

*Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul:
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole:
Thank you, Lord, for giving to me
Thy great salvation so rich and free.*

Our world as we know it has been changing so much (and not for the better) over the past several years, yet still, we have so many reasons to be thankful!

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:16-21).

No matter how hard times get, you can always take comfort in the words of a simple song we all learned as children. It has such a great meaning to any age.

*Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so,
Little ones to him belong;
They are weak, but HE is strong.*

*Jesus loves me, HE who died
Heaven's gate to open wide.
HE will wash away my sin,
let His little child come in.*

*Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.*

I pray that each of you have a blessed Thanksgiving and always remember the sacrifices that our Lord and Savior made for us all. Jesus loves you!!

Jennifer

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3). And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Over the last four weeks, we have studied the earthly life and ministry of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have brought to us the miraculous nature of His conception, the simplistic holiness of His birth, the righteousness of His ministry, the horror of His crucifixion, and the triumphant majesty of His resurrection and ascension. In their pages, we have been left with no doubt as to the holy nature of Jesus and His identity as the Son of God. ***And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*** (Matt. 16:16; see also Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). As we begin the Gospel of John, we are asked to hold fast to all that we already know while simultaneously opening our hearts and minds to an even deeper and more complete identification. ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** More than the promised Savior (Messiah), more than the ***Son of the living God***, Jesus was ***God***.

God is the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1; Is. 44:24; John 1:3; Col. 1:16). He exists in three parts, ***For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one*** (I John 5:7), each of which has been present in the totality of God since the beginning (John 1:1). Jesus is ***the Word***, which ***was made flesh, and dwelt among us***. As God incarnate, the Word was born, lived, and died a fully human, mortal being, but at no point during that process was it diminished in any way. Jesus Christ was at once human and divine, and His presence here on earth had been ordained by God the Father since before the creation of mankind.

When discussing the life and earthly ministry of Jesus, it is

not uncommon for us to assign His different actions and emotions to one 'side' or the other, almost as if we were discussing someone with a split personality. The truth is, there was never a moment of His life here on earth that Jesus was not simultaneously 100% God and 100% man. As we read the Gospel of John, let us endeavor to see and apply ALL aspects of Jesus Christ to every situation—God and man in one, united and indivisible. Let us rejoice in His coming and avail ourselves of His teachings. Most of all, let us appreciate the full scope of His sacrifice and acknowledge Him as our Savior and King, accepting once and for all time His gift of mercy and grace.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Is. 9:6-7).

Thought for the Day: *It is impossible to separate Jesus into 'man' and 'God'; those who claim to approve of Jesus' teachings while simultaneously denying God have no comprehension of His true message.*

Word Studies: 1:5 **the darkness comprehended it not** = did not appropriate it; the unbelieving world cannot see its need for a Savior; 1:39 **tenth hour** = 4 p.m. by Jewish time, two hours before evening.

Cross References: For **John 1:23:** See Is. 40:3; Mal. 3:1. **John 2:17:** See Ps. 69:9.

Pray for Staff: Jennifer Palafox, Bible Pathway President • **Government Officials:** Rep. Darrell Issa (CA), Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar (FL), Rep. Ryan Zinke (MT) • **Country:** Georgia (4,935,880) Southwestern Asia • Major Language: Georgian • Religious opposition to Christianity • 83.9% Georgian Orthodox; 9.9% Muslim; 3.9% Armenian-Gregorian; 0.8% Catholic (Greek); 0.8% Other; 0.7% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask for understanding of the Word of God so you can share it with others (Ps. 119:27).

And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk (John 5:5-8).

As we read the Gospel of John, we can't help but be amazed at the personal nature of Jesus' love and compassion. ***Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life*** (5:12). Although He regularly taught (preached) to crowds, Jesus ministered to individuals. No one was beneath His notice. Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the nobleman at Capernaum – Jesus responded personally to each individual need. This same scenario is played out once again as Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Near the sheep gate, where lambs were bought for sacrifice, was located a pool, which the Jews called Bethesda. This pool was known for its healing properties. It was believed that the first to enter the pool after an angel stirred up the water would be cured (5:4). This pool was surrounded by five porches (covered patios). ***In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water*** (5:3). Into the midst of these stricken souls walked the Son of God, but His presence was unobserved. ***And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years***. It was to this helpless, hopeless man that Jesus was drawn. Moved with compassion, ***He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?***

This man had been lying there, unaided, for many years. Whatever hope he had once had of healing had long since faded away. He honestly believed that no one cared. Jesus looked beyond his brokenness to the soul that lay inside ***and saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk***. Healed

through the saving grace of God, the man immediately did as Jesus bade him (5:9). A short while later, Jesus left him with a parting word: ***Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee*** (5:14).

Like this man, we have lived spiritually helpless, surrounded by crowds of desperate sinners. How grateful we should be that Jesus, with love and compassion, has come to each of us, asking: ***Wilt thou be made whole?*** Jesus looks beyond our brokenness because He desires that all recognize Him as Savior and Lord. ***For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*** (Luke 19:10). How tragic it would have been for the infirm man if he had answered his Savior by saying, “Go away—I do not need help.” Yet all too often today, this is the response that He receives. Held captive by worldly pursuits, we refuse to admit we are broken. Without that understanding, we cannot be made whole.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (I Tim. 1:15).

Thought for the Day: *It is not paranoia to believe that the world does not care about our problems, but to believe that we have been abandoned is to ignore God's unwavering presence.*

Word Studies: 4:6 **sixth hour** = noon by Jewish time and 6 pm by Roman time; 5:21 **quickeneth them** = gives them life.

Pray For Staff: Tiffany Parisi • **Government Officials:** Gov. Brian Kemp (GA) • **Country:** Germany (80,996,685) Central Europe • **Major Language:** German • **Religious Freedom** • 34% Protestant; 34% Roman Catholic; 3.7% Muslim; 28.3% Unaffiliated/Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask for understanding of the Word of God as you read each day (Ps. 119:34).

God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do (John 6:1-6).

As Jesus looked out at the crowd of tired and hungry people, He already knew exactly how He would handle the situation. When ***He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat***, He was not seeking a solution to the dilemma; instead, He was testing His disciple. He wanted to know his level of faith. How much did he trust in his Lord? How much had he learned during his journey with Christ? Philip's answer was a practical one, rooted firmly in the physical world around them. ***Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little*** (6:7). Philip could see no way in which they could satisfactorily feed the multitude even if they spent all the money they had. His answer revealed much as to the state of his faith. Even with his great love and respect for his Master, he did not yet have the level of trust and belief that he would need to see him through the coming trials.

Jesus' rebuttal was quick and sure. Not only was it possible to feed the multitude, but Jesus was moved to show His disciples how it could be done on the strength of faith alone. ***And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would*** (6:11). The simple meal of five small loaves and two fish (6:9) fed over 5,000 men (6:10) with twelve basket-fuls of leftovers (6:13). His message was clear – nothing was beyond the ability of God. ***Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me*** (Jer. 32:27)?

God often asks us to take on tasks that, on a purely human level, seem to be impossible. Yet what seems impossible to us is always possible with God. And he said, ***The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*** (Luke 18:27). Whatever the task that He has set before us, He expects us to approach it with confidence, secure in the knowledge that He already has the way planned out. ***And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do.*** Our reaction to His call will reveal to God the level of faith we currently employ. We can either turn regretfully away, as did Philip, and list for God the many reasons why we cannot take on the task, or we can answer with confidence and trust, "I am willing, Lord. Show me the way."

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths (Prov. 3:5-6). ***Ah LORD God! behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee*** (Jer. 32:17).

Thought for the Day: *God does not ask of us what we cannot do; when overwhelmed, we can take inspiration from His expectations.*

Cross References: For **John 6:31**: See Ex. 16:4; Neh. 9:15; Ps. 78:24: **John 6:45**: See Is. 54:13.

Pray For Government Officials: Sen. Mazie Hirono (HI), Rep. Michelle Fishbach (MN) • **Country:** Ghana (25,758,108) Western Africa • Major Languages: English, Asante, Ewe, Fante • Religious Freedom • 71.2% Christian; 17.6% Muslim; 5.2% Traditional; 0.8% Other; 5.2% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask for boldness in telling others about the Lord (Ps. 119:46).

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12)

I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep (John 10:11-15).

Standing in the Temple around the time of the feast of the dedication (Hanukkah), surrounded by Pharisees, scribes, and other Jewish leaders, Jesus made this bold pronouncement. When He stated ***I am the good Shepherd***, He identified Himself as the ***One Shepherd*** of the prophecy of Ezekiel, and He also made it clear that the current religious leaders were also represented (in a less than flattering light) by Ezekiel's words.

The religious authorities in Israel were known as the shepherds of Israel, but they were false, self-centered prophets. ***Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks*** (Ezek. 34:2)? To rectify this, the Lord fulfilled His promise to send the True Shepherd. ***And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their Shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it*** (34:23-24).

The image of Jesus as a loving Shepherd guiding and protecting His flock is presented time after time in Scripture. He is ***the good Shepherd***, and we are His true sheep. In His care, we are nurtured and protected. ***And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*** (1 Pet. 5:4). Once we have joined His flock, we will no longer be fooled by those who attempt to lead us away. ***And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.***

And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers (John 10:4-5).

There was muttering in the crowd as Jesus identified Himself as ***the good Shepherd***, but when Jesus went on to reveal Himself as coequal and coeternal with God the Father, the religious leaders became openly hostile. ***My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one*** (10:29-30). Their fear and hatred of the man before them spilled over, and ***then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him*** (10:31).

Those who do not have a relationship with Jesus will often go to great lengths to deny Him. They are not content to merely live without Him themselves; they want to banish Him from the lives of all mankind. Praise God that He has gathered us into His fold. We can rest safe in His embrace, knowing that there is nothing they can do to remove us from the protection of our Heavenly Father.

All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

Thought for the Day: *God's Word should be a constant reminder to those without faith that their lives can have meaning, but those lost in their sins are far quicker to lash out against the news than embrace it.*

Word Studies: 10:3 **porter** = doorkeeper; watchman; 10:41 **resorted unto Him** = came to Him.

Cross Reference: For **John 10:34**: See Ps. 82:6.

Pray for staff: Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Carol Miller (WV), Rep. Richard Hudson (NC) • **Country:** Gibraltar (29,185) South-western Europe • Major Language: English • Religious Freedom • 78.1% Roman Catholic; 7% Church of England; 3.2% Other Christian; 4% Muslim; 2.1% Jewish; 1.8% Hindu; 0.9% Other/ Unspecified; 2.9% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** In times of trouble, pray and seek comfort in the Word of God (Ps. 119:50).

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go (John 11:41-44).

The Bible tells us very little about the private life of Jesus. We know next to nothing about His relationships with friends and family, which is probably why every little bit of information we are given seems precious. Jesus' all-encompassing Godly love for all of the 'lost sheep' He came to save is apparent in every aspect of His ministry. Still, there is something about knowing that Jesus had friends that He loved on a personal level that enables us to more easily relate to Him as a mortal man and better understand what He sacrificed for our salvation.

Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus (John 11:5). These three siblings had opened their hearts and home to Him, and a close friendship had been formed. They had accepted Him as their Lord with no reservations. When Lazarus fell grievously ill, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus. ***Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick (11:3).*** In faith, they placed their brother's life in Jesus' hands.

As days passed and Jesus did not arrive, their faith was put to the ultimate test. The long, anxious hours spent tending Lazarus on his sickbed ended in bitter sorrow and disappointment when their brother died. With the support of neighbors, family, and friends, they buried and mourned their dead. Four days later, Jesus arrived. As he stood at the tomb of Lazarus, ***Jesus wept (11:35).***

To those gathered in mourning, Jesus' arrival seemed ill-timed. ***And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this***

man should not have died (11:37)? Even Martha had noted that **if Thou** (Jesus) **hadst been here, my brother had not died** (11:22). The faith reflected in those words was heartwarming, but incomplete. Jesus was not merely a skillful healer; He was God incarnate. Upon His arrival, He had wept for the pain His dear friends were enduring, but He rejoiced at the lesson that His perfect timing would enable Him to offer them. **For with God nothing shall be impossible** (Luke 1:37).

The power of God is boundless. There is nothing that can prevail against it, not even death itself. Martha had believed in the saving power of Christ (11:24), but only in an abstract, future sense. It was not until she saw her brother emerge from his grave at Jesus' command that she could fully understand that all things, at all times, were totally and completely under the Lord's control. When we live under His protection, we have nothing left to fear.

I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things (Is. 45:5-7).

Thought for the Day: *The Bible does not mention Jesus' close friends as a way of establishing a hierarchy of personal importance to God; It does so to reveal to us what each and every personal relationship with Him can become.*

Word Studies: 12:46 **I am come a Light** = I have come to reveal the Truth.

Cross References: For **John 12:13:** See Ps. 118:26. **John 12:15:** See Zech. 9:9. **John 12:38:** See Is. 53:1. **John 12:40:** See Is. 6:9-10; Ex. 4:21.

Pray For Radio: Sponsored By James & Ila Drost • **Government Official:** Rep. Frederica Wilson (FL), Gov. Chris Sununu (NH), Gov. Tony Evers (WI) • **Country:** Greece (10,775,557) Southeastern Europe • **Major Language:** Greek • **Restricted Religious Freedom** • 98% Greek Orthodox; 1.3% Muslim; 0.7% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Lift up your prayers to God with your whole heart (Ps. 119:58,145).

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Once again, we are drawing near to the horrific yet God-ordained ending of Jesus' earthly ministry. Today, we are privileged to 'listen in' as Jesus privately prepares His disciples for the ordeal that is soon to come. The first crisis they will encounter is a betrayal by one of their own (13:21). Jesus knows that this will be hard for them to accept and overcome, but He reminds them that, ultimately, the right of judgment is God's (12:47-48). For the remaining eleven, Jesus then emphasizes the true nature of His ministry. ***A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.***

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:18). This was the old Command, given under the Law of Moses. The earthly ministry of Jesus had opened the eyes and hearts of His followers, allowing them to see, for the first time, a true and perfect love (17:26). Therefore, the bar had been raised. No longer were they to mirror an imperfect, self-centered love; instead, they were instructed to reflect the perfect, selfless love that Jesus had bestowed upon them. Those of us today who have found new life in Jesus Christ are also bound under this new commandment.

By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another. As Jesus prepared His disciples to carry His message into the world, He stressed that they must first be recognized as His followers before leading others to Him. Jesus knew that many false prophets would arise to "teach" in His name (Matt. 24:23-27). In order for the true Gospel to be spread, it had to be possible for the public to identify those in whom the Holy Spirit resided (John 15:26-27).

This fact remains as indisputable today as it was in the time of Christ. In order for our witness to be credible, it must be

shared from a heart overflowing with the love of Christ. When Jesus is Lord of our lives, our words and actions will be guided by compassion, forgiveness, and mercy. We acknowledge our place in the family of God by sharing His unselfish love with everyone around us. Jesus taught: ***As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.*** In other words, when we live in obedience to Jesus, we live in love. There is no room in our lives for bitterness, anger, hatred (Eph. 4:31), or self-righteousness (Luke 18:11). Christ's love is the greatest gift that the world has ever known, and it should be our most urgent desire to share it with as many people as we possibly can.

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him (1 John 3:18-19).

Thought for the Day: *God tells us to extend our hands in love to those who love the world so that when the world turns its back on them, they will know they have God to turn to.*

Word Studies: 13:10 **but not all** = but not every one; all were clean except Judas; 15:2 **purgeth it** = eliminates what is keeping it from bearing better fruit.

Cross References: For **John 13:18**: See Ps. 41:9. **John 15:25**: See Ps. 35:19; 69:4.

Pray For Staff: Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. John Carter (TX) • **Country:** Greenland (57,728) Northern North America • **Major Languages:** Greenlandic, Danish, English • **Religious Freedom** • Evangelical Lutheran; Traditional Inuit Spiritual Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask for understanding as you read the Word of God (Ps. 119:73).

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you (John 15:19).

I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy Truth: Thy Word is Truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world (John 17:15-18).

Throughout the Gospel of John, much emphasis has been placed on the love that God has for His creation. ***For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*** (3:16). It has been stressed, repeatedly, that love is the foundation upon which faith is built (8:42). Now, as Jesus approaches the end of His physical ministry, His love for His disciples shines through as He prays for God to guide and support them through the difficult times to come.

His loving prayer, however, was not just for the eleven close friends that He was leaving behind. He was praying for everyone who would come to know and accept Him as Lord and Savior from that point on. ***Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word*** (17:20). Every word that Jesus spoke to these men to prepare them for His service once He would no longer be physically present among them was also said for our benefit. As Jesus prayed to His Father in preparation for the ordeal to come, He did so with you and me in the forefront of His mind.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus held nothing back. He did not set Himself apart, insulating Himself against the world's evils. He sat down for meals with tax collectors and thieves (Matt. 9:10-13), interacted as equals with Samaritans and other non-Jews (John 4:1-30), and even dealt kindly with adulterers (8:3-11). He did not stand in the front of the room and lecture these people; He went out among them, stayed at their homes, and got to know many of them on a personal level. Through it all, He remained sinless and committed to His mission on earth.

It is this type of relationship with the world that Christ now expects us to follow. Once we have given ourselves to Jesus, we ***are not of the world***, yet we have been sent into the world.

Today, many Christians choose to live in semi-seclusion, avoiding the society of sinners in hopes of escaping the pollution of the world. They are focused on protecting God's identified family, not on seeking those who may be lost. This is not the mission that has been set before us by God. ***When Jesus heard it, He saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*** (Mark 2:17). Jesus does not call us to stay separate. He challenges us to live out in the open—shoulder to shoulder with those we are called to serve. He knows it won't be easy; that is why He has marked us as His and requested from the Father that we receive the same level of support that He Himself received during His time on this earth.

And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are One: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me (John 17:22-23).

Thought for the Day: *To completely shut ourselves away from the world is to deny the test God has set before us. Through tribulation, He deepens our faith.*

Word Studies: 17:12 **son of perdition** = Judas Iscariot; 18:30 **malefactor** = evildoer, criminal.

Cross Reference: For John 17:12: See Ps. 41:9.

Pray For Government Official: Rep. Andy Biggs (AZ), Rep. Rick Allen (GA), Rep. Sam Graves (MO), Rep. Susie Lee (NV), Rep. Morgan Luttrell (TX) • **Country:** Grenada (110,152) Caribbean • **Major Languages:** English, French Paois • **Religious Freedom** • 53% Roman Catholic; 13.8% Anglican; 33.2% Protestant • **Prayer Suggestion:** Rise early in the morning to lift up your prayers to God and hope in His Word (Ps. 119:147).

I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine (John 17:9).

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you (John 20:19-21).

On the first day of the week, the coming of dawn brought a miraculous sight at Joseph of Arimathea's new garden tomb. Mary Magdalene had arrived before first light to discover that the Savior had arisen, and with His Resurrection, a new and victorious day dawned for the human race. ***So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory*** (1 Cor. 15:54).

Acceptance with God was obtained at the moment ***when Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost*** (John 19:30). As the words *It is finished* triumphantly rang from the cross on Calvary, the sin debt of all believers past, present and future was paid in full. The resurrection then brought to man proof of reconciliation and peace with God. Jesus paid the debt and broke the chains of death. ***I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death*** (Rev. 1:18).

Although Jesus had explained to the disciples that His death was only temporary and His resurrection was assured (20:18-19; Mark 8:31; Luke 18:31-32), they had still reacted to His crucifixion with grief, hiding behind closed doors in ***fear of the Jews***. Sorrow gave way to rejoicing, however, when ***came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.***

As the disciples rejoiced, Jesus began preparing them for the daunting task ahead of them. Although the essential work had been completed on the cross, mankind's indi-

vidual salvation was not guaranteed. Jesus had torn the veil separating God from man (Mark 15:38), but to receive everlasting life, each person would still have to choose to take Christ's hand and walk through the door. The task of spreading the Gospel of Christ and pointing out the open doorway fell to the faithful Eleven.

Where would we be today if the disciples had decided that the risk was too great and had returned to their fishing instead? They were, after all, only human. After Jesus' arrest, Peter had vehemently denied Him, and all the rest had forsaken Him in His suffering. What would have happened to Christ's church if they had decided that it was too dangerous to openly follow the teachings of Jesus? How many people would have died a slave to their sins because they had not been given the chance to experience the love of Jesus?

The same choice has been given to each of us today. Jesus stands before us, saying, as ***My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.*** Are we brave enough to answer His call? Are we willing to live our faith 24 hours a day, never compromising, no matter the circumstances? Will we live for Him? Will we die for Him?

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you (John 15:13-14).

Thought for the Day: *Their inability to see God is enough for many to discount His promises; the certainty that He can see us keeps the faithful watching for His return.*

Word Studies: 19:1 **scourged** = whipped with leather cords weighted with sharp pieces of bone or lead; 19:30 **It is finished** = His physical ministry was complete.

Cross References: For **John 19:24:** See Ps. 22:18. **John 19:36:** See Ex. 12:46; Ps. 34:20. **John 19:37:** See Zech. 12:10.

Pray for Staff: Ryan McCrary • **Government Official:** Rep. Mark Green (TN), Gov. Joe Lombardo (NV) • **Country:** Guam (161,001) North Pacific Ocean • Major Languages: English, Filipino • Religious Freedom • 85% Roman Catholic; 15% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Praise God for His mercy (Ps. 136:2).

When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:6-9).

Although it opens with Jesus' physical departure from earth, the Book of Acts is as much a record of His ministry to God's people as are the four preceding Gospels. Whereas the Gospels recorded the giving of the Word, Acts provides us with a record of Its acceptance. Its pages bear witness to the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual joining of individuals who had been transformed through their acceptance of the Word and their receipt of the Spirit. The Book of Acts allows us to experience that glorious time after the veil of sin separating us from God was ripped in two, and the united body of Christ (the church) rose up to stand in His presence. **For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit** (I Cor. 12:12-13).

In the moments before Jesus' ascension into heaven, there was confusion among His assembled disciples. They knew why He had come, but they were still having difficulty understanding why He was leaving with so much still to do. **Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?** They did not as of yet grasp the whole truth of all they had learned from Him. Jesus looked upon them with compassion, but the time for direct teaching had passed. His answer was meant to remind them that they were expected to walk by faith and, simultaneously, to comfort them with the promise of the Spirit.

It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.

As we look out over the chaotic world we live in, it is often hard for us to understand God's timeline. Just as did the disciples, we are often moved to ask, ***Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom?*** In our desperation to see evil eradicated and God's glory spread across the earth, we sometimes forget that God has the situation well in hand. It is not ours to know when He will act; it is enough that we know He will. Our task is to live in this world supported by the indwelling Holy Spirit, to walk daily in faith down the path that He has marked before us, and to ***be witnesses unto Him***. God will take care of the rest!

Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me (Mic. 7:7-8).

Thought for the Day: *We are not working daily to spread God's Word to achieve His victory; we do it so that all who hear may share in the celebration of what He has already achieved.*

Word Studies: 1:3 **after His passion** = after He had suffered death; 1:12 **a Sabbath day's journey** = a little over one-half mile which was the extent a Jew was to travel from home on the Sabbath; 2:27 **leave My soul in hell** = forsake Me in the grave (Sheol).

Cross References: For **Acts 1:20**: See Ps. 69:25; 109:8. **Acts 2:17-21**: See Joel 2:28-32. **Acts 2:25-28**: See Ps. 16:8-11. **Acts 2:34-35**: See Ps. 110:1. **Acts 3:22-23**: See Deut. 18:15,18-19. **Acts 3:25**: See Gen. 12:3; 22:18.

Pray For Staff: Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Sen. Sherrod Brown (OH) • **Country:** Guatemala (14,647,083) Central America • **Major Languages:** Spanish, Amerindian Languages • **Religious Freedom** • Roman Catholic; Protestant; Indigenous Mayan Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Give thanks to the God of heaven; His mercy and loving-kindness endure forever (Ps. 136:26).

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God (Acts 5:1-4).

One of the remarkable characteristics of this early church in Jerusalem was the spirit of oneness that manifested itself as each member sacrificed their material resources for the good of all. Wealthy believers sold their land or houses and brought the money to be used for the Lord's ministry and the common welfare. ***Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need*** (Acts 4:34-35). This program of sharing wealth was a purely voluntary one—it was not compulsory in any way. It is confusing to many, then, why Ananias decided to lie. While the land remained in his possession, it was his to dispose of in whatever manner he saw fit. Even after he had sold the property, the money was his to do with as he pleased.

The majority of the body of believers seemed to be motivated by a sincere desire to forward the work of Christ. However, Ananias and his wife Sapphira were working under a different motivation. Instead of seeking to please God, they desired the praise of their peers. Even though they were uncomfortable giving away all of their possessions, they were afraid that others would look down on them if they did not. For that reason, they devised a plan to look pious while still holding out a private nest egg.

The sin that cost Ananias and Sapphira their lives was not the sin of greed. Although it is obvious that they struggled with

a love of worldly possessions, this is not the sin on which the Holy Spirit challenged them. The sin for which they died was the sin of pride. They sought recognition to which they were not entitled, caring only that the congregation viewed them as generous and self-sacrificial givers. While their intent may have been to deceive the church, in order to do so, they willingly lied to God. ***A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish*** (Prov. 19:9).

Many self-proclaimed Christians today attempt to live the “double lives” of Ananias and Sapphira. Outwardly, they embrace the Christian faith and unite with the church, yet inwardly, their selfish desires rule their actions and behaviors. While they may be fooling the church, God knows He does not have their allegiance. In the end, it is not going to matter what our peers think of us. We will not be able to bring character witnesses with us when we stand before God. The only thing that will matter is the state of our hearts.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Gal. 6:7).

Thought for the Day: *Attempting to use our own perceived greatness to eclipse God in the eyes of others only succeeds in averting our own eyes from Him.*

Word Studies: 5:2 **being privy to it** = knowing of it, she helped plan the deception; 6:11 **suborned** = influenced to do wrong, bribed.

Cross References: For **Acts 4:11**: See Ps. 118:22. **Acts 4:25- 26**: See Ps. 2:1-2.

Pray for Staff: Kevin Jennings • **Government Officials:** Rep. Bill Johnson (OH) • **Country:** Guernsey (65,849) Western Europe • **Major Languages:** English, French • **Religious Freedom** • Protestant; Roman Catholic • **Prayer Suggestion:** Praise the Lord for His loving-kindness and faithfulness (Ps. 138:2).

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

The Jewish leaders were in an uproar. They had plotted the crucifixion of Jesus, confident that once the 'heretic' was dead, the unrest amongst the people would cease, and all would go back to 'normal.' Much to their surprise, that did not happen. The movement that had opened with the teachings of Jesus continued to spread. Now, instead of contending with one heretical 'miracle worker,' they were faced with a dozen (Acts 5:12), and the number was growing (6:8)! Furthermore, these miracles were being performed in Jesus' name (4:10), which just incited the crowds further. Attempts had been made to stifle their claims (4:17-18), but due to a lack of popular support, had been unsuccessful (4:21).

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people (6:8). With the public rise of Stephen, the Jewish leaders grew desperate. The situation was threatening to grow beyond their control. ***And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law*** (6:12-13). They planned to intimidate him into recanting his words and expose him to the general population as a fraud and a liar.

Then said the high priest, Are these things so (7:1)? This question was thrown almost mockingly at Stephen as he stood in open court. They knew that their 'witnesses' would attest to his guilt no matter what excuse he offered. Their belief that they held the upper hand lasted only until the moment Stephen began to speak. Instead of answering to the false charges against him, Stephen confidently faced his accusers and started relating

the history of Israel, making note of the frequent faithlessness of her people. ***To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him (Moses) from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him*** (7:39-40). He ended his speech by turning the tables on his accusers. ***Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*** He charged them with the murder of Jesus, and he then informed them that their actions had been in vain. ***And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God*** (7:56). Overtaken by a fear and dread deeper than any they had ever known before, they fell upon Stephen, drug him to the outskirts of town, and stoned him to death.

In his final hours here on this earth, Stephen lived for his God. The single most important thing to him was to provide witness for Christ. He wanted all who heard his words to realize that Jesus had overcome the machinations of man, that He had defeated death and arisen victorious, and that His power now flowed through the ever-expanding body of believers. In faith, Stephen lived. For love, Stephen died.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

Thought for the Day: *The threat of death cannot subdue those imbued with faith that Jesus has conquered it.*

Word Studies: 7:19 **subtily** = shrewdly, treacherously took advantage; 7:51 **stiffnecked and uncircumcised** = stubborn, deaf to the truth, and unrepentant; 8:9 **sorcery** = witchcraft, magic arts.

Cross References: For **Acts 7:3:** See Gen. 12:1. **Acts 7:27-28:** See Ex. 2:14. **Acts 7:32:** See Ex. 3:6. **Acts 7:33-34:** See Ex. 3:5,7-8,10. **Acts 7:37:** See Deut. 18:15. **Acts 7:40:** See Ex. 32:1. **Acts 7:42-43:** See Amos 5:25-27. **Acts 7:49-50:** See Is. 66:1-2. **Acts 8:32-33:** See Is. 53:7-8.

Pray For: Our Military, Worldwide, Former & Active • **Country:** Guinea (11,474,383) Western Africa • Major Language: French • Religious Freedom, Some Religious Societal Discrimination • 85% Muslim; 8% Christian; 7% Indigenous Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask the Lord to reveal what is not pleasing to Him (Ps.139:23-24).

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do (Acts 9:3-6).

In this chapter of Acts, we receive our first in-depth introduction to the man who later goes on to write, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, 1/3 of what we now know as the New Testament. By all accounts, Saul of Tarsus was a man to be feared. He was an influential Jew, a Pharisee educated in the Temple (Acts 22:3), and a Roman citizen by birth (22:27-28). All of this combined made him an influential leader in the movement to exterminate the early Christian Church. He was an approving witness at the stoning of Stephen, and it was his opinion that belief in Christ as the resurrected Son of God was blasphemous and warranted the death penalty. He had made it his life's mission to stamp out the heresy the Apostles were teaching. He was not content with merely running them out of Jerusalem; He wanted them to cease to exist (9:1-2).

As the **light** shone down **from heaven** and the **voice** of the Lord rang out, Saul's fear would have been palpable. He believed himself to be a godly, righteous man, and he was confident that he was pursuing dangerous, misinformed people working counter to the will of the Lord. Yet, at that moment, on the road to Damascus, Saul was forced to confront the fact that He had it all wrong. Jesus, a man he knew to be dead, appeared to him in His Divine form, proving that the ministry of this new church was true! Saul was struck with the realization that he had not been attacking men at all; he had been persecuting God Himself!

Shaken and blinded, Saul spent three days in prayer and fasting (9:9-11), awaiting the instruction of the Lord. Scripture

does not record what thoughts and feelings ran through the mind and heart of Saul during this time, but God confirms his rebirth while speaking to Ananias: ***But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel*** (9:15). From the moment of his conception, the Lord had known his plans for Saul, just as He had for Jeremiah centuries before. ***Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations*** (Jer. 1:5). There on the road to Damascus, stripped bare of the legalistic religious ideology that had shaped his life up to that point, Saul, at last, answered the call. Humbled before God, he placed his life in His hands, saying, ***Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?***

And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it (Jer. 18:4).

Thought for the Day: *Once God has illuminated our lives and allowed us to see His truth, we will never be the same again.*

Word Studies: 10:1 **centurion** = a captain of an Italian troop of 100 men; 10:3 **ninth hour** = 3 p.m, the usual hour of evening worship among the Jews.

Cross References: For **Acts 10:14**: See Lev. 11:4; 20:25; Deut. 14:3,7. **Acts 10:34** See Deut. 10:17. **Acts 10:38**: See Is. 61:1-3.

Pray For Staff: Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Sen. Jack Reed (RI), Rep. Nicole Maliotakis (NY), Rep. Stephanie Bice (OK), Rep. Monica De La Cruz (TX) • **Country:** Guinea-Bissau (1,693,398) Western Africa • Major Languages: Portuguese, Crioulo • Religious Freedom • 50% Muslim; 40% Indigenous Beliefs; 10% Christian • **Prayer Suggestion:** Trust the Lord and ask Him to direct your steps (Ps. 143:8).

To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins
(Acts 10:43).

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:15-18).

Salvation is by grace alone. ***Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this*** (John 11:25-26)? This truth was well accepted by the Jewish Christians who made up the core of the early church. Yet, for many, one question remained. Who was eligible for grace?

Since the earliest days of the nation of Israel, God has provided a way for those born outside of His chosen people to find their way to Him. ***And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you*** (Ex. 12:48-49). This process of conversion was still widely accepted in the early church as a necessary step for any gentile who sought to be reborn into the body of Christ. It is clear from our readings that Peter himself must have subscribed to this belief. Yet as he knelt in prayer on a rooftop in Joppa, Peter began to undergo a 'conversion' of his own.

Prayer is a great revealer. The more one prays, the more hardness and hostility in the heart are washed away. As the Lord examined Peter's heart, He found that His beloved disciple still had not fully grasped the universal nature of God's love. By showing him the vision of the sheet with its 'unclean' contents and bidding him to eat, God was making a profound

statement. There is nothing that is 'unclean' that God, and God alone, cannot make 'clean.' This lesson was enough to cause Peter to accept the invitation to the Roman Centurion's house, but it is what came next that truly humbled the Apostle.

As ***the Holy Ghost fell on them*** (the unconverted Gentiles), Peter bore witness to God's acceptance. ***Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?*** The question, "Who is eligible for grace?" was conclusively answered at that moment. Jesus Christ was not merely the Savior of the Jews. He was/is the Savior of all of mankind.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Thought for the Day: *God offers us all the opportunity to walk the path to salvation. Our time is much better spent following the path He has placed before us than arguing against another's right to be there.*

Word Studies: 12:1 **Herod** = Agrippa I, King of Judea, grandson of Herod the Great (Luke 1:5); **to vex** = to trouble; 12:4 **four quaternions** = 4 guards of 4 soldiers each; **Easter** = Passover; 12:15 **mad** = out of your mind; 13:17 **high arm** = great power.

Cross References: For **Acts 13:22:** See I Sam. 13:14; Ps. 89:20. **Acts 13:33:** See Ps. 2:7. **Acts 13:34:** See Is. 55:3. **Acts 13:35:** See Ps. 16:10. **Acts 13:41:** See Hab. 1:5. **Acts 13:47:** See Is. 49:6.

Pray For Staff: Tiffany Parisi • **Government Officials:** Sen..Dan Sullivan (AK), Gov. Greg Abbott (TX), Rep. Max Miller (OH), Rep. Wesley Hunt (TX) • **Country:** Guyana (735,554) South America • **Major Languages:** English, Amerindian Dialects • **Religious Freedom** • 30.5% Protestant; 28.4% Hindu; 8.1% Roman Catholic; 1.1% Jehovah's Witness; 7.2% Muslim; 17.7% Other Christian; 7% Other/None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving (Ps. 147:7).

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear(Acts 15:7-10)?

As we discussed yesterday, Salvation is from grace alone. ***For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast*** (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation by grace is one of the basic tenets of our faith. The concept is beautiful in its simplicity: ***That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*** (Rom. 9:10). Despite the straightforward nature of the definition, however, the reality of salvation by grace alone, the receiving of unmerited favor by God, is still hard for many of us to grasp. But why?

We live in a world that is merit-based. In general, the more effort a person is willing and able to expend, the more that person is likely to succeed and prosper in life. A student who studies hard and puts forth his best effort in all of his endeavors is much more likely to be rewarded with a scholarship than one who doesn't even make an effort to attend class. The worker that meets his deadlines, supports his co-workers, and generally goes above and beyond to see that the job is done right has a greater chance at a promotion or raise than the one with little interest in the position beyond the paycheck it provides. Day after day, in every aspect of our lives, we are shown proof that

what we 'do' is the deciding factor in what we 'have.'

It is difficult for us to accept that this is not the case with God. ***For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*** (John. 3:16). God does not just love the motivated; He loves ***the world***. His grace is freely offered to each and every one of its inhabitants, and there is nothing that we can do or say that will change that. This is the concept that the Jews were struggling with. They couldn't accept that God considered men who weren't putting in the same level of 'effort' as they were to be their equals, so they sought to rebalance the scales in their favor.

When it comes to the dissemination of His grace, God does not want or need our input. It is His to give and ours (individually) to receive. We have no say in who it can be gifted to or what they must do to be worthy of it. Any attempt we make to regulate their behavior or force them to prove their right to be counted as one of us flies in the face of God's promise. Such restrictions and constraints cast doubt, not on their acceptance and understanding of grace, but on ours.

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they (Acts 15:11).

Thought for the Day: *In the eyes of the Lord, no man stands above any other; those who seek to distinguish themselves from their peers will only succeed in distancing themselves from Him.*

Word Studies: 14:2 **made their minds evil affected** = influenced them to be hostile; 14:8 **impotent** = weak, helpless, crippled; 15:10 **yoke** = burden.

Cross Reference: For **Acts 15:16-17:** See Amos 9:11-12.

Pray For Government Officials: Rep. Debbie Lesko (AZ), Rep. Greg Pence (IN)
• **Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Country:** Haiti (7 million) Caribbean • **Major Languages:** French, Creole • **Religious Freedom** • 80% Roman Catholic; 16% Protestant; 1% None; 3% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Praise the Lord for His wonderful blessings (Ps. 150:2).

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few (Acts 17:10-12). And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:7-8).

Paul's travels and ministry were not without struggle. Time after time, Paul's teachings on the gospel of Jesus Christ and the path to salvation placed him in conflict with local leaders (both Jewish and Gentile). He had been run out of town on more than one occasion, often in fear of his life (Acts 13:50; 14:1-6, 19-20; 17:5-10). Paul did not allow the overwhelming opposition to deter him from the mission that Jesus had given him. Instead, he allowed it to push him further afield to an ever-widening audience. ***And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles*** (18:5-6).

Every so often, Paul found himself in a place of welcome. A place where people listened to his words with curious minds and open hearts. A place where the populous understood the power of prayer and study and would accept nothing less than God's truth. It was for these people, the ones that hungered for the Spirit without knowing just what it was they sought, that Paul tirelessly continued.

It is easy for Christians today to get discouraged as we attempt to share Christ's message with those around us. The

need is clearly there, but we encounter so many people with hardened hearts and vicious, sharpened tongues that it sometimes seems easier to withdraw from the fray. We tell ourselves that it is enough that we are ready and willing to share God's love with anyone who comes looking for it and that it is a waste of time to keep putting ourselves out there to face ridicule and derision from all those who openly scoff at the name of Jesus. The problem with this line of thought is that it is self-serving, not God-serving. Jesus did not instruct us to stay home and 'make ourselves available'; He taught us to go out into the world and live according to His will, spreading His gospel from here to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19-20).

Paul did not allow the ugliness of God's enemies to waylay him from His appointed task, and neither should we. Those who close themselves off and refuse to hear the truth of God's Word are not hurting us; they are hurting themselves. God's Love is stronger than their hate, and it is our responsibility to push on toward those eager to receive it.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Thought for the Day: *Love and hate are not equal and opposing forces; love is Godly, while hate is worldly; hate can never hope to touch God.*

Word Studies: 17:19 **Areopagus** = the Athenian council which met on Mars Hill; 17:29 **Godhead** = the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

Cross Reference: For **Acts 17:31**: See Ps. 96:13; 98:9.

Pray For Staff: Gilbert Palafox • **Government Official:** Rep. Andrew Ferguson IV (GA) • **Country:** Rome, Italy • **Major Languages:** Italian, Various Other Languages • **Religious Freedom** • Roman Catholic • **Prayer Suggestion:** Let your prayers be praise to the Lord (Ps. 150:6).

But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you (Acts 21:39-40; 22:1).

Paul was in trouble. The elite Jewish population of Jerusalem was in an uproar and crying out for his blood. He had been branded a blasphemer and a traitor—to his race, to his religion, and even to God Himself. ***And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place*** (Acts 21:27-28). He had been ‘rescued’ from near-certain death by Roman authorities responding to the uproar at the Temple. Believing him to be an Egyptian insurgent (21:38), The Romans had taken him into custody and led him away from the bloodthirsty mob.

Common sense would have had Paul keeping his head down and quietly acquiescing to the arrest. It would have been in his best interest to get as far away from the angry Jews as possible, thus giving them time to cool down and focus on other things. Paul’s focus, however, was not on his own safety. He had come to Jerusalem at the urgings of the Holy Spirit for the express purpose of ministering to those in need of a Savior, and he refused to be deterred from his mission. After receiving permission, Paul turned to address the crowd. He did not feel the need to justify himself to these people. He lived to please God, not man, so he did not waste time by pleading his case or attempting to convince them that he was not guilty of the things he was being accused of. Instead, he shared with them the greatest joy of his heart. In a strong and confident voice, he related how God had changed his life forever. ***And he said, The***

God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord (22:14-16).

While there are times that we are called upon to educate others on what God expects of His children, we are first and foremost called to bear witness to Him (Matt. 5:16). Through word and deed, we are to share with the world the difference He has made and is continuing to make in our day-to-day lives. Paul was a gifted theologian, but as he stood before the gathered Jews, he sought to enlighten, not educate. More than anything else, Paul wanted his hearers to look upon him and perceive the presence of Christ.

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul. I cried unto Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue (Ps. 66:16-17).

Thought for the Day: *To lose yourself to anger in the face of ignorance of God is to lower yourself to that level of ignorance.*

Word Studies: 20:12 **not a little** = greatly; 21:15 **took up our carriages** = packed our baggage; 21:24 **be at charges with them** = pay their expenses.

Pray For Staff: Ryan McCrary • **Government Official:** Rep. Eric Swalwell (CA), Rep. Beth Van Duyne (TX), Scott Fitzgerald (WI) • **Country:** Honduras (8,598,561) Central America • **Major Languages:** Spanish, Amerindian dialects • **Religious Freedom** • 97% Roman Catholic; 3% Protestant • **Prayer Suggestion:** The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips (Prov. 16:23).

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds (Acts 23:27-29).

Paul was a heretical rabble-rouser in the eyes of the Jewish leaders, but to the Romans, he was an enigma. Under their law, Paul had ***nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds***. Paul was taken into Roman custody primarily to restore order to the mobs of angry Jews that had formed outside of the Temple, and he was kept in custody for his own protection. Claudius Lysias, chief commander of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, was in over his head. He knew that Paul was Roman-born and therefore protected by Roman law, but he was also a Jew, and the Jewish leaders were screaming for his blood to be spilled. Not wanting to be further caught up in the controversy, he made arrangements for Paul to be sent at once to Felix, the Roman governor of Judaea.

Felix likely received Paul with a fair amount of trepidation. The situation was eerily similar to the one that had befallen Pontius Pilate when he had been called upon to judge Jesus of Nazareth, except, in this instance, the accused was also a Roman citizen. Felix could not condemn a fellow Roman without proof, but he would be committing political suicide if he made enemies of the influential Jews. Instead of making a ruling that could have quite possibly ended his career (either way he chose to rule), Felix deferred judgment for an indeterminate amount of time. He ordered Paul to be kept in Roman custody (but not in prison) until such time as a verdict was reached.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). Paul's friends and fellow evangelists were horrified when he announced that he was returning to Jerusalem (Acts 21:12-14), fearful that once he did, he would be met with certain death. Still, Paul had persevered,

confident that he was following the path set before him by God. Scripture doesn't go into detail on the reactions of his friends to his Roman capture and imprisonment, but based on their past responses, it is likely that they were at once relieved that he had not been immediately executed and dismayed that his ministry had been silenced. Paul, on the other hand, was at perfect peace. As always, he was right where God wanted him to be, ministering to those who needed Him most (even if they didn't recognize their need.)

Governor Felix believed his actions were undertaken for self-preservation, never once realizing that God was working through him to further spread His Word. Similar scenarios are regularly occurring in our world today. God is the creator of all, believers and unbelievers alike, and He works through ALL of His creation for the furtherance of His plan. As Christians, we must never lose faith. God cannot be silenced through the workings of man. As long as we are prayerfully following His will, we can be confident that we are exactly where He means for us to be and that His light is still shining brightly through us.

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps (Prov. 16:9).

Thought for the Day: *God's perfect plan does not lend itself to coincidence or mistakes; even the selfish motivations of individuals can't change its ultimate fulfillment.*

Word Studies: 23:3 **whited wall** = whitewashed wall, meaning hypocrite (see Matt. 23:27); 23:23 **third hour of the night** = 9 p.m.

Pray For Bible Pathway Printer: Polluck Printing, Nashville, TN • **Country:** Hong Kong (7,112,688) Eastern Asia • Major Languages: Chinese, English • Limited Religious Freedom • 90% Eclectic Mixture of Local Religions; 10% Christian • **Prayer Suggestion:** Study and heed the instruction of the Word of God that your prayers may be heard (Prov. 1:28-30).

And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me (Acts 27:22-25).

The last two chapters of the Book of Acts read almost as if they were taken from an action-adventure novel. Paul appealed his case to Caesar and left Caesarea under Roman guard, and he is now bound for Italy (Rome). This is in fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Paul on his first night of captivity in Jerusalem: ***And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome*** (Acts 23:11). No doubt his captors felt he had made a foolhardy choice. While every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar, drawing the attention of the empire's chief authority figure when you were not a man of considerable influence was not often a good idea. Yet Paul made his appeal without fear. He was following the path that the Lord had laid before him. Jesus had already acquitted him, and his future was assured (Phil. 1:21); therefore, no earthly judge held any sway over him.

The first leg of the journey was completed under unfavorable winds (Acts 27:2-8). Upon arriving at Lasea well into the fall (so dated because Luke recorded it as being past the fast of the day of atonement), Paul urged them to sail no further till spring (27:9-11), but his warnings were disregarded, and they sailed on. Predictably, they hit bad weather almost immediately. As their plight worsened, many of the passengers and crew despaired. They knew that they were going to die. Paul was at absolute peace, so much so that he was moved to comfort his captors: ***And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.*** They would have openly scoffed at his words, but his cheerful attitude remained. They could not cause him to doubt

because he possessed God's promise. ***Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.***

Paul trusted in his Savior. That was the simple truth upon which he based his life. Amid the fiercest storm and the darkest night (27:27-33), Paul never once doubted the Word of God. So sincere was his conviction that he partook of a thanksgiving celebration before safety was reached (27:34-36). This is the level of trust that we each must strive for in our own lives. We are protected by a mighty God; He is in complete control, even when our lives are turned inside out and upside down. Only in Him can we find safety and peace.

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Heb. 6:18-19).

Thought for the Day: *Neither the machinations of man nor the whims of nature can wrench us from the hands of God, nor can they deter us from His path without our consent.*

Word Studies: 26:5 **most straitest** = most exact, strictest; 26:7 **instantly** = earnestly; 27:7 **under** = close to, on the side sheltered from wind; 27:12 **commodious** = suitable; 27:30 **under colour** = under pretense; 28:2 **barbarous people** = foreigners, who don't speak your language well; 28:13 **fetched a compass** = circled around; 28:16 **suffered** = permitted.

Cross Reference: For **Acts 28:26-27**: See Is. 6:9-10.

Pray For Staff: Kevin Jennings • **Government Official:** Rep. Bruce Westerman (AR), Rep. Salud Carbajal (CA) • **Country:** Hungary (9,919,128) East-Central Europe • Major Language: Hungarian • Restricted Religious Freedom • 37.2% Roman Catholic; 11.6% Calvinist; 2.2% Lutheran; 1.8% Greek Catholic; 1.8% Other (Other Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish); 18.2% None; 27.2% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask the Lord for wisdom and discernment (Prov. 2:1-6).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

The Book of Romans is, in many ways, a theological masterpiece. Within its pages, Paul expounds upon God's fundamental truths and explains in clear, concise language what is required of us to obtain salvation by grace. Paul is forthright in his message, but he does not 'preach' at his audience. Paul speaks from his heart as a man saved by grace, trying to share his joy, not as a teacher lecturing a classroom of reluctant students. More than anything else, Paul wishes for every person who hears his words to come for themselves into the presence of Christ. ***But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*** (Rom. 3:21-23).

The church in Rome was unique for its time in that it was chiefly comprised of Gentiles. To quell rising unrest, the Emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to depart from Rome (Acts 18:2). The departure of the Jews had not been able to stem the spread of Christianity in Rome, however. Christ's message persevered, and the church formed around Gentiles who had little to no interest in the original calling of God's chosen people or the continuity of the Old Covenant (Old Testament Scripture). Trouble erupted in the church when Jewish Christians returned to Rome with the intention of correcting the fledgling church's faulty theology. They believed that it was their responsibility to instruct the Gentiles on the laws of Moses and the ways of God.

Paul viewed the opposing factions with no small measure of distress. He realized that both the Jews and the Gentiles were hyper-focused on procedural and legalistic issues and had lost sight of the one thing that truly mattered: the

freely given grace of Jesus Christ. As was his custom, Paul addressed the Jewish Christians' misconceptions first. He confronted them on their misplaced pride, accusing them of appropriating a state of righteousness that belonged only to God (Rom. 3:10-11). The Jews had come to Rome arrogantly believing that the only path to Jesus lay in adherence to the old ways, never once realizing that it was precisely that blind allegiance that was placing a stumbling block in their own path. Paul had to make them understand that when it came to Jesus, there was no such thing as 'us vs. them.' Without Christ, there was no way for the Jewish Christians to lead their Gentile brothers in the paths of righteousness because, without Christ, righteousness did not exist.

The only way in which we can live as a witness for Jesus Christ is if we are willing to let go of self. We cannot effectively share His grace with others if we simultaneously seek recognition for our accomplishments. We must reach out to others on the strength of God's love alone—all other ways lead to failure.

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:38).

Thought for the Day: *Those who claim to be God's enemies do so with prideful self-importance that only reveals how in need of Him they are.*

Word Studies: 1:13 **let hitherto** = prevented; 1:21 **vain** = morally misguided, empty, worthless; 1:29 **debate** = strife; **malignity** = depravity of heart; **whisperers** = gossipers; 2:22 **commit sacrilege** = rob temples; 3:2 **oracles** = the Scriptures; 3:25 **propitiation** = satisfaction, reconciliation, appeasement; **remission** = forgiveness of former sins.

Cross References: For **Rom. 1:17:** See Hab. 2:4. **Rom. 2:24:** See Is. 52:5. **Rom. 3:4:** See Ps. 51:4. **Rom. 3:10:** See Ps. 14:1. **Rom. 3:11:** See Ps. 14:2. **Rom. 3:12:** See Ps. 14:3. **Rom. 3:13:** See Ps. 5:9.

Pray For Staff: Jennifer Palafox • **Country:** Iceland (317,351) Northern Atlantic Ocean • Major Languages: Icelandic, English, Nordic Languages, German • Religious Freedom • 76.2% Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland (Official); 3.4% Roman Catholic; 2.9% Reykjavik Free Church; 1.9% Hafnarfjörður Free Church; 1% The Independent Congregation; 3.6% Other Religions (Pentecostal, Asatru Assoc., Muslim, Jewish); 5.2% None; 5.9% Other/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Let your faith in the Word of God overrule all fears (Prov. 3:6).

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:6-11).

What a joyous passage! As Christians, we all know that Jesus died so that we could have eternal life, but how many of us truly realize that He intends for that eternal life to start, not at the moment of our mortal death, but at the very instant that we accept Him as our Lord and Savior?

The more we understand the various aspects of the death of Christ, the richer our experience of its power will be. We believe Christ died on the cross for our sins, but many pass over what it means ***that the body of sin might be destroyed*** in our lives. There are those who still fear the pull of sin and believe that they must constantly fight against it lest they succumb. They do not understand that, in Christ, they are ***dead indeed unto sin***. Sin is the reason Jesus endured the suffering of the cross and the humiliation of the grave. But all who have accepted Him as Savior and Lord are now dead indeed unto sin; it has lost all rightful claim over us. We are entirely and forever freed from its power. ***Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*** (6:18). This does not mean we will never sin again, but it does mean that if we have truly found salvation in Christ, we will never be controlled by sin again.

Just as Christ's death set us free from the power of sin, so too did His resurrection free us from the power of death. ***For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection***

(6:5). Jesus died, but the Glory of God overcame death. He ripped the power out of Satan's hands and returned. ***Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead*** (Acts 10:40-41). Once our sinful selves have been crucified in Christ, we are resurrected with Him into the holy family of God. ***Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*** (Heb. 2:14-15). Although we still face the reality of physical death, all of us who have received life everlasting through Jesus Christ now realize that it is not the end of life but, instead, the true beginning.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:55-57).

Thought for the Day: *Accepting Christ means rejecting sin. We cannot claim a new life while continuing to indulge our previous vices; we cannot claim to worship Him while sin vies for His affection.*

Word Studies: 4:8 **will not impute sin** = no longer regards as a sinner; 7:8 **concupiscence** = evil desires or lust; covet-ousness.

Cross References: For **Rom. 4:3:** See Gen. 15:6. **Rom. 4:7- 8:** See Ps. 32:1-2. **Rom. 4:17:** See Gen. 17:5. **Rom. 4:18:** See Gen. 15:5. **Rom. 7:7:** See Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21.

Pray For Radio: Sponsored By Thursday Morning Prayer • **Government Officials:** President Joe Biden, Rep. Ruben Gallego (AZ), Rep. James McGovern (MA) • **Country:** India (1,236,344,631) Southern Asia • Major Languages: Hindi, English, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, 10 Other Official Languages • Religious Freedom • 80.5% Hindu; 13.4% Muslim; 2.3% Christian; 1.9% Sikh; 1.8% Other; 0.1% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Seek God as more important than food to satisfy your hunger (Prov. 3:13-18).

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He saith also in Osee, I will call them My people, which were not My people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: For He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth (Rom. 9:19-28).

In chapter nine of the Book of Romans, Paul addresses one of the chief accusations being levied at him by the Jewish leaders of the time. Namely, that Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was perverse and counter to God's will. They claimed that either Paul was wrong in what he was teaching or that God had somehow failed the Jewish people and gone back on His word to them. To the accusers, it was simple. If God was truly infallible, then Paul was wrong. If Paul was right, then God was unjust and fallible. Paul made no attempt to defend himself or his message. Instead, he systematically broke down the illogical argument of his accusers using the established Word of God.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion (Rom. 9:14-15). The sover-

eignty of God is absolute. He acts in His own counsel, needing neither our agreement nor approval.

Furthermore, God is perfect. It is not possible for Him to sin or morally stumble; He is the author of righteousness, and the definition of righteousness is written through His actions. The earth and all that is on it belong to Him. Every soul in existence was created by Him. What He chooses to make of His creation and how He chooses to use it is out of our control. Questioning Him and demanding that He make Himself accountable to us is both ignorant and futile.

God never lies; He never goes back on His word. Humans can and do misinterpret His word, but blaming Him for our lack of understanding just proves how incomplete our understanding is. Paul took the complaining Jews on a journey back through Scripture in an attempt to open their eyes to the fullness of God's promise and the eternal nature of His plan. It was not God that failed them; it was they that failed God.

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone (Rom. 9:31-32).

Thought for the Day: *The faithless often try to entrap God's servants with what they believe to be solid logic, but a fallen world cannot judge or understand God.*

Word Studies: 9:15 **compassion** = grace, mercy, gentleness, loving-kindness; 10:21 **gainsaying** = self-willed, disobedient, faultfinding.

Cross References: For **Rom. 8:36:** See Ps. 44:22. **Rom 9:7:** See Gen. 21:12. **Rom. 9:9:** See Gen. 18:10. **Rom. 9:12:** See Gen. 25:23. **Rom. 9:13:** See Mal. 1:2-3. **Rom. 9:15:** See Ex. 33:19. **Rom. 9:17:** See Ex. 9:16. **Rom. 9:25:** See Hos. 2:23. **Rom. 9:26:** See Hos. 1:10. **Rom. 9:27-28:** See Is. 10:22-23. **Rom. 9:29:** See Is. 1:9. **Rom. 9:33:** See Is. 28:16. **Rom. 10:5:** See Lev. 18:5. **Rom. 10:6-7:** See Deut. 30:12-13.

Pray For Staff: Tiffany Parisi • **Government Officials:** Sen. John Neely Kennedy (LA), Sen. Richard Durbin (IL), Rep. Yvette Clarke (NY) • **Country:** Indonesia (253,609,643) Southeast Asia • **Major Languages:** Bahasa Indonesian, English, Dutch, Javanese • **Religious tolerance** for decades has been gradually replaced by its rising anti-Christian violence • 86.1% Muslim; 5.7% Protestant; 3% Catholic; 1.8% Hindu; 3.4% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Commit your fears to the Lord, and He will give you peace (Prov. 3:24-26).

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35). Godly love is more than just a Christian virtue or a spiritual gift; it is the mark that identifies us as members of the body of Christ and is the foundation of the new heart we received at our rebirth. **Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new** (II Cor. 5:17).

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another. Godly love must be freely given; it cannot be earned, nor can anyone be deemed 'too unworthy' to receive it. Our debt is not to our fellow man but to God. **Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins** (I John 4:10). His love for us, offered without cause, is priceless and beyond our ability to ever repay. The terms of our indebtedness are simple. We must accept His love and allow it to work through us, emanating outward and saturating our every word and deed. God does not want to be 'paid back.' He has instructed us to pay it forward.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. To those united in the body of Christ, the law is an illustration of Godly love. We obey it not because it has power over us or we are bound to it but because we are led by love to do so. **For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to**

them a God, and they shall be to Me a people (Heb. 8:10). The love of God, the living Word, resides inside of us, guiding and directing us at every turn. Embrace it—live it—let it take control. Indebted to God, we are forever free.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:43-48).

Thought for the Day: *Godly love must be accepted, not earned; only by understanding this can we begin to understand what He expects of us.*

Word Studies: 11:14 **emulation** = jealousy; 12:9 **dissimulation** = hypocrisy; 13:13 **rioting and drunkenness . . . chambering and wantonness** = unbridled lust, immorality and indecency.

Cross References: For **Rom. 11:3:** See I King 19:10,14. **Rom. 11:4:** See I King 19:18. **Rom. 11:8:** See Is. 29:10. **Rom. 11:9-10:** See Ps. 69:22-23. **Rom. 11:26-27:** See Is. 59:20-21; Jer. 31:33. **Rom. 11:34:** See Is. 40:13. **Rom. 11:35:** See Job 41:11. **Rom. 12:19:** See Deut. 32:35. **Rom. 12:20:** See Prov. 25:21-22. **Rom. 13:9:** See Ex. 20:13-17; Lev. 19:18.

Pray For Staff: Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep Andrew Clyde (GA) • **Country:** Iran (80,840,713) Mid East • Major Languages: Persian, Azeri Turkic, Turkic Dialects, Kurdish • Hostile to all Christian activity • 99.4% Muslim (90-95% Shi'a; 5-10% Sunni); 0.3% Other (Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian) 0.3% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask the Lord to help you teach His Word to your children; it will give guidance and instruction as they go through life (Prov. 6:20-23).

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen (Rom. 16:17-20).

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (Matt. 7:15). The particular version of **false prophets** Paul warns about in today's reading are those who seek to destroy from within. These individuals nominally teach the Gospel but put their own personal spin on it. By cherry-picking the points that suit them, adding what they need to get their message across, and downplaying the rest, they attempt to put Jesus to work for them. The thing that makes them so insidious and hard to spot is their sincerity. Many have deceived themselves to the point that they believe what they are preaching. They insist that they have unlocked the 'secret' of salvation and promote it above all else.

When confronted with such an individual, it is tempting to argue with them in defense of God and His Word. We feel we must "set the record straight" no matter what we must do or how long we must fight. Paul suggests a different approach. **Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.** Instead of unintentionally validating their opinion by arguing with it, utterly ignore it. Continue living for God and sharing the Gospel with all who will receive it, and avoid those who are intentionally altering it. By ignoring and avoiding them, you take away their opportunity for public debate. You demonstrate the insignificance of their message by continuing to live strong in Christ according to His Word as He gave it—no reinterpretation.

tions, addendums, or retractions. Be ***wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.***

God does not need us to defend Him. He does not need us to validate the truth of His Word. He asks us to share that truth in word and deed, but it is up to the hearer to choose whether or not to receive it. Even if our words are true, we lessen our witness for God by confronting others with anger or contempt. Those who are determined not to hear the truth will not be convinced of their error by angry words or extended debate. But by quietly and confidently living in Christ, we stand against their falsehoods without uttering a word against them. In His time, God will ***bruise Satan under our feet.*** All we have to do is trust in Him and allow that trust to shine forth in our daily lives. He will do the rest.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ (1 Pet. 15:16).

Thought for the Day: *An unshakable faith in God does not need to defend His Word against those who speak ill of it; we know He will prevail.*

Word Studies: 14:1 **not to doubtful disputations** = not for passing judgment on his questionable opinions; 16:2 **succourer** = helper, defender.

Cross References: For **Rom. 14:11:** See Is. 45:23. **Rom. 15:3:** See Ps. 69:9. **Rom. 15:9:** See Ps. 18:49. **Rom. 15:10:** See Deut. 32:43. **Rom. 15:11:** See Ps. 117:1. **Rom. 15:12:** See Is. 11:1,10. **Rom. 15:21:** See Is. 52:15.

Pray For Staff: Ryan McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Sean Casten (IL), Rep. Wendy Nickel (NC), Rep. Debbie Dingell (MI), Sen. Charles Schumer (NY) • **Country:** Iraq (32,585,692) Mid East • Major Languages: Arabic, Kurdish, Turkmen, Assyrian, Armenian • Persecution of Christians, Yezidis, Others • 97% Muslim (Official-60-65% Shi'a, 32-37% Sunni); 3% Christian/Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Diligently seek the guidance of the Lord (Prov. 8:17).

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (I Cor. 2:1-5).

Paul was an educated man (Acts 22:3) with above-average oratory skills. He was a Pharisee (23:6) well-versed in the laws of Moses and the commandments of God. He was also a skilled tradesman, a tent-maker who capably supported himself and others as he traveled on his missions for Christ (Acts 18:3; II Cor. 11:9). While all of these things described Paul, none of them defined him. First and foremost, Paul considered himself a servant of Christ. ***Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God*** (Rom. 1:1). Every word he had spoken and every action he had taken since the moment Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus had been spoken and undertaken based on that defining premise.

When he first appeared in Corinth, Paul approached the people on their level as a humble servant of Christ. He didn't try to intimidate them with his societal status or impress them with his knowledge and skills. While either of those tactics might have been successful in the short run, he knew that the only way to facilitate a lasting faith amongst these people was to allow them to experience the Gospel of Jesus Christ for themselves in the way that would most impact their lives. ***Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me*** (John 12:31-32). Jesus HAD been ***lifted up from the earth***, and it was with His words, His power, and His glory that Paul sought to gather like-minded individuals into His service here on earth. ***And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's***

wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

What do we do when we approach someone to share our love of our Savior for the first time? Do we allow Christ to lead, approaching the individual in the manner they are most accustomed to and comfortable with, or do we think it more essential to first gain control of the encounter so that we can more fully demonstrate God's love in the way in which we feel it should best be presented? Is our focus solely on sharing the Gospel and allowing Jesus' power to draw them to Him, or do we feel the need to showcase our own righteousness so that the person we are witnessing to can properly appreciate what they are 'missing?' Before we approach anyone, we must ask ourselves this: Are we acting out of a desire to glorify God, or are we seeking glory for ourselves in association with His name?

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (II Cor. 4:5-6).

Thought for the Day: *Those willing to hear His Word do not need to be manipulated into hearing it, and those unwilling to hear will remain just as deaf with or without such posturing.*

Word Studies: 1:21 **the foolishness of preaching** = foolishness to unbelievers; 2:6 **perfect** = spiritually mature; 3:1 **carnal** = worldly; 4:5 **counsels** = motives; 4:11 **naked** = poorly clothed; **buffeted** = treated with disrespect.

Cross References: For **I Cor. 1:19:** See Is. 29:14. **I Cor. 1:31:** See Jer. 9:24. **I Cor. 2:16:** See Is. 40:13. **I Cor. 3:19:** See Job 5:13. **I Cor. 3:20:** See Ps. 94:11.

Pray For Staff: Gilbert Palafox • **Country:** Ireland (4,832,765) Western Europe • Major Languages: English, Irish • Religious Freedom • 84.7% Catholic; 2.7% Church of Ireland; 2.7% Other Protestant; 1.1% Muslim; 1.7% Other; 1.5% Unspecified; 5.6% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray for national revival, for righteousness exalts a nation (Prov. 14:34).

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of Him (I Cor. 8:1-3).

When Paul composed his letter to the Corinthian church, Christianity was still very much in the minority in Corinth. Idol worship involving animal sacrifice was commonplace, and much of the excess meat from those sacrifices was sold for profit in shops adjoining the pagan temples. The Corinthian church was divided over the question of whether or not it was permissible for Christians to purchase and consume meat that had previously been part of an idol sacrifice. Some held the viewpoint that partaking of the meat meant that the consumer was actively worshiping the idol. Others believed that the meat was a provision from God, as was all meat, and that by avoiding it, Christians were unwittingly validating idol worship by claiming an imaginary idol could somehow make something ‘unclean.’

Paul’s answer was two-pronged. He affirmed the fundamental truth of God’s sovereignty over all things as well as the false, illusionary nature of idol worship. ***As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him*** (I Cor. 8:4-6). But instead of continuing on in full support of the rights afforded them through the understanding of their faith, Paul told them that they were asking the wrong question. It wasn’t a matter of whether or not they had the right to do it; it was a question of whether or not it was the right thing to do.

Paul counseled them to quit focusing on knowing their rights

and instead turn their attention to which action would better show love and support for others who were not yet as secure in their faith. ***But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak*** (8:9). He stressed that no personal right is worth claiming if it causes such confusion in others that they turn from God because of it. He reminded his hearers that anyone who knowingly acted in such a manner would sin against both man and God. ***But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ*** (8:12).

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another (John 13:34). Loving our brother or sister in Christ means putting their needs ahead of our wants. It means going out of our way to uplift and encourage them on their journey with Christ instead of judging them for their weakness while simultaneously flaunting our own strengths. If this is not something we are willing to do, we may need to closely examine our own hearts. Are we genuinely living free in Christ, or are we instead motivated by worldly pride?

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another (Gal. 5:13).

Thought for the Day: *God directs us to accept the authority of those in worldly power, not to blindly follow them.*

Word Studies: 5:11 **a railer** = one who is verbally abusive, a reviler; 6:9 **effeminate** = male homosexual who takes the feminine role; **abusers of themselves with mankind** = sodomites; 7:1 **not to touch a woman** = not to marry; 7:5 **Defraud ye not one the other** = Do not deprive each other of marital rights; 7:12 **let him not put her away** = let him not leave her or divorce her; 7:32 **without carefulness** = free from anxieties.

Cross References: For **I Cor. 6:16:** See Gen. 2:24. **I Cor. 9:9:** See Deut. 25:4.

Pray For Government Official: Rep. Jimmy Gomez (CA) • **Country:** Israel (7,821,850) Middle East • **Major Languages:** Hebrew, Arabic, English • **Witnessing to Jews about Christ the Messiah is actively discouraged** • 75.1% Jewish; 17.4% Muslim; 2% Christian; 1.6% Druze; 3.9% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Prayer with an upright spirit and heart is a delight to God (Prov. 15:8).

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away (I Cor. 13:4-8).

Godly love is perfect love. It is patient and kind -- never envious or boastful. It is not conceited, with inflated ideas of its own importance, and it is never rude. Godly love does not insist on its own way and is not self-seeking. It is not quick to take offense, nor does it think about evil things or rejoice in anything sinful; Godly love always delights when truth is upheld. Godly love can overlook faults, is eager to believe the best, and is always hopeful. It knows no limit to its endurance and will never cease. Godly love comes only from God; it is a gift He freely shares with us in the expectation that we also share it with each other. ***Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love (I John 4:7-8).*** Jesus emphasized the importance of love to the Christian heart when He said to His disciples: ***A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).***

From Christ's words, we can see that love is not just one element that can be found in true believers; love is THE thing that separates God's children from the rest of the world. ***Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods***

to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing (I Cor. 13:1-3). Nothing we do without it has any meaning, not for ourselves or anyone else.

How can we, as imperfect, selfish human beings, ever live up to God's standard of perfect love? The simple answer is that in and of ourselves, we can't. But after we have accepted Christ as our Savior and opened our hearts to the presence of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to reflect the love that God is showering on us outwards toward the rest of the world. If we claim to have found Christ, yet we cannot find compassion in our hearts for our fellow man, then perhaps we need to reevaluate the strength of our commitment.

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (I John 4:20-21).

Thought for the Day: *Godly love cannot be replicated, but it can be aspired to.*

Word Studies: 10:24 **another's wealth** = the well-being of others; 10:25 **shambles** = meat market; 11:11 **man without the woman** = independent of; woman is essential to man; 11:13 **comely** = proper; 12:2 **dumb** = mute.

Cross References: For **I Cor. 10:7:** See Ex. 32:6. **I Cor. 10:26:** See Ps. 24:1.

Pray For Staff: Kevin Jennings • **Government Officials:** Sen. Shelley Capito (WV), Rep. Summer Lee (PA) • **Country:** Italy (61,680,122) Southern Europe • Major Languages: Italian, German • Religious Freedom • 80% Christian (Overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, some Protestants & Jehovah Witness); 20% Atheists/Agnostics; (About 700,000 but growing, Muslims) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Read, study, and listen to the Word of God so that your prayers will be answered (Prov. 28:9).

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity
(I Cor. 13:13).

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame (I Cor. 15:33-34).

As Christians, we are not called to lead sheltered, secluded lives. If we are to spread the gospel of Christ to those who desperately need to hear it, we will have to interact with the world around us. Jesus Himself set the example we are to follow. ***And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*** (Matt. 9:10-13). At the same time, we are warned to stay alert to the worldly temptations we will encounter. Even as we stand as a beacon for Christ (Matt. 5:16), we must take care not to draw our strength or inspiration from the world surrounding us. ***Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness*** (II Cor. 6:14)?

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Paul's warning against the influence of the worldly is even more relevant today than it was during the time of the early church. With the advent of smartphones, social media, and 24/7 connectivity, the pressure to compromise our values and conform to societal norms has never been greater. The danger increases when we also surround ourselves with non-believing friends. The more time we spend in their company, the more we will relax and let down our guard; the more we let down our guard, the more vulnerable we will become to subtle influences.

There is a way to both fulfill our mission as witnesses for Christ and protect ourselves from undue influence. First, we must follow the example of Christ and regularly make time to

seek direct support and guidance from God. ***And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God*** (Luke 6:12). The more time we spend in prayer and prayerful contemplation of His Word, the easier it will be for us to discern His will in all things. ***And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*** (Rom. 12:2). Second, we must endeavor to build an earthly support system from individuals that share our love of Christ and our devotion to His Word. If we surround ourselves with people who love God with the same intensity we do, we will have nothing to fear from letting our guard down in their presence. ***Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind*** (Phil. 2:2). Instead, our time together will strengthen our resolve and brighten the light that we then take out into the world.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

Thought for the Day: *God's word is not to be hoarded or guarded; only by spreading it can we find its meaning.*

Word Studies: 14:10 **signification** = meaning; 14:11 **barbarian** = foreigner; 14:20 **in malice be ye children** = in doing evil, be as harmless as a baby; 14:27 **by course** = in turn; 15:9 **meet** = worthy, fit; 15:20 **slept** = have died; 15:33 **evil communications corrupt good manners** = evil companions or associations ruin or defile good character.

Cross References: For **I Cor. 14:21:** See Is. 28:11-12. **I Cor. 15:3- 4:** See Hos. 6:2. **I Cor. 15:25:** See Ps. 110:1. **I Cor. 15:27:** See Ps. 8:6. **I Cor. 15:32:** See Is. 22:13. **I Cor. 15:45:** See Gen. 2:7. **I Cor. 15:54:** See Is. 25:8. **I Cor. 15:55:** See Hos. 13:14.

Pray For Staff: Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Paul Gosar (AZ) • **Country:** Jamaica (2,930,050) Caribbean • **Major Languages:** English, English Patois • **Religious Freedom** • 62.5% Protestant; 2.6% Roman Catholic; 14.2% Other/Unspecified; 20.9% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Confess and forsake your sins that you may receive mercy (Prov. 28:13).

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body (II Cor. 4:7-10).

The **earthen vessels** (clay pots) to which Paul refers here were of very little intrinsic value. Their worth was determined by what they contained. When empty or filled with waste, they were carelessly discarded, but when filled with costly oils or used as a storage place for gold and silver, they were highly prized. As Paul attempts to explain to the Corinthians the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit in relation to the imperfect heart of man, he compares the true believer to such a vessel. He explains how our worth is not found in our human 'shell,' which is inherently flawed and easily broken, but is instead measured by the glory of Christ that emanates from us (Col. 1:27). We are infinitely precious to God, not because of the simple form which He has given us, but because within each of us, He has placed a part of Himself (I Cor. 3:16). And it is through that life-giving spark that He has chosen to share His Word with the rest of mankind.

Even as Paul reveals this glorious truth, he hastens to remind us of the realities of the fallen world in which we live. We can expect to be **troubled, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down**. Scripture reveals to us that trials and troubles, in whatever form, are necessary for every Christian's spiritual growth; without them, we would not exercise our faith to develop spiritual insight and strength (Acts 14:22; I Pet. 1:6-7). Instead of being angry and discouraged as we face our worldly problems, we are urged to join ourselves with Christ. **Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls** (Matt. 11:29). In this way, we will be able to face trials and suffering with the confidence that our Lord is in complete control. **Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But re-**

joice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy (I Pet. 4:12-13).

If we attempt to face these troubles on our own, we will crumble, much like an empty clay pot that has been crushed under a great weight. Yet if we trust in the **power** that is of God, we will stand – without **distress** or **despair**, comforted by the knowledge that we have not been **forsaken** and we will never be **destroyed**. Alone, we are defenseless, but with God, we are triumphant. ***Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*** (I John 4:4).

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Cor. 4:17-18).

Thought for the Day: *We don't have to wait to be struck by the world to know if God's power has reinforced us; we know it has by the fact that we have no fear of the blow.*

Word Studies: 2:5 **not overcharge** = not overstate the case or be too severe; 2:9 **know the proof of you** = test your loyalty; 2:14 **savour** = satisfaction, sweetness, like a lovely fragrance; 3:10 **even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excellet**h = what was glorious (Law given to Moses) has no glory in comparison to the surpassing glory of Jesus Christ; 4:15 **redound** = abound, overflow, result in abundance.

Cross References: For **II Cor. 3:13:** See Ex. 34:33-35. **II Cor. 4:13:** See Ps. 116:10.

Pray For Staff: Tiffany Parisi • **Government Official:** Sen. Michael Bennet (CO) • **Country:** Japan (127,103,388) Eastern Asia • **Major Language:** Japanese • **Religious Freedom** • 83.9% Shintoism; 71.4% Buddhism (Exceeds 100%, many belong to both); 2% Christian; 7.8% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** When you pray, be brief and pray from your heart (Eccl. 5:2).

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich. And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack (II Cor. 8:9-15).

Money is a social construct created by mankind to simplify the exchange of necessary goods and services. Fiscal wealth is a worldly concept that is meaningless in the kingdom of God. ***They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him*** (Ps. 49:6-7). Yet just because He assigns no intrinsic value to money does not mean that God ignores it or the way it is used by His creation. Money can be a valuable tool in the furthering of His kingdom and the spreading of His gospel. It can provide a way for us to meet our daily needs and attend to the needs of others.

Depending on our attitudes and relationship with God, money can be a blessing or a curse. If we desire it for the sake of wealth, status, and self-gratification, then it becomes our master and a stumbling block in our path. ***But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*** (I Tim. 6:9-10). But if we accept it as one of the many tools

available on our journey in Christ and resolve to first and foremost use it for His glory, whether we have much or little, then it loses its power over us. When our focus remains on the riches of Christ over the riches of the world, we become blessed beyond measure. ***That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*** (Eph. 2:7).

Paul's message to the church in Corinth readily applies to our lives today. Wealth is not a thing to be celebrated or hoarded, nor is it to be feared; instead, it is to be shared, along with heaping portions of Christ's love, mercy, and grace. Each member of the body needs to bring their all to the table and work together to improve the whole. ***Not that other men be eased, and ye burdened***, but that everyone may be given the opportunity to partake of God's grace.

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him (I John 3:17)?

Thought for the Day: *To seek wealth or power is to stray from God's path; if He deems either necessary for your journey, you will find it along the way.*

Word Studies: 5:5 **wrought** = prepared; 5:13 **beside ourselves** = insane; **sober** = of sound mind; 6:5 **In stripes** = Having been beaten; **tumults** = riots; 6:6 **unfeigned** = genuine; 6:12 **Ye are not straitened in us** = our love toward you is not restrained; **bowels** = emotions; 6:13 **for a recompence in the same** = in return for our love; **be ye also enlarged** = open your hearts to us; 7:9 **that ye might receive damage by us in nothing** = that you not be offended in what we did or did not say; 7:10 **not to be repented of** = without regret; 7:11 **carefulness** = diligence, seriousness; 8:1 **we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on** = we want you to know what the grace of God has accomplished in; 8:4 **Praying us with much intreaty** = urging us to allow them the privilege; 8:7 **abound** = excel; 8:8 **forwardness** = earnestness.

Cross References: For **II Cor. 6:2**: See Is. 49:8. **II Cor. 6:16**: See Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:27. **II Cor. 6:17**: See Is. 52:11. **II Cor. 8:15**: See Ex. 16:18.

Pray For Staff: Judy McCrary • **Government Official:** Gov. Andy Beshear (KY) • **Country:** Jersey (96,513) Western Europe • **Major Language:** English • **Religious Freedom** • Protestant; Roman Catholic • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray that God will teach you His ways and transform your life by His Word (Is. 2:3).

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand. But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth (II Cor. 10:12-18).

Paul had worked hard to provide the church at Corinth with the best start possible. ***And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them*** (Acts 18:8-11). Even after he left the area, he stayed in contact through letters, offering encouragement, advice, and support, as well as necessary Godly chastisement. Yet now Paul's authority was being challenged. Everything from his methods and ideology to his moral character was being questioned. He was accused of exceeding his authority and using his letters as a 'bully pulpit' to say things he was too weak and cowardly to speak in person (II Cor. 10:1,10).

Paul did not let these accusations pass without rebuttal, although he did not enjoy defending himself. ***I am become a***

fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing (12:11). Paul was not concerned with how others thought of him personally, but he refused to allow his witness to be destroyed. Yet when Paul fought back, he did so in a way his opponent didn't expect.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) (10:3-4). He didn't meet accusation with accusation; he wasted no time trying to prove that he was a 'better' person than his accuser. In fact, the only challenge he lay down was for them to look within themselves and to ascertain by whose authority they were launching their attack. Paul then drew upon the authority of God and laid it all on the line. God's good opinion was the only one that mattered, and as long as he had that, he would not be silenced.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you (Phil. 4:8-9).

Thought for the Day: *We must remember that we stand equal with those with whom we share His Word; the only difference is that they have yet to find His path.*

Word Studies: 9:2 **forwardness** = readiness; 9:5 **bounty** = gift; 9:7 of **necessity** = under compulsion; 9:13 **experiment** = experience, proof, evidence; 10:13 **without** = beyond; 11:2 **espoused** = betrothed, engaged; 11:3 **beguiled** = deceived, seduced; **simplicity** = sincere faithfulness; 11:5 **a whit behind** = at all inferior to; 11:6 **rude in speech** = unskilled as an orator; 12:7 **buffet** = discipline; 12:17 **make a gain of you** = take advantage of or exploit you; 12:20 **swellings** = pride; self-assertion; 12:21 **lasciviousness** = lustfulness; 13:6 **reprobates** = rejected, not genuine Christians.

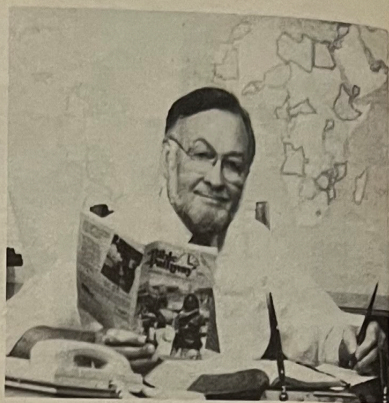
Cross References: For **II Cor. 9:9**: See Ps. 112:9. **II Cor. 10:17**: See Jer. 9:24. **II Cor. 13:1**: See Deut. 19:15.

Pray For Staff: Ryan McCrary • **Government Officials:** Gov. Kristi Noem (SD) • **Country:** Jordan (7,930,491) Southwestern Asia • **Major Languages:** Arabic, English • **Conversion from Islam is not permitted** • 92% Sunni Muslim (Official); 6% Christian; 2% Other (Shia Muslim, Druze) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask the Lord to make you willing to go wherever He wants to send you (Is. 6:8).

Dear Friend:

An executive with the local Samsonite Manufacturing Company recently called me.

He had just returned from the National Gideons Convention in New Orleans where he was talking with Wes Darstalk, a businessman from New Jersey. When the executive from Samsonite mentioned he was from Murfreesboro, Mr. Darstalk said, "Oh, Murfreesboro is very dear to my heart. It is the home of *Bible Pathway*, which God used to turn me to Christ as my Savior."



From all walks of life, people are discovering the life-changing power of the Bible through *Bible Pathway*.

A Swedish medical doctor now practicing in Oregon recently visited our headquarters and remarked to Vice President Jerry Wiles, "My giving goes to three major ministries: Wycliffe Bible Translators because they translate the Bible into the languages of the people; the Gideons because they distribute the Bible in many countries; and Bible Pathway Ministries where an international teaching ministry is provided through the Bible."

With *Bible Pathway* as your guide, you will find yourself going through the Bible with new interest, new direction, and new understanding.

Just think! By reading just 15 minutes a day, you can read through the entire Bible in one year.

Don't let anything keep you from the rich rewards you will gain as you set aside just a few minutes each day to read what God has to say to you.

Your Bible-reading friend,

John Hash
John A. Hash, Litt. D., Editor

Be a Distributing Disciple. . . reach your neighbors . . . your church . . . missionary groups . . .

Dear Friend:

To most of us the month of November immediately brings warm memories of family and friends from Thanksgivings past. Actually most of our thoughts are family centered.

Imagine the memories we'll celebrate when the family of God meets in Heaven. We will be able to greet those with whom we have shared the love and saving knowledge of Christ.

How thrilling to realize that even the least-educated Christian can point the way to life everlasting. Months and years of training are not necessary – you can start now. Bible Pathway has a proven method . . . called **Distributing Disciples**. It enables you to distribute *Bible Pathways* to your friends, families, groups, organizations, church, or community. For the price of 70¢ each [in quantities of 10 or more mailed to one address] you can furnish this systematic, in-depth, devotional commentary, that encourages each reader to discover the real answers to all life's problems.

The far-reaching effects are astounding! Sharing just 10 *Bible Pathways* each month is equivalent to having a Bible study group of 10 families. With an average of three persons in each family, your teaching ministry of *Bible Pathway* once a month will help 30 people understand and appreciate their Bible 365 days a year. The blessings are eternal.

Just think! For every person you keep from being a drug addict, from divorce, from AIDS, from suicide, from being lost forever – you will be rewarded throughout eternity.

Just as the twelve Apostles' ministry would not have been effective without those who were willing to labor with them, neither could Bible Pathway Ministries International continue without Christians like you who desire to fulfill our Lord's Great Commission.

I encourage you to prayerfully consider how many families you want to guide each month through the one Book that can change their lives for eternity. This is a great way to be a Bible Class teacher in your church – just set your *Pathways* in a convenient place for people to pick up.

John A. Hash

Notes

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