

## Heart Matters – Part II

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*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

*– Romans 10:9-10 –*

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Salvation is a heart experience, occurring deep within our soul, at the center of our very being. What was once hopelessly lost is miraculously transformed. The spiritual operation performed by God when we believe on Christ is also accompanied by a host of ongoing blessings – gifts that God places within the breast of the believer for our good and His glory. Let us consider and be overwhelmed by what now resides in our hearts who have trusted Jesus...

The Love of God: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. – Romans 5:5

The Holy Ghost: Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. – 2 Corinthians 1:22

Christ Himself: That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith... - Ephesians 3:17

Obedience to God: But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. – Romans 6:17

Abundant Peace: And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The Grace of God: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. – Colossians 3:16

Comfort and Stability: Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work. – 2 Thessalonians 2:17

Direction and Purpose: And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. – 2 Thessalonians 3:5

Brilliant Light: 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. – 2 Corinthians 4:6

The Law of God: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. – 2 Corinthians 3:3

But wait – there's more! We will marvel at the wonderful characteristics God has enabled in a believer's heart next week...

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## The Seeking Shepherd

*Luke 15:6: And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

What pathos! What endearing care the Lord has for the lost. It is evident in the fact that He here gathers together the outcasts and demonstrates His willingness to forgive. These words were validated by actions. How many occasions do we find the Savior stooping to heal the lame, or to feed the poor, hungering multitudes? How He wrote on the ground when asked to accuse the adulteress and by thus doing wrote forgiveness over a life of shame.

Did he not weep with the grieving sisters when they brought him to the grave of their dead brother? And did he not summon him out of the grave to their astonishment and joy? And did not the good shepherd lay down his life for his friends? Indeed "greater love hath no man than this".

A hireling shepherd might just as soon leave the lost lamb to its own devices. He might reason that the sheep made its own bad choice in leaving the flock and so should rightly pay the consequence. He had the 99 left. The loss would be negligible. But a good shepherd sees the value of the one. He would as soon lose all than to lose even one. And so embarks on His mission to "seek and to save that which was lost".

How foolish we have all been in the time past of our lives. We accepted the multiplied benefits of provision, health, and protection afforded to us from our Father in Heaven. Yet we "like sheep have gone astray". The siren call of worldly lusts and pleasures and the deceitfulness of riches seduced us and spirited us away to a profitless destiny. Too far away to find our own way back, and perhaps too ashamed to admit our error, we cower in desolation, hunger, and fear. But then we spied the shadowy figure of the one who took the far journey and traced our sinful path and sought and found us just as we were ready to perish.

The parable of the lost lamb was a two-edged sword. It brought comfort and delight to the disenfranchised sinners who had lost hope that they could ever enter the heavenly kingdom because of their abysmal sin record; at the same time, it served as a scathing denunciation of the apostate religionists who excluded those who didn't meet their standard of holiness. "But woe unto you scribes Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."

The Jewish religion had devolved into a perfunctory, external ritual, with no tolerance for those who had lost their way. The Good Shepherd came to call these back to the flock-Matthew 9:36:"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd". Not only had he come to save the chosen people, but He had room in His atoning work for the despised gentile as well, John 10:16: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd"..

Have a blessed day,

*Pastor*

## Faith and Trust

*When Jesus heard it, he marveled and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

*Matthew 8:10*

Throughout the scriptures, there are references to varying levels of faith. Some verses speak of no faith, others of little faith, strong faith, and in today's verse, great faith. Surely, every true believer wants to be strong in faith, or to have great faith; but how does one obtain this condition? We can ask the Lord as the disciples did to increase our faith. Is it just that easy, or is there some plan to follow so that our faith will become strong? Romans 10:17 teaches that *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*; therefore, we see that growth in faith is intrinsically tied to God's word. The truth of the Word can produce and increase faith in the hearer's life. Ephesians 1:12 mentions those who first trusted Christ, and this trust indicates to hope in advance of confirmation. Trust has an element of faith, just as faith has an element of trust. Sometimes the word for trust is also translated as hope. Hope is holding on for some unseen and favorable outcome to occur.

In today's account, a Roman Centurion is asking for Jesus to heal his servant who was sick of the palsy, which was a type of painful paralysis. This Centurion, displays a great level of compassion, especially for one whose station in life was below him. Though a leader in the Roman army, this Centurion rightly saw himself inferior to the Man from Galilee. Most people would readily welcome Jesus, offering to come to their house to heal a servant. This soldier recognizes that Jesus was the highest authority of all and that the only thing necessary was for the Lord to speak the healing word. This confidence could only have come from hearing Jesus' teachings or hearing about His works of healing others. Possibly the centurion had seen the actual events or at least heard of them. Whatever the case, the Centurion is commended by the Lord for his great faith.

Today, believers not only have the account of Jesus' great works in the four gospels but also the inspired completion of the New Testament. From the Acts of the Apostles, throughout the Epistles, and the Revelation, we have the written Word. This Word is worthy of our faith and trust. Its powerful impact has reached beyond the people of the first century to us today. The word continues to improve lives, restore relationships, and most importantly secure salvation for those who believe. We need not see some supernatural appearance of the Lord to affect our request, rather we must simply believe what He has said. Whatever our need, may our request of the Lord be: *but speak the word only!* J. Ekis

## Listening

*Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.*

*Psalm 143:8*

The prayer in this psalm comes from a soul desperate for a hearing with the LORD God. He begs God to hear his supplications, in the midst of persecution from his enemy, who has overwhelmed his spirit and left his heart desolate. He asks not for judgment, but for mercy, as he knows his own weakness and failures. As a result, he desires to remember the past works of the LORD, to meditate on them, that he might encourage his soul to trust the LORD for deliverance.

Yet, in this text, he also recognizes his own need to be able to hear the LORD's answer for which he cries, even though he confesses his trust in the LORD. He doesn't expect the lovingkindness of the LORD to simply deliver him in passivity, but that it would cause him to hear clearly enough to know the path of obedience wherein he should walk. Understanding that path would teach him to do God's will (verse 10), so that his upright walk would lead his soul out of trouble (verse 11). In desiring that understanding, he says that he lifts up his soul unto the LORD.

What does this mean to lift up the soul? The figure suggests a physical act with a non-physical entity. Could we, with the psalmist, take our soul in our hands and hold it up before the LORD? Then perhaps, with an echo from Psalm 139, repeat the refrain, "Search me, O God..."? If we want to hear Him, as He has heard us, we should be listening to know His way, so that we might walk in it. How often do we want His deliverance from difficulties so that our own way won't be disturbed, when all the while He has allowed such difficulties to draw us to the point of this psalm, and recognize our need to listen, learn, and obey, that it might truly be well with our soul? May the LORD give us such listening souls, that we may conclude with the psalmist, "I am thy servant."

### Heart Matters – Part III

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*Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.*

*– Deuteronomy 4:39 –*

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Our conversion to Christ not only renewed our hearts with an abundance of divine blessings, but also enabled them to routinely live under a new identity. Just look at a few instances of what the Spirit tells us are the characteristics of the regenerated heart of sons and daughters of God. As believers, our hearts should consistently prove to...

Routinely seek God: But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. – Deuteronomy 4:29

Rapidly respond to conscience: And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. – 2 Samuel 24:10

Be continuously reflective & introspective: Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. – Psalm 4:4

Rejoice in God's Word: The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. – Psalm 19:8

Overflow with praise for God: My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. – Psalm 45:1

Be fixed and immovable: My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. – Psalm 57:7

Be fearless: Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. – Psalm 27:3

Be actively cleansed: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. – Psalm 51:10

Be willing to serve God: Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord... - Exodus 35:5

Be diligently kept: Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

We are not what we once were, brothers and sisters! Our Christ has made us new creatures. Let us ensure that we tend our hearts for Him at all times! --- *D. Murcek*

# Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

*Isaiah 59:19: When the enemy shall come in like a flood,  
the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.*

What a sure defense the believer has on which to rely. The unrelenting mystery of iniquity is constantly reappearing in some delusive form to vanquish the work of the church. It must be that Satan knows "he has but a short time" and so he is about devising his diabolical machinations to thwart the power of the gospel. Our inspired text imbues us with the confidence that the gates of hell cannot and will not stand against us. Be assured that where "*sin abounded, grace did much more abound*".

But what is it that that is in the Spirit's hand that causes the enemy to make so hasty a retreat? The word *standard* refers to the unfurled banner that each of the 12 tribes had around which the various sons of Israel would rally in times of emergency. What courage the wearied fighter would take when in the midst of the grand conflict his eye should spy that standard. Of the myriad of names ascribed to our Lord, *Jehovah-Nissi* might most aptly embrace the prophet's imagery—*the Lord our Banner*. Emblazoned on this sacred cloth we might easily be find the words "*If God be for us, who can be against us*". With a renewed invigoration the warrior advances the cause of Christ with invincible fortitude to "win the well-fought day".

Anarchists have co-opted peaceful and justifiable protests in our country to advance their own evil agenda. These agents of the devil have rioted, burned, looted, and occupied sections of our cities in hopes of fueling an overthrow of constitutional government and the rule of law replacing it with Marxist socialism. True believers must earnestly resist this insurrection by petitioning the Holy Spirit to lift up the standard against them.

On September 13, 1814, Francis Scott Key, aboard a British vessel where he was negotiating for a captured American officer's release, anxiously watched the bombardment of the Fort McHenry through the daylight hours. According to Key, "It seemed as though mother earth had opened and was vomiting shot and shell in a sheet of fire and brimstone." But as darkness descended, Key could see little more of the battle than the "red glare" of the enemy's newly designed gunpowder-propelled Congreve rockets tracing fiery arcs across the sky. "The heavens aglow were a seething sea of flame," he later wrote to his friend John Randolph. In the "angry sea," as Key described conditions on that stormy night, the flag-of-truce sloop was "tossed as though in a tempest." Key was alarmed by the sound of "bombs bursting in air"—British shells detonating short of their target.

It seemed unlikely, Key would later recall, that American resistance at the fort could withstand such a pounding. Not until the mists dissipated at dawn September 14 did he learn the outcome of the battle. "At last," he later wrote, "a bright streak of gold mingled with crimson shot athwart the eastern sky, followed by another, and still another, as the morning sun rose." Gradually he was able to discern not the British Union Jack that he had feared, but still, defiantly, an American flag, enormous in its dimensions, fluttering in the breeze from the flagpole of an undefeated Fort McHenry. The fort had not fallen: Baltimore remained safe. It was, he later wrote, a "most merciful deliverance." And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air gave proof through the night that our flag was still there"

One likewise wonders if our nation can withstand the enemy's assault from within and preserve the freedom that has been purchased and preserved at so precious a price. God owes no nation that "forgets" him any promises of preservation. But to the Church that He has purchased with His own blood, He extends the promise that "*the gates of hell cannot prevail against it*". Let us not be found derelict in our duty as preserving salt. Let us plead to the Almighty to lift His holy standard against the existential evils of our day and preserve the liberties for the coming generations.

Have a blessed day,

*Pastor*

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

## **A Place of Retreat**

*... where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oft-times resorted there with his disciples.*

*John 18:1,2*

Gethsemane is forever known as the place where Judas Iscariot betrayed our Lord Jesus. This garden the name of which means “oil press” was located at the foot of the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. This is the site where Peter, James, and John failed to watch with Jesus as he agonized in prayer before his trial and execution. After Jesus willingly submits to God’s will He is taken by the arresting party which eventually leads to His sacrifice at Calvary.

An interesting thing to glean from this text is that Jesus often retreated to this garden with His disciples. Because our Lord was the leader of his disciples, it seems that it was He who led them to this place. We know that there is purpose in all that Jesus ever said and did, so retreating to the garden would enhance the depth of the disciples’ spiritual growth. The Bible does not record the interactions that occurred in the previous visits to this place, but often resorting there indicates that it was an important place to the Lord. Knowing human nature, Jesus would certainly have known that the disciples could lose their focus while witnessing the flurry of miraculous activities involved with following the master. Though each teaching and every miracle had inestimable value, spending intimate time with the Lord in the garden was equally valuable. What a great privilege the apostles had to experience walking and talking and living with the Master for three-plus years. But often retreating with Him provided uninterrupted time to focus on who Jesus was and what He said—this private time probably reinforced the awareness of this privilege.

This account also sets an example that is good for us to follow. The balance of serving the Lord and spending private time with Him is important to our spiritual life. An imbalance hinders the effectiveness of each. Spending private time with the Lord helps to keep us grounded by realizing who is truly the Lord of our life and why we serve Him. Doing various good works in His name can make a positive difference in other’s lives when it is done with the power that is made possible by spending time alone with Jesus. As Jesus oft retreated to the garden with His disciples, may we find that place of solace from the business and noise of the world to spend personal time with our Lord.     **J. Ekis**

## Righteous judgment

*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds.*

*Romans 2:4-6*

In this passage and its context, the apostle issues stern warnings concerning the judgment of God. As he develops just below this the manner in which God will render to every man according to his deeds, one might be tempted to think that the apostle is promoting justification based on those deeds, as he continues, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile" (vv. 7-9). Yet in the next few chapters he lays down the clear scriptural and logical basis for justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28). Is the apostle contradicting himself? Not at all. He is simply in the process of developing his case. It is always important for us to rightly divide the Word of God based on the context. We must step back from the few verses here and see the big picture, how he has, since the first chapter, been discussing the judgment of God. He fully lays out the problem before introducing the solution, which he does about two-thirds of the way through chapter three.

So what do we do with verses 7-10 of chapter two, which seem to imply that eternal life, glory, honor, and peace will be rendered to those who patiently continue in good works? We understand that their context describes the judgment of God, which is always according to works, as our text declares. Indeed, the hypothetical person, Jew or Gentile, that could fulfil this description, might be justified by works. As he says later to the Galatians, "if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Galatians 3:21). But as the case is developed further, he proves and concludes in chapter three, by scripture and reason, that the hypothetical does not exist in mere humanity, which is also his answer to his supposition in Galatians: "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Thus, he demonstrates in both epistles how God provided the remedy, that justification and sanctification must be accomplished by grace through faith in Christ, who fulfilled the hypothetical case, and more.

So then, as the judgment of God is always according to works, it is necessary that salvation must be by grace. Let us be thankful for that grace as we by faith aspire to the hypothetical (Philippians 3:12).





## Tenderhearted

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*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

*– Ephesians 4:32 –*

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The Bible is replete with references concerning the condition of the human heart, with the New Testament focusing on both the believer's acquaintance with it and the keeping of it. In the Gospels alone, Jesus declared that the pure in heart are blessed, warned that adultery can be committed within the heart, identified the heart as the field in which the gospel is sown, exposed the heart as the fountain-source of all sin, warned the disciples about the ever-present threat of the hardening of the heart, and encouraged them to let not their hearts be troubled precisely because of their trust in Him. Add to this litany the many exhortations of the epistles and it will be evident that the Lord wants us paying very close attention to our hearts!

One of those apostolic injunctions regarding our hearts is found in today's text. We are enjoined to be "tenderhearted". The Greek word here is a unique conflation of two other Greek words, and it could be transliterated "well compassionate," or burgeoning with pitiful sympathy. Being tenderhearted carries the connotation of being easily moved toward the good rather than toward the evil when it comes to our perspective and dealings with others. It means when interacting with fellow-sinners, especially our spiritual brethren, to think less about their faults and more about their plight – and to assist them in whatever way we can with the help and power of the Holy Ghost. Being tenderhearted, we rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep. When tenderhearted, I lose self – my good, my desires, my "rights" – for the benefit of my neighbor. It means I freely forgive those who have wronged me, and I forbear with them who have done the same but don't seem to recognize their transgression. After all, has not Jesus done the same and more for me?

Lord, only You are truly tenderhearted. We need your help in this matter. Make us like You – kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving one of another. --- *D. Murcek*

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## The Present Crisis 2.0

*And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD. Jeremiah 9:3:*

Jeremiah lived in treacherous times. Truth had already "fallen in the streets" as Isaiah had previously predicted. Prophet, priest, and king were all confederate in their apostasy and "he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey". Prevarication wore the cloak of religious garb and while political sycophants entertained the king with fanciful delusions of prosperity and peace, the enemy assembled at the gates ready to wreak havoc on the deceived people of God. God's patience has its threshold and Israel had foolishly squandered their last vestige of hope by disparaging the Lord's true messenger.

In his trenchant poem *The Present Crisis*, James Russell Lowell captures the spirit of his compromised era:

*Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne, —  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.*

Depending on how you assess our current age, we are either cursed or blessed with a superabundance of information. There truly is no excuse for ignorance in our information-saturated times. What used to take hours of research in the card catalogs at the local library can now be accessed in seconds with a few keystrokes from the comfort of an easy chair. But there is an inherent and present danger that must be assiduously averted; the "father of lies" has infiltrated the ranks of the learned. The devil, as his name asserts, is a deceiver. Of his many personas let us add that he is the editor-in-chief of all "Fake News". It is imperative to apply the interrogative "What is Truth?" before we permit the entrance of the perverted wisdom of this generation to infect our minds

There is in the heart and mind of every believer a sublime arbiter of truth—the Spirit of Truth who promised to guide us "into all truth" and who "teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie". This is a blessed protection from the skewed sophistry of a world gone mad by its hatred for all things holy.

As we are bombarded with messages that are borne of minds controlled by the devil it is all too easy to fall prey to ideas that "proceed from evil to (more) evil". With the Holy Spirit's help, the Christian must scrutinize all information with a jaundiced eye and cast out the profane leaven that will utterly corrupt his wholesome temple. Beloved, let us gird up the loins of our minds and be valiant for the truth in this desperate time of religious apostasy, moral declension, and pseudo-intellectualism.

Have a blessed day.

*Pastor*

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

## Joyful Service

***Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things...***

***Deuteronomy 28:47***

The context of today's verse is on the eve of Israel's entering the Promised Land after forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Though there were times of severe testing on their journey, Israel also enjoyed and witnessed many divine interventions and experiences that confirmed them as the children of Jehovah. God's favor shown with provision and protection was glaringly apparent as they meandered about in the wilderness of Sinai. Israel experienced both successes and failures with the constant reminder that they were the people of the true God. On the precipice of entering the Promised Land God gave Moses the conditions under which both blessings and chastisements would occur. Unfortunately, Israel often chose the wrong path consequently bringing down God's chastening hand. It was always God's desire for His people to prosper by choosing the right path as revealed in Isaiah 48:18 *O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.* The abundance of what God had done for them should have been the catalyst for his people to joyfully and gladly serve Him.

Israel's exodus from the bondage of Egypt and the following years of wandering through the wilderness often portrays the path of the Christian life. The origin of that journey begins at the cross, where our sins were washed away. Being delivered from the bondage of sin alone should be enough to produce a joy that never departs. One of the trademarks of the early Christians is that they were *filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost*. But after our conversion, our gracious Heavenly Father continues to shower us with His blessings from above. There are times when He delivers us from Satan's assaults, rains bread from heaven to satisfy our hungering soul, and refreshes us with His living water. Each experience should deepen our gratitude, suppress our complaining, and remind us that we serve a great and mighty God. Service done grudgingly with a complaining spirit and a joyless countenance is of no value to God, and a poor witness to those who know not Christ.

As we see from today's text, our service should be with joy and gladness. Many burdens accompany this life, but with the Lord's presence and the blessed hope of His promises, we can with *joy draw waters out of God's well of salvation*.

J. Ekis

## Competing laws

*For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.  
Romans 7:22-23*

In this chapter, the apostle refers to a number of various laws. When he refers in general to “the law,” this obviously and in context means the law of God, as explicitly used in our text. Also in this text, he labels the law of his members, the law of his mind, and the law of sin. Previously, in his opening metaphor, with respect to a wife he refers to the law of her husband. And then, just before our text, he describes a law that he has discovered by experience: “when I would do good, evil is present with me.”

What is a “law” anyway? A search of modern dictionaries leads to various definitions that may be interpreted in current context, and in some cases are even non-committal. In such times, it is often refreshing to consult Noah Webster’s 1828 edition, where he provides no less than 26 definitions of law in its various forms, one of which refers to our text. A great number of these definitions employs the words “rule” or “principle.” In Webster’s definition referring to our text, it says “That which governs or has a tendency to rule; that which has the power of controlling.” The etymology of the word refers to something laid down, as a standard. Thus the various laws described here can be considered rules, which govern the mind, or the members of the body, or which govern, or are governed by, sin.

He has therefore described the principle at work in his human experience in terms of two competing laws, that of his mind and that of his members, or, as termed otherwise in the trilogy of chapters six through eight, his flesh. The flesh, which we have inherited from Adam, is simply bound to the principles of sin, and will naturally follow them. So it is not generally good advice to “do what comes naturally.” On the other hand, the law of the mind has been given a choice by God’s grace. When we choose Christ, the Spirit of God provides the alternative for the inward man, the mind, to delight in the law of God, so that sin, or the flesh, “shall not have dominion [or rule] over you” (6:14). As a result, he concludes victory in this competition for “them which are in Christ Jesus ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (8:1-2). Let us therefore be thankful for the powerful gift of such choice, and yield daily to the Spirit of life who dwells within (8:9-10).

## Living and Dying

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*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.  
– Philippians 1:21 –*

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Before we came to Christ, we had no idea what life was. It was ill-defined, if defined at all. For some, it was a relentless pursuit of being “happy.” For others, a quest to feel good. Some of us saw it as meaningless, while others found some facsimile of purpose in existence, though if pressed, that “purpose” could not stand up to intense scrutiny. This was all because we were distantly adrift from life’s Giver.

But this all changed when Jesus came into the heart! After confessing our sins and casting ourselves helplessly upon the mercies of a Holy God, He freely forgave us for Christ’s sake, and we were born again. Life was not only new, but full. Our Lord came to give us life more abundantly. We were no longer merely surviving, but now thriving. We suddenly realized that before we were fashioned in the womb, He knew us. His will was for us to be – and by being, to glorify Him. THIS is life eternal, knowing Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Oh, the freedom in our pardon! Oh, the wonder of our salvation! Oh, the glory in our redemption! To live – to truly live – is Christ. To know Him, and the fellowship of His suffering, and the power of His resurrection – THIS is living. Yes, in the world we have tribulation, but we are of good cheer because He has overcome the world. Yes, we are troubled on every side, but not perplexed. We are distressed, but not in despair. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. THIS is life!

But simultaneously, this life we currently live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God is one that is temporal in nature. We tend to forget that it is merely a rehearsal for the main event, a vestibule to the unfathomable eternity that only the redeemed of the Lord can claim as their own. In our flesh, we cling too firmly to its fleeting days. We often find ourselves consumed by its troubles and overwhelmed by its challenges. The Master mercifully prepares us in various ways for our coming appointment with our mortal exit – the illness of a loved one, the untimely death of a family member, the tragic end of a friend. Our own bodies begin to break down, reminding us of our subjection to the curse. During our struggles with life’s heart-breaking moments, we are being weaned from this world. While we continue to kick and claw and grasp the temporal, we begin to desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. But fight we must and fight we will – until He tells us to fight no longer. And when that moment of our scheduled departure finally arrives for each of us, He will graciously dispatch His angels from the third heaven to usher us across the valley of the shadow of death into eternal realms, the glories of which our earth-bound selves have not even begun to imagine. When we finally step across that great divide onto Heaven’s blissful shore, will we wonder why we were holding on so tightly to our mortal existence? Will we feel embarrassed that we were not eagerly anticipating this eternal day? When we see Him face to face, will we not finally understand in all its fulness and grandeur the unspeakable treasure we inherited when asked Jesus to save us?

Brothers and sisters – to live is Christ, and to die is gain! --- *D. Murcek*

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Blest Be the Tie that Binds

*Acts 20:36-38: ¶And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.*

John Fawcett was converted at age 16 under the ministry of George Whitefield. The evangelist passed through Bradford in 1755 and spoke from John 3:14. Fawcett later recalled, "As long as life remains, I shall remember both the text and the sermon." He first joined the Methodists, but three years later began attending the Baptist Church in Bradford, England. Upon telling Whitefield he wanted to preach, the evangelist gave Fawcett his blessing. He was ordained a Baptist minister at Wainsgate, Yorkshire. John was asked to serve as the pastor of a small church in Wainsgate, at age 25. In his own words, Fawcett describes his congregation at Wainsgate: "The people were all farmers and shepherds, poor as Job's turkey; an uncouth lot whose speech one could hardly understand, unable to read or write; most of them pagans cursed with vice and ignorance and wild tempers." The Established Church had never touched them; only the humble Baptists had sent an itinerant preacher there and he had made a good beginning. They were not able to pay much, and most of what John received as wages came in the form of wool, potatoes or other produce. When John and Mary began having children they found it difficult to make ends meet.

After serving at Wainsgate for 7 years, his reputation as a preacher grew to the extent that he was invited to substitute for the ailing pastor Dr. John Gill at Carter Lane Baptist Church in London. Upon Gill's death, Fawcett was offered the position. The church was a very large and prestigious church in London that would be able to provide him a much larger salary.

The Fawcett family packed their household belongings and prepared to move. The day came and the congregation was in tears as John and Mary prepared to leave. Mary is quoted as saying, "I can't stand it, John! I know not how to go." John responded, "Lord help me, Mary, nor can I stand it! We will unload the wagon!" And John is recorded to have said to the crowd gathered around them, "We've changed our minds! We are going to stay!" John and Mary unpacked the wagon and let the church in London know that they would not be accepting the position.

Fawcett then wrote this hymn to express his thoughts to the poor people with whom they had chosen to live and serve. The following Sunday, after their decision to remain at Wainsgate, John Fawcett preached from Luke 12:15, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses." He closed his sermon by reading the text of his new song *Blest Be the Tie that Binds*.

Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts is Christian love.  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne  
We pour our ardent prayers  
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one  
Our comforts and our cares. *and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

We share each other's woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear.  
When we asunder part  
It gives us inward pain,  
But we shall still be joined in heart,  
And hope to meet again...

*Pastor*

## More Than a Cliche'

*Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.*

*2Corinthians 1:11*

*God bless you, I'm blessed, I'll be praying for you, If God wills, and Praise the Lord*, are some of the most used phrases among Christians. Though each has great significance, familiarity and frequency may cause us to say those phrases without contemplating the importance and commitment of what we have said. Have any of us told someone that we will be praying for them because of their present need, and then forgotten to do so?

Prayer is our greatest and easiest resource. We say "All we can do is pray," when, in truth, it should be the first thing we do, because even when all else fails, it is the most important thing we can do. Prayer is the one way that we *all* can contribute to the Lord's work. In today's text, the Apostle Paul commends believers for helping him by their prayers. If we ever wonder if our prayers have any impact, all we need to do is read this verse. Paul certainly believed that the help he received was because of the prayers of others. Prayers have no bounds or distances that they cannot transcend. It matters not the time of the day when we pray, for the One who hears our prayers neither slumbers nor sleeps. Our prayer does not depend upon where we are located when we pray, because we are praying to the Lord who fills heaven and earth. Throughout the scriptures, we see how the power of prayer produced what was impossible for man. Elijah's prayer activated the power of God to rain down fire from heaven. In desperation, as the Assyrians were about to invade Jerusalem, Hezekiah prayed and the Death Angel destroyed Sennacherib's army. As Peter was bound in jail, prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him. These prayers released the delivering angel to remove Peter's chains and open the iron gate, securing his freedom. Cornelius' prayers and alms came up before God for a memorial, which eventually opened the door for bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. Prayers also perform that unseen work that eventually produces an outward manifestation of God working. People can reject our words and refuse acts of kindness, but they have no power to silence the prayers that are brought before the throne in intercession for them. Whether we fully understand it or not, prayer inclines the ear of God to one's request and sets in operation His working out His will in the situation for His glory.

As the Corinthian believers helped Paul by offering prayer for him, we also can help the work of God to advance by our prayers. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16)*

J. Ekis



## Place of wrath

*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.  
Romans 12:19*

We don't have to look far or listen long in our current culture to be exposed to someone launching attacks of some kind on someone else, in many cases in retaliation for wrongs either received or perceived. In many instances, vengeance has been elevated to virtue. Yet, in the realm of our Christian life, and especially among fellow believers, the bulk of this chapter calls us to resist the natural tendency to fight back, either literally or figuratively. In fact, in the context of the few verses before this one, we are called to extend such treatment, not only toward one another (v. 16), but toward all men.

Why are such exhortations needed? Perhaps because of the internal desire of men for justice. But, as with most sins, we seek to achieve a generally right objective by means that are opposed to the right ways of God. It began when Adam and Eve sought to fulfill their desires for something looking good, tasting good, and giving wisdom, all seemingly good desires, by directly disobeying the stated will of God. Yet, in the situation where we may desire to execute justice for ourselves against a perceived personal wrong, our text provides the solution. There is a place for that wrath to be exercised, and it doesn't reside in our own hands. It is God who provides the place for justice to be dealt. While we can obviously conclude that this will ultimately occur in that final Judgment Day, it is also not surprising that the epistle soon after this addresses the role of the God-ordained ruler, who "is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).

The apostle in these contexts echoes the Lord in His mountain sermon to "resist not evil" (Matthew 5:39), not citing situations that necessitated the administrators of the law to judge in applicable cases of bodily harm (eye for eye and tooth for tooth, e.g., Leviticus 24:20), but lesser examples, to which the Pharisees would extrapolate this law to permit personal retaliation. Jesus was not abrogating that law (Matthew 5:17), but correcting its misapplication. As His followers, we have a higher calling than retaliation; we have the right to relinquish our rights and let wrath function in its rightful place (I Peter 2:21-23), in the hand of God or His ordained channels.

## Vanxiety

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*It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so he giveth his beloved sleep.*

*– Psalm 127:2 –*

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When teaching young people, I occasionally conflate words in order to solidify in their thinking the silliness of certain actions – i.e., give an absurd thing an absurd name. To impress upon our own children when they were younger the weakness of the flesh, we coined the term “preeping.” This is defined as when one begins praying, but then ends up sleeping – this is preeping. (You will recall, Peter, James, and John were guilty of preeping in the Garden of Gethsemane!)

Our text affords us an opportunity for such mnemonic turning of phrase as well. Vanxiety is the vanity of anxiety. God tells us that it is vain – fruitless and useless – to rise up early or sit up late with care and worry and sorrow. How disappointing it is to examine our hearts in the light of this verse! All those sleepless nights worrying about this or that, anxious about outcomes that we cannot affect, did nothing to better the situation, did they? Of course not! The old preacher Vance Havner once recounted the pithy wisdom he had heard as a young man, that worry is like a rocking chair – it gives you something to do but doesn’t get you anywhere...

Anxiety and fretfulness are unfortunately natural and frequently exhibited attributes of the human condition. But as believers, we need to also recognize that a disposition of nervous angst is one that is antithetical to the faith which is to define our lives. Not only does fearfulness contradict our trust in the benevolence of our good and gracious Father, but it needlessly robs us of the peace which is our birthright as His beloved children. When shouldering the wearisome weight of worry, we are to cast all our care upon Him in the full assurance that He cares for us. In the face of paralyzing hardships and unsettling difficulties, we are to believe God, for He is good. Under the burden of our most pressing concerns, we are to take His yoke upon us because it is easy and the burden light. When feeling beaten up and trodden down, we are to remember that we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Despite our tribulation in a hostile environment, we are to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world.

Away with vanxiety! It is a waste of time for a son or daughter of the living God and joint heir with Christ to be bogged down in the Slough of Despond. With the psalmist, let us lay us down and sleep, for the Lord will sustain us. --- *D. Murcek*