

Something or Nothing?

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Galatians 6:2,3

One trend that has negatively impacted our culture today is the rise of self-centeredness. Books on positive thinking, visualization, and self-esteem have made great inroads into our daily life. Corporations, professional athletic teams, and countless individuals have jumped on the bandwagon of promoting themselves. As this mindset precipitated Lucifer's fall, it can also place believers at the edge of spiritual decline.

What are we and what is our value? Because we have been created in the image of God, we have great value and a divinely appointed purpose. As believers, we strive to strike a delicate balance between dependence on the Lord while also exercising our free will to serve Him.

The Scriptures remind us of the balance we should maintain in our attitude in following Christ as both the Lord's children and servants. We can do nothing without Him, yet we can do all things through Him. We are weak in and of ourselves, while at the same time we are strong in Him. We are residents in a sinful world, but our citizenship is in heaven. We are born in the flesh to earthly parents yet have become reborn heirs of the eternal God. We are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. If we lose our life, we will find it; and if we humble ourselves, we will be lifted up. While we advance as saints to our heavenly kingdom, we must never forget that the Lord lifted us out of the pit.

Today's context in Galatians 6 speaks about bearing the burden of one who has been overtaken by a fault. Both believers and unbelievers can be trapped in a pit of sin. While the unbelievers have yet to know the power of deliverance, the believer has experienced freedom through the blood of Jesus, yet can still fall back into that pit in a time of great temptation. In either situation, we should exhibit compassion and concern. Remembering that we also have been rescued from our pit of sin can help us to have the right attitude toward those who are trapped. The Great Reconciler, the Lord Jesus, has also given us the ministry of reconciliation. A hand that is motivated by prayer and compassion has an opportunity to reach down and help someone escape their trap.

Today's scripture warns us not to be deceived by thinking we are something when we are nothing. Remembering that we are nothing without the Lord can help us to better serve the One who is everything.

J. Ekis

All of These and More

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Psalm 18:2

In the scriptures, the attributes of God are revealed by a variety of names. The three most prominent names are God (Elohim), LORD and GOD (Jehovah), and Lord (Adonai), which combined occur over 9,000 times in the Old Testament. Together these names reveal God as the self-existent One, that is eternal, supremely strong, and master of all. Other aspects of God's nature and attributes are revealed through some compound names as well. The Bible also uses metaphoric language to better help us understand our great God. Today's verse is a descriptive and concentrated cluster of what God was to David.

The background of this Psalm seems to be when David experienced deliverance from His many trials while being pursued by the vengeful and jealous King Saul. David learned to draw from His faith in God to find the strength and protection to help him to endure. Every step of the way the Lord proved Himself faithful. All the varying circumstances necessitated different facets of God's attributes to sustain and support David through his times of trial. The intimacy of his relationship with his Lord was intensified during these times.

Like David, we also will have our times of trial. It is during these seasons of tribulation that we will find the extreme limitations of our strength, moving us to exercise our faith and dependence on God. In our weakness, we can become strong in Him. Adversity can strengthen earthly relationships; the same holds for our relationship with our Lord. Knowing Him as the constant rock on which we stand produces hope as the storms of life assault. When the many darts of Satan are hurled against us, we find safety in the fortress of God; and as pressures and temptations approach, we can find refuge in His high tower. Even during our inner struggles where fear and doubts molest us, there is peace in knowing that we are secure in the horn of His salvation. The truth of *Psalm 56:13 For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?* reminds us that God not only saves, but He also preserves.

As we experience that the Lord is a rock, a high tower, a buckler, and a fortress, we will also discover that He is all of these and more.

J. Ekis

Look inward

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Romans 12:9

In contemplating the application of these very practical exhortations that enumerate different aspects of how a transformed life, with a renewed mind, should administer the gifts that God has dealt to each by faith, we do well to apply them personally. While we may hear general explanations and examples of dissimulation, or hypocrisy, do we examine the emphasis of the text before us? It warns specifically of the danger of loving hypocritically. For example, when exercising the gift of ministry (v. 7), while we “wait on our ministering,” do we examine our inner motive, lest our outward act of love be borne of a selfish spirit that desires accolades from the recipient rather than the glory of God? Or how do we view those Pharisees whom Jesus condemned in Matthew 23? Do we imagine ourselves standing on Jesus’ side, also condemning them who had not the Spirit, or do we look instead into our own hearts and identify similar hypocrisies that need the remedy of transformation? Can we actually understand the unhypocritical love of His excoriation, through the truth that they so desperately needed, desiring not their condemnation, but their repentance? We only need to read a bit further to see the spirit with which He delivered the message, as He lamented over the unrepentant leaders of the unrepentant city (Matthew 23:37).

Moving to the next admonition, as we abhor that which is evil, do we apply that first to the evil that we find still within our own hearts, which still can be tempted to sin? Can we cry out with the apostle, “who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Or do we take pride only in abhorring the evil in others, especially the famous or those who would stand against us? We can easily find in this present world plenty of examples of sin that we can and should hate, as we love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. But will we exhibit the same hatred for our own attitudes that will not be broken over the lost state of those trapped by the world system? Are we generally known as Christians for only what we hate, or are we rather known for how and whom we love? Are we so thankful to God for the good that He has graciously provided to which we can cleave, so that it spills out of us to others? Beloved, this chapter is addressed to us, the brethren. Let us take it very personally, and allow it to renew our minds to the glory of our Father in heaven.

Chattering Penury

In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.
– Proverbs 14:23 –

Our text offers some immediate practical wisdom. It should be obvious (at least to those not brainwashed in the devilish teachings of Socialism) that profit and wealth come from work. No one can or should expect to “get ahead” by sitting idle. While God is the One Who blesses the storehouse, it is rarely filled with any supply that is not the result of personal sweat. God has ordained it so. Deuteronomy 8:18 reminds us that is the Lord that gives the power to get wealth, and Paul’s inspired example to the Thessalonian church was that if any would not work, neither should he eat (2 Thess. 3:10).

There is a deeper spiritual application to this proverb, however. It has to do with the Kingdom of God. Jesus referred to it as laboring in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-2, 8) and as occupying till He comes (Lk. 19:13). The profit from this Kingdom work is foreshadowed in temporal blessings of soul while we pilgrim in this barren land (Mk. 10:30), but the full manifestation will become our eternal possession only after we pass through death’s gate into our inheritance that is incorruptible an undefiled and that fadeth not away (1 Pet. 1:4). There will be gold, silver, and precious stones directly proportional to the toilsome labor that the faithful disciple engaged in with purity of heart while earth-side (1 Cor. 3:12).

But many believers will miss out or severely diminish their heavenly remuneration due to lack of initiative to enter the fray while the day was at hand to do so. The excuses for this are multitudinous, from faux humility to lack of prioritization, but among the most pathetic are those who speak with great veracity and zeal about biblical themes and theological issues, and yet have never sullied their hands, or done so with any constancy, in the very personal business of witnessing for the Savior.

Spreading the gospel is not easy. It really cannot be done effectively behind the curtain of social media or in non-personal interactions or philosophical online “discussions”. And it requires more than just “praying for” someone. It is most frequently and nearly uniformly necessary to engage lost souls on a personal level in order to effectually influence them for the Kingdom. It is toilsome. It requires effort, involves risk, and at times begets heartbreak. It should not be something we do merely periodically, when this or that program that we like to serve in comes around, but should rather be something we actively seek to do on a continual basis. It is an integral part of the Christian walk. Without it, we are actually living in disobedience to our Lord who commanded us to make disciples of every nation.

Are we laboring for the King? Let our intentions become more than talk. For the love of God and men, let us resolve to be consistently about the Master’s business. There is great profit in this greatest of work. The fields are still white unto harvest. To the plow and to the sickle!

-- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Operation of God Part II

*Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
Col. 2:12-13*

From last Friday's, lesson :

(The doctor walked back into the patient's room clutching several x-ray films along with the radiologist's report. The patient, reading the dour expression on the physician's face, concluded that the test results confirmed the grim diagnosis-radical and immediate surgery would be the only hope for preserving the patient's life. All the previous modalities failed to suppress the advancement of the insidious cancer. Radiation, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, hormone therapy, stem cell transplant and even photodynamic therapy were all employed but proved to be ineffective treatments. Surgery was the last option because of the size and placement of the tumor and because of the amount of cutting that would be involved, but with all channels exhausted the patient was handed the permission forms to sign and the operation was performed. The incisions were made and the cutting was extensive. The ensuing pain from the operation was excruciating, but because of the skill of the surgeon, the operation was a complete success, the deadly tumor removed, and the patient's life preserved.)

Let us consider the above scenario as an allegorical lesson regarding the "operation of God".

REFERAL: So with the examination completed and the diagnosis pronounced, the Primary Care Physician will refer you to a surgeon for the needed life-saving procedure.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SURGEON: To ensure complete success it behooves us to find the right doctor. As the UPMC commercial says "Choose your health care provider as though your life depended on it" Mark 5:26:(She) had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.

FINDING THE GREAT PHYSICIAN: No one knows your condition better than the One who created you. And no one can employ the life-saving skills with more acumen than the Son of God. Psalm 103:1-4: Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;

EXPLANATION: The best physician wants to thoroughly explain what the patient will be undergoing as well as what is to be expected with post-surgery pain and rehabilitation. The Lord invites us to "count the cost" of following Him before making the decision. Proverbs 5:23 He shall die without instruction, and in the greatness of his folly, he shall go astray...For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:

PRE-OP PREPARATION: No eating the night before surgery. Shower with antibacterial soap. Pre-op consultation with anesthesiologist and physician. Signing consent forms. The Holy Spirit does his work of conviction to bring the sinner to an awareness of his jeopardy. The sinner repents and is receptive to a new life in Christ. Isaiah 1:16: Wash you, make you clean; Matthew 3:3: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. an awareness

SURGERY: Surgery requires cutting away the bad and in some cases transplanting the new: Ezekiel 36:26A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

CLEANING AND SUTURING THE INCISION: After the procedure, great care is given to apply antiseptic to the wound to prevent infection. Luke 10:34:And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.

Praise to Jesus, the Great Physician!

Pastor

(Continued to next Friday)

Everything in Moderation

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

Philippians 4:5

The definition of moderation is *the quality of being moderate: avoidance of extremes or excesses; also, temperance*. Sometimes this word is stretched to justify partaking in potentially harmful substances, as long as we only use a little bit. It is certainly good to exercise self-control, especially in areas that can negatively affect us. While moderation is a good thing to possess, today's text has a different meaning.

The apostle Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned the Epistle to the Philippians while he was in prison. Paul preached the power of Christ in him and demonstrated that power through the many trials he endured. His epistle highlights that the believer's lifestyle should be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Joy, humility, prayer, and contentment are a few that are addressed.

Today's verse emphasizes that believers should let their *moderation be known to all men*. Moderation in this text suggests a mild and gentle spirit. As followers of Christ, we are to emulate the example He set. His divine teachings and His miracles were certainly attractive, but they were augmented by how Jesus conducted himself. As the Lord's first advent is depicted as a lamb, every aspect of His life would display gentleness. Even at His unjust trial, when confronted by the angry Jewish leaders, Jesus' words and actions emanate from His moderation. He demonstrates no anger or hatred toward His persecutors. The prophet Isaiah records that *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep, before his shearers was dumb, so he openeth not his mouth*. Because the gentle Lamb of God willingly laid down His life as a sacrifice for sin, mankind would have a Savior.

As He walked, so are we to do the same. When we have the opportunity to share the good news with others, our lives should demonstrate a gentle spirit that resonates from our peace within. The effect of our words will be diminished if we appear to be angry or frustrated. Especially in today's world when so many people are restless and frustrated, we have an opportunity to show them something different. Just maybe the message we bring and the spirit with which we bring it can influence someone for the Kingdom of God. Pray that the Holy Spirit will fill us, and suppress our unbecoming manner and allow His moderation to flow from us.

J. Ekis

Precious memories

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

Philippians 1:3-5

Whether it be memory that initiates prayer, or prayer that augments memory, the apostle reflects the refreshing aspect of such interaction that brings thanksgiving and joy to our hearts. Paul here is no doubt remembering the hungry, teachable, and generous spirit of the Philippian believers that grew from that first day, when he met Lydia and her prayer partners, to the encounter with the jailor whose life was transformed in a night, unto the time of this writing from the Roman jail, where he had continued to receive sustenance sent from this faithful church. He could pray for the work of God to continue in each of their lives, as his faith was strengthened by the joy for what God had done in them throughout that time.

Although our prayer times may include the burdens that we bear for others as they deal with difficult circumstances of this life, those times also allow us to remember and contemplate the work of the Lord in their lives. As we precede our intercessions with recounting the marvelous works of God in building the lives of fellow believers, we benefit from the thankful spirit that such an exercise engenders. That spirit, in turn, can enable us to pray more effectually as we consider that the Lord is certainly able to continue that work in and on behalf of those we bring before Him. While current and urgent needs may tend to crowd out such opportunity from our minds, let us follow the apostle's example and give thanks to God, as we recount our common fellowship and growth in the gospel with those for whom we pray. Then, may we also be able to share with the apostle the confidence, "that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Help Me, Lord

*Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy.
– Psalm 109:26 –*

Though we are God's people, we are frequently prone to harbor a misconception in regard to communicating with the Lord. We often fall prey to the heathen notion that we shall be heard for our much speaking. But our God does not listen for words from our lips. He yearns to attend to the cries that emanate from deep within our being. This is what the psalmist meant when he cried, "Deep calleth unto deep..." True prayer is often outwardly brief when erupting from a heart engaged. Such inward engagement of soul is ongoing, conforming to the apostle's injunction to "pray without ceasing."

Over the course of the last thirty years, I have found our God to be quite responsive to this most simple, earnest prayer. "Help me, Lord," has sprung from my heart so many times and been answered in such a vast array of situations that it would be impossible to enumerate them all. He has heard me and attended to this cry, "Help us, Lord," when my wife or children were sick. He has rushed to my ejaculatory, inward call, "Help me, Lord," when in expeditious need of right words to comfort a broken-hearted soul, or when I pined for wisdom to turn a difficult conversation towards a witness for Him. He has responded to this prayer countless times when taking up His Word to instruct young minds and hearts in its sacred contents. He has lovingly rushed to my side in my own seasons of loss and sorrow, when the grief was so overwhelming that these simple words could barely formulate within my heart, let alone pass through my lips – "Help me, Lord." He has even condescended on numerous occasions to assist me in the most practical of ways with comparatively inconsequential challenges, such as when financial distress presented itself, or things like household projects or auto repairs appeared a bit too big for my limited aptitude or resource to remedy.

"Help me, Lord," is a confession of our weakness, and of His strength. It is an admission of our smallness, and of His grandeur. It acknowledges our finitude, and His omnipotence. It exhibits our sincerity, that we are certainly not abnegating our responsibility to do our part, while recognizing that the problem at hand is well beyond our control, and we need our Father's benevolent interposition for resolution. "Help me, Lord," is a prayer most effectual when a heart is wholly convinced that human means are insufficient, and yet securely confident that God can and will help because of Who He is – our shield (Ps. 33:20), our salvation (Ps. 38:22), our deliverer (Ps. 40:17), the preserver of the simple (Ps. 116:6), and the maker of heaven and earth (Ps. 124:8).

Today will undoubtedly present many and sundry challenges. Help us, Lord! -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Operation of God Part III

*Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
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(The doctor walked back into the patient's room clutching several x-ray films along with the radiologist's report. The patient, reading the dour expression on the physician's face, concluded that the test results confirmed the grim diagnosis-radical and immediate surgery would be the only hope for preserving the patient's life. All the previous modalities failed to suppress the advancement of insidious cancer. Radiation, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, hormone therapy, stem cell transplant, and even photodynamic therapy were all employed but proved to be ineffective treatments. Surgery was the last option because of the size and placement of the tumor and because of the amount of cutting that would be involved, but with all channels exhausted the patient was handed the permission forms to sign and the operation was performed. The incisions were made and the cutting was extensive. The ensuing pain from the operation was excruciating, but because of the skill of the surgeon, the operation was a complete success, the deadly tumor removed, and the patient's life preserved.)

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The Great Physician has completed the life-saving surgery and now gives the patient the necessary instructions to ensure a complete recovery.

POST-OP INSTRUCTIONS: With every surgery there comes some degree of pain and adjustments. Colossians 2:11: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." The patient will need to alter his lifestyle so as to prevent damage and infection to the wounded areas. The new believer must obey the surgeon's instructions if he wishes to make a full recovery.

SELF-EXAMINATION: The patient must take care to cleanse the wound and apply healing ointments to prevent infection. 2 Corinthians 13:5 "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." Reapplying the cleansing power of the Word of God each day will ensure that the infection of sin will not take any advancements.

FOLLOW-UP DOCTOR VISITS: The surgeon will turn your case over to your primary care physician who will want to see you on a regular basis. It is essential that the patient continue to be seen long after the surgery. The PCP may order various tests and blood work if he suspects any problems. Hebrews 10:25 "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Consistent church attendance is tantamount to healthy Christian living.

MEDICINES: It may be necessary to remain on various medications to aid in the complete healing of the patient. Jeremiah 8:22: "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Psalms 107:20: "He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."

REHABILITATION: This necessary component must be assiduously applied so as to bring full restoration to the patient. The process is often painful and laborious but if patiently endured will yield great benefits. Ephesians 4:16 "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

REST: Vitally bound to the healing process is the necessity of the patient in getting proper rest. Tension and agitation aggravate the mind and body and vitiate the patient, thus interfering with his recovery. Psalms 4:8 "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety." Isaiah 57:2 "He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness"

HOSPITAL BILLS AND COPAYS: There are unexpected costs to every procedure. One needs to evaluate the financial burden that such procedures may incur before electing to proceed with surgery. Luke 14:28: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?" Your new life in Christ may cost you family, friends, position, wealth, and cherished habits. The disciple must count the cost before giving consent to the operation of God.

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

It Ruins Everything

... Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

Ezekiel 18:30

Sin! It ruined everything! With our predecessor's disobedience sin entered the world and every animate and inanimate thing was affected. The pristine paradise of Eden became off-limits to man, leaving man to navigate a cursed world. In time, God would choose a people through which to work out His plan of redemption; but even His chosen people continued to manifest the effects of sin in their disobedience to God. Finally, God sent His only begotten Son to be the Savior, and ultimately, He will remake heaven and earth.

In today's text, the Prophet Ezekiel, who was carried away in an earlier deportation, is calling God's people to repentance. He warned them that their transgressions would be their ruin if they continued in their rebellious ways. It was their disobedience that brought about their captivity and their continued alienation from God.

As it was with Israel, sin is the ruin of us all. Before conversion, it was our sin that separated us from God. Some of our transgressions brought outward ruination to our life, while other inward sins continued to rob us of peace while steering us farther away from God. By trusting Christ, we escape the eternal ruin of sin, but we are still subject to its detrimental effects. Left unsuppressed self-centeredness will strain or eventually ruin relationships. Always demanding our preferences or dominating conversations often causes others to draw back. Pride is the source of contentions, and it is what keeps God at a distance. How many arguments would cease if one of the parties would choose to hold their tongue? Self-justification continues to make excuses for wrongs, marginalizing any level of repentance. The Proverbs warn that *every way of man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts*. Unconfessed sin will seem normal and will deepen the blindness of our hearts. Spiritual lethargy will prevent us from having good and positive habits. If our attitude toward daily scripture reading is half-hearted, it will stunt our appetite for daily spiritual food. Staying on the milk of the Word will limit the necessary spiritual protein to strengthen our inner man. We are to exercise ourselves unto godliness and doing so will help stimulate us to further obedience.

Many stumbling blocks can bring ruin to our Christian walk. If we stop progressing, it is important to examine ourselves to see if there are any impediments. If we sincerely ask the Lord to reveal what hinders our growth, we can with His help turn away from the things that would ruin our walk with Him. ~ J. Ekis

Light

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

John 1:4-5

As the apostle John begins his gospel account, he swiftly spans through time, from eternity past where the living Word created all things, to the time of the incarnation of the life-giving Son of God, full of grace and truth. Among the many descriptions that John applies to the Lord, in our text he emphasizes the light of life that He shines in the midst of the darkness that pervades the hearts of mankind. Just a few thoughts later he states that the light of life “lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (verse 9). We understand this to be a description of conscience, which attests within every person to the truth of the Word of God. John also describes the witness of John the Baptist to the light of Christ. Yet, with the inward witness of conscience, as well as the outward witness of the prophet, the apostle’s commentary sadly concludes that the darkness comprehended it not. This is echoed also in the statements that those in the world that was made by Him knew Him not, and that even His own, the people of Israel, received Him not.

This is expounded further in chapter three in the discussion with Nicodemus, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d” (John 3:19-20). This expanded teaching helps us understand why the darkness of men does not comprehend the light. It is not because they are incapable, but because they are unrepentant, and choose to run from that light that would expose their evil.

Yet, later in that first chapter of John, we are introduced to those early disciples that began to pursue and believe the witness of the prophet and the light. Thus, in the face of the darkness, we can see the mercy of God in continuing to shine that light to bring people to eternal life. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 4:6). Let us be thankful for His grace, and allow His light to reflect its witness in us and through us to those that need to turn to the light.

The Foolishness of God

*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
– 1 Corinthians 1:25 –*

This devilishly influenced world increasingly embraces Satan's lies. Mankind is drinking in doctrines of devils at an alarming pace. "God is dead" has been the operative philosophical construct of the postmodern world. Man is no longer in need of a mythical supreme being, they tell us. Human reason is the sum total of all things. Belief in God and personal salvation through Him is infantile foolishness to be eradicated from civilized society.

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: The LORD shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:4). God is not dead. To the contrary, it is mankind that is dying (and does it not seem the more "civilized" we become, the faster the death process advances?) But God has graciously provided a way for perishing humanity to find eternal life – in the cross of Jesus Christ. All who humble themselves, subjecting their God-given reason to a God-directed faith that embraces the Son of God's propitiatory sacrifice upon Calvary's Hill can experience the glorious power and wisdom of God in the conversion of the soul.

In the cross, God has destroyed the wisdom of men. Human pride and arrogance cannot look upon a heaving, bloodied Christ and reconcile such a thing intellectually with salvific efficacy. It will only be those who humble themselves here at the foot this cross, subjecting their human reason to God's stated design, that will apprehend its eternal mystery.

In the cross, God has exposed the weakness of men. Human intellect is unaware of its insufficiency in things temporal, much less its incapacity in things eternal. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Six feet of dirt make all men equal." The same end is in store for everyone who draws breath, be they potentate, slave, soldier, businessman, ambassador, housewife, et. al. Death proves all humanity alike – equally and hopelessly powerless. Ah, but those who respond to the preaching of the cross of Christ find the overwhelming power of God! This is a power unlike anything known to man. It is a power that radically transforms a person from within. It is a power that changes the whole man – his thoughts, his words, his conduct. And the cross's power is one that releases a soul from the fear of death, because death itself was conquered forever by the One who willingly shed His blood upon it!

Yes, God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. Our Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Let us who have experienced the saving power of the preaching of His cross recognize that by it, the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world. May we be content today to be fools for Christ's sake (1 Cor. 4:10), actively proclaiming the cross's efficacy via our graciously transformed lives. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Speechless

Luke 1:20,22: And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

.. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

There are malevolent miracles recorded in the Bible, and this most certainly falls into that category. The petulant messenger from God had enough of Zacharias' unbelief and thus smote him with a temporary speechlessness. After 400 years of absolute silence from the Lord, Gabriel suddenly appears in the temple to confirm the hope of the everlasting kingdom. Zacharias and Elizabeth were in that rare group of those "who waited for the kingdom of God". Though stricken by years, they fervently clung to the "blessed hope and glorious appearing" of the Son of God. But that they would be chosen as supporting actors in this glorious drama was perhaps more than Zachariah could fathom. And so, his momentary hesitance to believe caused him to suffer a commensurate chastisement. Gabriel vanishes as suddenly as he appeared leaving the faithful priest with no ability to tell the others of the glad evangel that had just been conveyed. Try to imagine this poor priest's frustration as he stands before the others with the glow of heavenly aura gracing his countenance and yet finds no voice with which to convey the glad tidings of good things.

Methodist Minister, Rev. William Sangster died on Easter Sunday, 1960 of Muscular Atrophy, which seized his muscles and destroyed his ability to speak. He penned these words just before passing. "How terrible to wake up on Easter and have no voice to shout "He is Risen!" And yet far worse to have a voice and not want to shout it"

For nine months, Zachariah had to pine away in his sentence of silence. How many times he must have wished that he could utter even a single line to prepare the others for the coming of the King of kings? How could such portentous promises be conveyed on a writing tablet or with hand gesticulation? No, this message must find its conveyance in syntax, uttered with ardent fervency. Alas, the angel forbade a word to issue from his lip until the term had been satisfied. For that duration, the good news lay dormant in the heart and mind of Zacharias until the birth of John. Until then, like David, "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue".

Holding the promised child in his arms, then was his tongue loosened and jubilant words poured forth from a heart aglow with hope and anticipation. "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;" Luke 1:67-69.

We in these last days, have even a greater message to tell, for the King has come and has redeemed us from all iniquity, while conquering death, defeating the devil, and soon returning in glory. Let us not be speechless in proclaiming the full gospel!

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Offense and Defense

... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Ephesians 6:17

In competitive team sports, such as soccer, football, baseball, and basketball, the two main components of the sport are offense and defense. A team must have a good offense and defense to be competitive enough to win. To be good in one area and not the other provides a great advantage to the opponent. A football team may have the ability to score forty points a game, but if they allow forty-five points a game they will lose. Today's text addresses the Christian soldier's offensive and defensive weapon: the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

When describing the soldier's accouterments, the shield, breastplate, and helmet are primarily for protection, while having the loins girt and feet shod enhances the soldier's mobility. However, the sword is used for both offense and defense. As an offensive weapon, the sword can knock weapons out of the enemy's hand and also be used to penetrate their vital zone. Defensively, the sword can redirect the enemies thrust of a spear or sword away from its intended target.

For our spiritual warfare, all of this equipment is valuable to fight the good fight of faith; but without the sword of the Word, we would only fight a defensive battle. The sword of the Word energized by the Spirit enables believers to defend against and also defeat the devil. When the snare of the fowler tries to entrap believers, it is God's truth that becomes our shield and buckler. When wavering with doubt because of the devil's lies, we should quickly hide behind the eternal shield of God's truth. The Word of Truth can also energize us to go on the offensive. Our great example, the Lord Jesus did this when tempted by the devil in the wilderness. As He was tempted with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, our Champion the Lord Jesus counterattacked by quoting scripture. The devil retreated when Jesus repulsed his attacks by saying "it is written". We can use the sword of the Word to not only resist temptation but also to make advances into the devil's kingdom. By the power of His Word, the Lord can use us to release people that have been taken captive by our enemy. If a lost person embraces the truth we share, they will be liberated to true freedom.

Every day we must remember that we are involved in spiritual warfare. With the sword of the Spirit, we can be fully equipped to resist the devil and have the weaponry necessary to reclaim some of his prisoners. J. Ekis

Sanctified Sagacity

Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab.

II Chronicles 18:1

Jehoshaphat had, to this point in the chronicler's account, been one of the better kings of Judah, even described in chapter 17 as walking in the first ways of his father David, seeking the Lord and walking in His commandments, and not walking "after the doings of Israel," the apostate northern kingdom. He is also described as fortifying key cities of Judah against Israel, and strengthening their military. Furthermore, he sent his princes and selected Levites to be itinerant teachers of the law of the Lord in all the cities of Judah. His faithful and wise attitudes and actions resulted in the blessing of God upon Jehoshaphat's reign, which also resulted in accumulation of wealth, both from the inhabitants of Judah and even from tributary enemies like the Philistines. He also appears to have been prudent in business affairs, which enriched both the nation as well as himself. By all estimation, Jehoshaphat could be described as a successful ruler, in both spiritual and secular realms.

Yet our text introduces a detrimental flaw in the judgment of this successful leader. It seems to imply some association between his accumulated riches and honor and the unwise choice to "join affinity" with the wicked king Ahab of Israel. This affinity refers to what we later see as the marriage of Jehoshaphat's firstborn son, Jehoram, to the daughter of Ahab, apparently the wicked Athaliah. The later accounts of these two accentuate the dreadful impact of this union on Judah.

Jehoshaphat becomes an enigma at this point in the record. In this chapter, he makes the foolish choice to meet with Ahab and agrees to join with him in battle against Syria. Yet he wisely insists on consulting with a prophet of Jehovah, in opposition to the counsel of Ahab's false prophets. Except, when the godly Micaiah pronounced Ahab's doom in the face of their lies, Jehoshaphat proceeded into the battle, additionally heeding Ahab's suggestion to remain in his kingly robes while Ahab disguised himself from the enemy. In spite of his mental dullness in these areas, Jehoshaphat was mercifully spared through the battle where Ahab lost his life. Then, after being warned by God's prophet of these foolish choices, he seemed to readily repent. God also gave him success in a subsequent battle against the children of Lot, in response to his prayerful and faithful leadership.

These apparently contradictory behaviors remind us of Elihu's statement to Job and his friends: "Great men are not always wise" (Job 32:9). Jesus similarly alluded to this when He noted that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). Let us learn the lesson from this account, and seek to employ God's discernment in both our spiritual and seemingly secular decisions. We must not make the mistake of assuming that God's blessing in one area guarantees the correctness of our choices in other areas of life. As His children, every choice we make must be directed by His principles.

Buying the Truth

*Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.
– Proverbs 23:23 –*

The Truth is for sale! That may be counterintuitive, but it is nonetheless true, else we would not be exhorted to purchase it. Like God's grace, His truth is free, but not cheap. It is not a commodity, like the devil's lies, which are multitudinous in variety and so plenteous that they are easy to obtain and virtually costless to secure (at least initially). God's truth, to the contrary, is precious. Like material gemstones, it needs to first be located, and then meticulously mined in order to unearth the vastness of its beauty and treasure.

When securing a threshing floor for a place to sacrifice and worship God, David insisted to pay for the property, telling the owner Araounah, "Nay; but I will surely buy it thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver" (2 Sam. 24: 24). We do well to follow David's example. Discipleship requires personal sacrifice. Our spiritual wallets, per se, need to "feel it" if we are to advance in our walk with the Lord. But we do not purchase God's truth with silver, gold, dollars, or cents. The investment currency is not material. So how do we "buy the truth"?

Buying the truth requires time and attention. God has gone to great lengths to make the quarry easily locative. The Word of God holds all that is necessary for life and godliness. But its contents must be mined in order to be possessed. The truth seeker must assiduously apply himself in order to unearth its sacred treasures. Time – vast amounts of time – that could be easily spent in other venues must be invested in learning how to read this Book. Humility and focus are also required, because this Book cannot be merely read like any other. It must be approached in faith, studied in sincerity, interpreted by the Spirit, and believed fully in order to redound its manifold blessings to the heart.

Investing in the pursuit of God's truth in this fashion secures it as a purchased possession within the soul. It becomes our own – a very part of us. We begin to understand what the apostle meant when he said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). When we buy the truth, we find that it is the means God has ordained for us to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. There will never be buyer's remorse with this most precious purchase! -- D. Murcek

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Fidelity

...and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. Jeremiah 23:28

We must first be sure that we have the word. Let us not be derelict in the keeping of this divine treasure that has been vouchsafed to our trust. The word of God is a precious commodity and must be assiduously guarded. What man does not take his most valued possessions and store them under lock and key? In a corrupt world thieves are wont to break through and steal if such safeguards are not put in place. In the spiritual realm "The thief cometh not, but for to steal" and to "pluck up that which is planted". So with all diligence we must be "Holding fast the faithful word".

Our salvation is wholly dependent on, not only hearing the word, but also in keeping and continuing in that word. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;" John 8:31.

In the many things that we have to read, be it book, magazines, legal contracts, news reports, etc., we can employ a more or less casual perusal of the matter. But God's word demands so much more of us, for they are words of life. Jesus said: "Let these sayings sink down into your ears" and "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." Let us be certain then that we are true possessors of the word of God.

Then we must speak that same word faithfully. "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" in executing the responsibility that has been entrusted to them. The Lord has given us the words of life and He expects us to freely distribute to others what has been freely given to us. It is not our prerogative to alter or diminish that message. Who are we to add to or take from what the Master has spoken? Stephen could speak no more or no less than what the Lord gave him to speak, though it cost him his life. Micaiah knew that he would incur the wrath of the king but nonetheless pronounced the words of doom despite the consequences. The same could be said of Nathan, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Paul, and even backslidden Balaam who all agreed with Peter "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" Acts 4:20.

The pillow prophets (Ezekiel 13) appeased their audiences in Ezekiel's day as they do in our current time. They yield to the flattery of men's admiration and acquiesce to the whims of the carnally minded who say "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits". When the word of God presents an inconvenient truth, the modern apostates change the immutable words of God and in so doing sate the guilty consciences while damning their eternal souls.

This much is certain, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Matthew 24:35. So let the people of God remain immovable in its glorious proclamation being, as our Master was, ever true and faithful.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor
Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God
Romans 10:17

A Tempering Balance (Spiritually Balanced)

But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

Ephesians 4:15

After having new tires installed on your vehicle, you will notice that your bill will itemize a price for mounting and balancing. If you have ever driven a car having even one of its wheels out of balance, you can appreciate the importance of having your wheels balanced. Without that balance, the car will shake and vibrate making controlled steering difficult. You may be able to drive from point A to point B, but the journey will be neither smooth nor efficient. Our Christian journey is similar, we must keep certain things in balance to be more effective in our walk with Christ.

Today's text is one of many that teach the importance of the proper balance of the Christlike virtues that should exist in our lives. It is important to be people of truth, and we are commissioned to share the light of God's truth with those who walk in darkness. Truth can be blunt, but it is necessary for liberating one who is caught in the devil's devices. But how we convey the truth is of the utmost importance. Balancing the truth with love can soften the heart and make its cutting message more palatable to receive. The saying "no one cares how much we know until they know how much we care" has validity. John 1 tells us that grace and truth were embodied by our Great Example the Lord Jesus, and He demonstrated that balance as He interacted with mankind. Jesus confronted the woman at the well about her lurid past and gracefully offered her the Living Water that could satisfy her thirst (the deep thirst of her soul). In Mark 10, as Jesus is about to reveal to the rich young ruler what he lacked for entrance into heaven, the scripture states "then Jesus beholding him he loved him". Though the young ruler walked away, he could not deny that the Master loved him. Just as Jesus was 100% God and 100% man, He also balanced full measures of truth with love. Elsewhere in the scriptures, as Jesus sent the apostles out into the hostile world, He told them to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. We too should be wise to the aggression of the lost of this world, while demonstrating our inner peace granted by the Holy Spirit that makes us harmless as doves. The book of James instructs us that we are not to be just hearers of the word, but also doers of it. Both hearing the Word and doing it complement one another. Hearing without doing the Word can lead to spiritual weakness while doing without hearing can lead to self-righteousness.

He that began a good work in us, continues to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Today, allow Jesus to correct any imbalance that may exist, so that you may be more effective and reflect Him in our Lord's service. J. Ekis