

July 2018 Bible Reading Plan

A True Disciple . . .



*Luke 9:18 Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"¹⁹ And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."²⁰ Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."²¹ And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one,²² saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."²³ **And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.** ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

July 2018 Bible Reading Plan

What Characterizes a True Disciple?



The Call of Matthew
Matthew 9:9-13

Matthew 9:9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. ¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

As pastor Chad preaches a series about what characterizes a true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will explore some passages that illustrate different aspects of discipleship. As we move towards the latter part of the month, we'll shift towards Paul's Letter to the church at Philippi.

The first characteristic with which pastor Chad dealt was that a true Disciple "Treasures the Word." The second was that a true disciple "Delights in Christ." We will pick up with the 3rd characteristic, which is, that a Disciple "Prays Fervently." The Word and Prayer are two major complementary ordinary means of grace, meaning that they are two of the things Christ ordained as the primary and normal means by which we would receive grace to enable us to live unto and for the Lord. The hymn "O Word of God Incarnate" speaks of the written Word as the "heaven-drawn picture of Christ, the living Word," meaning that if we would know Christ, the true Christ, we must know him as revealed in the Scriptures, because they are the "*heaven-drawn* picture of Christ," as opposed to the imaginations of mere men or women. To delight in a false Christ is futile and extremely dangerous.

The Bible Reading Plan has been intended from the beginning to teach us something about *how* to read and interpret God's Word, and to encourage and guide us in doing so, and precisely because doing so can be a life-transforming matter. When Peter preached at Pentecost and 3000 people were converted, we are told that they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." If we trace the references to the "Word" of God through the Book of Acts, and also note the praying of the people, it is no wonder that the Church grew as it did. They experienced a *flood* of God's grace, as has the Church from time to time throughout its history when it was devoted to the Scriptures and to prayer.

So let's look at some examples of fervent prayer, and then turn to three more characteristics of faithful disciples of Christ: striving for holiness, love for the Church/church, and sharing of the Gospel. As we do so, please be in prayer for Chad Watkins as he leads us through these matters in the preaching of God's Word.

Bill Tyson

Jesus taught his disciples what we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” The 1st petition is “Our Father, ... Hallowed be your name.” The Westminster Larger Catechism gives this exposition of what that means: “In the first petition (which is, Hallowed be thy name,) acknowledging the utter inability and indisposition that is in ourselves and all men to honor God aright, we pray, that God would by his grace enable and incline us and others to know, to acknowledge, and highly to esteem him, his titles, attributes, ordinances, word, works, and whatsoever he is pleased to make himself known by; and to glorify him in thought, word, and deed: that he would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness, and whatsoever is dishonorable to him; and, by his overruling providence, direct and dispose of all things to his own glory.” (WLC 190) The honor of God’s name is in view.

1. Reflecting on that answer regarding the 1st petition of the Lord’s Prayer, what implications does that have as to how a disciple ought to pray fervently – fervently about what? _____

The Psalms contain a number of Psalms of Praise to God, Psalms that reflect a fervency in prayer for the honor of God. This is the Lord’s Day, so take some time to read as much of the following as you can, and just make notes related to how you might praise God in light of these particular Psalms. Allow me to illustrate what I mean.

Let’s begin with Psalm 103. Read Psalm 103:1-8 for the moment – we’ll continue after my illustration:

Psalm 103:1-2 – I should fervently pray and bless the Lord for all his benefits to me, and seek to do better to remember as many as I can, beginning with his forgiveness of my sins.

103:8 – as in WLC 190, I should praise God for his attributes, his mercy and grace, his slowness to anger and abounding steadfast love, and reflect on how he has shown these to me.

Now, you read through Psalm 103 and list things you should praise God for with respect to your own life, and perhaps that of Westminster:

If a disciple is supposed to be *fervent in prayer*, there are other things that will fill his prayers, not necessarily every day – which could overwhelm us – but spread over time. The WLC 191 speaks of the 2nd Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. **Read WLC 191, and then we’ll look at a couple of passages of Scripture.** “What do we pray for in the second petition? A. In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fulness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him for ever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.”

The night of his arrest Jesus told his disciples: *Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. (John 15:20)* **Read Acts 4:13-31 and 12:1-17.** In these passages we find the principle of John 15:20 in action. In the first, Peter and John heal a man lame from birth, and when that leads to quite a stir among the people, religious authorities arrest Peter and John, whom they eventually release. Acts 4:13-31 speaks of the release and subsequent prayer of the church. Acts 12:1-17 recounts Herod’s killing of James, John’s brother, and his arrest of Peter with the same intent to put him to death, and vs 5 speaks of the “earnest prayer” made for Peter by the church.

1. Yesterday we spoke of fervent praise to God. What is the nature of these “fervent prayers” on the part of the church? _____

2. Especially in the first of these two passages, what stands out to you in the nature of the prayer offered? What was a major concern on their part, and how is that different from how many of us would pray if our pastor were imprisoned for preaching the Word of God? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Many believers throughout the world live under persecution. How ought we to pray for the persecuted Church? It is right to be concerned about the persecution itself. But what else ought we to include besides relief from persecution? Hint: Read Paul’s request when he writes from prison to the church of Ephesus – Ephesians 6:18-20. Now pray ...

Today let's look at several of Paul's prayers for the various churches he served, with a view to seeing the type of things we ought to pray as follows of Christ, who is fulfilling his statement in Matthew 16:18 when he said: "... I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." First, though, let's look at Paul's commendation of another disciple of Christ and his "fervent prayers."

Read Colossians 4:12-13.

1. Here is a true disciple, and what is his concern? _____

Read Colossians 1:3-14.

2. What are Paul's concerns as he prays fervently for the church, and how should that inform our prayers? _____

Read Ephesians 1:15-20 and 3:14-21.

3. Again, what sort of things does Paul pray for, and how ought that to inform how we pray? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Two things to reflect upon: 1) Think now about how you ought to pray for Westminster today, and 2) In the charge I gave the congregation on June 10th, I suggested that you especially use Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 to pray for your pastor, Chad Watkins, and for his family. So today, take time to pray specifically and fervently for Westminster, and for your new pastor and his family – hold them up fervently today and at least weekly before the Lord, letting the Word of God guide you in how you pray for them. It is for your benefit that you pray for him and for his family, because you will reap fruit from his labors if God answers those prayers!

In many ways this is a great day to celebrate and praise our God for our nation and the freedoms we have enjoyed, and continue to largely enjoy. However, it is also a day when we as disciples of Christ must be concerned that our nation is abusing the freedoms we have by sinning, and doing so in multiple ways. We have killed millions and millions of babies in the womb. We have succumbed to our sinful desires, and allowed our freedoms to be an opportunity for license to sin. Our prosperity had led to greed and complacency, and too often to forgetting the God who has blessed us. We could go on and on.

Fervency in prayer ought to include confession of our sins, and those of our church and nation. The Psalms and other Old Testament passages point to this aspect of prayer. The wonderful thing about it, is that individually we can be assured that God forgives the sins of those who repent and confess their sins, resting wholly upon Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Nationally, we may pray for such repentance and hope that the Lord will bring revival and reformation through his Church, although that is not as certain.

So, today, I want to have us read two passages that encourage and model for us how we ought to fervently confess our own sins, and one passage that reflects prayer for a nation, even though we are not a nation in covenant with God as was Israel. But God has blessed us richly as a nation, and used this nation in tremendous ways, as he did England and Scotland once, countries, however, desperately in need of revival and reformation today.

Read Psalms 130 and 51, the first of which is tremendously encouraging, the second a model of repentance and confession.

1. What do you learn from Psalm 51 about how you should confess and repent before God? _____

Read Daniel 9:1-19 fairly rapidly if necessary.

2. Let it inform your prayers for the nation today, though. What sort of things ought you to pray for our nation? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Use the above in your reflections, and pray fervently in light of those passages.

Praying fervently as a disciple also includes fervent prayer when one’s situation might tempt him to be disappointed with God, or even embittered towards God because of what is happening in one’s life, or perhaps in that of a loved one.

Read Psalm 44, and as you do, note the huge change that takes place beginning with verse 9.

- 1. Summarize the thrust of the Psalm and the Psalmist’s struggle: _____

Verse 22 is quoted by Paul in Romans 8:36, but Paul lived on the other side of what God had done in Christ, and it made a huge difference in his perspective, because God had done what Ps 44:26 requested, and in an amazing way.

Read Psalm 73, and note as you do, that the Psalmist begins with his conclusion, but recounts the path he traveled to get there.

- 2. What made the difference in the Psalmist’s perspective, and what does that say to you about the importance of your involvement in Westminster (or another Bible believing church if you live elsewhere and use our Bible Reading Plan)?

- 3. What do these Psalms remind us of with respect to our perspective on our present lives? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Think about the Psalms above, and how the Psalmist responded to his situation, and **if you can take time to read one more Psalm, read Psalm 88** and reflect on the same matter as I just mentioned about these other Psalms. Psalm 88 is perhaps the darkest Psalm in the entire Psalter, and does not reach resolution at the end. But it still teaches us something about handling troubles in this life.

One great treasure of the Old Testament over the New is historical perspective, by which I mean that the length of time covered by the Old Testament gives much more historical perspective than does the much briefer time-span of the New. So one gets to see God’s dealings with his people over a long period of time in the Old Testament, and one gets to see the ebb and flow of the people’s spiritual lives in the Old better than the New. Granted there are other factors involved as well. The Spirit comes in the New Testament era much more fully than in the Old. But even with that, the history of the Church has borne out that the Church has suffered ebbs and flows in its faithfulness much like Israel of old. Psalms 80 and 85 are fervent prayers for restoration and renewal or revival, apparently due to the sinfulness of the people and their wandering from God. We get a glimpse of such an ebb in the New Testament as well, particularly in Revelation 2-3 as Jesus addresses and critiques the 7 churches, including Ephesus. **Read Psalm 80.** It is a fervent, impassioned plea for restoration from beginning to end of the Psalm.

1. What plea is found three times over in the Psalm? _____

2. Upon what does the Psalmist depend for their salvation? _____

3. Where does the responsibility lie for their turning to the Lord? Think about that question carefully. _____

Read Psalm 79:8-10, and note the argument used in that Psalm just before this one.

Read Psalm 85.

4. Notice Psalm 79:5, 80:4, and 85:4-5, and the reference to anger. In addition, Psalm 85:1-5 seems to reflect a previous restoration, but which now has gone bad again so that the Psalmist is once again pleading fervently for restoration and revival. What would be the result of “revival”? _____

5. Psalm 85:6 makes a powerful point about the effect of “revival.” What is it? _____

Read Ephesians 4:17-24. Here Paul speaks of personal renewal that is intended to be continuous. What is it that brings about such renewal? _____

The church at Ephesus was a vibrant church during the time of Paul’s rather extended ministry there, as recording in Acts 19-20. Paul had ministered the Gospel in the synagogue in the beginning of his time in Ephesus, but 19:8ff recounts that due to opposition, Paul moved to the hall of Tyrannus, and reasoned daily in the hall of Tyrannus for at least two years – DAILY! The result was that

“all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” (20:10). In chapter 20, Paul later recounts the nature of his ministry in Ephesus to the elders of the church who had traveled from Ephesus to Miletus to meet with Paul. Paul speaks of having taught them in public and from house to house. He did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable (vs 20), from testifying both to Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (20-21). Paul characterizes his message as testifying to the gospel of the grace of God (21), proclaiming the kingdom (25), and affirmed he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God (28), which I believe he summarized in the book of Ephesians.

John wrote Revelation a good bit later, and he records that Christ critiqued the church of Ephesus for having “abandoned the love [they] had at first,” and called them to repent. The church was in need of renewal or revitalization even though it had not succumbed to false teachers, apparently maintaining sound doctrine.

For your Meditation and Prayer: The experience of the church of Ephesus makes it clear that a church can be sound in doctrine and yet lose its spiritual vitality. Look back at Psalm 85:6, and reflect on that in light of pastor Chad’s message about delighting in Christ. God has shown us his steadfast love, granting us salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ, and as he delighted in his Son, so he would have us delight in and rejoice in Jesus. Pray for that to be a reality at Westminster.

Theme for the week to come: “A True Disciple Strives for Holiness”

Ephesians 4:23-24 calls us “to be renewed in the spirit of [our] minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in [righteousness and holiness of the truth] (that is, the truth as it is in Jesus as in vs 21).” I put part of the verse in brackets because I think that is a better translation than the ESV’s “true righteousness and holiness,” which although true in itself, fails to make the point that such righteousness and holiness is that which grows out of and is in accord with the truth that is in Jesus. The truth that is in Jesus, of which Paul speaks, is both what Jesus taught during his ministry on earth, and what he taught the writers of the New Testament by his Spirit after his resurrection. So today we’ll look at selected parts of the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7, and tomorrow we’ll look at Ephesians itself.

Read Matthew 5:6 and 5:20-48.

Righteousness and Holiness are essentially the same thing. Matthew 5:3-12 speaks of characteristics of a disciple of Christ, one of which is that he hungers and thirsts for righteousness. So the question is – “What IS this righteousness of which he speaks?” He speaks of it again in 5:20, saying our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. As you read 5:20-48, over and over again you read: “you have heard that it was said to those of old ... But I say to you ...” Jesus is not contrasting his teaching with that of the Old Testament, but with that of the scribes and Pharisees about the Old Testament. Jesus is affirming the intent of the Old Testament in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, who had majored on externals.

1. So, what is that righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees? In what way does it “exceed” what they had taught? _____

A comment: Remember that a principle of Scripture is that you always interpret in the context of the Scriptures, both context immediately surrounding a verse or statement, and more broadly as well. Scripture interprets Scripture. So what we must not do here is think that Jesus is teaching that we save ourselves by achieving some level or depth of righteousness. He began the Sermon on the Mount saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” meaning that the person who will enter the kingdom of heaven recognizes at the outset his total bankruptcy of spirit. He has nothing of which to boast before God. So the issue is not salvation by works. Jesus is not here describing *how* one is saved to enter the kingdom of heaven, but what will characterize those who are saved to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is akin to Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2:8-10 -- *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Read Matthew 6:1-6 & 16-18.

2. What is the difference between the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and that which Jesus teaches? _____

Read Matthew 7:21-27.

3. What characterizes a true disciple (and, righteousness and holiness) according to this passage? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect back over what you have read, and upon your own life. It might be an occasion for “fervent prayer”!

As I have said a number of times while at Westminster, I think Ephesians is something of a summary and panoramic overview of the “whole counsel of God” which Paul taught in Ephesus. It doesn’t cover everything, of course, but gives an overview nevertheless. Chapters 1-3 primarily deal with what we normally think of as theology, and chapters 4-6 deal with an overview of how we are to live worthy of our calling to be a new redeemed humanity in the midst of this world of fallen humanity. We are to become different. We are to be restored to the image of our Creator, the moral image lost by the fall – restored to the righteousness and holiness that grows out of the truth of God revealed in Christ. So, let’s look at those chapters. This is what I want you to try to do today: below I have broken Eph 4-6 into sections, and I want you to *skim* those chapters and simply write a couple of brief notes about what each section deals with. I’ll give you an illustration in the first section. Eph 4:1 governs the entire 3 chapters. Paul urges the Ephesian “disciples” to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called,” which I contend is to live as a new redeemed humanity in the midst of the fallen mass of humanity in this world. We are to be salt and light; we are to show what God created us to be in the beginning by more and more taking on the image of our Creator in righteousness and holiness growing out of the truth that is in Jesus. So skim these chapters and jot a couple of notes about the subject of each section. I’ll give one illustration:

4:2-16 – This section is about how we are to live in the church, maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and growing under the leadership of our pastor and elders into maturity.

4:17-19 -- _____

4:20-24 -- _____

4:25-5:2 -- _____

5:3-14 -- _____

5:15-6:9 – verses 15-21 speak of living according to wisdom by the power of the Spirit, concluding with the exhortation to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, followed by three sections describing how that submission is to function in different areas of life. So you pick up those areas:

5:22-33 -- _____

6:1-4 -- _____

6:5-9 -- _____

6:10-20 -- _____

6:21-24 _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: What I suggest you do today is to look back over those sections, and ask the Lord to help you see which areas you most need to work on personally, and if you can make time, spend some time praying about that area or those areas.

Ephesians 4:1ff spoke of maintaining the unity of the Spirit, and what sort of spirit we must have to do so. Eph 4:29 mentions how we use our tongues, which is critical to maintaining the unity of the Spirit.

Read Ephesians 4:29 and James 3:1-18.

1. How are we to use our tongues according to Eph 4:29 as a part of the new redeemed humanity that reflects the image of Jesus? _____

2. How serious a matter is it to misuse our tongues according to James 3:1-12? _____

3. When we misuse our tongues (read James 4:11-12 for one way we often do), whose image are we reflecting according to 3:6? Explain: _____

4. Who do you talk to about other people in the church? Anyone? Are your words worthy of representing a new redeemed humanity purchased at the cost of Christ’s blood? If not, what are you going to do about it? _____

5. James 3:13-18 remains in the context of words spoken, reflecting on the spirit and motives behind them, positively or negatively. Eph 5:15 told us to “Look carefully then how we walk, not as unwise but as wise.” So, in light of James 3:13-18, actually 3:2-18, do you walk according to heavenly wisdom, or according to earthly, unspiritual, demonic “wisdom”? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: You may think I am making too much of this area, but if I take James 3:6-8 seriously, it means you and I both need to examine ourselves and the use of our tongues. Have we managed to prove James 3:8 wrong? This is an area of righteousness and holiness all of us must reflect upon, because we so often and so easily violate what is taught in Eph 4:29 and James 3! So think about your conversations with people with whom you let down your guard and say what you think, often about others. Are there things to confess to the Lord, and things to repent of? Pray over this matter. It is critically important. As a pastor I’ve often been on the end of hearing someone tell me how badly they have been hurt by someone’s words spoken all to glibly.

Read Romans 12:1-2, and keep your Bible open there.

As we speak of a true disciple striving for holiness, these verses come to my mind as one of the most important principles we ought to understand.

1. The sacrifice of an animal required its death. Do you think offering ourselves as “living sacrifices” requires less than whole-hearted-and-souled commitment to the Lord? Explain your answer: _____

2. How does verse 2 of Romans 12 relate to verse 1? _____

3. What relationship can you see between Rom 12:2 and Ephesians 4:20-24?

4. If you want to know and discern the will of God, meaning, how he wants his people to walk, what must you do? _____

5. How does Luke 6:46-49 relate to Romans 12:2? _____

6. What about Matthew 15:1-9? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: It is often easier to *assume* we know the will of God, and simply *ignore* pursuing God’s truth, than to devote the time and energy into exploring the Word of God to know his will. The result is often “conformity” to the world’s views, or to a moderation of their views to something we find comfortable with in our consciences, rather than the diligent pursuit of Truth. Identification with the “morally upright” of our world is not the same thing as the “renewal of our minds” through the Word of God to discern what the will of God is.

The writer had just concluded a parade of men and women of faith and their accomplishments by faith, and at 12:1 makes a specific application to their (and our) lives.

Read Hebrews 12:1-17.

The larger context of this passage is important. Hebrews 10:35-39 had urged the people to endurance, characterizing genuine saving faith as an enduring faith. The writer had then spent the entirety of chapter 11 illustrating persevering faith through the lives of various men and women who had believed the Lord and had held fast to his promises. The final illustration, but more than merely another illustration is the introduction of Jesus, to whom we are to look as we run the race set before us (12:1-2). Verse 3 then uses Jesus’ example as a challenge for our endurance, that we might not grow weary or fainthearted. But then the writer begins to speak of the disciplines of a Father, and God’s disciplines of us precisely because of his love for us.

1. Why does God discipline us? What is his purpose in doing so? _____

2. Ought we to expect to escape God’s disciplines if we are his children? Should we be surprised at the trials that come our way? Explain: _____

3. Is the severity of the trials a child of God faces measured by justice, so that the better a person is, the lighter and less painful the trial? Explain: _____

4. When we undergo trials that are altogether unfair at the hands of others, perhaps even other members of the church, how do we put them in perspective? What does the writer tell us to do when facing mistreatment by others, whoever they may be? _____

In verse 11, the writer speaks of our being “trained by” God’s disciplines. The Greek word for “trained” is the word from which we get *gymnasium*. It is as though we are in God’s gymnasium, and he as the trainer is designing his disciplines and trials to develop in us those specific character qualities we need, or that he wants us to have. Perhaps he wants to train someone for some future ministry to another. Perhaps he observes some point of weakness, or some area where we are lacking spiritually. Perhaps we have become too comfortable with this world, even in its fallenness, because we have received so much from his hand – like the people of Israel did when they entered Canaan, and received houses they did not build, and crops and vineyards they did not plant, wealth for which they

had not labored, etc. What if instead of stimulating us to serve the Lord more fervently, to pursue holiness more seriously and diligently, we begin to enjoy his gifts and neglect those things? Might God respond to these things to address our spiritual needs? What if we can't see anything God might be doing in our lives or the life of one for whom we care? What does this passage teach us? _____

5. Verse 14 is a very important verse, and the reason I chose this particular passage in light of pastor Chad's message about disciples striving for holiness. How important is it that we strive for peace with everyone, and for holiness?

6. The writer warns about someone failing to obtain the grace of God, and of some root of bitterness springing up to cause trouble so that many might be defiled (vs 15). **Read Deuteronomy 29:18-21**, which seems to be the passage the author of Hebrews is alluding to by "root of bitterness." What characterizes the person in Deuteronomy that is so dangerous, not only to himself but to others? What impact should the grace of God have upon a person's life that is obviously foreign to this person (*see Titus 2:11-15*)? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Look back over your answers to the questions proposed, and give thought to them, praying for understanding of what God would have us understand, and for trust in him when we don't understand.

Read Galatians 5:13-26.

1. True or False: Holiness is an individual matter between me and God. _____
Now, explain your answer from this passage: _____

I've given you a fair amount of space to answer the above, because there is a lot said about it in this passage.

2. True or False: Holiness is primarily about relationships. _____
Now, explain your answer from this passage: _____

3. Some of the things mentioned as "works of the flesh," that is, of our sinful nature, are clearly and obviously wrong. Which ones do you think are more subtle? Thinking back to the 10th when we looked at James 3, what sins of the tongue can you think of that might be expressions of some of the things mentioned that are not so obviously wrong? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: In answering the questions just above, particularly the last one, did you mention "gossip"? Paul mentions it in a similar context in 2 Corinthians 12:19-21. Why can "gossip" be such a subtle thing, but so readily be a way of "biting and devouring" another (as in Gal 5:15), and contribute to "enmity, strife, rivalries, dissensions, and express jealousy or envy and slander? One of the best Greek Lexicons defines "gossip" as found in 2 Corinthians 12:20 as "derogatory information about someone that is offered in a tone of confidentiality, (*secret*) gossip, tale-bearing." It is sobering to realize that in Galatians 5:20 Paul says: "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God," and in 2 Corinthians 13:8, shortly after his similar list as Galatians 5, he urges the members of the Corinthian church: "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith." Do we take these matters related to peace and holiness as seriously as the writer to the Hebrews, and as Paul? – which leads to the next characteristic of a disciple . . .

Theme for the week to come: “A True Disciple Loves the Church”

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 again, but this time with the above theme in view.

1. This passage does mention “love,” but beyond that, it is filled with expressions of love for the church in one way or another. See how many you can pick out: _____

2. A “Disciple” is one who learns from and follows another. Jesus said: “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.” (Matthew 10:25) If that is the case, what are some implications of Ephesians 5:25-27? _____

3. It is easy to say, “I love the Church,” when speaking non-specifically, like a child saying “I love EVERYBODY in the whole world,” which simply is not true! Loving the Church/church must be concrete and specific – what church? Which people? because the church is people, not a building, not a vague concept. Look back over Ephesians 4:1-16. What evidences are present to say they were to love a specific church in their case, and particular people, some of whom they might likely not have hit it off with naturally? _____

4. So, what did it mean to love them? What does it mean to love Westminster Presbyterian Church – specific people, all of them? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: My guess is that some of you have certain people you don’t particularly like, possible don’t talk about very positively, and wouldn’t miss if they left. You need to address that! You need to pray for them, and you need to pray for repentance and for love as a fruit of the Spirit.

We won't try to read all three chapters, but allow me to establish the context, and then we'll focus on a few matters that pertain to loving the church.

The Corinthian church had a lot of problems. There were divisions over preachers they liked or didn't (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1ff), there was immorality being tolerated within, there were members taking other members to court instead of seeking help to settle matters within the church, there were members offending others by indulging in practices that others found offensive and regarded as wrong, and, there was a huge problem with respect to different gifts of the Spirit, which is what we are going to look at for a few minutes.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

1. What can you discern from those verses about the problem within the church over spiritual gifts? _____

In chapter 14, Paul will address the issue of members wanting to speak in tongues, which was a rather spectacular gift. But there was a problem in the attitude behind it.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:2-12.

2. What is the attitude of those who want to speak in tongues that so disturbs Paul? _____

3. Right in the middle of these two chapters, Paul includes chapter 13. **Read 1 Corinthians 13, and then answer:** Why do you think he wrote chapter 13 right in the middle of his discussion of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church?

4. What was the focus of their love? Who did they love most? How big an issue was that in light of Jesus' teaching about the two great commandments?

5. Read the following verses to see what would have been their concerns if they had truly loved one another, and then spell them out below: 1 Cor 12:7, 11, 24-26, (you've read chapter 13 already), and 14:1-4, 12, 18-20. So, what should have been their concern? What would have demonstrated love for the church? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Do you think of what the church can do for you most, or what you can do for others in the church – ALL others in the church?

As we think of a disciple loving the church, one of the greatest examples set before us in the Scripture is the apostle Paul himself, and one of the greatest illustrations of that is his dealing with the Corinthian church. Let's see . . .

Acts 18 records Paul's planting of the church in Corinth. He spent over a year and a half there. 1 Corinthians reveals a lot of problems in the church, as we noted yesterday, one of which was their divisions over preacher-preferences. Some preferred Paul, some Apollos, others Cephas (Peter).

1. **Glance through 1 Corinthians 4:14-15, 10:14 and 15:58** – what do you note about Paul's attitude toward the church? How does he view them? _____

In 2 Corinthians we begin to pick up on strains in relationship between Paul and some in the church, something already reflected in 1 Corinthians in the divisions over preacher preferences. But in 2nd Corinthians it is much more pronounced. Chapter 1 seems to reflect criticism of Paul because he changed his plans about visiting them, and Paul has to defend his actions – problem! 2:1ff alludes to a painful visit he made to them over some problems in the church which required action on Paul's part, and it didn't go over well at first apparently.

2. Read 2 Cor 6:3-13. Do you detect some strain in relationship in vss 11-13 that cause Paul to make clear to them what he has to endure in ministry, and has endured even for them? What do you see in vss 11-13? _____

3. Read 2 Cor 7:2-9. Do you see evidence of contrast in Paul's spirit towards them and theirs toward him, even though further on he reflects that they responded well in the end? _____

Chapters 10-12 are a sustained self-defense on Paul's part, not for selfish reasons, but because the gospel is at stake.

4. Read rather rapidly the following, and see what you can discern about relationships between the church and Paul – 10:1-2 and 10:7-11:33. Then read 12:11-21. _____

For all Paul had done for the Corinthians, all he had suffered, all he had sacrificed, as well as having to play the part of a parent corrected his wayward child, the Corinthian church members were much more ready to favor others who took advantage of them, than Paul. But this is my point: Did Paul continue to love them? Did he persevere in relationship with them because of his love?

For your Meditation and Prayer: Is Paul not a model for us of Christ's love for us? Pray about what that ought to mean for our relationships with others in the church.

Read John 13:34-35.

I recently was going through files to determine what to keep and what not. I came to my folder of wedding services I have conducted. It has impressed me over the years that although every one of those couples would have professed their love for one another, and did, most, if not all, really didn't understand what love really is all that well. Most didn't really know the person they were marrying; they only thought they did. And sometimes, after they married and got to really know the person they married, they didn't like who they married as much as they had thought they did. Guards were let down, and they began to express who they really were more than when they were dating and wanted to make an impression on the other. I'm sure many grew to genuinely and deeply love one another in spite of those discoveries. Strong marriages were built. Some didn't – sadly!

When we read a text like the one you just read, we can sometimes think that we love the Church of Jesus Christ. We can attend a huge Christian conference, and meet others that we really like, because we share a common faith. But where is the real test of our love? It is not there, is it? It is in the local church. It is like a marriage. The real test of love is when we get to know people more deeply. We sometimes find that we don't really like them as well as we thought when we get to know them better. Others we may like more. And we naturally gravitate towards those we like more. But we are called to love the church, to love one another, and not necessarily because we like one another in every respect. We are to love others in spite of things we don't like. We are to love like Jesus loved us. Isn't that the point of the text above? So let's read some other passages from 1 John.

Read 1 John 2:3-11 and 3:11-18 and 4:7-21.

1. Is there a difference between “liking” somebody, and “loving” somebody? Explain: _____

2. Is there a different standard for pastors and church members with respect to loving others in the church? How would you answer that? Explain: _____

3. We are given certain qualifications to look for in men we elect as elders and deacons in the church. Is there a double standard, one for officers and another for church members? Explain: _____

You may be wondering where I am going with those questions, or at least suspect that I am going somewhere with them. You would be correct. So I'll answer my own questions: There is not a different standard for pastors and church members, or a double standard for officers and members – not Biblically, that is – except in something like being “apt to teach” for elders. Pastors, elders, and deacons are called to be examples to the flock, precisely because members are to follow their example, not because there is a different standard or double standard. I think many church members DO have a double standard, in the sense that some assume it is all right for them to live at a lower standard. That is not true.

The reason for the qualifications of officers is to say that they should have matured or grown to a point that they can be examples, but not to say that others can be content with a lower standard. And may I add, some members are beyond those of us who lead in their spiritual maturity and growth, which is a challenge and example to us. Many women, who are not to serve in church offices, are fully qualified so far as spiritual maturity and even giftedness. But God gave the responsibility of leadership in the family and church to men, and we often fall short, admittedly, and sadly.

But this is the point I want to make and for you to consider. Members of a church expect their pastor to love them, or believe he ought to. But sometimes members assume they don't have to love everybody in the church, which means, they don't have to love “the church,” because “the church” IS the people who make it up. And that is not true!

4. In the passages you read for today, where did any exclude any of the members of the church? Where did any indicate that you only needed to love the people you happen to like and gravitate towards? Do you find any exceptions? _____

I hope you only needed that little line after “...any exceptions?” to answer, and that the other lines are blank, unless you explained why you answered “no.”

So, this is the point: Jesus's command in John 13:34-35, and John's teaching in the passages we read from 1 John, all say that “true disciples love the **church,**” not part of it, or some of it, or most of it. We are to love the church as Christ has loved us. It is true that there are probably some in the church who are not true believers. We are to love them with the desire that they would come to Christ, and if we see they don't appear to be genuine believers, to pray for them, and minister to them, if we are able.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect on your love for the members of the church. Is that an area where you need to grow? There are people we have to “bear with in love” because we don't particularly like some things about them, but we are to genuinely love them anyway. Pray about these matters, and that the Spirit will so work in us that we will love one another fervently.

Read Ephesians 5:25-27.

You may be wondering: didn't we just deal with that recently? And "yes" we did. But today I want to shift to another implication of that passage.

The application we made earlier pertained to our love for a local church, because that is where our love is expressed concretely for the most part, and where we can fulfill the "one another" ministries mentioned in the New Testament epistles. But there is another application more broadly.

1. What does it mean to love the Church worldwide? Can you think of ways we can love the Church that Christ purchased with his blood worldwide? _____

I mentioned earlier attending conferences where we meet other Christians from other places, some from other parts of the world. And we often experience an immediate bond because of Christ, whom we share. Although that is not the deepest love, there is a love that flows immediately as we recognize a brother or sister in the Faith.

Some of the "Church" Christ purchased has not yet come to faith, but will. Christ died for us long before we came to faith, but we have come to faith (assuming we have) because he bought us with his blood. Every spiritual blessing, including saving faith and repentance, comes to us because purchased by Christ through his saving work.

2. So, how can you love the Church that is "yet to be" in our generation? _____

3. How can you love the Church broadly – the Church under persecution? the Church struggling for survival? the Church devastated by a hurricane or tornado?

For your Meditation and Prayer: We love concretely, most challengingly, and most deeply, in the local church. But does our love extend beyond, even in our own denomination? How can we love the Presbyterian Church in America because of its strong stand on the Scriptures and its commitment to Reformed Theology? How can we love other denominations that differ with us somewhat theologically, but still hold to the Gospel and the Word of God?

Theme for the week to come: "A True Disciple Shares the Gospel"

Read John 1:35-52 and Matthew 9:9-13.

1. What is common to each of those whom Jesus initially called to be his disciples: Andrew, Philip, and Matthew? _____

2. What was different between Andrew and Philip's story and Matthew's in terms of how they shared something of the gospel? _____

Read Matthew 5:13-16.

3. Jesus speaks of a witness in these verses. What is the nature of the witness he describes? _____

4. When you think of sharing the Gospel, what are your biggest obstacles to doing so? _____

5. What can you do to overcome those obstacles? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Give some time to think of ways you could be a witness to the Gospel to others. Pray and ask for wisdom in these matters. Reflect on what keeps you from being a witness – if you are hesitant – and pray for wisdom and courage to figure out ways to share the Gospel compatible with your personality. Peter was bold and spoke readily, but Andrew was usually behind-the-scenes, inviting people to come to Jesus. Matthew used an altogether different method.

Read Colossians 4:2-6.

Earlier pastor Chad preached about Disciples praying fervently. We began the month there. As Paul comes toward the close of his letter to the Colossian church, he urges them to “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” He is writing from prison in Rome, and he gives them a prayer request. It is most likely different than what most of us would have asked. We would likely have been mostly concerned to get out of prison, don’t you think?

1. What is Paul concerned about? _____

2. In his concern, Paul models for the believers in Colossae, and for us, what ought to be our concern as disciples of Christ. What concern is that? _____

We believe in God’s sovereignty in evangelism. It is he that causes a person to respond by powerfully calling and regenerating those he chooses to save. But that does not mean we ignore human dynamics when we interact with others. We don’t walk up and bluntly declare the gospel, expecting that *how* we do it makes no difference, that God is going to act no matter how we do it.

3. What do you think Paul means when he says: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time”? _____

4. What does “salt” do to food when cooked, and how might that apply to talking to someone about Jesus? _____

Notice that he doesn’t tell them to knock on doors, or do something specific to reach out to people – not that those are bad or wrong – but tells them how to respond to someone asking a question. Perhaps he anticipated that their lives were likely to attract attention so that people asked why they were different. Whatever the case he seems to speak of their responding to someone who asks something about their lives.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect back on Paul’s prayer request. Ought that not to be what we pray for ourselves too, and then we need to be alert for answers to that prayer so that we don’t miss the opportunities the Lord provides, and we need to make opportunities. Pray that the Lord will open doors of opportunity for you, and for others who might be engaged in outreach.

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10 and 3:13-18.

Peter alludes to or quotes from three passages of Scripture in 2:9-10 – Exodus 19:5-6 regarding the people of Israel, Isaiah 43:21, again of Israel – “... my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise” – and Hosea 2:23, which opens the door for all who are considered “not my people.” The phrase “that they might declare my praise” naturally leads to what we find in 3:13-18, where we are to be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in you.

1. Do you feel prepared to do that, to offer a defense of the hope of the Gospel? If not, what do you plan to do about it? _____

2. As with Colossians, if our “good behavior” stands out in the midst of our culture, it is anticipated that people will ask. But how are we to make that defense? What is to be our spirit? _____

3. Notice in verse 17 the phrase “suffer for doing good, *if that should be God’s will...*” Why might it be God’s will for us to suffer for doing good? _____

Immediately Peter points out that Christ suffered to bring us to God, and that was obviously according to the Father’s will. So, in a somewhat similar manner, it may be his will that WE suffer in order to bring others to Christ.

When I read 1 Pet 3:15, I visualize in my mind the idea of Christ being “set apart” (the primary meaning of “holy”) to that one place of **authority** over my life, the place where he is preeminent over all of life. Is that not what a disciple is supposed to do? Is that not what Luke 9:23ff is about – look that up? Luke 9:23 was the theme verse of a youth retreat where I was converted.

So, here again Jesus emphasizes that “discipleship” is about denying ourselves, taking up the cross (and so dying to ourselves), and following him. He defined his mission at one point as bearing witness to the truth (John 18:35), and that is our role as well.

For your Mediation and Prayer: God’s sovereignty is written all over this passage in 1 Peter 2:9-10 and 3:13-18, and yet we are still told how we are to approach others with gentleness and respect. Witness and apologetics are not about humiliating our opponent, but about respectfully trying to win others over.

Since pastor Chad is going to begin a series on Philipians the first Lord’s Day of August, and there will be something of an overlap of themes with this past week’s focus on Disciples sharing the Gospel, we are going to lead into the book of Philipians over the next week and a half. So turn to Matthew.

Read Matthew 16:13-28.

1. Jesus continued to preach and teach and heal, eventually arriving in Caesarea Philippi, where he asked the question in vs 13, to which Peter gave reply. How did Peter get that insight? _____

When Jesus proceeded to tell the disciples what was to happen to him in Jerusalem, Peter objected, and was met with a stinging rebuke. Jesus proceeded to give a tremendously important statement about discipleship, which parallels Luke 9:23 that we observed in the last day’s reading, only not recording the word “daily” which Luke recorded.

2. Looking at Matthew 16:24-27, what are the demands of discipleship under Jesus? _____

3. Backing up slightly, what did Jesus indicate that he would be doing prior to his coming to judge the world? _____

4. So, how would you expect that he would accomplish that purpose? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: As I indicated in yesterday’s reading, I was converted through Luke’s version of Matthew 16:24, because God used it by his Spirit to impress on me the radical nature of the Lordship of Christ, and that overwhelmed me with a sense of my sinfulness to have not acknowledged him as Lord of every area of my life. I still struggle with my shortcomings, and how easily I can fail to deny myself and take up the cross “daily” (as Luke records) and follow Christ as Lord. Part of the conviction he brought to me was that I was not concerned to be a witness to the other kids at school, but was content to let them perish while I did nothing to share the Gospel. I still fall short, and at nearly 70 years of age, need to share the Gospel more freely. Do you? Reflect on your own concern to share the Gospel with others in various ways, but intentionally, and make it a matter of prayer.

In the last message I preached, concluding the series on the Westminster Confession of Faith, I spelled out again the way I understand the unfolding of God’s redemptive purpose. As I understand it, Matthew 12:29-30 is Jesus’ declaration that the “strong man,” meaning Satan, is about to be bound by virtue of Jesus’ death and resurrection, in the particular sense that he can no longer keep the nations completely under the authority of his kingdom, and Christ and his Church would then plunder Satan’s kingdom through the proclamation of the Gospel during this New Testament Age. That is what I think Revelation 20:1-3 describes. Part of my reason for believing that is found in the next chapter of Matthew as Jesus unfolds the nature of the coming of his kingdom (notice in Matthew 12 the conflict of “kingdoms” in vss 25-28). The kingdom of God came with Jesus in the manner of a sower sowing seed until the time of the harvest comes at the return of Christ. So let’s look at Matthew 13.

Even John the Baptist seemed to think that when the Christ came, he would immediately bring judgment and deliverance. Jesus’ parables revealed that the kingdom of God did not come in the manner of final judgment and deliverance, but in the manner of sowing of the seed of the Gospel to the Nations.

1. **Read through Matthew 13, and make notes that indicate an era of sowing prior to a harvest and judgment, and see if my representation seems correct:**

2. What do the parables of the mustard seed and leaven indicate about the kingdom? How are they alike, and how are they different in what they portray?

3. What do you gather from the parable of the net (vss 47ff)?

For your Meditation and Prayer: Close by reflecting on what the parables of the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great value should mean to you, and make it a matter of prayer that what they mean will more and more be a reality.

Read John 12:20-33.

Jesus is drawing near to the time of his death in this Gospel, and some Greeks come, wishing to see Jesus. Philip met them, told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip did what Andrew is almost always seen doing, bringing people to Jesus. Jesus seemed to take it as a sign that the time of his death was at hand.

1. Taking into account what Jesus says in this passage, what do you think was the significance of GREEKS coming to him? (hint: vs 32) _____

2. What practical significance do verses 24-26 have for your life? _____

3. Compare Matthew 16:25-26 with John 12:25-26. Does John's account illuminate the meaning of Matt 16:25, and also reflect Matt 16:26? What do you think? Explain: _____

4. Does John 12:31-32 square with what I said yesterday about binding the strong man to plunder his kingdom? Explain what you think. What about Colossians 1:12-14? _____

Read John 17:1-9 and 17-21.

5. In John 14-16, Jesus spoke repeatedly of the Spirit coming to continue and carry on his work. Here he speaks of his authority to give eternal life to all whom the Father has given him, some of whom are yet to come. How do you see that unfold in the Book of Acts? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Turn back in your Bibles to Isaiah 53, the clearest and one of the most important prophetic passages in all the Old Testament. If you have time, read the entire chapter. If not, read 53:10 – 54:3. That is what is unfolding right now. Praise the Lord, and give him thanks.

Read Matthew 9:37-38 and Matthew 28:18-20.

Although the immediate context of Matthew 9:37-38 was Jesus' ministry on earth, Matthew 13 makes it clear that the harvest would embrace the nations. The mustard seed would grow to accommodate the birds of the air (representing peoples from the nations coming to roost), and the leaven of the Gospel would permeate through the entire earth, which we see happening extensively even now.

1. So, in light of Matthew 28:18-20, how ought we to apply Matthew 9:37-38 today? _____

[Dr. Lloyd Kim, coordinator of MTW, our World Missions agency, has asked that we all pray that God would raise up 1% of our denomination as a missions force in the next few years. Why don't we pray that the Lord raise up 1% of our congregation to go into Missions?]

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is given in several forms in the Gospels, but always with a view to discipling the nations as in Matthew. **Read Luke's account in Luke 24:45-49, and then turn to Acts 1.**

1. Luke is the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Acts 1:1-8 picks up from Luke 24:45-49, and the Book of Acts unfolds from Jerusalem and the coming of the Holy Spirit, to Samaria and on toward the uttermost parts of the earth, the Gentiles. What guarantees the success of the Gospel? _____

2. Does the certainty of the Mission relieve the Church of huge responsibility? Explain your answer: _____

3. What does it do for the Church? _____

4. Does the certainty relieve the Church of sacrifice and hardship and persecution? What does it do for the Church? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Read Colossians 1:24-29. Think about that passage and how it ought to impact us and our attitudes toward discipling the nations. Pray that we might have a heart like that of the Apostle Paul. What does it say he did?

Acts begins in Jerusalem with the fulfillment of the promise that the Father would fulfill the promise of the Spirit, giving to his exalted Son the authority to send forth the Spirit (Acts 2:33). At Pentecost 3000 are converted, and the Church continues to grow rapidly under the power of the Spirit using the ministry of the Word. With the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7, a persecution arises, led largely by Saul who is intent on destroying what he believed was a heresy leading people astray from the living God. Because of his vehemence, the believers began to scatter through Judea and Samaria, and Philip begins to proclaim the Gospel in Samaria – remember the pattern of Acts 1:8 – “you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”? Samaritans receive the Word of the Gospel, and Christ certifies their acceptance by giving the Holy Spirit to them when the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to see what was happening there. Chapter 9! The conversion of Saul! whom we know as Paul. Chapter 10 – God has Cornelius send for Peter, who preaches the Gospel to Cornelius and his household. And Christ sends the Holy Spirit upon them dramatically while Peter was still preaching, accompanying the outpouring of the Spirit with speaking in tongues to certify that now the door was opened to the Gentiles, which was huge!!! Meanwhile, those who were scattered because of the persecution, came to Antioch, and a church was planted in Antioch of Syria. The church in Antioch grew, and Barnabas went to Tarsus where Saul was, and brought him back to Antioch, which was a multi-national-or-ethnic church – Acts 11. Acts 13 – While the church of Antioch was worshiping, the Holy Spirit said: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” So commenced Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey into portions of central modern day Turkey. After the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, Paul commences his 2nd Missionary Journey. After traveling through the regions he had visited on the 1st Journey, and re-visiting churches, Paul had a vision in the night of a man in Macedonia calling “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Concluding that God had called him to go to preach the gospel there, Paul sailed to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi.

Let’s stop our time-line there, and back up briefly.

1. How can you see God’s sovereign hand involved even in persecution?

2. Although Peter was called to open the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul was chosen to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. God had orchestrated numerous events in Paul’s life to lead to that calling, and to prepare him to be the premier expositor of the Gospel. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.** Do you see any parallel to what God did in the life of Saul, soon to be called Paul?

3. Is there any wonder that Paul became the champion of sovereign grace? Read his burst of praise to the church of Ephesus, and his prayer for the Ephesian believers that follows: ***Read Ephesians 1:3-2:10.***

For your Meditation and Prayer: Pray through Ephesians 1:3-2:10, praising God and thanking him that he has done a sovereign work in your life, if so be the case. Let me give you an example or two:

1:3 – Father, I praise you for your grace that is given me “in Christ,” for I would never have any favor from you were it not for what you did for me in your Son.

1:4 – Thank you for choosing me in Christ before the foundation of the world, that I might become holy before you. I confess I am so far short of being holy and blameless before you now, but thank you that it is certain that I will be one day, because you have secured that certainty for me through your son, Jesus.

Etc.

2:4ff – Father I thank you that though I was dead in my sin and trespasses, with no hope in myself, that you raised me from spiritual death just as you raised Jesus from the physical death, and made me alive in him.

Etc.

Now, you pray through the passage.

We'll return now to Philippi and Paul's ministry there.

Read Acts 16:6-15.

1. Why did Lydia give heed to the Gospel Paul preached? _____

Notice that her "household" was baptized with her.

Things did not go well afterwards when Paul cast an evil spirit out of a slave girl. Notice that her owners cared nothing about her condition so long as it served their purposes, and were not pleased that she was delivered from an evil spirit. But the evil spirit knew who Paul served. The very first ones to recognize who Jesus was during his ministry were the evil spirits!

Read Acts 9:10-16, and note vs 10. How many of us would choose to serve, and persevere in our service, with that prospect and experience?

2. What was Paul and Silas's response to being severely beaten, thrown in prison, and having their feet fastened in stocks? _____

3. Suppose Paul and Silas had moped and complained, saying bad things about those who were responsible for their being beaten and those who beat them? Do you think the Philippian jailer would have responded as he did? Would they have done so in spite of that since God is sovereign in our salvation? Think before you answer that. Explain your answer: _____

Note that the jailer's whole household was baptized as well.

4. Note Paul's response to the magistrates. Why do you think he responded that way? _____

Such was the beginning of the Philippian church as we begin to launch upon a study of Paul's letter to the Philippians. This was a great church. May I suggest that in preparation for Chad's preaching through the letter to the Philippians, you do three things:

- 1) Read the letter over from beginning to end in one sitting a couple of times
- 2) Pray for Chad as he prepares and brings to you his messages.
- 3) Pray for yourself, that the Word will bear rich fruit in your life. There is much to learn from this letter. It is a great book!

