

September 2026

Daily Devotional

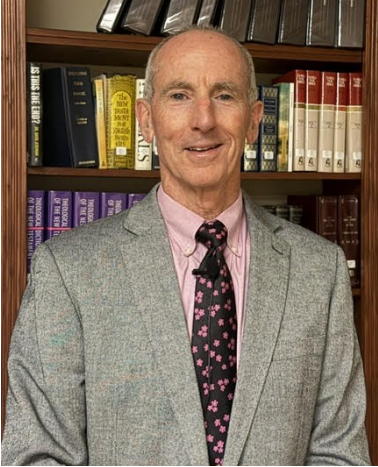
The words of the Lord are flawless,
like silver refined in a furnace,
like gold purified seven fold.

Psalm 12:6



Vistoso Community Church

Foreword



This month we begin and end with lessons from the Psalms. We begin with the final lessons from the series that we began in August. At the end of the month, we return to a series of lessons from Psalms that will continue into October.

Between these bookends, we find encouragement from John's Gospel and guidance on spiritual warfare from

Ephesians. Enjoy the truths of God's Word and be blessed by them!

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig'.

Kevin Redig

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

Returning to the Psalms

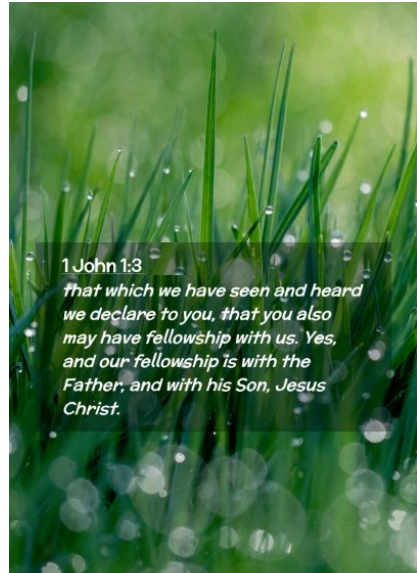
Tuesday, September 1: Read I John 1

As we complete our study in Psalms for now, today we consider whether Nathan's message to David that *"God has taken away your sin"* applies to us as well. As Jesus' time on the cross came to a close, He declared, "It is finished." (John 19:30) He is declaring that the wages of mankind's sin has been *paid in full!* It is for this reason that we can hold fast to the promise of I John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Before we work through this important verse, let's make a few observations from the entirety of Chapter 1:

- John tells us his reason for writing—fellowship! (Verse 3) In particular, the verse refers to the believer's fellowship with both the Father and Son.
- The challenge for remaining in fellowship with God is this: There is no darkness—no sin at all—in God (Verse 5); so there is no possibility of being in fellowship with Him if there is sin in our lives (Verse 6).
- Yet at the same time, all of us are going to sin (Verses 8 and 10). So how can we possibly have fellowship with our perfectly holy God?



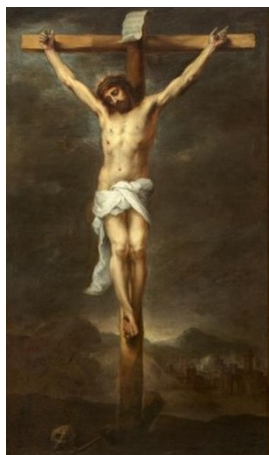
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Returning to the Psalms

Tuesday, September 1: Read I John 1 (Continued)

I John 1:9 is God's answer, when seen in the light of the cross. Since Jesus has already paid it all, this verse means:

- **If ...** We must choose to ask for forgiveness.
- **we confess our sins ...** The word confess means to agree—literally, to say the same thing. Confession is to turn to God and agree with Him that what we have said, thought, or done is a violation against His holiness.
- **He is faithful and just ...** He is faithful because He does the same thing every time. He is just because the sins were paid for by Jesus at the cross.
- **and will forgive us our sins ...** This isn't a judicial forgiveness, for that happened at the cross. This is relational because we are back in fellowship with Him.
- **and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** This is a bit of unexpected good news! Not only are we forgiven for what we have confessed, but, if there is unknown sin in our lives, we are cleansed from that as well. You see, once we start to sin, it is very possible that we will pile sins on top of sins without even recognizing some of them. If we confess our known sins, God will forgive us and cleanse us from any other unrighteousness we may have picked up along the way.



Like David, upon the authority of God's Word, we too can know that our sins are forgiven.

Returning to the Psalms

Wednesday, September 2: Read Psalms 53 and 54

I have included two psalms in today's reading, simply because it seems that Psalm 54 is a bit of encouragement to counteract the difficulties highlighted in Psalm 53. Let's start with the *bad news*! There are men who convince themselves that there is no such thing as God:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." ... Psalm 53:1

The problem presented in Psalm 53 is that it would seem nearly everyone is in that camp:

Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Psalm 53:3

It is most certainly a difficult time for the saint when the culture has taken on such an attitude. What are we to do? Psalm 54 tells us to call out to the Lord:

Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by Your might. Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth.

Psalm 54:1-2

Even during a season when *fools* seem to dominate the culture:

Surely God is my help; the Lord is the One who sustains me.

Psalm 54:4

And, of course, we know how the story ends:

... I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good. You have delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.

Psalm 54:6-7

Continued on the next page.

Returning to the Psalms

Wednesday, September 2:

Read Psalms 53 and 54 (Continued)

Our God is good, and worthy of our praise. It is much better to keep our eyes on Him than to be vexed by the *fool!* Ultimately, the Lord will triumph over all who have rejected Him. The lies the fool uses to convince himself don't impact the reality of God's existence in the slightest. And, one day, sooner rather than later:

... at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:10-11



Encouragement from John

Thursday, September 3:

Read John 5:30-47

How do you handle a VIP like Nicodemus? Jesus' approach might surprise you. Nicodemus starts by giving Jesus an honorary title, Rabbi. The politically correct thing for Jesus to do would be to let Nicodemus finish his gracious introduction and reply in kind. Instead, one sentence into Nicodemus' greeting, Jesus cuts him off, and says the following,

"... No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

John 3:3

This is a slap in the face to the proud Pharisee! Let me ask you, "Did Nicodemus understand what Jesus was talking about?" Verses 4 and 9 make it clear that he did not. So, in effect, Jesus said to Nicodemus something akin to the following: "You think that by your religious system you are in God's Kingdom. Until you both understand and respond to it, there is truth you know nothing about that is going to keep you from ever entering the Kingdom."

What a shocker this must have been for Nicodemus. You can tell from the dialogue that follows that Nicodemus has completely lost control of the conversation. It is now focused upon what Jesus has to say (which is where it belongs). There is a time to avoid pleasantries and *cut to the chase!* Jesus did just that in the course of His dialogue with the religious Jews of His day. He must have given them quite a shock also when He told them you cannot obtain eternal life from the Scriptures without also coming to the Savior whom the Scriptures proclaim.

You see, it is possible to make an idol even out of the written word, if you ignore the Living Word from which the Bible receives its authority.

Encouragement from John

Friday, September 4:

Read I Corinthians 2

There is one more thing I would like you to consider before leaving the narrative between Nicodemus and Jesus. It is something that I trust will help you as you try to share your faith with others. Here is the principle:

Lost people (like Nicodemus) have a very difficult time wrapping their minds around spiritual truth, so stick with the one thing they need the most—the Gospel!

The issue is that spiritually dead people cannot understand spiritual truth. If it weren't for the ministry of the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts of men, no one would understand well enough to come to salvation.

It doesn't matter whether we are talking to sophisticated lost people like Nicodemus or unsophisticated ones like the Samaritan woman, it is very important for us to stick to what is the *main issue* when dealing with lost people. That issue is their need of salvation and God's answer to that need in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

You can see this point in the first part of today's reading when Paul said,

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I Corinthians 2:2

All too often we get involved in discussions of spiritual things about which the lost person might be curious. Then, before you know it, we are deep into an explanation which might show our theological knowledge but goes right over the head of the lost individual.

Encouragement from John

Friday, September 4:

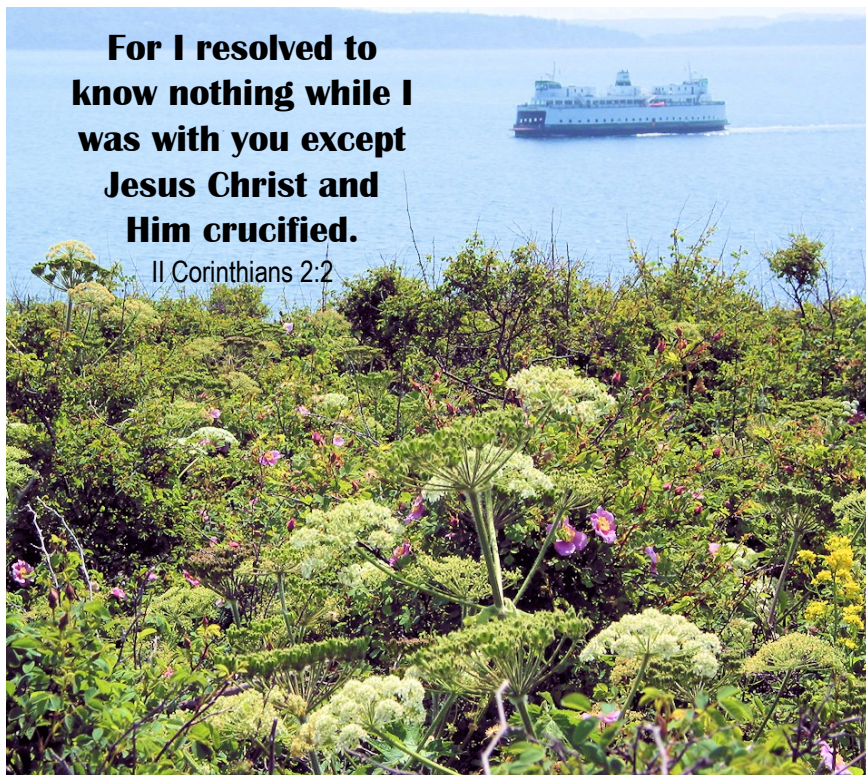
Read I Corinthians 2 (Continued)

More often than not, when this happens to me, it is a topic that the lost person turns around later and uses to ridicule Christianity. I've learned this lesson the hard way: When dealing with a lost person, stick with their need before a Holy God and the good news of the Gospel.

If I am going to be ridiculed by a lost person, I want it to be with respect to the cross of Christ and nothing else.

**For I resolved to
know nothing while I
was with you except
Jesus Christ and
Him crucified.**

II Corinthians 2:2



Encouragement from John

Monday, September 7:

Read John 3:18-36

We make all kinds of decisions every day. Some we consider to be really big and worth making with care—what career to pursue, whom to marry, and so on. But the single biggest decision that will be made by all members of the human race is whether or not they will place their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The first verse of our reading is one of many that support this claim:

Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 3:18

Couple this with the very last verse of our reading and you have all the repetition you need to affirm this truth:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on *him*.

John 3:36

Eternal life and freedom from God's condemnation on the one hand and the absence of life coupled with condemnation on the other hand is related to one decision—whether or not we believe in Jesus Christ. What could be more significant than these two options?

Between these two options are some of the reasons people choose death and condemnation. They love the darkness (Verses 19-20) or they love the ways of this world more than a spiritual relationship with their Creator (Verse 31). Despite our natural inclination to unbelief, God has provided the means of salvation. We don't have to stay in the darkness for whoever believes in the Son can be transferred from the dominion of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son. God has done all the work, ours is but to come in faith.

Encouragement from John

Tuesday, September 8:

Read John 4:1-30

Our reading today is the second of the great narratives in the Gospel of John, and the settings couldn't be any more different. In John Chapter 3, Jesus is in the royal city of Jerusalem talking with a Jewish VIP, Nicodemus. Here in John 4, He is in the hated land of the Samaritans talking with a woman of questionable reputation. Yet, look how Jesus uses circumstances to discuss the exact same issue—eternal life.

... "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:13-14

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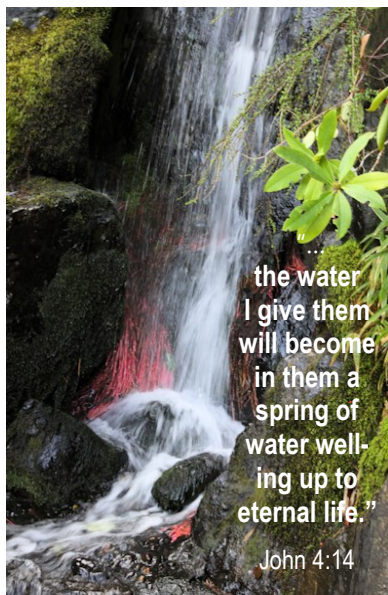


Encouragement from John

Tuesday, September 8: Read John 4:1-30 (Continued)

We could spend days on these two verses, but here are a few things to consider:

- Jesus cared about lost people. That is why He spent time with a Jewish member of the Sanhedrin and an often-divorced Samaritan woman. This is also why He had fishermen and a tax collector for disciples.
- When Jesus said He came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17), He meant exactly that. We will see this over and over again in John's Gospel—"*whoever drinks the water I give.*" Does that sound like Jesus is offering salvation to an elect few or to whomever will respond?
- *To drink* is a synonym for *to believe*. It is a helpful synonym because it teaches us that faith is part of the normal capability of every human being. Who can drink? Everyone! Who can believe? Everyone!



The best thing about this narrative is that we find, in the later half of the chapter, that both the woman and many of those to whom she bore witness did, in fact, place their faith in Jesus. They did partake of the water of eternal life offered by Jesus and by Him alone.

Encouragement from John

Wednesday, September 9:

Read John 4:31-54

I find Verses 32 and 34 to be very compelling with respect to the Christian Life. How many of us can say that we exist on a level of thinking where we can say the following?

"I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Jesus goes on to explain what is actually sustaining Him:

"My food ... is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work."

Do you see what I mean about compelling? What sustained Jesus was doing the will of the Father. Oh, that it would be the same for us, that obedience to God's call in our lives, whatever it might be, would be that which sustains us. Oh, that we could find that form of spiritual nourishment that is far more satisfying than the physical.

For the next few verses, beginning in Verse 35, Jesus gives us some insight into at least part of God's will for us. He says to His disciples: *"Do you not say ..."* In other words, He has switched from talking about what drives Him to guiding their thinking.

"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest?' Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

Continued on the next page.

Encouragement from John

Wednesday, September 9:

Read John 4:31-54 (Continued)

Here is a summary discussion of these verses:

- *"Do you not say, 'Four months more ...'"* This is an idiom which means, don't kick back and procrastinate.
- Jesus provides an alternative: Open your eyes to the lostness of people around you, they desperately need the Gospel!
- There is a division of labor in sharing the Gospel. There are those who sow and those who reap. Those who sow are those who communicate the Gospel without a response, they do so by word, by deed, and by the life lived. Then there are those who reap, those who happen to be there to add the final words of truth that prompt a faith response.

An example of reaping can be found as a continuation of yesterday's narrative of the Samaritan woman:

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed

because of the woman's testimony ...

John 4:39

What a blessing it must have been for this woman of a shady background to both sow and reap a harvest unto eternal life.

How can we do less?

Encouragement from John

Thursday, September 10:

Read John 10 (John 4:46-54)

John 4:54 ends the chapter with: *This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed.*

What was the miracle? Jesus healed the sick son of a royal official. Two things make this noteworthy. First is the way he did it. The royal official traveled to Jesus to beg for his son's life. After a short dialogue, Jesus told the official he could return to his son for he was healed. As the official was careful to document, the son was healed at the exact time Jesus pronounced him healed.

With these first two miracles, we first see that Jesus has power over the very substance of matter, for He turned water into wine which means he changed the very atoms of one mixture into those of another. In the second, we see that He has power over both illness and distance. He healed the son across a great distance and without ever having seen him. Who has this kind of power? God does! These miracles authenticate the deity of Jesus Christ.



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Encouragement from John

Thursday, September 10:

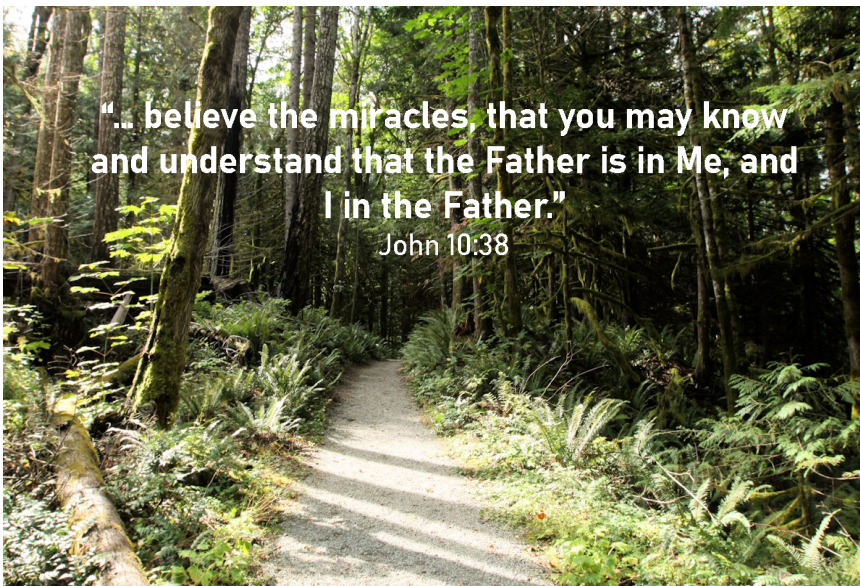
Read John 10 (Continued)

The second thing to note is the royal official's response to the revelation of Jesus' deity: *So he (the royal official) and all his household believed.*

This is exactly the purpose of miracles as we learned in John 20:31, and also why I had you read John 10:37-38:

"Do not believe Me unless I do what My Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe Me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father."

Jesus isn't looking for anything from the official other than faith—no works, no changing his ways. The only thing He chastises him for is lack of faith. Over and over, in the Gospel of John, when Jesus interacts with people, He is calling them to faith in Himself! Everything else is meant to follow.



**".. believe the miracles, that you may know
and understand that the Father is in Me, and
I in the Father."**

John 10:38

Returning to Romans

Friday, September 11:

Read Romans 12:1-13

As we continue to work our way through the Book of Romans, we find ourselves in the closing chapters—chapters rich with application. If the deep doctrinal treatises on justification and sanctification are found in Romans 3-8, then Chapter 12 through the close of the book is all about application. Given that we are looking at five chapters of the book, it would appear that application matters very much to our Savior.

Let me remind you of what we have learned in Romans 12:1 by means of a paraphrase:

I am pleading with you brothers, by the mercies of God, that you put yourselves under orders to God, as a living sacrifice—one that would be holy as He is holy, and fully acceptable to Him, which is how we rightly worship!

So what are the characteristics of a living sacrifice? Romans Chapter 12 wastes no time answering exactly that question:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought ...

Romans 12:3

It would seem that *living sacrifices* are humble!

As we work our way down through Verse 13, we are going to find one aspect after another of what a living sacrifice *looks like*:

- Using our gifting to serve others in the Body of Christ
- Loving devotion within the body

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Returning to Romans

Friday, September 11:

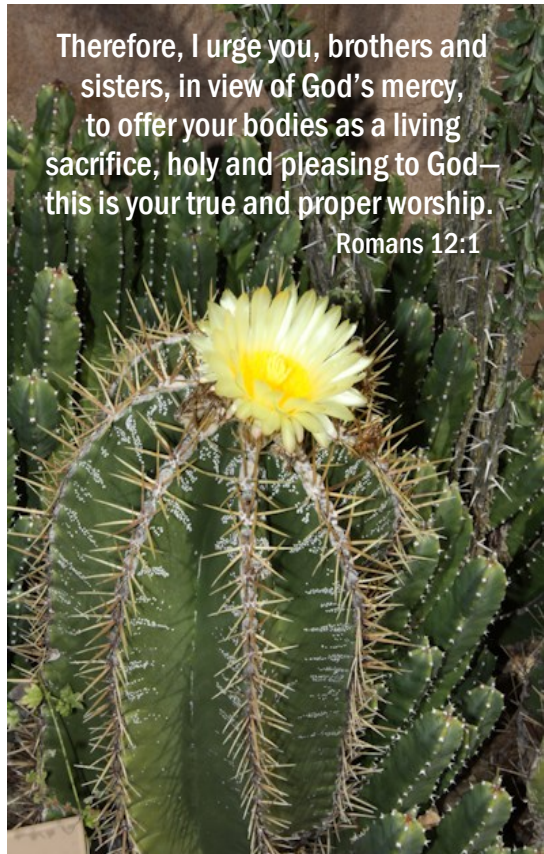
Read Romans 12:1-13 (Continued)

- Joyful in hope and patient in affliction
- Hospitable and sharing with those in need

These types of behavior are certainly counter to what is going on in our society right now.

Further, we have no way of serving in the way the verses describe apart from the spirituality learned earlier in Romans. This is a spirituality that is dependent upon separation from the sinful nature so that we can walk by the Spirit!

As we continue on in this chapter and those that follow, we are going to see the dynamic function of a spiritual family that is meant to provide a witness to the watching world that is attractive and draws others to hear the truth.



Returning to Romans

Monday, September 14:

Read Romans 12:14-21

I'll begin with a reminder: What we are covering comes under the umbrella of what it means to be a *living sacrifice, under orders to God, and that as an example of true worship!*

The first part of Romans Chapter 12 would seem to focus upon sacrificial behavior within the church setting:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Romans 12:10

On the other hand, today's reading seems indicative of a shift to how we are to deal with the fallen world around us. For example,

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Romans 12:14

I trust you will agree, those who persecute the believer should be outside the Church and not within! Now this can very easily create a bit of confusion for the Christian. For back in Verse 9, we are told to *hate what is evil* ... and now we are told to *bless those who persecute*.

The confusion arises when it becomes obvious that it is those with evil intent that are persecuting! So, what are we to do—hate or bless? Given the evil that is being perpetrated in our day, it is actually pretty easy to start hating lost people and seeing them as the enemy. It is here that God's Word calls us up short in Romans 12:19:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath ...

Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Monday, September 14:

Read Romans 12:14-21 (Continued)

Let's work through some Biblical principles that will help us navigate this challenging situation. We'll call it: Love Toward the Unlovely!

- Within the fellowship, Chapter 12 is quite clear, we are to *love without hypocrisy, love others before self, and have a servant's mindset.*
- One particular risk within a fellowship of believers is related to the fact that new or untaught believers can bring a lot of worldly baggage with them. It is incumbent upon the mature to keep such baggage from ever gaining a foothold within the *Body of Christ!*

Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." II Corinthians 6:17-18

- What about the angry faces of those in the world who spew evil ideas. We must make this simple distinction: *hate the evil of this fallen world, understand the plight of the sinner!* We'll pick up with this tomorrow, but for now, here is the final goal:

Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:21



Returning to Romans

Tuesday, September 15:

Read Philippians 1:1-16

We closed yesterday with the concept: *Hate the evil of this fallen world, understand the plight of the sinner!* How do we do this? How do we find this balance? Let me suggest we develop something I'm going to call: *having the mind of Christ!*

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ...

Philippians 2:5

Let me show you an example. During the crucifixion, this is what Jesus was subjected to from those who passed by and those crucified with Him:

Those who passed by hurled insults at Him ... Those crucified with Him also heaped insults on Him.

Mark 15:29, 32

How did Jesus respond?

"Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." ...

Luke 23:34

How did Jesus respond to the thief being crucified with Him, who initially reviled Him but then changed his mind?

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise."

Luke 23:43

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, puts both of these ideas together for us:

... snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Jude 23

Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Tuesday, September 15:

Read Philippians 1:1-16 (Continued)

We hate the evil of this world, but are fully engaged in reaching the lost with the truth of the Gospel! Ponder this, when it comes to *overcoming evil with good*, we do so when we have *the mind of Christ!*

A believer has *the mind of Christ* when, in the midst of the evil of this world and the failings of others—even Christians, he or she can keep eyes fixed on Jesus and:

- Maintain a vertical fellowship with the Lord
- Hold sin at arm's length
- Refuse to engage in the sin of others

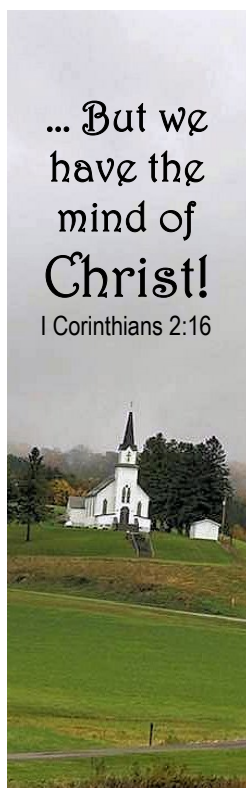
Only then can we rightly love our brothers and sisters in the fellowship while at the same time love the lost enough to reach out with the Gospel.

Is this really Biblical? It would seem so based upon what we have learned.

Decide for yourself if Peter isn't really saying exactly the same thing:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth." When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted himself to Him who judges justly.

I Peter 2:21-23



Returning to Romans

Wednesday, September 16:

Read Romans 13:1-7

What an interesting reading today! Here is a summary:

Governmental authorities exist under God's sovereignty; if we resist what God has allowed, we are resisting Him, so don't be surprised if discipline results (think of speeding tickets); civil government, properly functioning, is to punish evil; obedience to civil authority is a matter of conscience for the Christian; give what you owe to civil authorities, whether it be taxes or honor, as unto the Lord.

You might be tempted to think that we changed topics. We have not. This section of Scripture simply shows us how a *living sacrifice under orders to God* will respond to civil authority. Allow me to make a few observations:

- I am guessing that in the last ten-year period, your angst over what the government is doing, has occupied a fair amount of your time. Yet, when we turn to Scripture and consider all that the Book of Romans has to say, we find these seven verses as if God is saying:
Obey civil government and move on! We have bigger fish to fry! Don't let the machinations of a fallen world distract you from the bigger picture. There are lost people to reach for eternity and spiritual maturity to pursue!
- These seven verses can be summarized in an instruction from Jesus:

... "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's ..."

Matthew 22:21

Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Wednesday, September 16:

Read Romans 13:1-7 (Continued)

Thus we see the principle established by Jesus was then further developed by Paul in Romans 13.

- Do you know what this means? Christians should be the best citizens! For that reason, I cannot think of any conceivable reason why Christians in America would not exercise their right to vote, and vote wisely—for that is what a good citizen would do!
- That brings us to a special case: What happens when God's Word clearly tells us to do one thing, and the government requires something completely different? Can the Bible help us with that? Of course.

We'll pick up here tomorrow.



Returning to Romans

Thursday, September 17:

Read Daniel 3

We closed yesterday with a challenging question: *What do we do when God's Word and the demands of civil authority clash?* Exactly this is what happened when the ministers of King Nebuchadnezzar told the Jewish exiles:

"... This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples ... you must fall down and worship the image of gold that king Nebuchadnezzar has set up."

Daniel 3:4-5

Or, when Daniel was told by Persian authorities: ..."

"... anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lion's den."

Daniel 6:7

Or, how about the Jewish midwives for the Jewish people enslaved in Egypt:

" ... If it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live."

Exodus 1:16

In every case, these demands of civil authorities were in clear violation of the revealed will of God. And, in every case, the people chose to obey God rather than men. I like the way Peter framed his answer when faced with the very same type of dilemma:

But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourself whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."

Acts 4:19

Continued on the next page.

Returning to Romans

Thursday, September 17:

Read Daniel 3 (Continued)

Now to be sure, obeying God rather than man can have some challenging outcomes! Hananiah and company were thrown into the fiery furnace, Daniel into the lion's den, Peter was arrested, and James was put to the sword. This cannot be taken up lightly. Nonetheless, it is not a complex issue, but a simple one. Jesus said it this way:

... "Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me."

John 18:37

It comes down to this truth because the gap between us and the world is the same as that between the gates of hell and those of heaven. It is no wonder that we are to:

... stand out as sons of God in a crooked and depraved generation among whom we are to shine as lights in the world as we hold out the Word of life ...

Philippians 2:15-16

We fail to heed this call when we imitate the world rather than stand in bold relief to it! So, obey the governmental authorities, praying they will not push too far, while you set your minds on things above, for we know Jesus is coming! And, when He does, He shall set wrongs to right.

In the meantime, hold fast to the truth and remember the words of Jesus :

"... you are not of the world ..."

John 15:19

Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, September 18: Read Ephesians 6:14-18

With today's reading, we begin a discussion of the Armor of God, our tools for spiritual warfare. Let's warm up to our subject:

- We will consider six pieces of equipment: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the Gospel of peace footwear, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.
- These are not an exhaustive listing of the things God has put at our disposal, there are many more. Rather, Paul builds the metaphor matching the basic outfit of the Roman soldier of the time. Can't you just imagine Paul, chained to two Roman soldiers, trying to think about how to explain the Christian's defense against the wiles of Satan, when suddenly a picture comes to mind!
- The grammar of this passage is very important. It reveals to us that the putting on of the armor of God is a command, and it is something that we must choose to do.



Continued on the next page.

Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, September 18:

Read Ephesians 6:14-18 (Continued)

- There is no hiring of mercenaries to fight our spiritual battles for us, for you and I need to learn to:

Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called ... I Timothy 6:12

- It is also important for us to note both the general and specific nature of this passage. As we have learned, we are to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might. That is the general. But then we are to take up the sword of the Spirit. This is not a call to pick up the Bible and brandish the entire book when tempted; rather, it is a call to apply the specific content of the Word to the circumstance at hand. Recall how perfectly Jesus applied just the right Scripture when tempted by Satan.
- The command to take up the armor of God is meant to be independent of time. In other words, it is meant to prompt the readiness of Nehemiah, that we might avoid the lapse of David. In the physical sense, Nehemiah and his men were always ready:

Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guard with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water. Nehemiah 4:23

On the other hand, a dreadful incident in the life of the otherwise godly David started with:

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of his palace ... II Samuel 11:2

What happened next The short answer is David had no armor. Tomorrow, the belt of truth!

Lessons from Ephesians

Monday, September 21: Read John 8

Ephesians 6:14 gives us our first piece of armor:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist ...

The role of the belt is crucial, both in the physical analog and the spiritual. Physically, it was a broad belt of leather from which all of the other equipment was attached. It was very similar to the web harness a GI wears in our day.

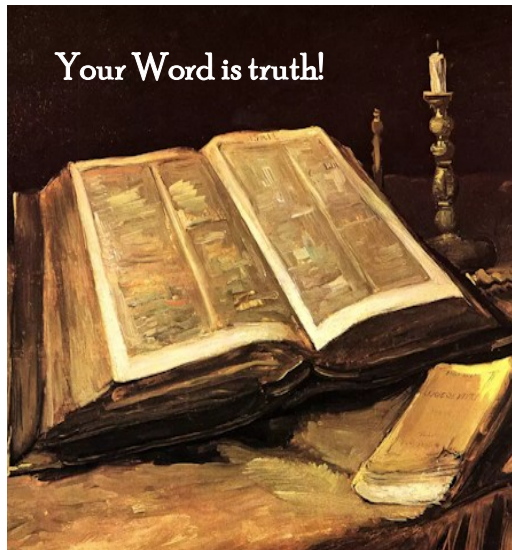
But what does it mean to *buckle up with truth* as an anchor for everything else? Consider the following:

- Truth begins with a person:

For the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 1:17

- The truth that came *through Jesus*, that is readily available to us today, is the Word of God. Jesus desired for us to be sanctified, He knew truth was involved, and He knew where to find truth! Here is an excerpt from His prayer on our behalf:



Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.

John 17:17

Lessons from Ephesians

Monday, September 21: Read John 8 (Continued)

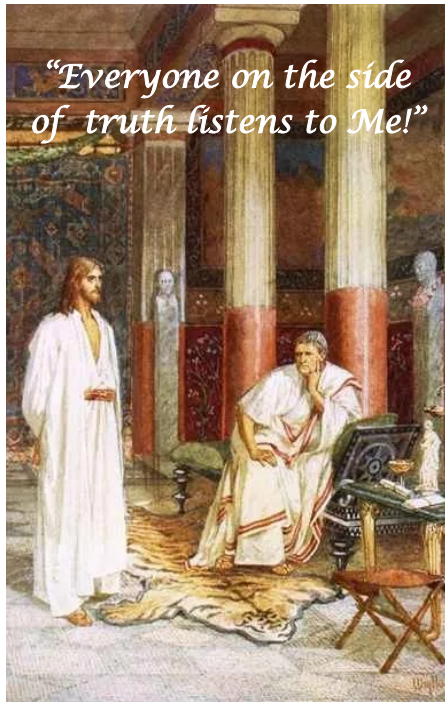
- Jesus wants us to choose to be on the *side of truth*, for He said to Pontius Pilate :

“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.” John 18:37

- Jesus knows that the truth will set us free, free from the bondage to the error of this lost world:

“If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:31-32



I trust you can see what Paul is doing. He is starting out with a command for us to live our spiritual lives by that which is foundational truth for every Christian—the Word of God. Every bit of it! It is the truth that is God-breathed, alive and powerful, able to make wise the simple, gives light to our path, judge the thoughts and intents of the heart, and is *solid food* for the maturing believer!

Is it any wonder, since our adversary is a liar and deceiver from the start (John 8:44), that the place for us to start is with the *belt of truth* firmly in place?

Lessons from Ephesians

Tuesday, September 22:

Read II Timothy 3

We've introduced the first piece of armor—the belt of truth. Perhaps this is first because it is the foundation for all that follows and because truth is absolutely necessary to *walk worthy* of the Lord while navigating this lost world that is under the control of Satan. To further reinforce what we have learned, let me add further to our understanding:

The battle over truth has raged since the inception of the Church, and will do so until our Lord gathers His Church to Himself.

Let me prove that from the Scriptures as preparation. First, look at Paul's analysis of the early church:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth ...

Acts 20:29-30

Paul planted churches and, upon his departure, those who desired to distort the truth were never far behind. That was early in church-history, how about at its close? We can see how things trend in today's reading:

... There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive ... always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth.

II Timothy 3:1-7

We are living somewhere between the beginning and the end of the Church, and the battle for truth is most certainly raging in our day as it has from the beginning of the Church. What's at stake? The quality of the believer's worthy walk before the Lord and our standing firm against the devil's schemes! The devotion tomorrow will answer some questions about the battle for truth.

Lessons from Ephesians

Wednesday, September 23:

Read John 17

To continue from yesterday, the battle for truth in our day is being fought on many fronts. We'll discuss two.

Ecumenism. There is a strong appeal for ecumenism in our day, which can be simply defined as choosing to place a priority on unity for its own sake, rather than unity around the truth. Now, I certainly am not promoting disagreeable Christians, but, at the same time, we are not being taught to stand firm against the devil's schemes by putting on the belt of unity! On the contrary, we need to put on the belt of truth and, when necessary, we need to stand our ground over the truth. For example, we must hold firmly to a Gospel that is centered upon faith alone in Christ alone, excluding any works on the part of man. This is one truth with which we dare not tamper.

There is a movement in the United States that has slowly been gathering adherents, it is called *Chrislam*. Here is an on-line definition of this movement, and note the forms of the words ecumenism and unity.

Chrislam is a movement, hoped by some to be the answer for the ongoing clash between the West, which is predominantly Christian, and the Middle East, which is predominantly Muslim ... Several protestant denominations have adopted this effort in the name of "love thy neighbor" and to promote an ecumenical, or unified, reconciliation between Christianity and Islam.

Let me be as clear as possible, any church or denomination that thinks Christianity and Islam can be unified has most certainly removed the *belt of truth* and is listening closely to the whispers of the evil one.

Lessons from Ephesians

Wednesday, September 23:

Read John 17 (Continued)

Christian Life. The purpose of the Christian Life is another example of the battle for truth in our day. Within our study of Ephesians we have learned how God has called us to *walk worthy* of who we are in Christ, imitating God, and redeeming the time. I recently listened closely to two college students, claiming to be Christians, talk about the purpose of the Christian life. They felt strongly it was about self-actualization. This is straight from the teachings of secular philosophy and psychology of many years ago. It was hurtful to hear these young people talk about their deep interest in Christianity, and then describe that to be a life where they were free from social constraint, living an authentic life, true to themselves, recognizing the legitimacy of their personal desires.

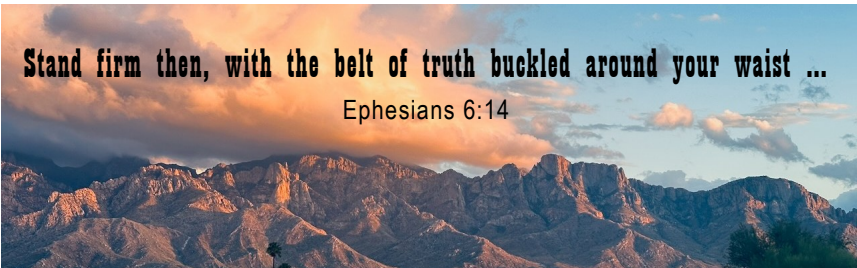
Does this sound anything like Biblical truth? These individuals had learned that Christianity consists of being who you are as a fallen individual, rather than what it means to be one conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. Perhaps now you can see why the *belt of truth* is needed so desperately in our, and every, day! It is no wonder Jesus prayed,

“Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.”

John 17:17

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist ...

Ephesians 6:14



Lessons from Ephesians

Thursday, September 24:

Read II Corinthians 5

Let's move to our second piece of armor: *the breastplate of righteousness*. The first thing to address is the possibility that this is a call to personal integrity. In other words, is it telling us to live righteously? In terms of the armor of God, the answer to that is an emphatic, "No!" For, as important as living uprightly before the Lord happens to be, whatever experiential righteousness we might manage to achieve, whatever our level of personal integrity, that is not how we stand against the wiles of the devil! What we need, and what God in grace provides, is so much higher, so much more perfect, and so much more suited to spiritual warfare!

The Believer's Imputed Righteousness. So, we are going to spend a couple of days on the believer's imputed righteousness, which is the means by which we can stand acceptable before a holy God.

- Paul often speaks of a kind of righteousness that is outside of what he can claim as his own.

... not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith ... Philippians 3:9

- Paul is speaking of something we are going to call *imputed righteousness*. The term imputed carries the idea of something that is credited to your account and is not of your own doing. Consider the following:

... not imputing their trespasses to them ... For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

II Corinthians 5:19,21

Lessons from Ephesians

Thursday, September 24:

Read II Corinthians 5 (Continued)

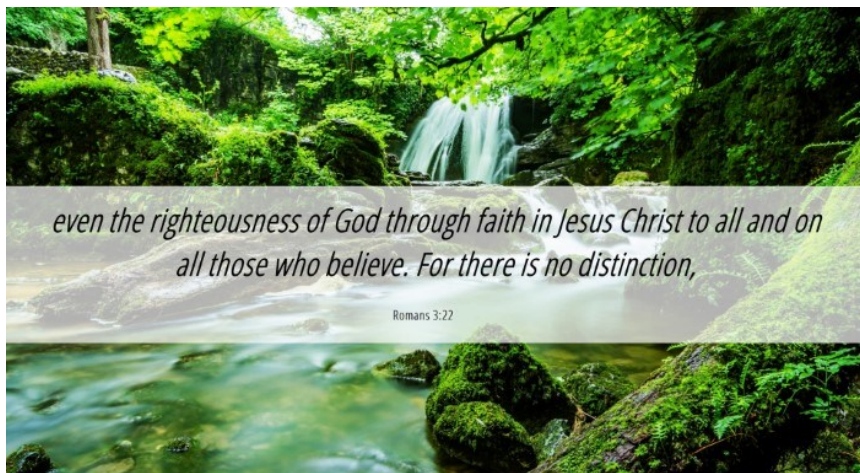
In this passage from II Corinthians, we see our sin imputed to Christ, and then His righteousness imputed to us as believers.

Justification. This brings us to the great topic of justification expounded upon in Romans Chapter 3:

... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe ... to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:22, 26

First we have righteousness imputed to the one who believes and then justification for the same individual. Justification is a legal term which means we are acceptable before the judge. The Christian, clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ, is acceptable before our holy God! No wonder this is part of our armor! We'll continue this topic tomorrow.



Lessons from Ephesians

Friday, September 25: Read Romans 3

It is the blood of Jesus that takes care of our sin, and it is His imputed righteousness that will allow us to spend eternity in the presence of a holy God. Now, some application:

- How is any human being ever going to withstand the scrutiny of God's holiness? If we rely on our efforts to produce righteousness, it is never going to happen!

There is no one righteous, not even one ... Romans 3:10

But for those who are justified, who have received the imputed righteousness of Christ Himself through faith, there should be great confidence with respect to our ability to stand before God. When our heavenly Father scrutinizes us, He is going to see the righteousness of His Son and we will be accepted. (Ephesians 1:6)

- God deals with the legal first and then moves on to experience. He first gives us a legal standing—that's justification—and then He calls those who are justified to develop a worthy walk!
- When you or I fail, at what point do we pick up the pieces? It is at the point of the righteousness that has been imputed to us, at the point of justification! That's the basis for our standing before God. Resting in that great truth is what it means to stand firm with the *breastplate of righteousness* in place!
- How about the closely-related topic of guilt? Satan knows just how to attack, often for things that happened in the distant past. Take up that same *breastplate of righteousness*, for it guarantees our ability to stand before a perfect and holy God and gets our eyes off of self! In closing, can you sing with me: *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness ...*

Returning to the Psalms

Monday, September 28: Read Psalm 57

The writer of this psalm is going through some tough times! He has an amazing mindset, so let me suggest we learn from his example. To begin with, one thing so preoccupies his thinking that he repeats it twice—the only repeat in the psalm! It is almost like he is saying, I have my own problems, but one thing is more important than they are:

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth. Psalm 57:5,11

Of course, the psalmist does take his problems to God:

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in You my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings until the disaster has passed. Psalm 57:1

What an amazing thing to be able to take refuge in the Lord Almighty. Even more amazing, that we can know Him in such a way that taking refuge is like a chick taking refuge in the storm under its mother's wings—not just warm and dry, but feeling the mother's heartbeat.



Continued on the next page.

Returning to the Psalms

Monday, September 28: Read Psalm 57 (Continued)

I think of this as coming to the Lord to be not only protected from the *slings and arrows* of this world, but to know my Savior's love for me—a love from which nothing can separate me! Did you note that we can stay right under the wings of the Almighty until the disaster, whatever it might be, has passed?

The passing of a disaster is normally considered to be a return to normal. But I have already made it my goal to take shelter under the *wings of the Almighty* until even the disaster we call physical death has passed. What I am saying is that I think God has provided us with the ability to shelter under His wings while we step out of this life into whatever is next.

I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills His purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; God sends His love and His faithfulness.

Psalm 57:2-3

I cry out to God, I try not to give Him too many instructions—for I would rather have Him fulfill His purposes for me rather than my own. In any event, I know God will answer because:

I know He is too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake.

Arthur W. Pink

He will always answer because He is faithful and will do so in His perfect love!

And all God's people said, "Amen!"

Returning to the Psalms

Tuesday, September 29:

Read Psalm 62

In a world that seeks to constantly pressure the Christian, Psalm 62 can provide welcome support:

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him.

Psalm 62:1

The world promises, but never delivers. On the contrary, true soul rest is found in God alone, and only He delivers from every trial.

He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Psalm 62:2

The world so often seems to be spinning out of control, but our God is a rock-solid reference point. Placing our faith in Him is to put it in the One truly safe place—a place that will never be shaken.

Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge.

Psalm 62:8

Continued on the next page.

Trust in Him at all times ... for God is our refuge!



Returning to the Psalms

Tuesday, September 29:

Read Psalm 62 (Continued)

Not a day goes by that we shouldn't be trusting the Lord for something. We can pour out every detail of our heart to Him, for He is our one safe place.

One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely You will reward each person according to what he has done.

Psalm 62:11-12

Do you want cause to find your refuge in the Lord, to put your faith in Him, and trust Him to deliver? Here it is:

- He is strong and He is loving!
- He is infinitely strong!
- He alone is omnipotent!
- When He acts, none can resist!

The Lord is loving—loving enough to die in our place, receiving the punishment that was ours to pay, so that we could live. He went to the cross so that we could live and have not just any kind of life but an *abundant life* lived in relationship with Him.

I have certainly mixed some Old and New Testament truths—as I should. For the Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:20), remains my deliverer, my solid rock, and my refuge (Psalm 62)!

These are wonderful truths to bring into the life of a church-age saint!

Returning to the Psalms

Wednesday, September 30:

Read Psalm 66

We end the month of September with praise! We need to look no further than the beginning of today's reading:

Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious! Psalm 66:1-2

Of course, at any time we can individually praise our great God for who He is and what He has done. But, I find times of corporate worship particularly helpful. There is something special to be said for singing God's praises together with other believers. For me, that is how to make His praise *glorious!* What a good reminder to be careful to avoid



engaging in corporate worship in such a way as to just be going through the motions but instead to *make His praise glorious!*

After opening in pure praise, the psalmist begins to point to things that God has done as further cause for giving Him praise. He points to things that are part of the history of the Jewish people, like

the parting of the Red Sea.

Continued on the next page.

Returning to the Psalms

Wednesday, September 30:

Read Psalm 66 (Continued)

But then note Verses 8 and 9:

Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of His praise be heard; He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping.

This general statement is certainly true of the Israelites, but it is also true of me—and I suspect true of you as well. The Lord has indeed protected me in all manner of circumstance, from my own wrong-headed decisions and with respect to my family.

It is not that things always go smoothly,

For you, O God, tested us; you refined us ... Psalm 66:10

Rather, I can see the hand of God preserving and guiding throughout the course of my life as a Father guides one of His children—truly He has *kept my feet from slipping*, and made me *lie down in green pastures*. He is indeed worthy of my praise as I look back over His faithfulness.

The psalm closes with what I think is a bit of a warning:

If I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.

Psalm 66:18-19

There is no sense going through the motions of praise with sin in the heart—the Lord does not *hear*—He does not receive our praise! But like the psalmist, as we make sure there is no unconfessed sin in our lives, we too can have confidence that God will both hear and respond to praise and supplication from a heart rightly-related to Him!

A photograph of two pink clematis flowers with white centers and dark pink stamens, growing on a white picket fence. The flowers are surrounded by lush green leaves. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

If I had cherished sin in my heart the
Lord would not have listened;
but God has surely listened and heard
my voice in prayer.

Psalm 66:18-19

VISTOSO



Community Church

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

1200 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd., Oro Valley, AZ 85755 ☎ 520 825-0652

Website: www.vistoso.org