's prayers. Paul's fatherly love for such disciples was real!

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands..."

Paul received the Holy Spirit when Ananias laid hands upon him (Day 2). Paul laid his hands on believers when he baptized him in Jesus' name, imparting the Holy Spirit to them (Day 14). When Paul and the council of the Ephesian elders laid their hands on Timothy while prophesying about his ministry, the Holy Spirit came upon him (Day 51). The Holy Spirit is the gift of God, an earnest of our heavenly inheritance. The Holy Spirit is the Helper of believers to be used for ministry in Christ's stead. Paul told Timothy to fan into flame the Holy Spirit that lived in him. The gift of the Holy Spirit brings the characteristics of God shown in Christ as well as the extraordinary powers of divine grace, as seen in Paul's ministry. Anazōpureō, the Greek word translated "fan into flame," means to kindle up or inflame one's mind, strength and zeal (per

Thayer's Lexicon). We may fan into flame the Holy Spirit through doing things that bring honor to the Spirit, including preaching the kingdom of heaven, being moved by compassion to perform acts of faith that demonstrate the kingdom, striving to excel in building up the church, and bringing continual worship and thanksgiving to God.

How did Jesus use the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit conferred to Him by the Father in His ministry?

'how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. '

Acts 10:38

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/ACT.10.38>

What was it that moved him to do good and to heal? He was "moved with compassion" (Matthew 9:36, Matthew 14:14, Matthew 15:32). He was stirred up by the love of the Spirit and the oppression of the enemy at the same time, so He used the anointing of the Spirit and power to free them and heal them all in order to demonstrate the kingdom of heaven and the goodness of God. Jesus Christ remains zealous of good works.

Paul is the primary example in Scripture of "Christ in you," having both received the Holy Spirit and conferred it to others including Timothy. How did he use the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit? Like Christ, he was zealous to preach the kingdom of heaven, and he also demonstrated the kingdom to do good as Christ did. Further, he strove to excel in building up Christ's church (1 Corinthians 14:12) by preaching, teaching and making disciples, and the Spirit of Christ in him stirred up his overflowing love for all of them. His passion for God's family oozed from all of his letters.

Through Christ and through Paul, we find the pattern for what the Spirit of God does in us. Let's stir up the gift in ourselves. As sons (heirs) of God, let's be led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:18, Ephesians 5:19). The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:19). All desire to know God's love, God's power, God's freedom, God's resurrection life, God's peace, God's fullness.

"...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control..."

The nature of our recreated spirit is not fearfulness, timidity, or cowardice (Greek word *deilia*), but rather power (*dunamis*), love (*agapē*), and self-control (*sōphronismos*). *Dunamis* refers to the power resident in us for performing miracles conferred by the Holy Spirit. It also refers to the strength, ability, and rich resources the Spirit of God confers in Christ. *Agapē* love is God's endless, giving, selfless love intrinsic to His good will. *Sōphronismos* refers to a calling to soundness of mind, to moderation and self-control by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit renews the mind of willing believers (Ephesians 4:22-23) to confer to them the very mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and the characteristics of His godly nature (Galatians 5:22-25).

We can be led by God's character and nature! None of this mixes well with fearfulness or cowardice, which is characteristic of our dead spirit connected to our rule by Satan as father. The righteous in Christ shall be as bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1).

When it came to evil, Christ, anointed with the Holy Spirit, was aggressive to defeat it, overcoming evil with good. Bold and determined, Jesus Christ turned every situation into glory to God. This is our pattern for the Holy Spirit residing in us. When the Holy Spirit has finished developing the love of God (agapē) in us, fear is cast out of us (1 John 4:18). Our God is sovereign and good. Our God is with us, in us and for us!

“...Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord...”

Knowing the nature of the recreated spirit that God has given us, let us not be ashamed to speak up and speak the truth about our Lord that brings life, freedom and good to all. As Christ followers, we have all been given a holy calling by God, predestined to be conformed into Christ's image so that we may bear God's own image and likeness. This calling comes with significant responsibility that we must take on, and it comes with some suffering as we experience resistance to the purpose and grace of God in the world. Let us not put off our calling from God, conferred to us in trust by our Creator and the source of all good, to seek comfort in the world; the indwelling Holy Spirit is our comfort.

“...Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus...”

Believers are each to follow the pattern (hupotupōsis) of life in Christ that Christ lived and taught. Paul also lived and taught this pattern of life. Connected to God, we are enabled to live this life in Christ as members of His living body, having God's own Spirit, able to put on (enduō) all of the riches which are in Christ, including, most importantly, His own faith and His own love. At the moment of our new birth, the Spirit of God has been entrusted to each of us as an earnest of our heavenly inheritance. We are to guard this deposit in Christ by choosing to be led by the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, bearing fruit of the Spirit (Matthew 7:17-20), rather than making the easy choices or speaking words that go against the Spirit's leading. There is only freedom, life and blessing in the pattern that the Word of God has laid out for us; the gate of God's way is narrow, and the way is hard (Matthew 7:14).

Prayer: I praise You, God, for sharing with me Your own Spirit, the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, to give me eternal life with You, to dwell in me, to empower me, and to conform me into Your image and likeness, as You have always intended. Your purposes and will are accomplished, and I choose to be a part of this. I choose to cherish and to stir up the precious gift that You have put in me and live according to the pattern that Christ showed me. You have become a fire inside, and I give all of me for all of You. You are good, and life in You is rich and satisfying. Blessed be Your name.

Day 58: A good soldier of Jesus Christ

Paul began his discussion about being a soldier of Jesus Christ in his first letter to Timothy: 'But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you...'

1 Timothy 6:6-20a

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/1TI.6.6-20>

Paul continued this discussion in his second letter to Timothy:

'You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything... if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ...But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be

quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.'

2 Timothy 2:1-7,13-16,19-26

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2TI.2.1-7,13-16,19-26>

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, ... Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith...”

When a soldier or other military man or woman enlists, they sign up to defend the interests of their nation, no matter what they may be. They give up their right to choose for themselves.

Have you enlisted to serve the interests of God rather than your own interests? (See Philippians 2:19-21).

This good soldier is a focused follower of Christ who does God’s word as their command, just as Christ did in His ministry. A good soldier properly recognizes the gift of resurrection life (zōē) in Christ and pursues more of this life from the source, that they may be thoroughly equipped to minister life. This soldier is driven by love of God and service to mankind out of godly love (agapē), resulting in a life rich in good works. This is life led by the Spirit that results in characteristics of a soldier that bear the Spirit’s fruits, including godliness, holiness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness, and contentment. The good soldier has their basic needs provided by God based upon trust in God for that provision. This soldier is committed to fight the good fight that advances the kingdom of God in the world, bringing Him glory.

“...But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation... As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty... No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits...”

The civilian life is the analogy for the former way of life before Christ, the natural life. It is a life lived in service of self and of worldly desire, and, as such, it does not lead to the type of love for God that He requires in covenant relationship. Its desires do not proceed from faith, and, thus, they are sin. It is destructive, just as all sin is. This civilian person is lacking in faith, not trusting God to provide for their basic needs should they step out in faith.

Paul also addressed the wealthy, who trust in their riches rather than God. As Jesus taught, it is difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Yet, if they are able to give themselves over to God completely, the Spirit will work in and through their lives.

Riches are empty; let’s get interested in what interests God. Let’s trust God and count on Him to perform His word. Let’s pursue the Giver rather than his gifts.

“...O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you...”

The Holy Spirit has been entrusted to us to live in us! Having the righteousness of God in us for Christ’s own ministry, choosing to live in a worldly way is offensive to the Spirit of God. When we are taking in much more from the world than we take in from the word of God and from

fellowship with Spirit-filled brothers and sisters, it is difficult to not place our focus on these things. While our action in faith catalyzes the Spirit in our lives, our sin grieves and quenches the Spirit of God.

Have you died yet?

What is it that we seek first? Who or what is it that we love most? Is our speech glorifying to the Spirit of God that dwells in us?

Jesus said, “seek first my kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). The Spirit of God is all about the kingdom (basilea) of God and the righteousness (dikaiosunē) of God. Per Thayer’s Lexicon, basilea refers to God’s royal power, dominion, and rule that are associated with Christ. Dikaiosunē refers to rightness, being made as one ought to be, approved before God. It includes right thinking, feeling and acting.

If His will has become our will, we are to pursue God’s interests.

“...You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also...Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved...”

We are able to strengthen and energize ourselves to continue the ministry of Christ directly from our connection to God in Christ Jesus, even in the face of persecution. As members of the body of Christ, we are to multiply that body by making disciples, thereby growing the family of God. We are to teach those we invest in that they also are to teach others. We are to teach them to take responsibility for God’s word and His people. God’s family is beloved to Him.

Let’s make His interests our interests and labor hard in the work the Lord has given us to do. It’s sacred work to invest our lives in the bride of Christ.

“... if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself...”

God is faithful in covenant relationship and is faithful to do what He said in His Word. He does not say things that He does not mean. He will perform His word on our behalf when we believe Him to be faithful, waiting on Him rather than taking matters into our own hands or going to someone else. When we speak or pray in faith for that which will bring Him glory, we are to hold onto His Word until it is performed (Mark 11:22-24, John 14:12-14). Praise God for the authority of His Word. When we preach Jesus, we can also hold onto God until the signs follow (Mark 16:15-20), as Paul did (Romans 15:18-19). Don’t accept defeat (2 Corinthians 2:14, Romans 8:37).

“...charge them before God not to quarrel about words... But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness...Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies...”

Paul directed the church to avoid controversies, quarrels, and irreverent babble. Not only are we to be careful about our own words, we are not to participate in anything that does not lift up Christ or lead to building others up. This also pertains to any disagreements on any topic that could cause separation in the body of Christ. He loves the unity of His body. What God has joined together, let no one separate. Let Jesus have the preeminence. The more He is held up; the deeper people will get in love with him and drop everything else.

***“...But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’
...Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work...”***

When we are recreated by the Spirit at salvation, we are made sinless as Christ is. God is holy, Christ is holy, and the Spirit of God lives in us, empowering us to live as Christ did while filled with the Spirit. Our knowledge that we are sinless and our cooperation with the indwelling Spirit of God to remain sinless allows us to be used mightily by God. Sins that we are unwilling to let the Spirit of God conquer cause us not to speak out or to step out in faith; they stop us from growing. They prevent the Spirit’s work in us to develop His fruits in our character. They stop us from the Spirit’s work to conform us into the image of Christ. No one who abides in God keeps on sinning (1 John 3:6,8); the Father will remove them from the Vine, Jesus Christ (John 15:1-2).

“...Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable... And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

Paul wrote that those who do evil, pursuing their own interests and ends, are like the vessels in a home that have been set apart for dishonorable use. Dishonorable use could include carrying out garbage or human waste. He wrote that those who do evil are in the snare of the devil, having been captured by him to do his will! We are either acting in faith, doing God’s will, or acting in unbelief, doing the devil’s will. In Christ, we have been set free (Luke 4:18, Romans 8:1-2) to follow Him in doing God’s will. Let us set our hearts on Christ’s prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

“...So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart...”

Good soldiers of Jesus Christ must be disciplined servants of all men, including those who do evil. Even with them, we are not to take offense. We are to patiently endure evil, correcting them with gentleness. We are to always exhibit the fruits of the Spirit, consistent with the divine nature that has been shared with us in Christ. Empowered by the indwelling Spirit, we are to love our enemies, being perfect (teleios, i.e., made complete in Christ) as our heavenly Father is perfect

(Matthew 5:43-48). It is God's ultimate interest that everyone will be given the chance to come to repentance.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for calling me heavenward as a good soldier in Christ Jesus. I will pursue Your interests rather than my own. You are good, and I trust You above all. I trust every word You've spoken. Thank You for a new spirit and for Your indwelling Helper to give me everything I need for this hard work. I will carry out Your will.

Day 59: A contrast between knowing about God and believing God

Paul continued his last epistle:

'But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.'

2 Timothy 3:1-17

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2Ti.3.1-17>

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty...”

This line begins a prophecy from the Apostle Paul. The term “last days” is broadly used in the Scripture. According to the Apostle Peter, Joel’s prophecy that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28-29) was for the last days (Acts 2:16-20). It happened almost 2000 years ago, beginning the dispensation of the Holy Spirit living in Christ followers.

“...For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money...”

This prophecy could have been true about people in previous generations. It also rings true in our current age. The Apostle Paul would definitely call us most, if not all, of these things. As part of the (broad array of) Christian church(es) in the Western world, I would say that the three that stand out most are lovers of self, lovers of money, and having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. In general, we are soulish, led by our own minds (so many different unrenewed or partly renewed minds), individual wills, and our emotions, rather than Spirit-led. As such, we do not appear any different or much different than the world. We are not pursuing God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; we instead pursue self interest and the natural extensions of it. Further, we don’t believe in the power (dunamis) Christ left to the church (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8) and the good will of God toward all as Paul did (Romans 15:18-19, 2 Timothy 1:7).

“...Avoid such people...”

Paul said that such people who called themselves Christians should be avoided. Paul would not consider them part of the bride of Christ at all. Instead, Paul would identify them as those in the snare of the devil, having been captured by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26). Further, Jesus taught that each tree is known by its fruit and that His family included those who did the word of God, having made Him Lord (Luke 6:43-46, Luke 8:21). Christ gave Himself up for the church so that He might present it “to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 4:27).

“...For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth...”

Paul prophesied about and found fault both with those who would go after women to fulfill their lust and the weak women who were lustful as well. These same people would always be learning new things and never able to arrive at the knowledge of the truth. While they might know much about God and a lot of other things, they would not trust in and follow Jesus Christ. This prophecy also seems representative of our current time.

“...You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings...”

Paul taught Timothy, as he did other disciples, to follow him in all things and he followed Christ in all things (1 Corinthians 11:1). This is also the pattern for each Christ follower. When we are resolved to cooperate with the indwelling Spirit to grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15, 23-34), we are also to disciple others this way.

“...But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed...”

We are disciplined into the image of Christ through allowing the indwelling Word of God that was planted in us to take root, grow up, and take over. This process makes us wise for salvation (sōtēria), where salvation here refers to our continual deliverance from the enemy, especially to the renewing of our mind.

“...All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

In Old Testament times, the Spirit of God was with the prophets. They wrote what they heard from the Spirit. As they wrote of things pertaining to the future, such as the times of Christ, they did not understand at least some of what they were writing. In New Testament times, the Spirit lived in them; they were also carried along in their writing by the Spirit. The word of God is an imperishable seed that, when received in the right soil, brings light, life, and maturity in Christ. Having final authority, it equips men and women for every good work that God has prepared for them. It can be used by them for teaching and training others in faith. For the church to be built, its members must be equipped.

Prayer: Father, I love You with all that I am. Thank You, Father, for Your Spirit. Spirit of God, develop in me and in Your church the character of Jesus, such that other believers see and

experience Christ in me and in Your church. Thank You for discernment of spirits that are not from You. Thank You for Your Word that gives light and life, equipping Your church. Thank You for the opportunity to make disciples and for Your power that confirms Your word that I speak.

Day 60: Fulfill your ministry

Paul concluded his letter to Timothy with the following:

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

2 Timothy 4:1-22

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/2Ti.4.1-22>

“...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching...”

While this was Paul’s direction to Timothy, it is for every follower of Christ, as God’s will for all believers is the same. Each is to preach the word of God, ready to preach it when the opportunity is right or when it is not. The Word of God is to be used to speak the truth in love.

“...For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths...”

Paul then moved back into prophecy about a future time when people, desiring to hear something pleasant and in agreement with what they want, according to their soulish or carnal nature, would accumulate for themselves teachers from which to learn. The people will turn aside unto falsehoods. Paul’s warning is similar to the one he gave to the Colossians regarding being taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to

the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:8). In our current time, it is easier than it ever has been to accumulate such teachers. It is harder than ever to determine what it is true, and many prefer to feed themselves information with which they already agree rather than anything that will cause discomfort or offense.

“...As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry...”

Paul encouraged Timothy to put off the old self and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God as shown in Christ—Christ, who showed us what it was for the Spirit of God to live and walk in a (hu)man. He went about preaching, teaching, healing, and making disciples. He did this all despite opposition, knowing He would suffer and die. This was Timothy’s pattern to follow, as it is ours. Every believer has a ministry and is predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. We are to be conformed to Him, spirit, soul and body, walking as He walked.

“...For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.”

Paul was suffering again in prison—his second imprisonment in Rome in 64-65 AD—as he wrote this last letter, and he discerned that the time of his martyrdom was near.

“...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

At the end of his life, Paul had been working as an apostle of Jesus Christ for decades. He was a good soldier of Jesus Christ. As Jesus had done, Paul had fought on behalf of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness, an already defeated kingdom. As Jesus had done before him, Paul, operating with Christ in him, took back territory from the devil by way of preaching, teaching, doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil, and making disciples wherever he went. This was Paul’s race to finish despite all resistance and suffering. He had been told by Jesus to open the eyes of the Gentiles, that they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:12-18, Day 2). Ananias was also told he would carry Jesus’ name to the kings and children of Israel. These prophecies were fulfilled in Paul’s new life in Christ. Paul grew in faith as he was obedient to minister. (This is a pattern for us as well.) He grew in likeness to Jesus Christ, who dwelt in him. (Paul taught and showed what it was to have Christ live within a person.) In everything that he experienced, Paul remained faithful. He made choices that would please and bring glory to God. Like Christ, he turned every situation into glory to God.

“...Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing...”

Due to his salvation in Christ that made him righteous and his faithfulness to obey God’s word, Paul knew that a crown of righteousness was waiting for him to be conferred to him when the saints were judged. Such a crown will be given to all of those who have made Christ Lord and loved God as God wants to be loved. We are to live by the Spirit in obedience to the Word of God, going about doing God’s good will. In doing so, we look forward to Christ’s appearing, and

He is our first love. We long to see Jesus Christ in person and to receive the fullness of God's inheritance.

"...Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry..."

Paul loved the disciples he had made and his fellow laborers, including Timothy, as sons. (Living by the Spirit, one also takes on God's emotions.) The gospel writers Luke and Mark were close colleagues of Paul in ministry. Paul considered Mark very useful in ministry. This is not surprising given the nature of his writing in his gospel; his attention was on the way that Jesus did good, carrying out the word of God by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He was a man of action like Paul and like Jesus. In contrast, Paul considered Demas to be in love with the world.

"...Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds..."

Paul had been put on trial before, probably referring to the trials during his first imprisonment (Acts 21-26,28). Even as Christ was deserted, Paul also felt deserted but did not hold this against anyone. He did not take offense. He trusted God in all things.

"...But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth..."

As Paul was opposed by men, the Lord strengthened him to the point where he was enabled to proclaim the gospel. Paul was ready when the time was opportune and when it was not. He created opportunities to do what God sent him to do. In these times, it's possible that Paul was literally rescued by God from the mouth of lions. It's probably a reference though to Satan and his schemes that often got Paul into trouble, caused him to be beat, and led him to be taken captive.

"...The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever..."

Paul trusted the Lord to deliver him up until the time where it was time for him to be with the Lord. Paul looked forward to the heavenly kingdom where he would be in person with His Lord Jesus Christ.

"...The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."

As his final words recorded for the body of Christ, Paul blessed Timothy with the grace (charis) and the presence of the Lord. This was a blessing for quickening, that Christ would be in fullness in Timothy as He was in Paul.

Prayer: Thank You, God, for the opportunity to love You and fulfill our ministry in Christ's stead. Be glorified in the work You do in and through us. Thank You for the fullness of Christ's presence in me as I go.

Conclusion

This book followed the life and writings of Paul over 60 days. He had seen Jesus living through and ministering through the disciples in Jerusalem, but he did not recognize the Lord in them. Thinking Jesus' way to be a cult, Paul (first called Saul) went around throwing Christians in prison and casting his vote against them when it came to their punishment. Then Jesus showed up to him on the road to Damascus, asking, "why do you persecute me?" Christ's followers are His body, so Paul was persecuting Jesus directly. After his infilling by the Holy Spirit, Paul became the example and teacher for others about Christ living within and ministering within men (humans).

Times in the Christian church are very different now than they were in Paul's day, almost 2000 years ago. Some of the main differences are that: 1) it is difficult to reconcile Christ as He is described in Scripture from the Christ conveyed in the varying beliefs and traditions of churches today, and 2) we rarely or never see examples of Christ living through and ministering through His disciples today as He did through Paul.

Yet, Christ desires to abide in and minister through each follower today as He did from the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. How do we step into what God has for each of us in Christ?

The words of a woman minister named Hattie Hammond show us the way. First, she said that we must see Jesus (as He is) in the Book. Second, we need to see Jesus in a man (human). We need to have an example, or a model, to imitate. Third, we have got to see Jesus in ourselves. We have to believe that if Jesus can abide in and minister through this person we know as an example, He can do so through us.

Paul became a great example for many to imitate. He knew and believed the word of God. He did the word of God wherever he went (Luke 8:21, John 14:12, James 1:22). He preached and taught the kingdom and the word of God wherever the Spirit led him to go. He spoke by faith to prompt the Spirit of God to demonstrate the kingdom with signs following the words he spoke (Romans 15:18-19). He made disciples everywhere he went, building the church, Christ's resurrection body, throughout the world. He loved deeply, as Christ loves. Paul knew how to create faith in his hearers, just like Jesus did. He was a channel of Christ's resurrection life (zōē), and he strove to excel to channel God's goodness and resources in Christ to others (1 Corinthians 14:14). Christ lived in him! So many saw it.

As described in the introduction, Paul knew he wasn't special — God was no respecter of persons. Anyone could do what he did. And so he taught the churches to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Many of them did.

What do we need to do to follow Jesus Christ as He expects to be followed? To see Jesus Christ as He is in God's word? To believe it? To start really doing it?

Do you need to see an example of Jesus really living in and ministering through a person? Are you able to be that person to others?

Wherever it is that God needs to take you next, it's time to go.

Topical summary of Paul's teachings and practices

On salvation

Paul's basic teachings on salvation were covered in [Selah: Paul's words on following Christ from Romans](#)

Salvation is based on God's rich mercy, great love, and grace (Ephesians 2:4-5). In the very foundation of salvation (1 Corinthians 3:10-11), brought about by saving faith (Romans 10:9-13), the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). In salvation, we are quickened together with Christ (suzōopoieō, G4806, Ephesians 2:5, Colossians 2:13). Our spirit is recreated new, made one with the Lord (John 3:3-6, 1 Corinthians 6:17). Yet, salvation isn't limited to our spirit being transformed through forgiveness by our faith in Christ so we may go to heaven after we die. God is also able to save our body through our faith in Christ's finished work, bringing resurrection life back to every part of it (Romans 8:11, Matthew 8:17). God saves our soul (mind, will and emotions) by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit that transforms us into His image and likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18); this is only done with our cooperation and our faith in what He has made ours (Romans 8:5-6). During his ministry, Paul's body was saved from death (Day 7) and sickness (Day 20) so he could complete decades of good works prepared in advance for him (Ephesians 2:10). His mind, will and emotions were transformed by the Spirit of God to those that Christ has.

On being led by the Spirit

In Christ, we are new creations made of spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17), yet we have our own minds and wills that are not renewed (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:14). We are to put off the natural life (Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:5-9), our carnal or soulish nature that seeks its own good and its own pleasure, to be led by the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:16-18,22-25) as Christ was in His ministry (Acts 10:38). This is what sons of God do (Romans 8:14). The characteristics of this life are the fruits of the Spirit, the very characteristics of Christ's divine nature. Paul showed what it was like to be led by the Spirit.

On Christ in you

It is the Spirit of Christ living in us (Colossians 1:27) as believers that transforms us into sons and daughters of God made in God's image and likeness as His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). With Christ living in us, we take on His fullness (Ephesians 4:13,15). We become love, light and life, as He is. For Jesus' words on these topics, see my book [Jesus' words on love, light and life](#). Paul's life showed what it was like to have Christ living within. He showed that, in Christ, sons of God take on Christ's nature, and they can do only what God can do. Paul did the same works that Jesus did (John 14:12). For more on Christ in you, see my book [Identity in Christ: 33 Characteristics of His Church](#).

On sanctification

By God's grace, we are not bound to live according to our old, sinful nature, nor according to the limits of what is possible for us without our connection to God in Christ. Sanctification is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit to renew our mind with our cooperation until we have all of the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and we walk as He walked (1 Peter 2:21). This is to choose to plug ourselves into the mind of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-15) rather than living by our

own individual mind and will that belongs to the old self. The process of sanctification is the process of slaying and putting off the old self while growing up into the image of Christ in all things (Ephesians 4:15). Sanctified people will take on the characteristics of the Spirit of God (Luke 6:43-45, Galatians 5:16-25), chiefly the love of God (1 Corinthians 13:13, John 15:12-14). Paul showed what it was like to live a sanctified life, and he taught about how to be sanctified (Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:22-23, Colossians 3:1-3,9-17).

On consecration

Consecration is to make and keep God as our first love, to give and to keep ourselves fully for God, holding nothing back (Romans 12:1, Ephesians 5:24-32, Mark 12:30, John 15:4-5, Revelation 2:4). This is the vow of covenant relationship with the covenant-keeping God. In our consecration, we choose to take on God's will, His plans, His goals, His mission, His purposes, His objectives, His agenda, His dreams, His attitude, His ministry. We are steadfast to allow the Spirit of God to dwell in us and live through us. Paul taught and lived out a threefold consecration: spirit, soul and body. Consecrating our lives to Christ as Lord yields salvation, bringing new life to our spirit. Consecrating our soul to God allows God's love, light, and life to move from our spirit to our mind and emotions, delivering us from the strongholds of the devil on our mind, bringing us His peace and joy (Romans 14:17). Consecrating our body to God brings His resurrection life to our bodies (Romans 8:11).

On the church, Christ's body, Christ's bride

The church is Christ's consecrated body in the world in which His mind operates to do the word and the will of God (Luke 6:26, Luke 8:21), continuing His ministry to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), bring freedom (Luke 4:18), and do good (Acts 10:38). By way of the Spirit of God, this body exists at the same time hidden in Christ's body in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). This bride of Christ is the one redeemed by the blood of God's own (Acts 20:28) to be without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27). The members that don't abide in the Vine and mature, because they refuse to take on the Spirit of Christ's mind and will (Romans 8:5-8), do not become functioning parts of the body. Choosing not to abide, they are separated by the Father (John 15:1-6). The Spirit of Christ desires unity for His body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13); let no one seek to divide what God has joined to Him in covenant relationship (Ephesians 5:31-32, Mark 10:9). We are to discern the body (1 Corinthians 11:18,29), lifting up Jesus, pursuing unity, and building up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

On responsibility as followers and members of Christ

We are responsible to grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15) and take on His nature (Galatians 5:22-25, 2 Peter 1:3-4) that has been put into our spirit. Part of growing up into Christ is taking on responsibility as ministers (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, 2 Timothy 4:5), as functioning members of Christ's body, as servants of all of mankind, as sons of God (co-heirs with Christ). All are to preach the gospel of the kingdom. All are to make disciples. All are to do good works prepared in advance for them (Ephesians 2:10). This should happen throughout all nations (Matthew 24:14). In so doing, Christ reigns in the world, putting His enemies under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25), turning all situations into glory to God (John 17:4). Paul's life in Christ showed that we

will have what we desire for the glory of God (John 14:13). His chief desire was to strive to excel in building up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

Paul's personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ will judge us based on our relationship with Him as Lord (Matthew 7:17-25). Paul knew God by way of the appearance of Jesus Christ to him; his fellowship with other Spirit-filled saints; the Word of God that came to dwell richly in Him; and the indwelling Spirit that spoke to him, spoke through him, worked through him, and changed him into the image of Christ.

The appearance of Jesus. The call to be a disciple of Christ is for all, but the Apostle Paul received a special appearance from Jesus Christ to redirect his path (Day 2).

Fellowship with Spirit-filled saints. Early in his life as a believer, Paul had other believers pour into him, including Ananias, Barnabus, Peter, and James (Days 2-4). As he proclaimed Christ to others, Paul saw them filled with the Spirit, disciplined them, and also enjoyed fellowship with them. Believers that became co-laborers with Paul included Silas (Day 8), Timothy (Day 9), Aquila and Priscilla (Day 12), Sosthenes (Day 15), and Titus (Day 21). To Paul, they were beloved family members.

The Word of God. The Spirit of Jesus living in Paul caused the Scriptures to come alive to him, to be understood, and to be brought to his remembrance. Paul commanded the Colossian church to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom (Day 40), presumably as it had in him.

The indwelling Spirit. The presence, life (zōē) and power of God came to permeate Paul through his soul (mind, will and emotions) and body. The Spirit directed him about where to go next. The Spirit spoke, prayed, and sang through Paul, both through his mind and through his spirit in tongues (Day 19). It was the Spirit that confirmed the message Paul spoke with power, stopping the interference of a false prophet (Day 5), healing people (e.g., Day 6, Day 14, Day 37), resurrecting Paul (Day 7), freeing him from prison (Day 9), and healing him from sickness (Day 20). Paul acted as Jesus Christ's ambassador and as His steward; he did what Christ would do, knowing he had His power of attorney, so to speak. As Paul got up, went out, and did God's word, the Spirit of God conformed him into the image of Christ. Through Paul's journey of faith, we watched him take on Christ's divine nature attributes (DNA): overflowing life, holiness, faith, wisdom, knowledge, discernment, attention, love, compassion, tenderness, generosity, grace, mercy, longsuffering, patience, peace, the spirit of unity, joy, thanksgiving, praise, passion, humility, power, strength, courage, determination, authority, and hope. Paul's emotions became those of Christ's. Like Christ, Paul showed himself to be a complete five-fold minister: an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a shepherd, and a teacher (Ephesians 4:11). By aligning himself with the Spirit, Paul lined up His will, purpose, plans, objectives, dreams, agenda, mission, priorities, ideas, vision, and interests with those of God. Paul showed us what it is like to give honor to the Holy Spirit. Through Paul we see Jesus Christ clearly in a man, showing both what is possible and what God expects of us (Romans 8:29). We see what it is to come to know God, as He made it possible for us in Christ our Lord to know Him.

Paul's practice of doing God's word

Paul knew what was right, preached and taught what was right, and did what was right. He was not idle. Instead, he spent his time, energy, and strength speaking and doing the word and the

will of God as Christ did (John 4:34). Paul knew God's word was His will. He didn't ask His will. Rather, he enforced it in Jesus' name. He considered God's word to be done, just as Abraham did (Romans 4:16-22). Paul knew that all of God's promises to those who have been made righteous in Christ are yes and amen (2 Corinthians 1:20). As such, God fulfilled every resolve of his to do good and every work of faith by His power (2 Thessalonians 1:11). As Christ did, Paul forcefully advanced the kingdom of God, taking territory from the enemy by force (Matthew 11:12), determined to make wrong things right. He did not accept defeat, knowing there are no hindrances to the work of God that can stand. Through Paul's ministry, the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily (Acts 19:20).

Paul's life in my view

My life. In middle school (the early 1990s), I began to grow up. God brought me into His family, as I described in my testimony given in the last pages of [God's Love Plan in Jesus and the Church: 40 Days in the Old Testament](#). In middle school, I also began training and competing as a distance runner, first competing in cross country and then in track and field distance events. It was in middle school that I began to take my studies in school more seriously. I was also disciplined to become a serious student of the Bible, coming to understand it as the word of God that still speaks with relevance today.

In high school (through the mid 1990s), I was taught about worldview and Christian worldview. I came to realize that every person puts together their own worldview in which they come to believe. It forms over the course of their life. We take in ideas, we think about them, and we make theories about what the world is and how the world works. Then we tend to test those theories according to experience— sometimes ours, sometimes the experience of others of which we are aware. Some of the new ideas make their way to become ingrained as strongholds in our mind. When all the strongholds are put together, this comprises our world, so to speak. It's really a worldview. Everybody has one. Ideas have consequences, and, as such, some of the ideas we take in come to affect our thought patterns, biases, beliefs, what we choose to talk about, our actions, and our plans for the future. As we take in new information from the world, it becomes subject to confirmation bias; that is to say, we tend to look for evidence to support the biases and beliefs that we already have.

In 1999, I became a husband and I entered military service in a role that supported warfighters. I learned how to teach them, giving them understanding of the technology they would be using as a means to equip them for what may come their way. Being around them caused me to grow up more and to learn what it was to take on responsibility, authority, and leadership. In 2000, I became a father. Being a father is very little like the books one reads about it; I had to learn it by doing it with my wife. God continued to change my nature in these new roles that I chose.

In 2003-2004, I moved into my second career following military service, where I learned to be an experimentalist. As an experimentalist, we learn new things kinesthetically, or by doing them. More specifically, I was learning to use radiation detection equipment in the laboratory, equipment which I would later be responsible for designing. Radiation is abstract and intangible, yet I was able to experience it with specially designed sensors in a repeatable way. For example, I was able to visualize energy being transformed into matter ($E=mc^2$) and vice versa in the lab. The theory worked as expected; there was no other way to explain the observations. This experience made the theory real to me! I was disciplined, so to speak, in the practice of research in this area by an engineering professor who was an expert in this area. Becoming a PhD engineer mainly depended on my own perseverance and grit to get through the process over four and a half years. During this time in graduate school, I also taught undergraduate and graduate students in the lab and in the classroom as a teaching assistant. As of 2008, I became the expert engineering professor that then disciplined others to be engineering researchers, mainly in the area of radiation sensing. I have been doing this ever since. As an experimentalist, we learn by doing— by trying something new and seeing how it works. Sometimes we can

simulate it to see how we expect it to work, but then to see if that is for real, we have to build it for real and try it. Or, if other peers have demonstrated it in practice before, we can learn from their documented work and testimony about it.

Late in 2013, I started teaching classes as a lay minister in local jails, first in life skills, then later in discipleship. I love to fellowship with the men there. I love to talk about the Bible and Christian life with them. I love to be part of a team of Christian men that invests in these lives. I love to later hear the stories about the way God has changed their lives, and, later, to see some of them around town and doing well. Through this experience, I have seen the way God can powerfully use a team of mentors and teachers that come from different churches, functioning together as Christ's body.

Three years ago, I started teaching engineering design to seniors. It turns out engineering design is also best learned by doing it, just like dance is best learned by doing it. In order to really learn and improve, you have to get out on the dance floor and get your toes stepped on. Especially the first time you try it, you need to get out there and risk looking ridiculous. Of course, it's easier to try along with others taking the same risk. In my class, I give them some guidance to point them in the right direction, then they make some plans and try it out within their teams. They learn by doing it, seeing how it goes, getting feedback from people with more experience in doing design. Then they try it again.

Paul's life. In reconsidering the Apostle Paul's life story, I find some similarities to my own experiences, however different they may seem from the life of this man.

What made me take another look at his life? In 2020, I became aware, at first by reading biographies, of contemporary followers of Christ that continued to live as Christ did, as the Apostle Peter did, and as the Apostle Paul did. This caused me to look at Paul's life differently than I did before, knowing that God is no respecter of persons (as mentioned in the introduction to this book). If God can work a particular way in Peter or Paul, He can work this way in me and in you as disciples of Christ. In fact, Paul's inspired writings suggest that this is clearly God's will for us (e.g., Romans 8:29).

Paul's first worldview was formed under his discipleship by Gamaliel (Day 1). In Jewish tradition, this discipleship would have been a combination of teaching and action in obedience to this teaching. While learning some truth about the true God, he also was disciplined in the human tradition of the Jews of the day.

Paul's worldview was radically transformed after Jesus appeared to him, spoke to him, and blinded him (Day 2). This tore down many of the strongholds that had been built up in his mind. From that point on, Paul received a new spirit, and he had to decide to cooperate with the Spirit of God to renew his mind. Paul went off to Arabia (Day 3), and so the beginning of this process of mind renewal may have taken a few years. He must have done some growing up during this time, allowing God to change his nature.

Within a few years, Paul became a doer of the word according to his new understanding in Christ. Ready to run the race God had set before him, he publicly identified as a Christian, and he preached and taught openly in the synagogues, just as Jesus did in his ministry. This time he was “proving that Jesus was the Christ.” When he went to Jerusalem after three years, he taught openly there as well, meeting with and learning from the leaders of Jesus’ church that he had persecuted. Paul’s worldview was built back up, being disciplined by the Lord and by other believers while he was obedient to what God called him to do. He learned to teach, preach, and make disciples by getting out there and doing it, just as Christ and the apostles before him had done. When the Holy Spirit called him at Antioch to be sent out, he went (Day 4). Christ had told him that he was to be sent out to his people and the Gentiles “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Sent out on his first mission, Paul’s faith and trust in God continued to be built up, along with his Christian worldview. A Christian worldview includes an understanding of the cooperation between the spiritual and the physical, between that which is seen and the things of God that are unseen. The first recorded miraculous work Paul did was to do unto another staunch opponent of Christ’s gospel as was done to him by Christ when he was the one in opposition to it (Day 5). Yes, the Spirit of God was upon him at the time he got fed up and chose to speak boldly and aggressively to Elymas the magician at Cyprus to blind him, but Paul still needed to act in faith, expecting that God would come through to do what Paul said would be done. If God did not “show up,” or, more accurately, work with Paul, when Paul spoke, Paul would have looked ridiculous. In the eyes of the audience to which Paul was speaking at Cyprus, Paul’s God would have also looked ridiculous. Yet, Paul *knew* God was with him, in him, and for him, and, by faith, Paul saw God act according to his spoken words. The Spirit of God was not with Paul more at that moment than the Spirit had been with him; the Spirit dwelled with Paul from the moment Ananias’ hands were laid upon him. In the moment, Paul believed, and so he spoke words of spirit according to the spirit of faith (2 Corinthians 4:13), expecting the mountain, or obstacle, to move (Mark 11:22-24). He found God faithful and powerful to work according to the action he chose to take for God’s glory (John 14:13-14). God had worked just as Paul expected that He would work. There is no education in faith like seeing God do the thing. (In Greek, the word *pragma* means thing, referring to either what is being accomplished, that which is, or that which has been done.) The Spirit of God given through Christ was indeed Paul’s Helper to bear witness to the truth of Jesus Christ (John 14:16,26, John 15:26-27, John 16:7-8), by word and deed (Romans 15:18-19). The proconsul at Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, came to believe in Christ. This experience of Paul solidified that he was indeed a fellow worker with God (1 Corinthians 3:9), connected directly to Him. Paul had learned to get up, believe God for the thing, and use what God gave him. As Paul sought to bring God glory and built His church, the God who was with him had his back and would confirm his message (Mark 16:20). Paul’s militancy had turned to be used for good.

Paul continued his journey with Christ and with Barnabus to do the word of God, discipling men and women in order to start churches. He also trained and equipped their leadership so they would continue to be disciplined and equipped for God’s good works, and he left to start other

churches. Paul became as a father to all of the new believers and new churches he started. On one recorded occasion while Paul was preaching at Lystra, Paul saw a man sitting who could not use his feet (Day 6). Perceiving that the man had faith to be made well, Paul decided to try something new (for him at the time, although he had very likely heard that it had worked for the Apostle Peter before, perhaps from Peter himself). Paul looked intently at the man crippled from birth, believed, and boldly commanded, “Stand upright on your feet.” If the Helper did not work with Paul when he spoke, Paul would have looked ridiculous and his witness of Christ would have been hindered. Yet, without any mentioned special leading of God’s Spirit and without fear, Paul stepped out in love and in great faith to do what he thought to be right. The Spirit of God came through again just as Paul expected, and it happened right away. The crippled man sprang up at Paul’s command and began walking, the resurrection life of God having made his body whole immediately! As Paul continued to learn by doing, this witness of God’s power and love confirmed Paul’s preaching about Christ. Paul had started doing the same works that Jesus did (John 14:12), using the gift God had put within him. It was no longer a theory to him that Christ would heal through him; he experienced firsthand that the power of God worked through him.

From this point, Paul continued to run with perseverance the race God had set before him (Hebrews 12:1), growing up into the image of Christ, from faith to faith (Romans 1:17), the life of God pouring out of him despite all of the resistance of the world pushing back on him. When he spoke and wrote about God’s resurrection life and His power, he spoke and wrote with authority about it because he had experienced it over and over again. As Paul worked with God to advance His kingdom and build His church, God transformed him from glory to glory into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18), as described throughout the rest of this book.

Our lives. The unchanging, living God wants to work in the unfolding story of our lives in ways that He worked in Paul’s life and story. That’s why God gave us the story of Paul’s life and his teachings regarding the way Christ works in us and through us. Paul’s life and ministry showed the full potential of our inheritance in the Holy Spirit. The best way to grow up is to get up, go out, and do the word of God, even as Paul learned to do it. Like Paul, we have in us the same Spirit of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11)! If we do not start to use what God gave us, the potential remains a gift completely unopened within us. God has no limits to work in our lives except those that we place on Him, since God Himself chooses not to work against our will. Instead, God works in accordance with our faith. We have not been given a spirit of fear, timidity or cowardice. Instead, like Paul, we have been given the Spirit characterized by power (*dunamis*), love (*agapē*), and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7). Like Paul and like Peter, we have been predestined to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ during our days on earth, both individually and as Christ’s functioning body in the world (Matthew 5:8-10, Ephesians 4:13-16, Romans 8:29). All of creation is waiting for the church to turn away from their own interests and get aligned with God’s plan for His sons and daughters (Matthew 6:10,33, Romans 8:19, Philippians 2:2-5,9-11,13,15,21).

Personally, Paul’s life, the example of Christ living in a man, presents a challenge for me. I know that I have the same Spirit residing in me, but not the same faith or the same love—or they have

not yet manifested as they did in Paul. I look forward to what God has next for me as He grows me up in faith while I start stepping out more into it. Amidst the cloud of witnesses that surround us (Hebrews 12:1), I look forward to walking together with and running alongside other brothers and sisters who are also intent to do all of the word and the will of God. I look forward to the good works that remain which God has prepared in advance for me to do (Ephesians 2:10). I look forward to making more disciples of Jesus Christ as I strive to excel in building up God's church (1 Corinthians 14:12).