

April 2026 Daily Devotional

**Let the Word of Christ
Dwell in You Richly!**

Colossians 3:16



Vistoso Community Church

Foreword

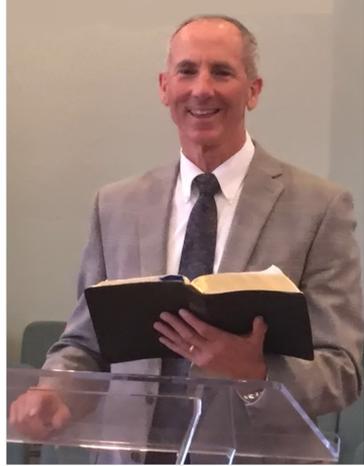
We'll finish the *Mission and Disciplines of the Christian Life* this month and spending a lot of time in Romans and Ephesians. As always, the Word of God will present us with wondrous things meant to be received by faith. We will also find lofty challenges which can only be met by a reliance on the Holy Spirit.

May God bless your time in His Word this month with ongoing spiritual growth.

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

The Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, April 1: Read Revelation 2

Today I would like to consider a few very practical aspects of worship. First, when we understand what worship really is, we should naturally begin to share our delight in the Lord with others. We've been rescued and brought back into the purpose for which we were created, how could we not want to help bring others back?



Is there a human being on this planet for whom Christ did not die and for whom God does not desire to have fellowship? No, not even one! If this natural extension of worship is not part of our thinking, then our understanding of worship still has room to grow.

Second, worship reminds us that it is possible to be deeply involved in ministry and forsake our *first love*. We can clearly see that in today's reading:

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who do evil ... and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

Revelation 2:2-4

Continued on the next page.

The Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, April 1: Read Revelation 2 (Continued)

One way of understanding this passage is to realize that it is possible to be busy with ministry and yet void of worship. In fact, sometimes it is ministry busyness that causes spiritual barrenness. We need to watch this tendency closely as we get involved in ministry.

Lastly, worship helps to keep us God-centered rather than man-centered. For it is possible to have a *form of godliness* without its power. (II Timothy 3:5) That happens when we shift our gaze from the Lord to such things as gifts and personalities.

I trust you can see how essential it is to properly understand and engage in worship as one of the disciplines of the Christian Life.

... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
having a form of godliness but denying its power.

II Timothy 3:4-5



Return to Romans

Thursday, April 2: Read Romans 8:1-14

Over the course of the next few days, we are going to talk about *sonship* and *adoption*. One of these is as challenging as anything you will find in the Scriptures, the other is as great a blessing as anything you will find. Let's begin with Romans 8:14:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Romans 8:14

In the first 13 verses of Romans Chapter 8, Paul has developed what he calls *The Law of the Spirit of Life*. As we have seen, this is a lengthy development of how we are meant to live the *Christian Life* by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. In the above verse, we are told that those who learn to do so are *sons of God!* There is something very important here, and in order to make it clear, we need to go back to the beginning of John's Gospel:

Yet to all who receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God ...
John 1:12

Faith in Christ leads to our becoming a *child* of God, which is equivalent to having been *born again* as a *new creation in Christ!* All of these speak of entry into the Christian Life. We start as a child—an infant! Now, note the change in Romans 8:14—Paul refers to those who are led by the Spirit as **sons**. The change in words is very intentional, for the word translated *son* speaks of a mature son. The newborn child is no longer in view.

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Return to Romans

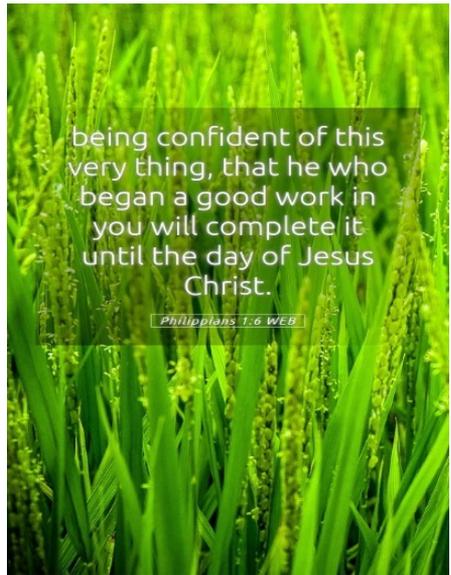
Thursday, April 2:

Read Romans 8:1-14 (Continued)

Right here in a nutshell we have a wonderful picture of what the Christian Life is meant to be. Through faith in the person and work of Christ we are spiritually born again and become a child of God. But we are not meant to stay in that condition, for we are meant to grow to maturity.

Romans 3-8 teaches us how to do so. Should we progress to the *Spirit-filled life*, we will have reached the maturity of an adult son which is exactly what God has in mind and which ultimately is a work that only He can perform:

... being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6



Consider this comment by Dr. Harry L. Reeder III:

It should be of the utmost comfort to our souls to realize that He who has put His hand upon us will never relax His hold.

I find this very encouraging. God never starts things that He is not able to finish. The question is: *Will we cooperate with Him when it comes to pursuing spiritual growth?*

Much more to come!

Return to Romans

Friday, April 3: Read II Peter 3

Following yesterday's discussion on *Sonship*, I want to talk about *Outcomes*. Specifically, I want to discuss the outcomes God has in mind when He provided for our salvation through His Son. Let me walk you through the progression:

1. A lost person getting saved for all eternity is cause for great rejoicing—not unlike bringing a newborn baby home for the first time.
2. However should that baby fail to grow in the home, it becomes cause for great concern. Likewise, let me suggest that a new Christian who fails to grow is an equal cause for concern.

... though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant ... is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature ...

Hebrews 5:12-14

3. In short, there is a difference between being *born again* into the family of God as a child, and becoming a mature son! We become a child through faith in Christ, but to become a mature son we have to:

... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

II Peter 3:18

4. So, why does Romans 8:14 make this statement?

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Continued on the next page.

Return to Romans

Friday, April 3: Read II Peter 3 (Continued)

The Holy Spirit is the essential element in our spiritual growth. He indwells every child of God (I Corinthians 6:19), He teaches us (John 15:26), He enables us by putting to death the misdeeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13) and producing fruit pleasing to God (Galatians 5:22-23).

5. As a final point, I do not think I can overstate this principle:

God's expectation for every child of God is growth into sonship, where sonship is a reference to spiritual maturity. And, by sonship I mean where we are caught up in our Father's plans, affections, and purposes; can be entrusted with His business; so that when people see us they see the life of our Savior on display!

Allow me to give God the final word on this:

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that he might be the first-born of many brothers.

Romans 8:29

Conformed to His likeness—that's the goal!



ROMANS 8:29

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



Return to Romans

Monday, April 6: Read Galatians 4:1-14

Romans 8:14 taught us that if we are led by the Spirit of God, then we are *sons of God*. For today, consider the new direction Romans 8:15 takes this:

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we call out, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15

Why does Paul mention a *spirit of bondage to fear*? It is because fear is the norm for those in Satan's kingdom, and by virtue of faith in Christ we have been freed from that fear for, by His death, Jesus destroyed:

... him who holds the power of death—that is the devil—and freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15

We need no longer fear what follows our physical death for, as children of God, we now have an eternal home with our Savior! And, if that were not enough, we have *received the Spirit of adoption!* It is our adopted status that allows us to address Almighty God as *Abba, Father*.

Now there is something that must be crystal clear in our thinking. Romans 8:14 labels those led by the Spirit to be *mature sons*, while Romans 8:15 states we are *adopted sons*. Why the change? Follow this carefully:

1. Jesus is a Son by nature. He is said to be the only begotten Son of the Father!

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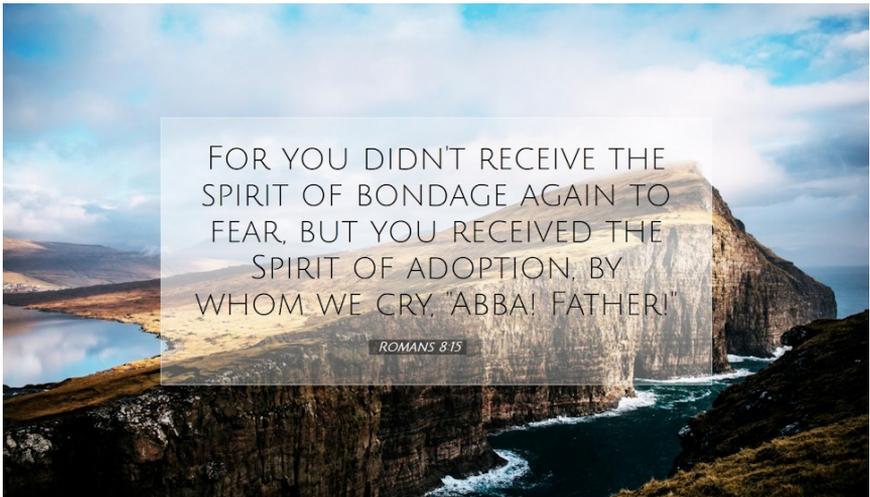
Return to Romans

Monday, April 6:

Read Galatians 4:1-14 (Continued)

2. Our sonship is one of being adopted into the family of God through faith in Christ. But wait, adoption, as understood by both the Greek and Roman world at the time Paul wrote Romans, was much different than in our day. We tend to think of adopting an infant and raising him or her as our own. But in the day Romans 8:15 was written, adoption was a practice of bringing an adult into a position of being an heir.
3. Do you see what God has done? In our lost condition, we were enemies of God and objects of His wrath. Now, saved through faith in Christ, part of that salvation includes being adopted into the privileged position of an heir.

That almost sounds too fantastic to believe, doesn't it?
We'll see tomorrow.



Return to Romans

Tuesday, April 7: Read Ephesians 1

In today's reading, we find something that is so absolutely astounding that I don't think most Christians are aware of it, much less believe it to be true. It is almost as if we are blasé about being an heir, as if it meant no more than inheriting something from a long lost uncle that wasn't worth much. But what does the Word of God have to say about our being heirs and having an inheritance?

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints ...

Ephesians 1:17-18

Here is part of that glorious inheritance for all the saints:

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ...

Romans 8:16-17

There you have it: Three days ago we saw that we are called to be mature sons of God—an impossibly high calling apart from the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Today, we have unimaginable grace: What belongs to Jesus belongs to us as well, for we are going to be *joint-heirs* with Him! Am I sure about this inheritance to come? The Word of God leaves no doubt:

In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you ...

1 Peter 1:3-4

Continued on the next page.

Return to Romans

Tuesday, April 7: Read Ephesians 1 (Continued)

This is how God does things. In His plan of salvation, those who believe become *sons of God* and therefore *heirs*—and not just heirs, but *joint-heirs* with Christ. This is His gracious provision for those who believe.

At the same time, He has called us to become more and more like the Lord Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit whom He has also provided. In short, our Father's plan is for us to grow into mature sons following the example of our Lord and Savior.

I know that may seem like an impossible task, but the same heavenly Father who has made us sons and heirs, will also provide that which is necessary to change us from the inside out as we walk by faith and by the Spirit. You'll never find anything like this in the world—only in the so-great salvation provided by our heavenly Father in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.



and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:17 WEB

Return to Romans

Wednesday, April 8: Read Colossians 3

Yesterday we saw that we are joint-heirs along with our Savior, and as a result have an inheritance on reserve for us in heaven. I suspect that might be just too wonderful for you to fully grasp in one day, so let's continue to develop it for a second day.

1. First, let me tell you that your glorious future in Christ is something God wants you to know about. In fact, it prompted Paul to pray for enlightenment on the part of the Church:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints ... Ephesians 1:18

2. Not only are we to know what is coming, we are to be confident that it is guaranteed to occur:

Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession ... Ephesians 1:13-14

If the omnipotent Holy Spirit guarantees our inheritance, then we should have no doubts about whether or not it is going to occur.

3. Ponder this: If we are joint-heirs with Christ, then we have a share in what belongs to Christ! That would mean we are going to share His home for all eternity (John 14:1-3); share an eternal and incorruptible body just like His (Philippians 3:20-21); and share His access to God the Father (Hebrews 10:19).

Continued on the next page.

Return to Romans

Wednesday, April 8: Read Colossians 3 (Continued)

In fact, I think it reasonable to simply say that we share in Christ's future—where He goes, we are going to go:

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4

4. So far these truths have been glorious to hear. But here is a more sobering aspect of our sonship:

... The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons ... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.

Hebrews 12:6-10



When Christ ...
appears, then you
also will appear
with Him in glory.
Colossians 3:4

Because we are sons, we should expect our heavenly Father to bring discipline into our lives—not to do us harm, but for our good. For He is going to be at work, doing whatever it takes, to conform us to the image and likeness of His Son. For Jesus is meant to be the *firstborn among many brothers*, and, of course, sisters! (Romans 8:29)

Lessons from Ephesians

Thursday, April 9: Read Ephesians 4:17-19

Today's short reading allows you to spend extra time in reflection, for these truths of application are both powerful and essential. The call to lost mankind is to turn to the person and work of Christ and believe!

All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name ... Acts 10:43

Since mankind is *dead in trespasses and sin*, God completed all of the work of salvation, ours is but to believe. There is no merit in faith, all of the merit is in the person and work of our Savior.

As we have learned, the first three chapters of Ephesians lay out, in great detail, the positional riches that belong to everyone who believes. In contrast, Chapter 4 begins a treatise on what God expects the born-again child of God to do with the riches that He has provided. It starts with a call to live a life consistent—in balance—with the position that is ours in Christ. What a high calling we have.

Today's reading brings us to another key application concept:

Therefore ... you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk ... Ephesians 4:17

Let me suggest that this verse is telling us the following:

1. From the moment of our salvation onwards, we come under a new set of *marching orders*.

Continued on the next page.

Lessons from Ephesians

Thursday, April 9:

Read Ephesians 4:17-19 (Continued)

2. Again, we see the word *walk*, a reference to the life lived. Believers are no longer to live a certain kind of life!
3. The word translated Gentiles could also be translated *nations*. It is a reference to the lost people of this world. In short, Paul's message to this dear church can be summarized as follows:

I am telling you something of the utmost importance, and I insist on it in the Lord. You must stop living like the lost of this world, for God has a much different plan for your life!



So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

Ephesians 4:17

Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, April 10:

Read Romans 1:18-32

Our study in Ephesians raises the question: Is it possible for a saved person to live like an unbeliever? If so, what causes that to happen? The answer to the first question is simple, of course it is possible! That's the very reason Paul is warning the church to no longer live like the lost. It is a nonsensical command if it is not possible. It is undesirable for a saved person to live like an unbeliever, but it is possible!

As for the second question, yesterday's text tells us how it happens—and it isn't pretty! Let's walk through the list:

1. It starts with futile or empty thinking. When there is no substance in the soul upon which to rely, the result is a *blacked out* understanding.
2. Blacked out thinking, in turn, leads to alienation from the life of God through unbelief.
3. Ignorance within is the result when you are not regularly taking in the Word of God!
4. The final result is that the soul is hardened—literally full of scar tissue. And, what is the result of all of this?

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. Ephesians 4:19

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Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, April 10:

Read Romans 1:18-32 (Continued)

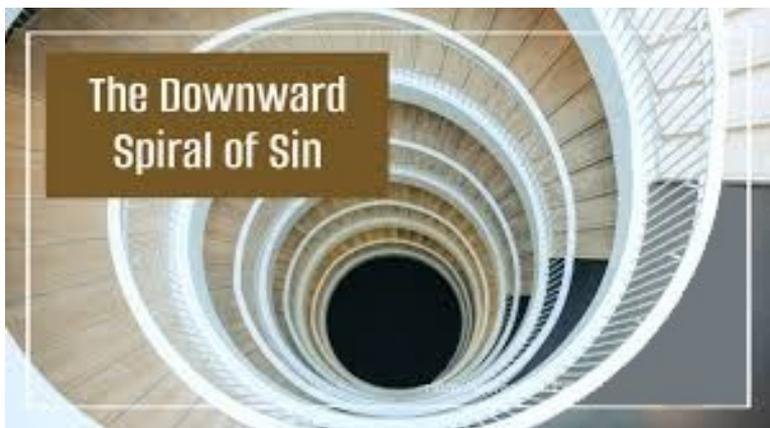
This is the description of a life that is in a terrible downward spiral—a continual lust for more sin.

You see this same spiral of sin in today's reading. Today's passage in Romans is descriptive of the unbeliever, but something very similar can happen to the believer! That is why Paul is giving believers such a strong warning:

I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer ...

Ephesians 4:17

For what could be worse than a Christian, with all that God has provided as the means to live a godly life, choosing to *give himself or herself over to sensuality*? Perish the thought we would ever *give our lives over* to anything but walking with the Lord!



Lessons from Ephesians

Monday, April 13: Read Colossians 3

Many have pointed out that the battle for the Christian Life is lived between the ears because it begins with what we think! We saw the negative side of this in our reading in Ephesians 4:17-19 when Paul wrote warnings against walking like the Gentiles: *futility of their thinking, darkened in their understanding, ignorance that is in them, and the hardening of their hearts*. Do you see how all four of these characteristics are related to what is going on in our souls—specifically, what we are thinking?

Today's reading gives us the necessary alternative for the Christian—the way the Christian is to walk:

... set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Colossians 3:1-2

We need to make a choice! Our minds don't go through the day in a vacuum. They are going to be occupied with one of two choices—the earthly or the heavenly. And, for our minds to be occupied with the heavenly means they have to be occupied with the Word of God. That's why David said:

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word ... I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You.

Psalm 119:9,11

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Lessons from Ephesians

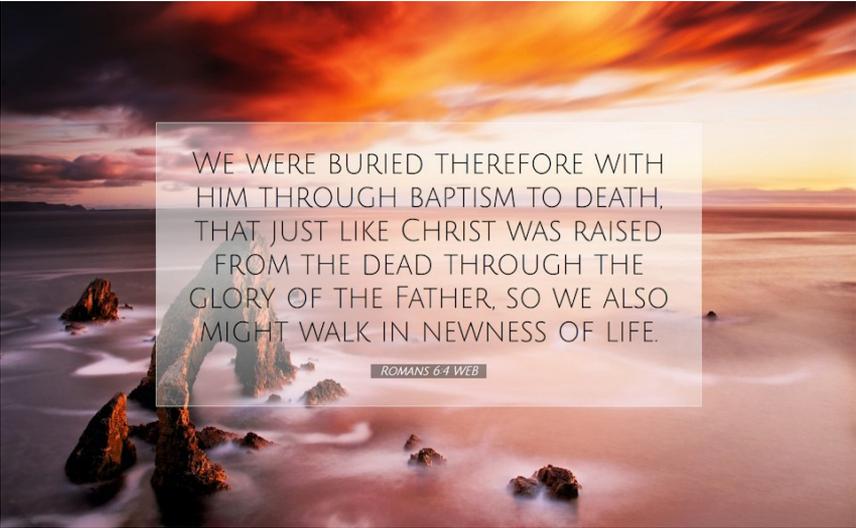
Monday, April 13: Read Colossians 3 (Continued)

Today's reading gives us the heavenly rationale for why we should fix the eyes of our soul on the heavenly, something we will also see reinforced in Ephesians:

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3

When we believed, we died to who and what we were in Adam. Then, we were made alive *in Christ* and have been called to newness of life *in Him*. Then, because we are *new creations*, with new lives that are now *hidden in Christ*, where exactly should our minds be focused? The answer, of course, is that our minds should be focused on things above, eternal things, divine things, as the hymn *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* so aptly states:

*And the things of earth
will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace!*



WE WERE BURIED THEREFORE WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM TO DEATH, THAT JUST LIKE CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD THROUGH THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, SO WE ALSO MIGHT WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.

ROMANS 6:4 WEB

Lessons from Ephesians

Tuesday, April 14: Read Ephesians 4:20-24

Our study in Ephesians 4:17-19 warned us of what not to do as Christians, then Verses 20-24 give us concise guidance on what to do! Meditate upon these things until they become firmly lodged in the soul. Verse 20 starts us off:

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.

You didn't find Christ in the pervasive worldliness that clamors for our attention. Rather, you found Him because God the Father drew you and God the Holy Spirit convicted you. As a result, you put your faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. You see the Christian Life is completely Christo-centric, as we see in Verse 21:

Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

In order to be *saved through faith* we need to have sufficient revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need the right object in which to believe! Then, the only way we grow as Christians—the only way—is if the Word of Christ dwells richly within. (Colossians 3:16)

Verses 22-24 are a wonderful summary of the Christian Life. Paul is not thinking of how a lost person gets saved, but rather how a saved person advances—what we are to do in our Christian walk! I suggest you underline three phrases in your Bible, for they are key: put off, be renewed, and put on. Let me expand these three slightly from the text: Put off your old self, renew your minds, and put on your new self. Paul uses the metaphor of changing clothes to help us understand our new walk. We are to take off that which is hopelessly soiled, and put on that which is unsullied and new. We'll work on this more tomorrow. In the meantime, reflect upon the goal: take off, be renewed, put on!

Lessons from Ephesians

**Wednesday, April 15:
Read Colossians 3 (again)**

Colossians 3:9-10 parallels Ephesians 4:22-24:

... since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

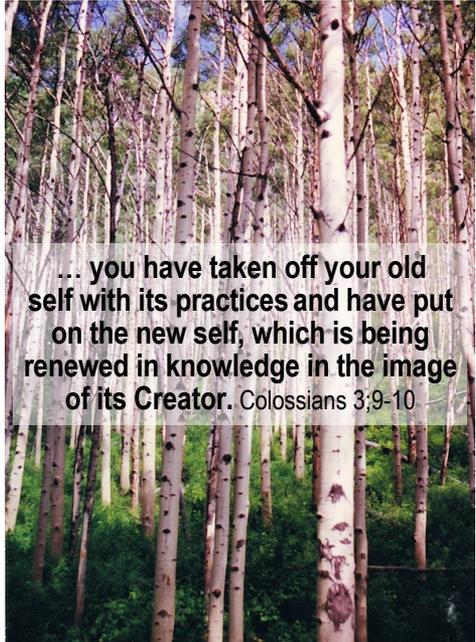
Ephesians 4:22-24

Again, Paul is saying: take off, be renewed, put on.

There is only one way we can respond to this instruction—by faith. For we *take off* who and what we were in Adam by believing that we have indeed *been crucified with*

Christ (Galatians 2:20) and are now *new creations in Christ* (II Corinthians 5:17).

We are *renewed* as we believe the truth of God's Word and thereby *grow in grace and knowledge* (II Peter 3:18) becoming *thoroughly equipped for every good work* (II Timothy 3:17). And then, we *put on* the new man as we believe that God has *given us everything we need for life and godliness* (II Peter 1:3) through the enablement of His Holy Spirit and the guidance found in His Word.



... you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Colossians 3:9-10

Lessons from Ephesians

Wednesday, April 15:

Read Colossians 3 (Continued)

The final thing in Ephesians 4:24 is a means of evaluating how we are doing in terms of taking off the old, experiencing renewal, and putting on the new. For the outcome of this process that God has in mind is that we *would be like God in true righteousness and holiness*.



Two final observations:

1. If our lives are not lining up with the righteousness and holiness of God, you and I have a spirituality problem. It might well be because we are not, by faith, *reckoning ourselves dead to sin*, renewing our minds in the Word of God, and allowing the Spirit of God to manifest the life of Christ within us.
2. This isn't a verse of completion, it is instruction on the process. It is not telling us that we need to have *arrived* at true righteousness and holiness; but rather, that we need to be moving in that direction! And all God's people said, "Amen!"

Lessons from Ephesians

Thursday, April 16: Read Ephesians 4:25-32

Take off, renew your mind, put on! I hope this great summary statement of doctrine is starting to sink in. For, as new creations in Christ, we are finished with the *old man*—that is, who we were in Adam. Instead we are to manifest the life of Christ. And, to do so, requires on-going spiritual growth through the steady intake of God's Word. This is Paul's instruction. Then, the rest of this chapter provides a number of examples of what it means both to *take off* the old and to *put on* the new.

There are a lot more examples of the kinds of things we need to *take-off* than there are examples of things to *put-on*, which tells us something about the fallen nature. For examples of Paul's instructions, consider that we are to:

- *Take off* falsehood, and *put on* speaking truthfully. (Ephesians 4:25)
- Stop taking from others, and instead be prepared to provide ministry. (Ephesians 4:28)
- Guard our lips carefully so that no unwholesome talk escapes, and instead use our words to build others up according to their needs. (Ephesians 4:29)
- Rid ourselves of bitterness, rage, and anger and, instead, be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. (Ephesians 4:31)

The distinctions between that which we are to *take-off* and that which we are to *put on* couldn't be any more stark. When others watch our lives, it is equally clear to them whether we are walking in the new life or the old! Our walk is part of our testimony. Part of what makes the truth of Christianity compelling are those who are walking in the new life that God has provided!

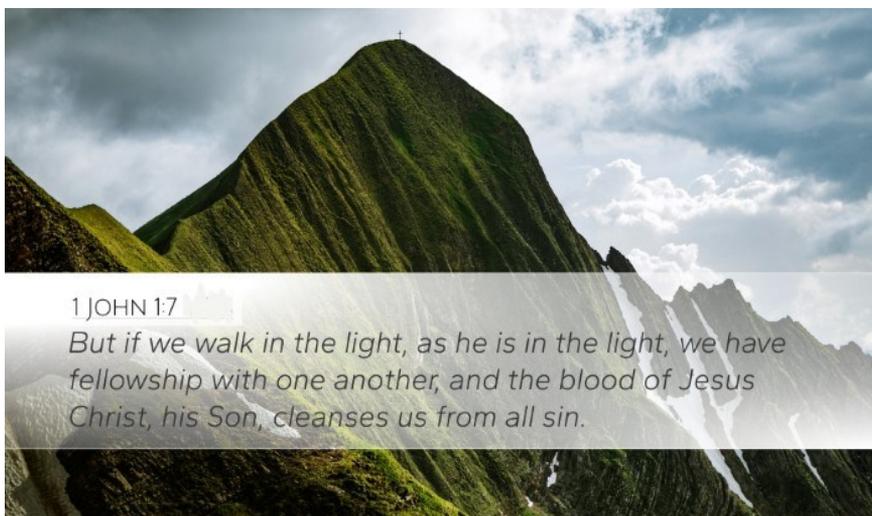
Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, April 17: Read Romans 6

One more thought on the *take off, renew your mind, put on* instructions of Ephesians 4:20-24. What is the basis of our forgiveness? Our answer should be: Jesus Christ *bore our sins in His body on the tree* (I Peter 2:24) and, through His death on our behalf, *the blood of Jesus ... purifies us from all sin* (I John 1:7).

This is a completely efficacious work of God on our behalf without any input whatsoever from us. That's why we call it grace! The fact that it is available to all who will trust in what God has done for them is what makes it the *Good News* of the Gospel. But what does this have to do with taking off and putting on? Christ dying in our place is the basis for how we become a child of God. It is what delivers us from the penalty of sin. But, as we turn to the Christian Life, the *walk-worthy* life of Ephesians, we have another problem. We need deliverance from the power of sin! We need to *take-off* that sinful nature.

Continued on the next page.



1 JOHN 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, April 17: Read Romans 6 (Continued)

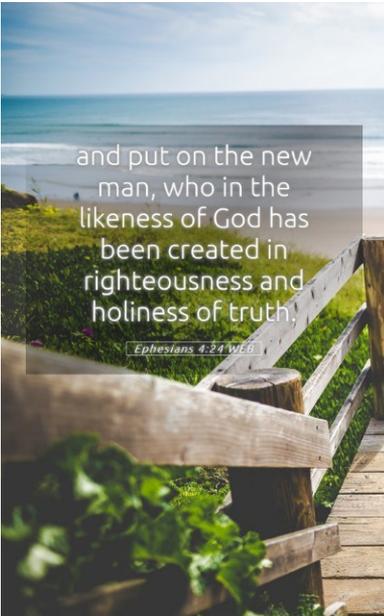
If we have a need, God always supplies in grace, and Romans 6 lays it out for us. We *take off* the old man by *reckoning ourselves dead to sin*. (Romans 6:11) We can do this because we:

... know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with (more accurately—neutralized), **so that we should no longer be slaves to sin** (there's our deliverance). Romans 6:6

What about *putting on*? Once again, by faith, we:

... reckon ourselves alive unto God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11

You see, God has identified every born-again child of God with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We take off the old when we rest in the finished work of the cross—such that the old man is rendered powerless—and trust in the Spirit of God to manifest the life of Christ in us. One thing remains—this new life needs to be renewed in the truth—the living and abiding Word of God—on a daily basis. What is God's goal? That we would be:



... created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:24

I told you that this section was absolutely packed with marvelous truth! *Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus!*

The Mission and Disciplines

Monday, April 20: Read Hebrews 10

Our Mission is stated in many places in Scripture:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Mark 16:15

With our minds clearly on the mission, we have investigated a number of the disciplines of the Christian Life that can allow us to be more effective in accomplishing our mission, things like Bible study, worship, and prayer. I have one more in mind that is nicely summarized by these verses:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Now perhaps you are thinking, "Okay, I get it! The last thing on his list is—go to church!" And if you are really cynical, you are already thinking, "Of course, the pastor is going to say, 'Go to church!'" Well, it's true, this passage is encouraging God's people to meet and, in particular, to encourage one another. For the rougher things get in the world, the more we need it! But is this an admonition to *go to church*? The word translated *church* in the New Testament doesn't mean building, it means those who have been "called out."

For *the Church* is an assembly of those who have believed in the person and work of Christ. It is those who form a living and vital entity with Christ at its head against which the gates of hell will not prevail. It is this idea of Christ's *Church* that is meant to put on display the glory of God to the watching spiritual hosts. And, this kind of *Church* is an entirely different matter altogether than the casual reference to "church is at 10:00 am." More to come!

The Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, April 21: Read Romans 16

Yesterday we began an investigation of what I am going to call *The Discipline of Assembly*, or the gathering of the Body of Christ. Let me give you a few more things to consider:

- The Church is not a building, but people:

And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:47

- The Church, meaning those who are part of the body of Christ, were bought at an extraordinary cost!

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.

Acts 20:28

- Those who assemble as the Church, have a clearly-defined head, or leader, of the Church—Jesus:

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Colossians 1:18

- The Church has both a universal aspect (*Christ also loved the Church*, Ephesians 5:25), and a local, geographic aspect (*Greet Priscilla and Aquila ... Likewise greet the church that is in their house*, Romans 16:3,5). This means our fellowship, although part of the universal Church, is a discrete local body with Christ at the head through which He desires to accomplish His purposes. The same is true of each local fellowship of believers.

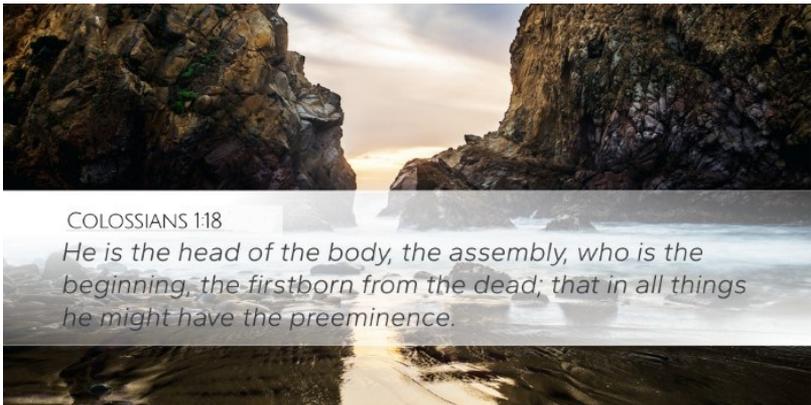
The Mission and Disciplines

Tuesday, April 21: Read Romans 16

(Continued)

- One last item for today. It is possible for a local assembly to be many things:
 - Functional
 - I know your deeds, your love and faith ...** Revelation 2:19
 - Dysfunctional
 - Yet I hold this against you ...** Revelation 2:4
 - Everything in between.

Now, are you starting to see where we are going with this particular topic, *The Discipline of Assembly*? We are called to not forsake gathering with other believers so that the body might not only engage in the other disciplines of the Christian Life, but also might be fully functional for all that God has in mind for it to accomplish.



The Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, April 22:

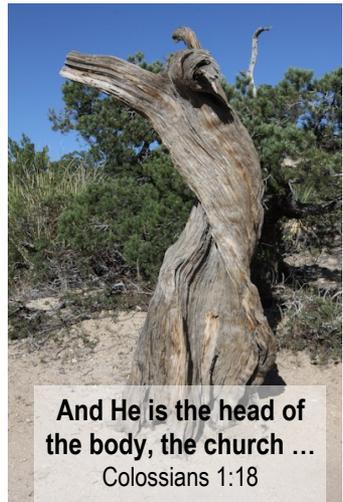
Read Isaiah 40:6-26

As we continue to study what I am calling *The Discipline of Assembly*, you should, by now, begin to realize that in truth this is much closer to a call to *value* the Church than it is a call to *go* to church because:

The Church is the "living entity" authorized by God for the day in which we live and through which He intends to supernaturally accomplish His purposes. It has supernatural power and is the epitome of the principle that the Spirit-enabled whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Nothing else has its standing or its future!

As valuable and dedicated as are many para-church organizations, there is nothing else like the Church. Let me give you a few items to ponder in support of these claims:

- Only the Church has Jesus Christ as its head! (Colossians 1:18)
Who is the head of the local church which you attend? Who is the head of your favorite para-church organization? There is a world of difference between those two answers. For that reason the two are accountable, enabled, and historically connected in completely different ways.



The Mission and Disciplines

Wednesday, April 22:

Read Isaiah 40:6-26 (Continued)

- Nothing else is sovereignly ordained and functionally gifted like the local church. (I Corinthians 12:4-31, Matthew 16:18) God chose the Church as His instrument, and then in grace gifted it in such a way as to make it functional.
- Nothing else is going to prevail against the *gates of hell*. (Matthew 16:18) Jesus makes it clear the Church is His and it will prevail. Even when individuals fail and the church in one part of the world goes into decline, the universal Church has supernaturally continued century after century.
- Only the Church is designed to put on display the glory of God to the celestial (and terrestrial) powers. (Ephesians 3:8-10) What an awesome privilege we have and what a purifying principle as we examine our areas of ministry and the intent of those ministries.
- The Church is meant to be the primary means of evangelism and discipleship. (I Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11-16) The Church is God-ordained and enabled.

No human organization can claim to hold title to the Scriptural warrant we have just reviewed. In fact, the Church turns its back on its divine warrant when it chooses to become another man-made entity. That is what makes it so sorrowful to behold when a church starts to forsake its First Love and become ever more worldly.

The Mission and Disciplines

Thursday, April 23: Read Matthew 16

The Church is God-ordained and enabled. No human organization, even a spiritually focused one, can claim to hold title to the Scriptural warrant given to the Church:

- Christ at its head.
- Consisting of a spiritually gifted body, against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail.
- Displaying the glory of God to the angelic host.
- His instrument for reaching the lost and nurturing those who respond.

You can see that this final discipline of the Christian Life has really been about seeing yourself as part of His Church. But perhaps your observation of the church in America has led you to a sense of despair and a heartfelt cry, "But the Church has failed!" Be very careful at this point for, although churches in America have some serious failings, do not forget the words of Jesus from Matthew 16:18:

"... I will build My Church ..."

The pronouns "I" and "My" are the key!

So when we say, "The Church has failed," we are dangerously close to saying that Jesus has failed. He said He will build it! There is absolutely no evidence in the Scriptures that God is going to change His plan until He purposefully removes the Church from this world. The Church has survived for two millennia, centuries of persecution, the dark ages, and much more. Always the Church continues through one message—the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Don't give up on the Church. Don't forsake assembling together so that you might be used of God to revitalize His Church, for the Church is His way. Join Him!

Returning to Romans

Friday, April 24: Read Romans 5:1-11

Before we continue on in Romans Chapter 8, let me spend a day simply highlighting the wonders of the Father's so-great salvation made available by means of the work of the Son. I don't think we can pause too often and simply take delight in what God has provided through His Son!

1. Those who have put their faith in Christ now have a justified standing before God:

Much more then, having now been justified by His Blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

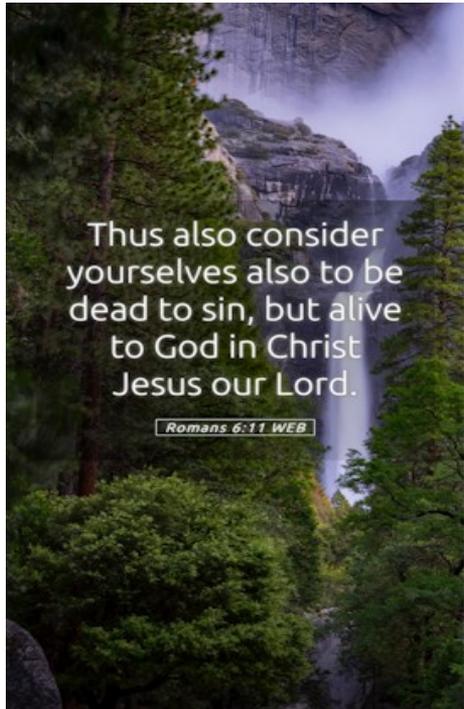
Romans 5:9

To be justified means we are righteous in God's sight, and as a result we need never again fear God's wrath.

2. Because of our identification with the death and resurrection of Christ, it is possible for us to *reckon* ourselves dead to sin and alive unto God!

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:11



Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Friday, April 24: Read Romans 5:1-11

(Continued)

Be sure to note, that this potential is found in one place, and one place only—***in Christ Jesus our Lord!***

3. Not only do we have new life in Christ, but God has poured out His Spirit into our hearts:

Therefore, having been justified by faith ... the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 5:1,5

It is the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that allows us to separate from the misdeeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13) and produce the fruit of Christ-like character (Galatians 5:22-23). We could continue on with the list, and if we were to do so, we would find that:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. ...

II Corinthians 1:20

And, this is functionally implemented by the Holy Spirit, for it is those who are led by the Spirit of God who are mature sons of God. So, we are wonderfully justified by turning to Christ and putting our faith in Him.

From that moment forward, we are called onward and upward to separate from the flesh and the world and learn to walk in the new life that is ours in Christ, bearing fruit in keeping with those who are *heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ!* (Romans 8:17)

What a glorious salvation our God has provided.

Returning to Romans

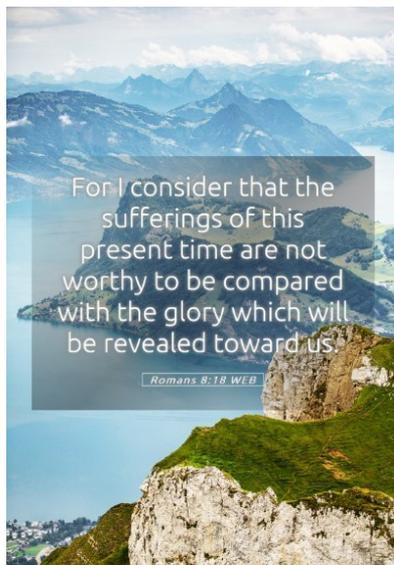
Monday, April 27: Read Romans 8:18-25

After yesterday's recap of the glorious salvation to be found in Jesus Christ, it is quite a shock to move on to the subject of suffering in today's reading. For Paul says,

I consider that our present sufferings ... Romans 8:18

Now, to be sure, this verse goes on to clearly state that the sufferings of this present time are not comparable to the glory that will be revealed in us. But the issue of suffering in the life of the believer can often be so difficult to understand, that the thought of the glories to come are driven completely from our minds.

In many cases, we have come to view suffering—all trials—as an indication that something is wrong. We want them to stop as soon as possible, and would just as soon avoid them altogether! To be sure, I am not suggesting that we would ever want suffering to come our way. But what I am saying is that the Scriptures are quite clear, we are going to face suffering (trials of many kind) in this life—and some of them will be for no other reason than we are Christians in a world currently under Satan's control.



Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Monday, April 27:

Read Romans 8:18-25 (Continued)

Isn't that exactly what Paul is teaching young Timothy as well as the church in Philippi?

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. II Timothy 3:12

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. Philippians 1:29

Now, given that suffering is certain to come our way, here is the good news: First of all, the Lord will be with us and is ultimately the source of our deliverance:

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Psalm 34:19

As a second bit of good news, it is not just today's reading that attempts to shift our focus to the glories to come. For Peter teaches exactly the same thing:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. I Peter 4:12-13

Why would we be overjoyed when the glory of our Savior is revealed? Because we are going to share in His glory!

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4

It would seem there might be a measure of suffering now, but eternal glory to come. We are going to have to consider this further.

Returning to Romans

Tuesday, April 28:

Read Lamentations 3:1-27

I hesitate to do another day on *suffering in the life of the Christian* because we just don't like this topic. But since we are all going to be on the receiving end, I thought it would be helpful to provide further encouragement.

First, God can use the suffering that comes our way for good! Joseph understood this:

... **"You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good ..."** Genesis 50:20

Paul stated it emphatically:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28



Now I think it is very reasonable to ask, "*What good could possibly come out of the suffering that comes into my life?*" Before I answer that question directly, allow me to share what I think is a very good place to begin when suffering, especially unexpected suffering, comes into our lives. We can always begin by, *resting upon the goodness of the One who is "too wise to make a mistake and too loving to be unkind."* (Pink)

Jeremiah echoes that thought by telling us that the Lord's

... **compassions never fail, they are new every morning; great is [His] faithfulness.** Lamentations 3:22-23

Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Tuesday, April 28:

Read Lamentations 3:1-27 (Continued)

From that starting point, here are a number of ways that God uses trials for good in the life of those who trust Him:

First, to refine our faith.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. I Peter 1:6-7

Amazingly, this refined faith will lead to future glory and honor.

Second, to build our character.

... we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Romans 5:3-4

I think we would all like to have well-developed, Christ-like character. But do you see that this passage is clearly telling us that it takes suffering through trials in order to develop the ability to persevere; and then, only after persevering through the trial, do we have the fruit of character! This is very important. What I am saying is that we do not really have the character quality of love, until we do so in the face of another's unlovely behavior!

Think about this and we'll pick up here tomorrow.

Returning to Romans

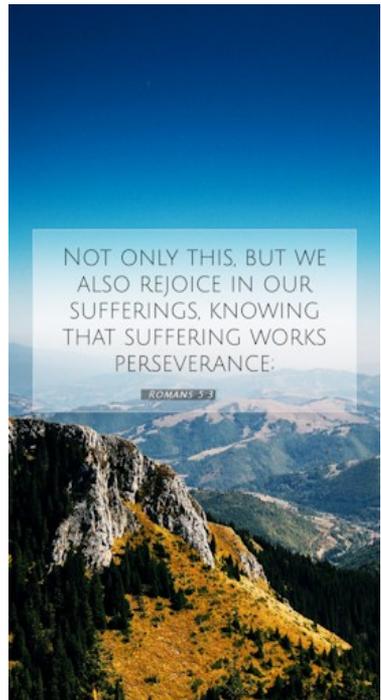
**Wednesday, April 29:
Read Galatians 5:16-26**

I made the case yesterday that trials (suffering) in our lives can be used by God for good—including refining our faith and developing Christ-like character. As we saw, Romans 5:3-4 tells us that,

... suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character ...

In other words, character is forged in the fire of adversity. As I mentioned yesterday, you can't really claim to have love toward others, until you do so in the face of an unlovely response.

To take that idea a step further: We haven't demonstrated forgiveness until we do so in the face of being wronged. We are not really patient until we are so when someone has given us cause to anger. We are not humble until we demonstrate humility when we have cause for pride. We are not merciful until we are so with good reason to condemn!



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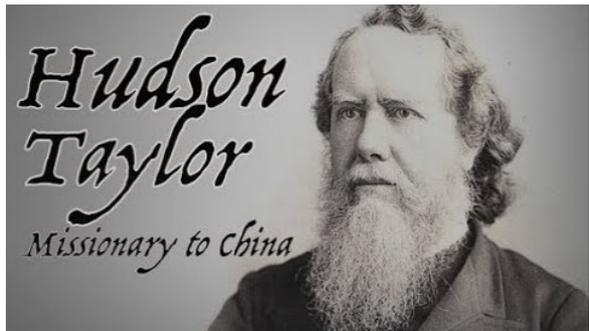
Returning to Romans

Wednesday, April 29:

Read Galatians 5:16-26 (Continued)

God can use all manner of circumstances to develop the character of Christ in us! Of course, it would be too much for us to manage on our own, but, as we walk by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is God's stated intent that we learn to manifest the fruit of the Spirit which is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. (Galatians 5:22-23)

This reliance on the Spirit to provide whatever is necessary in the face of the trials that come our way is very clearly communicated by well-known missionary Hudson Taylor. It should be noted that he had many ups and downs in his ministry life, and was often discouraged until he learned the very same lesson we are wrestling with. Follow along closely as he explains:



He, I know, is able to carry out His will and His will is mine ... So, if God places me in great perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? ... the work and strain are all gone. His resources are mine, for He is mine ... all this springs from ... (oneness with Christ).

Returning to Romans

Thursday, April 30

Read II Corinthians 12:1-10

Yesterday we considered two ways God can use the trials we face for good: to refine our faith and to develop godly character. Let me suggest a third.

Third, God uses trials to teach us that *His grace is sufficient!* Paul has been having a very rough time of it because of some kind of physical trial—something he calls a *thorn in the flesh*.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me. II Corinthians 12:7

So how did Paul handle this?

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. II Corinthians 12:8

You would certainly expect God to answer Paul's prayer and allow him to continue his work of evangelism, planting churches, and writing Scripture. But God, in essence says, "No!" And what He did say should get our attention:

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." II Corinthians 12:9

Do you see? We do not need the trial to go away, we just need the grace of God to work through us. His grace will always be more than enough. In this way, God's power is made perfect! What that means is that it is the power of God on display and not ours!

Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Thursday, April 30

Read II Corinthians 12:1-10 (Continued)

Now, although I believe God's grace is more than sufficient, I must admit I have a difficult time remembering that when some aspect of weakness arises. It is at this point, I find Paul's response amazing, and indicative of his status as a spiritual giant. For he says,

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses that Christ's power may rest on me ... I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships ... For when I am weak then I am strong.

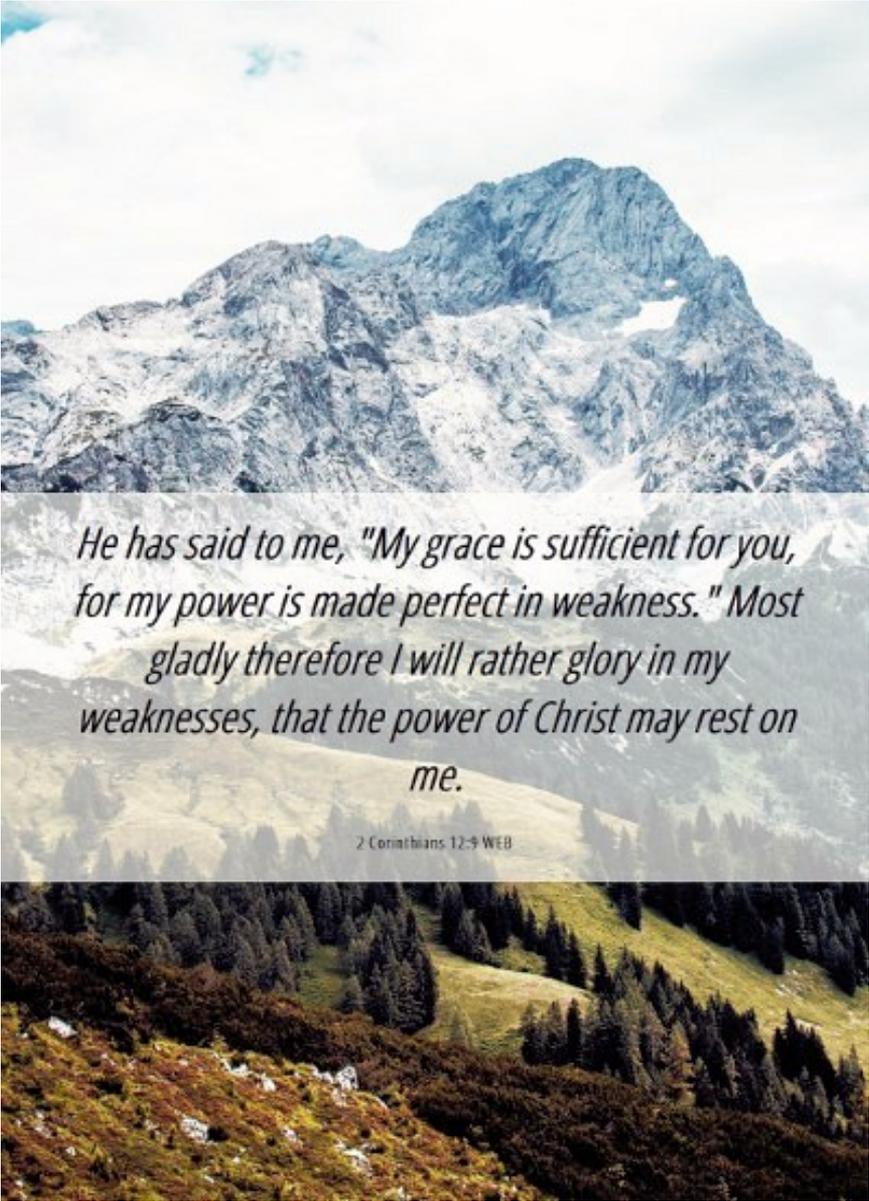
II Corinthians 12:9-10

It would seem Paul picked up on the lesson almost immediately—the very same lesson I am still struggling to learn, and I imagine you might be as well. But, once we learn this lesson, there is no trial that can keep God from accomplishing Divine good through us. Consider the many challenges Paul faced over the course of his life, and stand in amazement at how the net result was to reveal Christ!

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

II Corinthians 4:8-10

God will do the same through us as we trust His grace to be sufficient no matter the weakness of the life through which it is manifested.



*He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most
gladly therefore I will rather glory in my
weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on
me.*

2 Corinthians 12:9 WEB

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Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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