



Corinthians

Weak

is strong

Studies in the book of 2 Corinthians

PART THREE: Weeks 14-23

Group Applications

Personal Study



four
oaks
church

Week 14

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (ESV)

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who

has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Context

- Paul does not ignore the difficulty or pain of human suffering, especially as one approaches death. He calls our bodies a “tent” and flat out describes it being destroyed. Our mortality includes disease, pain, and deterioration of mind, which bring about a real groaning (vs. 2 “we groan” = longing; vs. 4 “we groan” = being burdened). “Far from being

romantic and glamourizing death, as believers sometimes do, Paul is realistic and sober. Just as the process of wasting away is a harsh reality of our existence, so too is the end of the process, the destruction of the ‘earthly tent.’”¹

¹ Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 96.

- The choice of language in this passage is closely connected to language Jesus used in describing how he would deal with the temple. A building from God, not made with hands, and eternal, are all phrases attributed to Jesus in reference to the temple in Jerusalem. Paul also uses the same word for destroy (καταλύω) that Jesus used to describe taking down the temple stone by stone.

Mark 14:58 (ESV) — 58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’”

- Most commentaries make a small but important distinction in how Paul describes being swallowed up by life. He is burdened but does not desire to be unclothed. In other words, the desire is not simply to die. He does not wish for death but rather to be taken up with greater life. Longing for heaven and glory and perfect union with the Father is not sadistic or suicidal thoughts wrapped in religion. He is honest about the difficulties of this life and longs to be “further clothed.”
- At least two things give Paul “good courage.” First, God has prepared us for this very thing. God’s providence and sovereignty give us hope. Second, the Spirit of God seals us and assures us of

God’s real presence despite not seeing Him.

- Verse 5 gives us further indication of the sealing nature of the Spirit of God. He is our guarantee of a future planned and prepared by God. A major work of the Holy Spirit is to bring assurance of salvation in the midst of difficulty and doubt. Doubt and hardship are opportunities to receive and revel in the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- There is quite a bit of discussion over the meaning of verse 10. What is this judgment and how does it function? Clearly Paul is not turning his back on the salvation by grace through faith, since that would invalidate a majority of his teaching in Romans and Galatians. So what role does this judgement (βῆμα, or “bema”) seat play in the life of a Christian? Persuaded that this judgment is not related to salvation, we must summarize the warning to indicate “that what believers do in this life has serious implications. They are accountable to the Lord for their actions, and will be rewarded or suffer loss accordingly. It is this awareness which Paul carries forward into the next section, where he speaks of ‘knowing the fear of the Lord.’”²

² Colin G. Kruse, 2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (vol. 8; Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 117.

Personal Study

- In order to endure the groaning and burdens of this mortal life, Paul leans on assurance. Read Romans 8, being careful to mark or reflect on any passage that indicates the assurance or hope one has in Christ.

- Read 1 John 3:1-4. What connection does John make between our hope for seeing Christ and our present lives? What application does he offer?

- Paul has written about the so-called “Bema seat” judgment to Corinth in a previous letter. Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. What imagery is offered here? Will the person with poor works be lost?

Group Application

- Have you ever slept in a tent? Describe the experience. What did you like/dislike about it? Also, if you can, share a funny story shows a tent won't last forever.

- Paul compares our earthly body to a tent and our resurrection body to an eternal building or heavenly home. Talk about these comparisons. What will be similar and different between our earthly and resurrection bodies?

- We are told to be of good courage twice in this passage. What are the truths in this passage that can give us courage? Is there a particular truth that resonates with you to give you courage right now?

- What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight? What aspects of your life are guided by your senses rather than by your faith? How can you bring a faith perspective into these areas?

- Paul concludes this section by pointing to the judgment seat of Christ as a motivation to please the Lord. What is an area in your life in which you desire to better please the Lord? How can the judgment motivate you?

Short Reading

From Systematic Theology
by John Frame¹

The Already and the Not Yet

In all this talk of the return of Christ and the millennium, we have missed one of the most fundamental biblical emphases. That is that we ourselves live in the “last days.” Hebrews 1:2 says, “In these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” The “last days” in this passage is the period following Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. The term “last days” is used in similar ways in Acts 2:17; 2 Timothy 3:1; and 2 Peter 3:3. As the amils, postmils, and preterists emphasize, there is a sense in which the kingdom of God has come.² It was established by Christ’s atonement, and we have all entered it (Col. 1:13). Yet in another sense the kingdom remains future, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10 KJV). So the kingdom is here, but yet to come. The last days are here, but yet to come. The fulfillment of history has occurred already, in Christ, but is also not yet, for

there is more to come. This is the tension that theologians refer to as the already and the not yet.

So in his atonement, Jesus destroyed the power of sin, yet sin will cling to us until his return. He has destroyed Satan in principle, but this victory will not be consummated until the Lord’s return. Oscar Cullmann compares this to the distinction between D-Day and V-Day in World War II. On D-Day, allied troops entered France, in principle dooming the Third Reich. But it took many months of bitter fighting before the Nazis surrendered on V-Day, “Victory Day.” The cross was like D-Day, and Jesus’ return will be like V-Day. We live between the times, always in the tension of the already and the not yet; and during that time, there are many battles to be fought.

Postmils, amils, and preterists emphasize the already, premils the not yet. A balanced eschatology will recognize the importance of both.³

Eschatology and the Christian Life

This discussion suggests that biblical eschatology has important practical consequences. I confess my disappointment that so much teaching about the last days

¹ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 1094–1096.

² Premils sometimes admit that the kingdom has come “in one sense.”

³ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 1093–1094.

is focused on the order of events. I suppose I'm more of a postmil than anything else, but I honestly don't believe that the Bible is perfectly clear on the order of events. In my view, when Scripture tells us about the return of Christ, it doesn't give us this information so that we can put it on a chart and watch the events as they pass by. That would be catering to our intellectual pride, among other things. Why, then, does Scripture have so much to say about the last days? So that we can reorder our lives in the light of Jesus' coming.

So far as I can see, every Bible passage about the return of Christ is written for a practical purpose—not to help us to develop a theory of history, but to motivate our obedience. These doctrines motivate our obedience in several ways.

First, the coming of Christ should *reorder our priorities*. In 2 Peter 3:11–12, the apostle says:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

Cf. 1 Cor. 7:26. Since God is going to destroy the present earth and replace it with a new heavens and a new earth, what sort of people should we be? The implicit answer: not people who care a lot about material things, or the pleasures of this life, but people who are passionate about the kingdom of God, which will remain for all eternity. That's not to say that there is something evil about material things, only that we should be using them for God's purposes, not just our own.

Second, if we are eager for Christ to return, we should be purifying ourselves (2 Peter 3:11–12). Every Christian not only should believe in the return of Christ, but should be eager for it to come. At the end of the book of Revelation, the church prays, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20 KJV). But if we are really so eager for Jesus to return, so eager for the new heavens and new earth, we should be seeking to be as pure as we will one day be in God's presence. First John 3:2–3 says:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Another ethical implication of the return of Christ is its encouragement. It shows us that

our labors for him today are not in vain. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” That’s a great comfort in the midst of difficulty. The things of this world are going to be burned up, but our labor for the Lord will bear fruit for eternity.

Fourth, our very ignorance of the time of Jesus’ return has ethical implications. For that ignorance implies that we must be ready at any time for his return (Matt. 24:44; 1 Thess. 5:1–10; 1 Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 3:14). When he comes, we want him to find us busy in our callings, in the work of the Great Commission.

Finally, when Jesus comes, we will receive a reward, and we should look forward to that reward in our labors here. That

reward should motivate us to good works here and now. In chapter 50, I mentioned that biblical emphasis on rewards, and many Scripture texts emphasize this: Matt. 5:12, 46; 6:1–4; 10:41–42; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:8–15; 9:17–18, 25; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:7–8; Col. 3:23–25; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 John 8; Rev. 11:18. Again, God doesn’t expect us to do our duty merely for duty’s sake, but to do our duty with full understanding that our Father will reward his children, not only in this life (Mark 10:29–30), but in eternity as well.

From the biblical emphasis, I conclude that the main reason that God speaks so much in Scripture about the return of Jesus is that this doctrine purifies the hearts of his people. May he use it to purify you and me, as we continue on our journey to glory.

Notes

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Week 15

2 Corinthians 5:11–17 (ESV)

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls

us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Context

- For a good working overview of the “fear of the Lord,” we can turn to a Bible dictionary.

The Fear of the Lord is in the Old Testament used as a designation of true piety (Prov. 1:7; Job 28:28; Ps. 19:9). It is a fear conjoined with love and hope, and is therefore not a slavish dread, but rather filial reverence. (Comp. Deut. 32:6; Hos. 11:1; Isa. 1:2; 63:16; 64:8.) God is called “the Fear of Isaac” (Gen.

31:42, 53), i.e., the God whom Isaac feared.

A holy fear is enjoined also in the New Testament as a preventive of carelessness in religion, and as an incentive to penitence (Matt. 10:28; 2 Cor. 5:11; 7:1; Phil. 2:12; Eph. 5:21; Heb. 12:28, 29).¹

- “Therefore.” Therefore, we persuade others. Paul is recalling the fact that our

¹ M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

works in this life will be judged one day. Therefore he wants to make the best use of his time. He wants to give his life to those works that will have the greatest eternal impact, not only because he wants his life to matter but because he desires for others to have a fruitful life as well.

- This passage acknowledges the thin line between success with worldly motives and success with spiritual motives. Paul does not want to preach himself. He does not want to boast. He has a clear conscience on this and yet, he does not just give up public ministry. He persuades others and desires to win more and more people to Christ. Our desire for success and acceptance will always carry with it the potential for pride and personal aggrandizement, but we shouldn't let that shut down our ambition. We persuade for Jesus' sake.
- The reference to outward appearance and being "out of our minds" is likely a shot at overly ecstatic ministry that would have included big shows of spiritual gifts. We must remember that this was the same church where order was prescribed for chaos (in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14).

- Commenting on the "love of Christ," Barnett has helpful thoughts on how to reconcile the fear of the Lord.

How is it possible to be motivated by the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ? Are not fear and love irreconcilable? It all depends on a proper understanding of fear and love, which, it should be noted, are not opposites. The opposite of love is hate. In the Bible "fear" is not cringing terror but holy reverence, and "love" is not romantic feelings but sacrificial care. The two words are consistent and reconcilable. Indeed, the fear of the Lord and awareness of the love of Christ fit perfectly together to provide the true motivation for Christian ministry.²

- The description of a Christian is that of a new being. A new creation. In many places the Bible references the old man being put to death. It is a complete turning from sin and death to newness, a new awareness of spiritual things, a new hope, a new love of the things God loves.

² Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 108.

Personal Study

- Read Proverbs 1:1-7. How would you describe the fear of the Lord?

- Read Romans 6:1-5. What does baptism symbolize? How does this correspond to 2 Corinthians 5:17?

- The importance of being “in Christ” cannot be understated. None of the benefits of the Christian life are offered to any but those who are in Christ. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. How many promises (count them!) are tied to being found in Him?

Group Application

- Paul says in verse 14 that the love of Christ controls or motivates us. Share a time that the love of Christ motivated you to do something you wouldn't normally do.

- The gospel calls us to die to self and live for God (verses 14-15). Why should we heed this call?

- What is one way God is calling you to die to self and live for Him right now? (see Colossians 3:5-17 for ideas)

- Paul reminds us that those who are in Christ are new creations and that the old has passed away. How can this truth encourage you this week?

- How do you plan to apply the passage and sermon to your life this week? How can your group help you and pray for you?
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Short Reading

**From The Doctrine of the Christian Life
by John Frame¹**

The Fear of the Lord

I have so far been restricting my consideration of biblical virtues mainly to the New Testament. Lists of virtues are rare or nonexistent in the Old. The Old Testament teaches godly living mainly through laws, applying them by narratives, psalmody, wisdom teaching, and the admonitions of the prophets. It does not focus much on virtues as subjective elements of godly character.

Yet there is one virtue that the Old Testament mentions very prominently, and which the New Testament also emphasizes: the fear of the Lord. In a profoundly enlightening discussion of the subject, John Murray says, “The fear of God is the soul

of godliness. The emphasis of Scripture in both the Old Testament and the New requires no less significant a proposition.”²

He mentions that in Scripture the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7) and of wisdom (Ps. 111:10). Job’s exemplary piety is founded on the fear of God (Job 1:8). In Isaiah 11:2–3, the Messiah’s unique endowment of the Spirit brings a delight in the fear of the Lord. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes, after describing alternative value systems, gives us his final word: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13). In the New Testament as well, the fear of God sums up the godly life (Luke 1:50; Acts 9:31; 2 Cor. 7:1; Col. 3:22; 1 Peter 2:17). Murray observes:

This emphasis which Scripture places upon the fear of God evinces the bond that exists between religion and ethics. The fear of

¹ Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub. , 2008. Print.

² John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 229. Much of this section summarizes Murray’s discussion.

God is essentially a religious concept; it refers to the conception we entertain of God and the attitude of heart and mind that is ours by reason of that conception. Since the biblical ethic is grounded in and is the fruit of the fear of the Lord, we are apprised again that ethics has its source in religion and as our religion is so will be our ethic. This is to say also that what or whom we worship determines our behavior.³

Murray then distinguishes between two senses of “the fear of God.” The first is being afraid of God, which brings “terror and dread.”⁴ The second is “the fear of reverence” which “elicits confidence and love.”⁵ The first is appropriate when sinners stand in the presence of God, anticipating judgment. Murray says, “It is the essence of impiety not to be afraid of God when there is reason to be afraid.”⁶ He finds examples of this legitimate terror in Deuteronomy 17:13; 21:21; Psalm 119:120. This theme is not absent either from the New Testament (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4–5; Rom. 11:20–21; Heb. 4:1; 10:27, 31; Rev. 15:3–4). Considering how terrible the judgments of God are, it would be wrong for us not to dread them.

But this fear of judgment cannot of itself lead us to love God. It is not, Murray

argues, the fear of God that is the soul of godliness. Rather, “the fear of God in which godliness consists is the fear which constrains adoration and love. It is the fear which consists in awe, reverence, honour, and worship, and all of these on the highest level of exercise.”⁷ Reverential fear of God is the sense of living in God’s constant presence. In considering the life of Abraham, Murray argues that it was because Abraham feared God that he obeyed God’s commands, even the command to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:11–12). He continues:

The same relationship can be traced in the other virtues that adorned Abraham’s character. Why could he have been so magnanimous to Lot? It was because he feared the Lord and trusted his promise and his providence. He had no need to be mean. He feared and trusted the Lord. Why could he have been magnanimous to the king of Sodom? It was because he feared the Lord, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and might not allow the enrichment offered to prejudice the independence of his faith; he needed not to be graspingly acquisitive.... That is all-pervasive God-consciousness, and it is God-consciousness conditioned by covenant-consciousness. This is the fear of God, or its indispensable corollary.⁸

3 Ibid. , 231. Note that Murray does not advocate an ethic of natural law, as that phrase is sometimes understood (see chapter 14).

4 Ibid. , 232.

5 Ibid. , 233.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid. , 236.

8 Ibid. , 139–40. Murray follows this discussion with an interesting reflection on God as “the fear

Murray concludes by presenting the fear of God as an antidote to the superficial Christianity of our time. The phrase “God-fearing” seems to have disappeared from the vocabulary of Christian virtues, reflecting a lack of understanding of God’s majesty, glory, and holiness: “The fear of God in us is that frame of heart and mind which reflects our apprehension of who and what God is, and who and what God is will tolerate nothing less than totality commitment to him.”⁹

I have expounded Murray at length, because I think he provides a necessary and neglected perspective on the Christian life. What he says here, of course, must be balanced by other emphases that we have already considered, the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Although there is no contradiction between fearing God and loving him, we often find it hard to achieve an emotional state that incorporates both and neglects neither. Another reason for the difficulty that Murray does not discuss is the problem of relating the fear of God to the New Testament concept of the friendship of God (John 15:13–15), based on the redemptive work of Christ. Because Jesus has torn the temple veil by his sacrifice of himself, believers have bold access into the holiest place, such as was not known in the Old Testament (Heb. 10:19). How is this new

intimacy, conferred by grace, compatible with the fear of the Lord?

It erases the need for fear in the sense of terror and dread (1 John 4:18), but not the need for reverence as we stand in God’s presence. At the present time, however, it is not always easy in our experience to separate the two kinds of fear. Until the consummation, I suspect, there will always be some element of terror in our reverence for God. Thus, there will always be some tension between the fear of the Lord and our experience of sonship.

But as for the relation between reverence and intimacy, we need to remind ourselves that our new friend Jesus, our heavenly Father, and the Spirit who dwells intimately within us are God indeed, the majestic, sovereign ruler of heaven and earth. The praise of God in the Psalms and in the book of Revelation expresses both intimacy and reverence. For many of us, there is tension here. But we do sometimes feel these two qualities fuse together in times of worship, sometimes in surprising ways. Christians are often overwhelmed with the consciousness that our Father God is the Holy One who works all things according to his eternal plan. May that unity of fear and love extend to all aspects of our lives.

of Isaac” (Gen. 31:42, 53).

⁹ Ibid., 242.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 16

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (ESV)

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and

entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Context

- Both salvation and evangelism are from God. He first ministers to us in Christ and then sends us to minister in a like manner, not by saving people ourselves but by pointing them to Jesus. Scripture is unabashedly Theo-centric. God is the source, the sustainer and main actor in all that occurs. More than that He is assumed throughout as existing with supreme power, presence and good will.
- In addition to the assumption of God's existing, scripture outlines the relationship of mankind in reference to God's law as broken. In not only legal terms but relational terms, the connection is severed. We

were reconciled in Christ, which is only possible if you accept that the relationship was gone before. We were living in enmity against God.

- While the dominant emphasis of 2 Corinthians 5 is the personal, reconciling salvation of souls, verse 19 has an interesting use of the "world" in reference to Christ's work. This has been defined as "the sum total of everything here and now, *the world, the (orderly) universe*,"¹ and reminds us that all of creation groans under the weight of sin. All things will be new. Not only are we new creations in Christ but we are just

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 561.

the first fruits of an entirely new work God is doing in Jesus Christ.

- We can learn from Paul's example in evangelism. He is convinced this is "all from God" and that it is God making the

appeal through us, and yet he implores the hearer. There is no ban on begging people to repent of their sin and be saved. Our understanding of grace or election does not preclude heartfelt appeal and invitation.

Personal Study

- Read Psalm 32:7-12. What does this describe as an activity of God? Now continue by reading Psalm 32:13-15. What ministry does David receive because of his salvation?

- Read Ephesians 2:13-16. What has Jesus "broken down?" How?

- Look at the promise of Jesus' work in Revelation 21:1-8. What does this stir in you? Make a list of things you are longing to see made new. It could be personal, emotional, financial, etc.

Group Application

- Share about a time you saw or experienced reconciliation. What was it like? How did you feel?

- How have we humans been reconciled to God? What did God do so that reconciliation could take place?

- Paul says that we are both ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ. What role(s) are we called to play in God reconciling the world to himself?

- Paul implores the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. Who do you and I need to implore? As a group, discuss how you can minister to these individuals (maybe think of a creative way to reach out to them). Then, spend some time praying for these individuals and that God would reconcile them to Himself.

Short Reading

From Lectures To My Students by Charles Spurgeon¹

Sometimes, too, we must change our tone. Instead of instructing, reasoning, and persuading, we must come to threatening, and declare the wrath of God upon impenitent souls. We must lift the curtain and let them see the future. Show them their danger, and warn them to escape from the wrath to come. This done, we must return to invitation, and set before the awakened mind the rich provisions of infinite grace which are freely presented to the sons of men. In our Master's name we must give the invitation, crying, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Do not be deterred from this, my brethren, by those ultra-Calvinistic theologians who say, "You may instruct and warn the ungodly, but you must not invite or entreat them." And why not? "Because they are dead sinners, and it is therefore absurd to invite them, since they cannot come."

Wherefore then may we warn or instruct them? The argument is so strong, if it be strong at all, that it sweeps away all modes of appeal to sinners, and they

alone are logical who, after they have preached to the saints, sit down and say, "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." On what ground are we to address the ungodly at all? If we are only to bid them do such things as they are capable of doing without the Spirit of God, we are reduced to mere moralists. If it be absurd to bid the dead sinner believe and live, it is equally vain to bid him consider his state, and reflect upon his future doom. Indeed, it would be idle altogether were it not that true preaching is an act of faith, and is owned by the Holy Spirit as the means of working spiritual miracles. If we were by ourselves, and did not expect divine interpositions, we should be wise to keep within the bounds of reason, and persuade men to do only what we see in them the ability to do. We should then bid the living live, urge the seeing to see, and persuade the willing to will. The task would be so easy that it might even seem to be superfluous; certainly no special call of the Holy Ghost would be needed for so very simple an undertaking. But, brethren, where is the mighty power and the victory of faith if our ministry is this and nothing more?

Great hearts are the main qualifications for great preachers, and we must cultivate our affections to that end. At the same time our manner must not degenerate into the soft and saccharine cant which some men affect who are for ever dearing everybody,

¹ Spurgeon, Charles H. (2012-07-04). *Lectures To My Students* (pp. 345-346). Fig. Kindle Edition.

and fawning upon people as if they hoped to soft-sawder them into godliness. Manly persons are disgusted, and suspect hypocrisy when they hear a preacher talking molasses. Let us be bold and outspoken, and never address our hearers as if we were asking a favor of them, or as if they would oblige the Redeemer by allowing him to save them. We are bound to be lowly, but our office as ambassadors should prevent our being servile.

Happy shall we be if we preach believingly, always expecting the Lord to bless his own word. This will give us a quiet confidence which will forbid petulance, rashness, and weariness. If we ourselves doubt the power of the gospel, how can we preach it with authority? Feel that you are a favored man in being allowed to proclaim the good news, and rejoice that your mission is fraught with eternal benefit to those before you. Let the people see how glad and confident the gospel has made you, and it will go far to make them long to partake in its blessed influences.

Preach very solemnly, for it is a weighty business, but let your matter be lively and pleasing, for this will prevent solemnity from souring into dreariness. Be so thoroughly solemn that all your faculties are aroused and consecrated, and then a dash of humor will only add intenser gravity to the discourse, even as a flash of lightning makes midnight darkness all

the more impressive. Preach to one point, concentrating all your energies upon the object aimed at. There must be no riding of hobbies, no introduction of elegancies of speech, no suspicion of personal display, or you will fail. Sinners are quick-witted people, and soon detect even the smallest effort to glorify self. Forego everything for the sake of those you long to save. Be a fool for Christ's sake if this will win them, or be a scholar, if that will be more likely to impress them. Spare neither labor in the study, prayer in the closet, nor zeal in the pulpit. If men do not judge their souls to be worth a thought, compel them to see that their minister is of a vexed, different opinion.

Mean conversions, expect them, and prepare for them. Resolve that your hearers shall either yield to your Lord or be without excuse, and that this shall be the immediate result of the sermon now in hand. Do not let the Christians around you wonder when souls are saved, but urge them to believe in the undiminished power of the glad tidings, and teach them to marvel if no saving result follows the delivery of the testimony of Jesus. Do not permit sinners to hear sermons as a matter of course, or allow them to play with the edged tools of Scripture as if they were mere toys; but again and again remind them that every true gospel sermon leaves them worse if it does not make them better. Their unbelief is a daily, hourly sin; never

let them infer from your teaching that they are to be pitied for continuing to make God a liar by rejecting his Son.

Impressed with a sense of their danger, give the ungodly no rest in their sins; knock again and again at the door of their hearts, and knock as for life and death. Your solicitude, your earnestness, your anxiety, your travailing in birth for them God will bless to their arousing. God works mightily by this instrumentality. But our agony for souls must be real and not reigned, and therefore our hearts must be wrought, into true sympathy with God.

Low piety means little spiritual power. Extremely pointed addresses may be delivered by men whose hearts are out of

order with the Lord, but their result must be small. There is something in the very tone of the man who has been with Jesus which has more power to touch the heart than the most perfect oratory: remember this and maintain an unbroken walk with God. You will need much night-work in secret if you are to gather many of your Lord's lost sheep. Only by prayer and fasting can you gain power to cast out the worst of devils. Let men say what they will about sovereignty, God connects special success with special states of heart, and if these are lacking he will not do many mighty works. In addition to earnest preaching it will be wise to use other means. If you wish to see results from your sermons you must be accessible to inquirers.

Notes

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

Week 17

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

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

Context

- We need to get the pronouns straight in this text!
 - » Our – all who trust in Jesus (i.e., the Christians reading this letter)
 - » He – God the Father
 - » Him (2x) – Jesus Christ
 - » We – Christians
- The phrasing “to be sin” has been debated greatly. It cannot mean that Christ became a sinner in actuality because He was a spotless sacrifice (affirmed in the very next phrase). Others believe that it refers to a sin offering with the idea of sacrifice, or offering implied but not written out explicitly. Of course, this is true to a large extent. Jesus was an offering for sin. In this case however, Paul seems to be equating sin with the penalty of sin itself. Sin carries with it the wrath of

God. It is death itself. In a play on words, the sinless one bears the wrath of sin directly in His being.

- The fact that Jesus was sinless is consistently affirmed in the New Testament.

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV) — *15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

- Union with Christ is one of the most significant theological concepts in scripture. What it means to be “in Him” is the difference between life and death. It means you must see yourself as being punished in Christ’s death. You died when He died. It means you must see your resurrection in His resurrection; he was raised so that you too might walk in newness of life. It means that you

no longer live for yourself, but to live is Christ.

- The great exchange of the gospel is not only that our sins are forgiven. Jesus did not die to give us tabula rasa (blank slate). He took our sin and gave us His

record of perfect holiness. This is referred to as imputed righteousness, and is the only basis of your reconciliation with God. We ought to be thankful that we don't just get a second chance; we get His first chance lived perfectly.

Personal Study

- Read Galatians 3:13. What exactly did Christ bear for us on the cross?

- Read Isaiah 53 slowly and intentionally. How does it describe the work of Jesus?

- Read 1 Peter 2:21-25. In verse 24, what wording is used to describe what happened in our relationship with sin and our posture toward righteousness?

Group Application

- Share a funny or meaningful story about a substitute—someone who took the place of another.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 is one of the clearest statements in the Bible of the doctrine of “substitutionary atonement.” This doctrine means that Jesus bore the penalty for our sins and took our place, so we don’t have to die for our own sins. In what sense did Jesus “become sin” on our behalf? In what sense do we “become righteousness”?

- Martin Luther calls this doctrine “The Great Exchange”; we give Jesus our sin and He dies for it, Jesus gives us His righteousness and we live eternally. How should this doctrine impact our lives?

- Who is someone you need to share this truth of the gospel with? Spend some time as a group praying for these individuals.

Short Reading

From Systematic Theology
by John Frame¹

Union with Christ

That last comment suggests a significant transition to this next topic. For we are inclined to ask: if we are one with Christ in his humiliation and exaltation, how far does this unity extend? Indeed, union with Christ is in Scripture the most general way of characterizing Jesus' work of salvation. Jesus saves us by uniting us to himself.

The intimacy of this language justifies the use of this topic as an “existential perspective” on the work of Christ. For in this aspect of his work he is, in a distinct sense, “God with us,” Immanuel. As in chapters 2–4, we find here the fulfillment of the covenant: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Jer. 7:23).

So union with Christ is an exceedingly broad topic. We will see that it underlies all the works of God in our lives: election, calling, regeneration, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. All of these blessings are “in Christ.” To study union with Christ is to

explore all of these particular blessings, and therefore the vast range of meaning in that little word in.

Scripture traces union of the believer with Christ into eternity past:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (Eph. 1:3–4a)

This is the relationship that we discussed in chapter 4 as the eternal covenant of redemption, or *pactum salutis*. In this covenant, before anything was made, the Father gave to the Son a people who would be “holy and blameless before him.” The holiness and blamelessness of this people, however, is problematic from the start. Rather, even before creation the Father and the Son knew that these people would fall into sin, and their redemption would require nothing less than the death of the Son of God. So the fact that these people are holy and blameless is a huge tribute to the grace of God (Eph. 1:6). But the success of this divine effort is never questionable. Even before redemption, even before creation, these people are chosen in Christ. The outcome of redemption is known in advance.

¹ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 913–917.

In a sense, then, Jesus' people are in Christ before they are actually redeemed. They are in Christ before they are humbled with him in his humiliation and exalted with him in his exaltation. This is to say that union with Christ, being "in" Christ, is the most general thing that can be said about us as his people. These phrases cover all the blessings of salvation from eternity past to eternity future. We are in Christ before we are baptized, before we are regenerate, in fact while we are still "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

Yet in a narrower sense, we are not in Christ unless we are justified before God, for otherwise we would still be under God's condemnation, and Paul says in Romans 8:1 that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What of those who are elect, but not yet justified by faith? They are "in Christ" by the covenant of redemption, but yet outside of Christ so far as justification is concerned.²

So the phrases "union with Christ" and being "in Christ" have a wide range of meaning. A person can be in Christ in one sense, outside of him in another. Union with Christ is not a single condition,

² In chapters 12 and 13, I indicated that it is possible for God to love and hate the same person in different respects. So God is genuinely wrathful toward those who are dead in trespasses and sins. But some of these are also elect in Christ, and God loves them for his sake.

constant through history. It is rather a series of conditions, anchored by union with Christ in the sense of eternal election. Below I will consider the more prominent biblical senses of union with Christ.

Election

Above, I said that Ephesians 1:4 states the origin of our union with Christ. God chose us "in him" before the foundation of the world. The passage begins with the Father's intention to bless us in Christ "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (v. 3). The Father's first step toward bestowing these blessings is to choose us "in him." The goal of this union is "that we should be holy and blameless before him." But that goal is eons away. In Ephesians 1:4, the setting is God's own eternity, and the people have yet to be created. Before the foundation of the world, the people exist only as God's ideas. But even as God's ideas, they are objects of his love. They are not, of course, mere ideas. God has already planned to create them and to give them lives within history. And even though they will spend part of their life spans in rebellion against God, spiritual death, they are surrounded by God's love. They are predestined to be holy and blameless because they are "in Christ," and so God will certainly love them forever. Cf. 2 Tim. 1:9:

[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

Why are we chosen “in Christ,” rather than merely “chosen”? In Ephesians 1:3–4, Christ is the One who secures our holiness and blamelessness. He guarantees that far in advance of our historical existence. So even in the ideal existence of God’s eternity, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Adoption

The Ephesians passage continues:

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:4b–6)

Election in Christ leads not only to our holiness and blamelessness, but even to our adoption as God’s sons and daughters. To be a son of God is not only to be like him, to image him, but also to have a position of privilege, entitling us to an inheritance:

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to

the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:11–14)

Redemption

In Ephesians 1, verses 3–6 and 11–14 describe God’s dealings with us in eternity. But verses 7–10, though also alluding to God’s eternal plan, focus on Christ’s redemption in history:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

God’s eternal plan to unite all things in Christ (v. 10) is revealed to us in history (v. 9) when God forgave our sins on the basis of Jesus’ shed blood (vv. 7–8). So God’s eternal intentions for us come through historical events, through the crucifixion of

Christ. On the basis of his blood atonement, we receive forgiveness of sins. Not only is redemption on the basis of his work, but it is “in him.” That is, God’s forgiveness of our sins arises out of that relationship that began in eternity past and continues into human history. And it is through that redemptive forgiveness that we gain an understanding of the eternal mystery (vv. 8–10).

Paul teaches in Romans not only the general fact that we are redeemed in Christ, but that when Christ died we died in him, and when he rose from the dead we rose with him:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3–4)

Similarly, Peter says that our regeneration to new life comes from Jesus’ resurrection (1 Peter 1:3–4). Jesus’ death for sin is our death to sin, and his resurrection from the dead is our resurrection to newness of life:

[God,] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us

with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:5–6)

Paul says that just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness, so our faith

will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:24–25)

So our justification, God’s verdict that our sins will not be counted against us, is “in Christ,” through his death and resurrection.

Similarly our sanctification, by which God makes us holy:

To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Col. 1:27–28)

Christ in us, ourselves spiritually mature in Christ.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith,

just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col. 2:6–7)

To be godly is to walk in Christ, rooted and built up in him, indeed created in Christ Jesus for good works:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)

So the Christian life is a life in Christ: he in us and we in him. As Jesus looks toward the cross with his disciples in the gospel of John, he promises that after he is raised, he will come to them and impart to them a rich fellowship with himself, analogous to the relationship that he enjoys with the Father: “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20). So in the familiar passage Jesus says:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. (John 15:1–9)

Notes

[illegible]

Week 18

2 Corinthians 6:1-13 (ESV)

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 3 We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; 7 by truthful speech,

and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. 11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 13 In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

Context

- The word behind “working together with him” is the concept of synergy (συνεργέω). It means we have the privilege of being brought alongside God in His work. He does not need us, but he has made us His ambassadors nonetheless.

- » The apostle Paul, and all Christians, represent Christ and “work with” God. This speaks both of our very considerable privilege in acting as colleagues of God and also of the resources of divine power by which he enables us to make his appeal to others. We are not helpless and alone as Christ’s representatives. God has made us partners, co-workers with

himself in his great rescue mission to reconcile the world to himself.¹

- Ministry ought to have a kind of holy urgency which accompanies the work. We don't panic or press or manipulate, but we need to avoid portraying a lethargic approach to eternal matters. Now. Now. Now is the time to receive the grace of God in salvation.
- The job of the minister is to get out of the way. We put no obstacles in anyone's way. This includes a willingness to sacrifice self and risk personal comfort (through afflictions, hardships, calamities) and have integrity of character (purity, knowledge, kindness). The truth is a stumbling block enough for those who are lost, so we work diligently to avoid adding cumbersome or troublesome hindrances to the gospel.
- Paul revels in the kind of contrast and upside-down nature of gospel ministry. Jesus embodied this spirit often with comments on dying to live and the first being last, etc. Here we see that the treatment you may receive in the world is precisely the opposite of how God sees you: Imposters, but honest; unknown, yet well known. The burden of ministry

is often to take the unassuming place and to serve joyfully in obscurity.

- The text makes an appeal to the church to reciprocate the affection Paul has for them. He is reiterating that any trouble they have is with the truth and not with the apostle. His desire to reestablish and sustain loving relationship with them is admirable.
- Paul nails it on the head — the gospel is not about us as believers but Jesus as Lord. Many people claim to preach Jesus but really preach themselves with Christian lingo. Paul had no such mentality. He saw himself as a servant to all and a pointer to Christ. He took to heart John the Baptist's words "He must increase, but I must decrease."
- The word 'proclaim' denotes a public heralding of the gospel. Paul did not keep the message of Christ to himself but put it out boldly and clearly. In fact, it was Paul's boldness and clarity that caused him so much grief. If Jesus is the most glorious being in the universe then Paul's responsibility is not to be his PR man but to simply make him known. Jesus Christ's glory is so radiant that for someone to miss it they would have to be blind.

I Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 122.

Personal Study

- Read Colossians 1:24-29. What lessons for ministry do we learn from this passage of scripture? What is our aim?

- Read Colossians 1:24-29. What lessons for ministry do we learn from this passage of scripture? What is our aim?

- How does Hebrews 3:12-15 mirror the urgency of 2 Corinthians 6? Why is it such a temptation to put these things off?

Group Application

- Share a story about persecution—either in your own life or someone you know. What were the circumstances? How did you feel?

- Why do you think Paul shares so much about his various struggles with the Corinthians? How can this help or encourage us when we go through difficulty in ministering to others?

- Paul opens his heart wide to the Corinthians, yet they restricted their affections for him. Have you ever experienced this? Is there someone currently to whom you are either restricting your feelings toward or vice versa? Explain.

- Spend some time praying for people to whom you desire to be close. Pray that God would give you the courage to open your hearts wide to them and that they would do the same.

Short Reading

From Concise Theology: a Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs by J. I. Packer¹

MISSION

CHRIST SENDS THE CHURCH INTO THE WORLD

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."
JOHN 20:21

Mission is from the Latin *missio*, which means "sending." The words Jesus spoke to his first disciples in their representative capacity, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21; cf. 17:18), still apply. The universal church, and therefore every local congregation and every Christian in it, is sent into the world to fulfill a definite, defined task. Jesus, the church's Lord, has issued marching orders. Individually and corporately, all God's people are now in the world on the king's business.

The appointed task is twofold. First and fundamentally, it is the work of worldwide witness, disciple-making, and

church-planting (Matt. 24:14; 28:19–20; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47–48). Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed everywhere as God incarnate, Lord, and Savior; and God's authoritative invitation to find life through turning to Christ in repentance and faith (Matt. 22:1–10; Luke 14:16–24) is to be delivered to all mankind. The ministry of church-planter Paul, evangelist (so far as strength and circumstances allowed) to the whole world (Rom. 1:14; 15:17–29; 1 Cor. 9:19–23; Col. 1:28–29), models this primary commitment.

Second, all Christians, and therefore every congregation of the church on earth, are called to practice deeds of mercy and compassion, a thoroughgoing neighbor-love that responds unstintingly to all forms of human need as they present themselves (Luke 10:25–27; Rom. 12:20–21). Compassion was the inward aspect of the neighbor-love that led Jesus to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and teach the ignorant (Matt. 9:36; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13), and those who are new creatures in Christ must be similarly compassionate. Thereby they keep the second great commandment and also give credibility to their proclamation of a Savior who makes sinners into lovers of God and of their fellow human beings. If the exponents of this message do not display its power in their own lives, credibility is destroyed. If they do, credibility is

¹ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: a Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993).

enhanced. This was Jesus' point when he envisaged the sight of the good works of his witnesses leading people to glorify the Father (Matt. 5:16; cf. 1 Pet. 2:11–12). Good works should be visible to back up good words.

Though Jesus anticipated the Gentile mission (Matt. 24:14; John 10:16; 12:32), he saw his earthly ministry as directed to “the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, always went to Jews first wherever he evangelized (Acts 13:5, 14, 42–48; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1–4, 10; 18:4–7, 19; 19:8–10; 28:17–28; Rom. 1:16; 2:9–10). The right of the Jews to hear the gospel first is a matter of divine appointment (Acts 3:26; 13:26, 46), and evangelistic outreach to Jews should continue to be a priority as the church seeks to fulfill its mission. Christian Jews are free from the ceremonial law but are also free to follow Jewish customs that express their ethnic culture. The long-standing expectation that Jewish Christians will leave behind their Jewish identity rather than rejoice in being “fulfilled” Jews is a cultural prejudice with no biblical basis

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

THE HOLY SPIRIT EQUIPS THE CHURCH

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.... He ... gave

some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

EPHESIANS 4:7, 11–12

The New Testament depicts local churches in which some Christians hold formal and official ministerial offices (elder-overseers and deacons, Phil. 1:1), while all fulfill informal serving roles. Every-member ministry in the body of Christ is the New Testament ideal. It is clear that officers who oversee should not restrict the informal ministries but rather should facilitate them (Eph. 4:11–13), just as it is clear that those who minister informally should not be defiant or disruptive but should allow the overseers to direct their ministries in ways that are orderly and edifying (i.e., strengthening and upbuilding, 1 Cor. 14:3–5, 12, 26, 40; Heb. 13:17). The body of Christ grows to maturity in faith and love “as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:16) and fulfills its grace-given form of service (Eph. 4:7, 12).

The word gift (literally “donation”) appears in connection with spiritual service only in Ephesians 4:7–8. Paul explains the phrase he ... gave gifts to men as referring to the ascended Christ giving his church persons called to and equipped for the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and

pastor-teacher. Also, through the enabling ministry of these functionaries, Christ is bestowing a ministry role of one sort or another on every Christian. Elsewhere (Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12–14) Paul calls these divinely given powers to serve *charismata* (gifts which are specific manifestations of *charis* or grace, God's active and creative love, 1 Cor. 12:4), and also *pneumatika* (spiritual gifts as specific demonstrations of the energy of the Holy Spirit, God's *pneuma*, 1 Cor. 12:1).

Amid many obscurities and debated questions regarding New Testament *charismata*, three certainties stand out. First, a spiritual gift is an ability in some way to express, celebrate, display, and so communicate Christ. We are told that gifts, rightly used, build up Christians and churches. But only knowledge of God in Christ builds up, so each *charisma* must be an ability from Christ to show and share Christ in an upbuilding way.

Second, gifts are of two types. There are gifts of speech and of loving, practical helpfulness. In Romans 12:6–8, Paul's list of gifts alternates between the categories: items one, three, and four (prophecy, teaching, and exhorting) are gifts of speech; items two, five, six, and seven (serving, giving, leading, and showing mercy) are gifts of helpfulness. The alternation implies that no thought of superiority of one gift over another may enter in. However much gifts differ as forms of human activity, all are of equal dignity, and the only question is whether one properly uses the gift one has (1 Pet. 4:10–11).

Third, no Christian is giftless (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7), and it is everyone's responsibility to find, develop, and fully use whatever capacities for service God has given.

[illegible]

Week 19

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 (ESV)

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,

and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” 1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Context

- 6:14 – To be unequally yoked literally means to be “hitched up” or crossbred with an animal of a different species. Paul is making the point that believers should not partner with the people who are causing trouble in Corinth. He even goes so far as to call the faction that opposes him unbelievers. Paul understands the people they partner with influence their conduct and direction of life, and he desires that Christians be wise about their associations. (ESV Study Bible)
- 6:15 – Belial is from a Hebrew term meaning “worthlessness” and is another name for Satan. In Paul’s sequence of thought he shows two opposing forces that cannot mix: righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, and Christ and Belial. Satan is the adversary of Christ’s work and, therefore, Christians are not to side with those who serve Satan.
- 6:16 – Paul quotes a series of Old Testament scriptures to connect the church as the fulfillment of Israel. In the Old Covenant, God promised Israel

that he would dwell among them in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple that Solomon built. In the New Covenant, God promises the church that he dwells with them through the Spirit, and that the gathered church is a “holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21-22).

- 6:17 – In the same way, Paul uses Old Covenant language of uncleanness to remind New Covenant believers that they are still called to be a holy people. Although New Covenant believers no longer have to abstain from certain foods or perform ritual washings (Col 2:16-17), they are still expected to be

“clean” in their associations and not to ally themselves with people who would draw them into evil deeds.

- 6:18-7:1 – God does not just welcome us to be his people, but to be his family. It is our family bond with God as sons and daughters that motivates our pursuit for holiness. Our sanctification, which is the process in which God changes us bit by bit to be more like Jesus, is ongoing and requires both 1) a knowledge of God as our Father and his promises, and 2) willing action by the power of the Spirit to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit.”

Personal Study

- Read 1 Peter 2:4-9 and list out all of the ways Peter connects the church to Israel. Why do you think he does this?

- Read Ephesians 5:7-21. What actions does Paul list in relation to walking as children of light?

- Read 1 John 1:9. How does this apply to Paul’s command to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement?”

- How does God’s command not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers fit with his call to preach the gospel to the nations?

- What are areas in your life that you need to separate yourself from worldly influences?

Group Application

- How would you respond to someone who says that as long as you believe in Jesus, it does not matter how you live?

- Paul tells the Corinthians (and us) to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. What are the reasons Paul gives us – both in his letter and by quoting Old Testament scriptures – that we should live holy lives?

- What kind of separation is Paul calling us to? How can we strike a balance between separating ourselves from sinful practices that mess up our spiritual lives while at the same time maintaining friendships with unbelieving neighbors and co-workers?
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- What is a particular area that God is calling you to live in holiness as the temple of the living God? How can your group pray for and help you do this?
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Short Reading

**A compilation of sections pulled from
Mingling of Souls by Matt Chandler¹**

Commitment

One of the things I noticed when I was in college ministry was the large group of students who wouldn't commit to anything—a college major, a gym, a church, a place to live, a group of friends. The only thing they seemed committed to was being noncommittal. Every semester

the talk would turn to another school they might transfer to, a new major they were going to try out, or a new part-time job they were interested in (because, you know, their current one was lame). This group was always holding out for something better and didn't want to miss out on anything that might be happening somewhere else. They were unstable. And this instability cost them the joy of knowing and being known.

In Song of Solomon 1:7, we read this: "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon." The woman is equating "love from the soul" with a commitment to her partner's presence. Wherever he

¹ Chandler, Matt (2015-01-01). *The Mingling of Souls: God's Design for Love, Marriage, Sex, and Redemption* (Kindle Locations 595-601). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

is pasturing his flock, wherever he is providing a place of rest and nourishment and provision, that's where she wants to be. There is an indication here of the desire to commit.

Obviously, when you are first attracted to someone, you don't make inappropriate commitments, but you do want to see before you pursue someone in a potentially romantic way if he or she is inclined toward commitment. The woman in this Song wants to commit to her suitor's pasture; for her, the grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence.

As you consider the person you are physically attracted to, look for evidence of commitment in his or her life. Has he joined and become committed to a local church? Does she have a deepening relationship with a group of friends? How is his relationship with his family?

I think that church membership is a huge consideration, precisely because there is no such thing as a perfect church, and in our day and age in the West, we have so many options to choose from. Churches are full of sinners, so there will always be some messiness in a church. Churches are like families that way. So when a person stays in a church for a long period of time, there is evidence that she has been able to see that everything's not perfect, but she nevertheless said, "I'm going to stay.

I'm going to try to make this work. My commitment is more important than my desire to run away."

If you find someone who is rootless, always looking for what's next, always looking for "better than"—better job, better group of friends, better church, better hobby, better whatever—you should be extremely cautious.

What you're looking for is a deep rootedness, or at least a deep capacity for rootedness. Obviously among young adults there is much that is in transition in relation to school and jobs and so on. But despite the transient nature of that particular stage of life, are there signs of deep commitment? If there is no evidence of commitment in his or her life, I would caution you to move very slowly into any kind of serious relationship.

Because the Bible tells us we need to go deeper than physical attraction in our relationships, and because we know that what we find physically attractive has been for the most part culturally informed, it is wise to acknowledge that God has hardwired us for the commitment of companionship over and above sexual attraction or physical pleasure. Companionship brings deeper joy and greater pleasure than the mere physical could ever bring by itself.

If you have physical attraction and no companionship in your relationship, you'll eventually be miserable; but if you have deep companionship with each other, physical attraction isn't as important and becomes less and less so as time passes.

In the movie "Cast Away," we see a stark depiction of a person's innate hunger for companionship. The main character, Chuck Noland, is involved in a plane crash. He survives but ends up stranded on a deserted island. As his loneliness wears on him, Chuck finds a volleyball that floated ashore, draws a face on it, and has conversations with it over the course of his time on the island.

After a number of years of isolation and a failed suicide attempt, Chuck builds a raft to try to get off the island. Following his successful launch, he encounters and overcomes a great storm. The next day, once the waters had calmed, his constant companion, Wilson, the volleyball, falls off the raft. In perhaps the most powerful scene of the movie, Chuck begins to weep uncontrollably because of the anguish of losing his only "friend." Through this brief scene, director Robert Zemeckis laid bare the undeniable ache in every human heart for companionship. It is a beautifully powerful portrayal of a need, which supersedes the mere desire for sexual gratification or "attraction." It truly is "not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2: 18).

In the end, of course, it is Jesus who provides this perfect companionship for his children. "No longer do I call you servants," he said in John 15: 15, "but I have called you friends." Through him we see that the commitment we make to our brothers and sisters in the church far outweighs even the good gifts of marriage and sexual fulfillment. Marriage and sex will pass away (see Matt. 22: 30), but our commitment as friends—as family!—with the saints of God will endure forever.

Can your prospective partner commit? His or her physical attractiveness is a good thing, but it's not an enduring thing—the ability to commit may carry the weight of eternity.

Approval by Godly Counsel

What we see next in our look at the Song of Songs is the excitement and joy that others had about their dating relationship: "We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver" (1: 11). The friends of the couple in this text weren't fearful for the hearts and souls of these two as they grew closer; they were excited.

One sure way to walk in foolishness in a romantic relationship is to date someone who troubles the godly counselors in your life. There was once a beautiful young woman at The Village who began a friendship with a young man who attended

the church off and on but seemed to have no real love for the Lord or fruit in his life. He was charming, had a great sense of humor, and was doing well at the firm that employed him.

Friends of this young woman noticed how she was drawn to him and gently reminded her that her desire should be for a godly man who would love, serve, and lead her toward a greater intimacy with Christ, not someone who was, for all intents and purposes, lukewarm about his faith. But the young woman ignored her friends' advice and began dating the guy.

Once again, her friends appealed to her to reconsider pursuing the relationship, and once again, she refused to listen. Instead, she found a different group of friends who wouldn't disagree with her choices, claiming all along that she could influence him for good.

Not long after they began dating, they started crossing lines she had never intended to cross, and the relationship turned almost entirely physical. And toxic. After about eight months, she discovered he was cheating on her, and her heart was shattered. She felt foolish and ashamed. In her brokenness, she nervously limped back to the friends who had warned her, pleaded with her, and prayed for her, fearing an "I told you so" or an "If you would have only listened ...," but instead she found grace, empathy, and compassion. This sweet sister

is still struggling, still wounded, but she found a safe harbor in which to heal with the friends God has given her.

Proverbs 12: 15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." The men or women with whom you are doing life, the ones you have shared your struggles, hopes, and dreams with, the ones who have prayed for you, encouraged you, and spoken into your life—what do they think about your relationship? Are they rejoicing or cringing? Obviously it's your life, but God has given you these men and women as a gift for your support and protection. Our godly friends, family members, and especially our pastors, elders, and other spiritual leaders very often see things about our relationships that we can't, or sometimes refuse, to see. As people who love us and who are accountable to God for caring for our walk with Christ, they should be honest about problematic relationships. So ask these people in your life for their perspective and counsel.

If they are not supportive of the relationship, fight the urge to find people who are more "supportive"—people who really just tell you what you want to hear—and instead heed the advice of godly counsel and let your relationship with the prospective partner be one simply of friendship, nothing more.

Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 20

2 Corinthians 7:2-16 (ESV)

Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. 4 I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy. 5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. 8 For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through

us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. 12 So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. 13 Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 14 For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. 15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. 16 I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

Context

- 7:4 – When Paul says he is “overflowing” with joy, he is using one of the strongest words possible. The word ὑπερπερισσεύω (hyperperisseuō) means to abound exceedingly and beyond measure. It is used only in one other place: Romans 5:20, where Paul describes how grace exceedingly abounds over sin. A similar sentiment is shared by God in Luke 15:7 where God explodes with joy over the repentance of one sinner. It may be the case that in our modern age, our lack of sensitivity and grief over sin has robbed us of one of the greatest joys of the Christian life —genuine repentance.
- 7:4 – In the same respect, Paul finds overflowing joy in the midst of great affliction. The word he uses for affliction is θλίψις (thlipsis), which means “pressure” or “a pressing together.” In other words, Paul was stressed out. Who wouldn’t be? He experienced trials in Asia that made him despair of life itself (2 Cor 1:8), was lashed, shipwrecked, beaten with rods, stoned, and above all else, he was anxious for the health of all the churches he loved (2 Cor 11:23-28).
- 7:6 – One of God’s favorite ways to comfort his saints is through other saints. Paul’s letters are dense with theology, but they are also warm with friendship.

Most of his letters end with extensive greetings and thanks to people Paul knows by name, and he gives specific praises to each one. Not only did God use Titus to comfort Paul, but he used Titus’ report of the Corinthian’s love for Paul. Keep in mind the confusion the church was in over whether they should trust Paul in 1 Corinthians.

- 7:12 – This is a common Hebrew way of dramatically making a strong point. It’s kind of like when athletic events announce third-place and runner-up before unveiling the winner. Paul is saying he didn’t write the letter for the sake of the sinner or the sinned against, but for a greater purpose: to show the Corinthians that they do earnestly love Paul despite their confusion. In other words, the Corinthians may have been confused about Paul because of false teachers, but in their hearts they knew Paul was an Apostle and a friend. Once they read his letter and repented, they realized this.
- 7:12 – There is a lot to learn from Paul’s example here. First, he sees the best in the Corinthians even when they are at their worst. He strikes a delicate balance in maintaining the seriousness of their sin while reminding them of his profound love for them. Second, Paul does not hold a grudge against them for their lack of appreciation for

his sacrifices on their behalf. Rather, he desires that they see their love for him in order that they may benefit. Paul is

not writing for his ego's sake, but for the sake of those whom he loves.

Personal Study

- What do you think is the key verse in this passage that sums up the heart of what Paul is trying to get across?

- What are some characteristics of genuine repentance, as stated by Paul?

- Both Peter and Judas sinned against Jesus, and both felt guilt over it. Compare Peter's grief (John 21:15-17) with Judas' grief (Matthew 27:3-10). How were they different?

- In what area of your life is there worldly grief but not godly grief? Pray for God to open your eyes to how you can turn that worldly grief into godly grief.

Group Application

- Share a story about either how you confronted someone in his/her sin, or how you were confronted in your own sin. How did you and the other person feel? What were the results?

- Paul says he has no regret in sending a previous letter because it caused the Corinthians to repent; then he seems to go back on his word and say he does regret it. Why? How does this inform how we relate to others?

- What is the difference between condemning someone and correcting someone?

- In what way is guilt positive? Negative?

- What are some ways we avoid genuine repentance? Is there a particular area in which you need to genuinely repent right now? How can your group pray for and help you?

Short Reading

From The World-Tilting Gospel by Daniel J. Phillips¹

Let me offer an illustration of what repentance is and is not, then return to explanation and application.

Walking in your neighborhood, you round a corner and are startled to find a house catching fire. Flames are beginning to lick hungrily everywhere. To your horror, peering through the front window, you can make out two men sitting in the living room. They're watching TV.

No time to waste! You burst in the front door and race to the TV room. "Your house is on fire!" you shout in alarm.

The gents look at you in polite interest. "Oh?" says the man on the left, setting down his pop can and politely muting the TV. "How do you know?"

"I saw flames starting everywhere!" you gasp. "Look, look out your window! Do you see the smoke?"

They look, glance at each other, then nod at you. "Yes. We see that. Yikes!" murmurs

the man on the right, extending a languid hand for his doughnut.

You gape a half-moment, but time is wasting. "Don't you see, if you stay here, you'll burn to death!"

Again they glance at each other, and Left Man concedes, "Yes, that makes sense. The house is on fire, you're right. Anyone in a house on fire will be burned to death. That'd be awful." He considers a moment, then inquires, "So, what do you think we should do?"

"Do?" you fairly scream. "You should get up off your backsides and run outside with me, right now, while you still can!"

"Yes, you're right," Right Man assents. "We really should. I see that." Left Man nods his hearty agreement.

Beside yourself now, and out of time, you holler Schwarzeneggerly, "Come with me if you want to live!" —and you run out the front door.

Right Man hops up and follows. Left Man watches a moment, shrugs, unmutes the TV, picks up the doughnut his friend dropped, goes back to the game.

And burns to death.

¹ Phillips, Dan. *The World-tilting Gospel: Embracing a Biblical Worldview & Hanging on Tight*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011. Print.

Now, both changed their minds, in a manner of speaking. Both came to mental assent with your assertion that the house was on fire. Both intellectually grasped that they'd be doomed if they did not flee the burning house.

But only one acted on those truths.

Which one repented, in biblical terms? Right Man, of course.

So while it is essential that we change our minds, and while God's Word will cause us to change our opinions about a great many things—primarily about Jesus Christ—perhaps that isn't the best way to explain the Greek noun *metanoia* (meh-tah-NOY-ah), or the related verb.

Maybe a better explanation of repentance would be a transformed mind, or a transformed way of thinking that issues in a transformed life.

We are exposed to the Word of God; and as a result, the way we look at and think about everything is transformed.

The churches at Ephesus and Thessalonica provide vivid examples of repentance.

In Ephesus, the apostles made Jesus and His Gospel the issue. Paul spent two years there, preaching and teaching the Word (Acts 19:8-10), and the name of the Lord

Jesus was raised to great prominence (v. 17). As a result, believers confessed their involvement in the occult (v.18), and took practical steps to burn those bridges behind them. They brought together all the writings they had about dark arts and burned them (v. 19).

Books were expensive; this collection was worth about fifty-thousand pieces of silver, Luke says. In buying power, think of that as around 137 years' worth of salary — with no days off! With that practical witness, the word about Jesus spread powerfully (v. 20). Even the local economy felt the impact of these Christians' changed lives (vv. 23-27).

Their fundamental beliefs changed, and their lives changed—in costly, practical ways. That is repentance.

Or again in Thessalonica, Paul boldly and effectively preached Jesus Christ, making Him and His Lordship the issue (Acts 17:1-4). Unbelievers made such an uproar that Paul had to leave town (vv. 5-10)—but even in that brief time, the seeds of a church were sown. That preaching of the Gospel was enough to change their lives.

Hear Paul tell it: “You turned to God from idols, to become slaves to the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead: Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thess. 1:9b-10). This held true,

even though their conversion meant persecution and suffering (2:13; 3:1-6).

Their fundamental beliefs changed, and so their lives changed. They turned from

the dead, false idols they served, and to the living and true God, to a life centered around their hope in the Lord Jesus. That is repentance.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 21

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 (ESV)

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. 6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. 8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 10 And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. 15 As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

Context

- After spending the first seven chapters of this letter defending his ministry and apostleship, Paul now turns to the sensitive issues of money and generosity. The church in Jerusalem was experiencing the ravages of famine that had left many in the church poor and destitute. One of the purposes of Paul's letter was to encourage these Gentile Christians in Corinth to give generously towards the financial needs of their Jewish brothers in Jerusalem.
- Paul makes it clear in these verses that Christian giving is to be ultimately birthed out of God's grace and fueled by joy in the Lord. This will become even more explicit in Chapter 9 when Paul reminds the Corinthians that God is honored and pleased with those who give cheerfully. We as well are called to give out of an "abundance of joy."
- One of Paul's chief points in this passage is that love is ultimately demonstrated through the actions it produces. Just as Christ displayed His love for us by becoming poor ("dying") for our sake, our love for God and others can be measured through our generosity. This is one reason that Paul can call the church in Corinth to "excel in the grace of giving" and to show that their love was genuine.
- A principle of giving that Paul emphasizes here in this text is that of proportionality. Generosity is never measured by the size of the gift but by the sacrifice that it entails. The Macedonians, whom Paul holds up as an example to the Corinthians, gave beyond what could normally be expected for those in similar financial circumstances. The fact that the Macedonians gave out of extreme poverty is evidence that not only were their gifts most likely small, but that Paul was ultimately concerned about their hearts.
- A final stream of thought that Paul weaves into this passage is that Christian giving is also a matter of commitment and fairness. Just as Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to essentially finish what they started in regard to taking up this collection, we too are to follow through with the financial commitments we have made to our church. To do so is a fundamental point of fairness; it is not equitable for people receiving ministry to not be subsequently vested in the financial support of that ministry.

Personal Study

- What is the connection of God's grace being poured out on you as a sinner and your generosity as a believer?

- Why is it so important for your giving as a believer to be fueled by an abundance of joy in the Lord versus "commands" from a church leader?

- If you are a member of Four Oaks, what sort of financial commitment did you make to the church when joining? Has it been difficult to keep this commitment? Why, or why not?

- How would the tenor of discussions about money in a church community change if everyone approached giving the way the Macedonians did (i.e. "begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints")?

Group Application

- Talk about the relationship between Jesus’ sacrificial death on the Cross and our generosity and giving.

- What does the phrase, “Not equal gifts but equal sacrifice” mean to you? How does it relate to Paul’s principles of fairness and proportionality that he outlines in this text?

- Talk about a time when you were blessed by the generosity of another Christian. Where might God be calling you to grow in your own generosity?

- What would happen to Christian ministry and mission if we allowed our “severe tests of affliction” to dictate the terms of our giving?

Short Reading

Four Questions to Keep Close to Your Wallet by Marshall Segal¹

Topic: Money

It's hard to imagine many things more maligned in Scripture than money.

After all, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Timothy 6:10). Paul didn't just say that it can be a temptation for some, or that it's easy to become attached to what money can buy. He says it's the root of evil — lots and lots of evil. Paul goes on to say, "It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." An unhealthy appetite for money makes even church people into self-destructive enemies of Christ. It's clear, if you can count your greatest treasure in dollars and cents, your soul is in danger.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy 6 with the hoarders and spenders in mind (1 Timothy 6:7). I doubt there's any question that in America today this is the most prevalent breed of our love affair with money — the kind of infidelity in which we build bigger homes,

buy more of the world's best stuff, and chase lives of greater comfort and luxury. A lust for more and more money to buy more and more things is evil, and it ironically and tragically steals and murders the life and happiness it promises.

Try Your Treasure

At the end of the day, we must each know our own hearts and be willing to ask what role money is playing in our thoughts and affections. Is it a means of worshiping God or a means of replacing him? Is our budget highlighting the sufficiency and worth of Christ or has it become a reason for boasting in or treasuring something other than him?

Here are four questions we can ask to help us get to the bottom of our treasure:

1. Is my spending marked by Christian generosity?

People in love with Christ and free from the love of money hold their dollars loosely and invest in ways that help others experience happiness in him. Because of the gospel, we're not stuck hoarding for ourselves or grabbing more earthly, lesser pleasures. We've died to the worldly needs and wants of our former life, and now our money can be a means of meeting others' needs — physical and spiritual.

¹ Segal, Marshall. "Four Questions to Keep Close to Your Wallet." *Desiring God*. N.p., 03 July 2014. Web. 19 Nov. 2015.

Our joy in God should be opening a delta of freedom and generosity where there was only a private pool before. Do you see and experience freedom to overflow to others? Does your spending look like Christ-like sacrifice for the sake of others? This is what makes generosity Christian. It looks like Jesus. It commends Jesus. It aims at Jesus, even while it's invested horizontally in providing for and blessing people.

2. What does my spending say about what makes me most happy?

Money is not the only resource we can spend (time, creativity, spiritual gifts, energy, etc.), but it's a currency that's universally respected and accepted. Especially in wealthy societies where we've been given much, our money carries significant power, and our spending will speak loudly.

Inevitably, we will put our money where our hearts are. It's a law of love. Your spending will either reveal your desire for God and for his fame in the world or it will help you identify your idols. If God makes you happy, your spending in love and ministry to others will say that. If other things have stolen your heart, you'll tend to spend away valuable resources on temporary, selfish comforts and have little leftover for worthwhile ministry and relationships.

There's also no question money itself cannot become our hope for happiness. No one who's gone to that well has ever come away truly happy. As even Benjamin Franklin has admitted, "Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one." Hope in God, and let money serve and highlight your happiness in him.

3. Does my spending suggest I'm collecting for this life?

Everything you can buy on Amazon or at the local shopping mall is temporary. If there is an eternity ahead, and if there is a God more satisfying than the world and all it holds, we really can't afford to be investing too much into this life. The return is too small and too short-lived. As John Piper has said, "There are no U-Hauls behind hearses" (Desiring God, 188).

Rather, we should keep our treasure in heaven and put as much of our time, energy, and resources here into enjoying God now and then, and helping others do the same. When we're tempted to keep and collect for our few short decades here, we need to be reminded that we'll enjoy forever the fruit of our Christ-exalting investments in people and relationships.

4. Is my spending explicitly supporting the spread of the gospel?

Billions of people in the world have no access — zero access — to the good news of Jesus Christ. If we truly believe the gospel and bank our lives on its message, this is the greatest challenge in the world. There is no more worthwhile cause, no more critical task.

If the peoples will be saved, then believers must be willing to pay. For the gospel to run, there must be men and women to carry it, and for them to carry it, they must be supported (Romans 10:13–15). These ought to be the most precious, joyful dollars we spend. God’s word and purpose cannot fail (Matthew 16:18), and every conversion is a resurrection, from death in sin to life in Christ. The cost to the church of translators and missionaries and relief is as nothing compared with the eternal results of world missions.

Again, Piper says, “If we, like Paul, are content with the simple necessities of life, billions of dollars in the church would be released to take the gospel to the frontiers” (Desiring God, 191). The statistics are discouraging and sobering when it comes to sacrificial giving among Christians, especially giving to reach the unreached. Collectively, we have the resources to

get the gospel into these places, but we haven’t yet — again, collectively — made the choices and sacrifices to see it through. We need to ask if our spending is consistently and explicitly moving the gospel to unsaved and unreached people. It’s a joy worth budgeting for.

Wielding Our Wealth

There are lots of questions you could ask about your money. The goal in these four is to keep your heart and hope for Jesus, the one who really can make you happy forever. We can’t afford to just avoid money, because God has decided that it would be one of the primary means by which the church spreads and grows. But for the sake of our souls, we must watch our wallets.

Let’s wield our resources against the poisonous love of money with all of its empty promises and for all that our more-precious-than-gold God is doing in our families, through our churches, and among the nations.

Marshall Segal (@MarshallSegal) is executive assistant to John Piper and associate editor at desiringGod.org. He graduated from Bethlehem College & Seminary and is editor of *Killjoys: The Seven Deadly Sins*. He and his wife Faye live in Minneapolis.

Notes

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Week 22

2 Corinthians 8:16–9:5 (ESV)

But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. 18 With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. 19 And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. 20 We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, 21 for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. 22 And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 So give proof before the churches

of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

Chapter 9

Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

Context

- Paul continues his discussion regarding the collection that is to be taken from the Gentile church in Corinth to aid the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Paul's aim in these verses is to give no opportunity for criticism or suspicion to arise on the part of the Corinthians in relation to the way that this money is being collected and handled. To this end, Paul spends time commending the character of those who are coming to collect the money, Titus and his two companions.
- In vouching for the character of Titus and the two men who will be traveling to Corinth with him, Paul highlights the “earnestness” this group had for the Corinthians. Their love was not a passive one, but was in fact being demonstrated by their willingness to make this long, dangerous journey to see the church in Corinth.
- Interestingly, Paul does not mention specifically who these two brothers were who were accompanying Titus to Corinth. This is probably because they were so well known to the Corinthians that they didn't need to be named. This points to an important issue when it comes to money and giving in the Christian community: there must be a

bond of trust and transparency between leaders and those whom they lead. Christians are not called to be generous towards causes, organizations, or ministries where they do not know, trust, or are able to engage with leadership. The Corinthians are to receive these men, not only because THEY know them, but because these three leaders are known to all of the churches in Macedonia as well!

- One of Paul's aims in this passage is to show that while different in style and culture, the Gentile and Jewish factions of the church are united by their common bond in Christ. He notes in verse 19 that this collection is being done, in part, to show the Gentile churches' “good will” towards their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ. As such, this collection was a tangible expression of their unity in Christ, as well as a fulfillment of the promise Paul made in Galatians 2: 10 “to remember the poor” in Jerusalem.
- Another principle at play here in this text is that the local church should never function in isolation or autonomy from other churches. There is an interconnectedness and dependency between the churches in Macedonia, Achaia, and Palestine. The mutual cooperation between these churches is not one of a hierarchical “command and

control,” but rather a partnership in the gospel that enables these churches to help and encourage one another in their gospel mission.

- A final truth that Paul hits upon is that of Christian example. Paul uses the good deeds of the churches in Macedonia to

exhort and encourage the Corinthians towards greater generosity. In doing so, Paul echoes Hebrews 10: 24, where believers are called to “spur one another on to love and good deeds.” As always, these good deeds serve others best when they are born out of joy versus merely duty (9: 5).

Personal Study

- What are areas of sin and struggle in your life that might cloud your Christian witness? What would need to change if you adopted Paul’s attitude of aiming “at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man”?

- When you take inventory of the spiritual discipline of giving and generosity in your life, are you in need of the kind of motivation and encouragement that Paul provides in 9: 1-5?

- What do you think about the interdependence of your relationships with other Christians, both within your local church as well as those in other places?

- Does the bulk of your Christian giving take place in the community where you have your closest friendships and relationships with leaders? Why, or why not?

Group Application

- Why is it so important that there be bonds of trust, transparency, and accountability between a church's leaders and those who financially support that church? What happens when there isn't?

- Paul seems to connect the attributes of love and earnestness to generosity and giving. Why does he do this? What do our spending habits reveal about what we are most earnest about?

- In what areas of giving and generosity are you in need of the kind of admonitions that Paul gives the Corinthians in 9:1-5?

- How would it change our thinking and attitudes about giving if we were to connect them more closely to the mission of the gospel and to God building His church and kingdom? Do you think about your giving as contributing to something much bigger than yourself?
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Short Reading

Do I Tithe to My Church or to God? by John Piper¹

It is obvious in one sense that a gift is going to the church. That is the name on the check. And so it is not bad. I don't think it is unbiblical or wrong to think that way. I am writing a check to the church. I am giving a gift to the ministry of the church. I want the gospel to advance through the church. I want the staff to be paid in the church. I want the children to be cared for in the church. I want heat on a winter morning in Minnesota in the church. It is to the church in that sense.

And the Old Testament spoke of gifts to maintain the tabernacle (see, for example, Exodus 35:4–36:38) and the New Testament is clear that giving to provide for those who lead the church is what God wants us to do. The workman is worthy

of his wage (Luke 10:7). Don't muzzle an ox when he is treading out the grain (1 Timothy 5:18) and the grain is the gift of the people who care for that preacher ox. So it is not a bad thing to think on the horizontal level here of money flowing to people and to ministry and to Christian institutions like the church. I think that is a right and biblical way to think. And these gifts are also gifts to God in the very same act if your heart is right.

The Bible speaks many times and speaks approvingly of God's people giving God gifts. For example, Numbers 15:21 says, "Some of the first of your dough you shall give" — that is D O U G H. It just occurred to me we have that modern word dough. The part of your meal offering. "Some of it you shall give to the Lord as a contribution throughout your generations." So the Bible talks about give God gifts. And in the New Testament, interestingly, Paul says to the Philippians in 4:18, "I have received full payment." The Philippians had sent him money. "I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied having received

¹ Piper, John. "Do I Tithe to My Church or to God?" *Desiring God*, 02 Mar. 2015. Web. 18 Nov. 2015. .

from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing God.”

So Paul saw the gifts that were sent through the hands of Epaphroditus to Paul to sustain his ministry as sacrifices and gifts and offerings to God himself. But — and this may be the most important thing I say — one of the most important teachings in the Bible, I think, is that, in one sense, we can’t give God anything. And that may be why the question was asked. I am not sure. We can’t give God anything that is not already his. And, therefore, our giving to him never enriches him. It never improves him. It never puts him in our debt. In fact, God is so completely self-sufficient that even our act of giving, not just the gift, but the act of giving, is God’s gift to us, not vice-versa. And here are the key passages of warning.

The Bible is really concerned that we not get this wrong. Acts 17:25 says, “[God] is not served by human hands as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.” We see the same thing in Psalm 50. God was really upset with the people’s attitude in their sacrifices, because evidently they had the notion they were providing for God’s needs. So he says in Psalm 50:9–12, “I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. . . . If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the

world and its fullness are mine.” And then he tells them how to do it. “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and perform your vows to the most high and call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will glorify me” (vv. 14–15).

So here is the glorious point from that text: God will never ever be put in a position of a beneficiary of our generosity. He is not a beneficiary of our generosity. He does not need our giving because he owns everything already. He aims already to be the benefactor, not the beneficiary, because the benefactor gets the glory. So he says, “Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you will glorify me. If anybody is dependent in this situation, it is not me, it is you. And I want to work for you. You don’t work for me. I give to you. You don’t give to me.”

So here is the fundamental truth from Romans 11:35: “Who has given a gift to him that he should be repaid?” Answer: Nobody. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. [And then here is the result.] To him be glory forever and ever” (v. 36). King David, in a great passage in 1 Chronicles 29:14, took a collection for the house of God that Solomon his son was going to build and the most revealing thing about God’s sovereignty in this matter is that God already owns everything and your very act of giving is a gift of God. So here is what he says. “Who am I? [And he is praying

Week 23

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (ESV)

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” 10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Context

- Through chapter eight and the beginning of chapter nine, Paul has detailed the way in which the generosity of the churches was to be collected; now in verse six he begins to give the “why” behind the generosity. To begin doing so, he employs a farming metaphor to contrast between two methods of sowing.

- In the “sparing” method, the sower carefully counts out each seed and places it in the ground. This method produces a very small harvest. In the “bountiful” method, the sower reaches deep into his supply, sending huge handfuls of seed across the field with broad, powerful sweeps of his arm. When it is time for harvest, there will be a bountiful return.

- In essence, Paul is saying, if you pull more seed from your bag, your bag will be more full than if you pulled less. As counter-intuitive as that sounds, it's the plain truth of God's economic program. God delights in generous giving. It brings him joy to see his children live generous lives. As we give cheerfully as we have determined in our own minds, God is happy! What a beautiful truth that is!
- Verse 8 gives us a clear understanding of why God blesses his children with abundance--so that we can we can provide for good works through avenues like supporting the work of church planting, international missions, benevolence, and generosity in our

communities. He supplies our need not so we can minimize joy through hoarding, but so that we can maximize our joy through generosity.

- Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112:9: the righteousness of a man is demonstrated by his care for the poor.
- God's promise of provision extends to "the saints" and produces an overflow of many thanksgivings to God. Though our financial situations change often, account balances rise and fall, when we live generously we will be enriched by God himself. God will receive glory (v 13) and unite the hearts of the Corinthians to the Jewish believers who will be the beneficiaries of their generosity (v 14).

Personal Study

- How does Paul's teaching on sowing and reaping align with your personal experience?

- Read Matthew 6:19-21. What connection does Jesus make between our "treasure" and our heart? How might Jesus' instruction be applied in your current situation?

- What might it look like for you to take a step of faith in generosity in the weeks ahead?

Group Application

- Discuss the teaching you've received on the issue of giving in the past. What was helpful? What was hurtful?

- Why do you think it's so difficult for us to talk about things like generosity? What can we do as a group to push past these challenges?

- Discuss some ways the group could take a step of faith in generosity toward believers in need, as the Corinthians were being encouraged to do by Paul.

- How can your group members pray for one another in the arena of financial stewardship and generosity?

Short Reading

from **The Doctrine of the Christian Life**
by John Frame¹

Private Property

The eighth commandment assumes that God has given to human beings ownership of property. Of course, ultimately all property belongs to God (Ex. 19:5; Pss. 24:1; 50:10). But he does call human beings to take dominion over the earth in his name (Gen. 1:28–30; Pss. 8:6; 115:16). We are, in other words, stewards of God, given responsibility to care for God's creation. To his stewards, God also gives the right to enjoy that creation. We are to administer this inheritance to God's glory as well as to our own benefit.

God also gives specific property to specific people. He gave the land of Canaan to Israel, and within Israel a certain portion of land to each tribe. But the land given to Israel as a possession was also the holy land of the Lord, the place of God's special presence. So families in Israel were not allowed to sell their land in perpetuity (Lev. 25:10–55).

This provision of the law reminded them that their land was ultimately God's, and

that God maintained the right to administer its use. Similarly, God ordered them to rest the land every seven years (Lev. 25:4). The land is Israel's (Ex. 33:1–3), but ultimately God's (Hos. 9:3).

Outside the borders of Israel, God also enables people to possess parts of the creation. When Abraham bought a burial plot for his wife Sarah, he respected the property rights of the Hittite people (Gen. 23:1–20). Scripture often affirms the property rights of human beings (1 Kings 21:3–6; Acts 4:37; 5:4). People own houses as well as lands (Acts 12:12; 16:14–15; 21:8).

So Scripture endorses the concept of private property, always with the proviso that God is the ultimate owner of creation and the one who has the ultimate authority over it. The eighth commandment assumes this concept. Stealing would have no meaning, unless there were a clear distinction between what belongs to me and what belongs to someone else.

We should not sharply separate property rights from human rights. To steal someone's property is to take his inheritance and to assault his dignity and freedom.

Work Ethic

The eighth commandment also presupposes a work ethic. We have already seen this in the fourth commandment's

¹ Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2008. Print.

requirement to work six days, and still earlier in the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28–30; cf. 2:15). After the fall, work becomes toilsome (Gen. 3:17–19; cf. Ps. 90:10; Eccl. 2:18–26), but it is still necessary and beneficial (Deut. 16:15; 1 Thess. 4:11–12). So we are not to be lazy (Prov. 6:6–11; 12:24, 27; 15:19).² Paul warns the Thessalonian church against idleness, a warning he identifies as an element of the apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 3:6). The apostles themselves set the example, working hard so as not to burden the church (2 Thess. 3:7–9; cf. 1 Thess. 2:9).² They decreed, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). That is, anyone who is able to work, but will not, may not presume on the generosity of his fellow believers.

Work is the antithesis of theft: “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Eph. 4:28). Labor replaces theft as a means of sustenance. And more than that: it turns the thief into a benefactor. Rather than taking what belongs to others, he gives to others what is his. So the eighth commandment mandates a lifestyle of generosity, of compassion, of love. In this way, we begin to see the “broader meaning” of the eighth commandment as a perspective on all sin and all righteousness. To keep the eighth

commandment is both to give everyone his due and, beyond that, to sacrifice our own goods in love for others, as Jesus gave his life for us. The eighth commandment mandates both justice and mercy.

In the narrow sense, Scripture notes the following forms of theft:

1. Property theft, normally requiring double restitution (Ex. 22:4, 7)
2. Kidnapping or manstealing, a capital crime (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7; 1 Tim. 1:10)
3. Swindling (Jer. 22:13–17; Amos 8:4–6; Hab. 2:9–12)
4. Stealing from widows and orphans, which is especially heinous (Matt. 23:14)
5. Defrauding employees (James 5:4)
6. Land theft (Isa. 5:8)
7. Unjust weights (Lev. 19:35–36; Deut. 25:15)
8. Misleading someone for economic gain (Prov. 20:14)

In the broader sense, Scripture speaks of theft in metaphorical, but important ways:

1. Stealing affection (2 Sam. 15:6)
2. False prophets, who steal God’s word from the people and proclaim their own words as God’s (Jer. 23:30)
3. False religious leaders as thieves and robbers (John 10:1)
4. Merchandising in the temple (Matt. 21:13)
5. Robbing God of tithes and offerings (Mal. 3:8; cf. Josh. 7:11)

² This is a frequent theme in Proverbs. Look up references to “sloth,” “sluggard,” etc.

If theft includes robbing God of his due, then we can understand how, in a sense, all sin is theft. So the eighth commandment is a broad mandate upholding God's whole law.

I shall not spend much time on stealing in the narrow sense. It is quite obvious that, according to Scripture, one may not take for himself something that belongs to someone else, without the permission of the other person. That is true even if one is hungry:

People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house. (Prov. 6:30–31)

According to the wisdom teacher, people in general are sympathetic to someone who steals in order to eat, but the owner of the food feels differently! In context, this is a natural consequence, which the teacher compares to the consequences of adultery. And like adultery, stealing even to satisfy an intense need is wrong.

So theft is wrong in a fairly obvious way. As I have been writing this book, I have noted that one of the most effective ways to show something is wrong is to compare it to theft. One should not take the property of someone else. There are, however, situational complications, for it is not always easy to determine what constitutes property, what belongs to whom in the first place, and

what limitations that ownership places on the use of the property by others.³

Tithing

As we have seen, Malachi 3:8 says that failure to tithe is actually robbing God. So we should consider the biblical obligation of the tithe and how it affects us. The Mosaic law mentions tithes in several places, and there is some dispute about how many tithes there were and what percentage of one's income was finally required. Rushdoony presents one possible interpretation of the data.

The regular tithe, ten percent of one's income (Deut. 14:22), was then tithed to the priests, who received ten percent of the tithe (Num. 18:21–28). Thus, the church tithe was a fraction of the total tithe. The poor tithe, paid every other year (Deut. 14:28; Amos 4:4), alternated with the rejoicing tithe (Deut. 14:22–26) on each six-year cycle out of seven. Thus, the combined poor tithe and religious tithe, averaged out to about 15 percent per year; some say 18 percent. Some of the regular tithe went for

3 My position on intellectual property (copyrights, patents, etc.) is pretty far from the mainstream. See my "The Other Shoe: Copyright and the Reasonable Use of Technology," available at http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1991OtherShoe.htm. See also Vern Poythress, "Copyrights and Copying: Why the Laws Should be Changed," at http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/2005Copyrights.htm.

levitical services to worship, and to music; much of it went to general social financing, i.e., to godly education and a number of other related services.⁴

Of course, the priests had income from other sources as well. Portions of grain (Lev. 2:3, 10; 7:14) and meat (Lev. 7:31–36) from the sacrifices were eaten by the priests, and they also ate the shewbread after it was removed from its stand in the tabernacle or the temple (Lev. 24:9). The census tax (Ex. 30:11–16) also went “for the service of the tent of meeting.”

The tithe was not a tithe on wealth, or even on income generally, but on agricultural produce.⁵ So the tithes are not deposited in a bank, but in a storehouse (Mal. 3:10). The tithe is holy, and its holiness seems to be connected with the holiness of the Promised Land: “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord” (Lev. 27:30). It might be argued, therefore, that the tithe is not appropriate in the new covenant, in which the promise of Canaan fades away into the greater promise of the new heavens and the new earth. We note, however, that Abraham, who owned no land in Canaan, paid a tithe to Melchizedek, the mysterious

priest-king who in Hebrews foreshadows Christ (Gen. 14:20; Heb. 7:4–10), indicating that tithes were sometimes appropriate even apart from Israel’s ownership of the Promised Land. Can we give anything less to the Christ who fulfills the priesthood of Melchizedek?

The New Testament does not explicitly require the tithe,⁶ although it says much about giving. Its emphasis, in passages like 2 Corinthians 8–9, is that giving should be voluntary and cheerful (2 Cor. 9:7–8), but also generous. In Acts 4:34–37, we read of Christians selling property to meet the needs of their poor. We shall look at their view of poverty in the next chapter. But radical giving seemed to be a rule for them—and a joy.

Newcomers sometimes ask church members how much money they should give to the church. The question seems crass, and church people often find various ways to avoid answering it. But for someone who is new to the Christian community, it is a reasonable question. What would be a good ball-park figure? Well, in one sense God demands all that we have, and sometimes he demands that in literal ways, as when he calls someone to

4 Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), 510.

5 The rejoicing tithe could be turned into money (Deut. 14:25).

6 Jesus does say, in Matt. 23:23, that the Jews were right to tithe mint, dill, and cumin, though they neglected other matters that were more important. But these Jews were, of course, living under the old covenant and under its distinctive obligations.

martyrdom or to the poor widow's moral heroism (Luke 21:1–4). But our inquirer is interested in what would be considered a normal amount, a base from which one may proceed to greater gifts. When I talk to such inquirers, I cannot get out of my head that again and again in the Old Testament the figure of 10 percent recurs. That is the Lord's portion. It may be that in the

New Testament that amount is not strictly required. But surely the “cheerful” giving of 2 Corinthians 9:7 cannot be much less than that. So I unashamedly recommend to inquirers the tithe, as a beginning of financial discipleship.⁷

7 John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (A Theology of Lordship; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 797–801.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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