

Week 49 Chronological

November 30: 1 Corinthians 5-8

There is a scandalous case of sexual immorality happening in the church. A son has taken his father's wife as his own. Most likely this guy's father and stepmother are not part of the church. So he is harming their view of the church and what appropriate behavior is. However, that is not the only problem. The other problem is that none of the church leaders have rebuked this man for what he is doing which is just as scandalous as the man's behavior. Rather than admonish this man and take him through the process of church discipline, they brag about what is going on, showing how tolerant they are of this sin. Someone should mentor this man and have him make things right between his father and stepmother.

Just as we live in a world of litigation, the believers back then had frivolous lawsuits among themselves. Paul warns them about this since they are taking matters that could be handled at the lowest level and they are instead airing out the church's dirty laundry. When these things happen, people on the outside of the church take notice. If we are not offering anything different than the rest of the world, why would they think that the church is any different than any other club? They are letting small matters that should be shaken off affect not just members of the church, but the outsiders that are looking in. They are all encouraged to run from sexual immorality. It will get them into serious trouble!

Paul shifts from his admonishments to questions about holy living. He had received correspondence from married people saying that they should abstain from touching their wives. Paul explains that sex was designed for marriage and it should be between a husband and wife. God does not expect married people to abstain from each other. So, we have some people in the church that have so little care about breaking God's commands that they are engaged in sexual immorality. Then there is another group that wants to make sure they don't violate God's command and have decided not to touch a woman, even his wife.

There is encouragement for new believers to be happy where they are at. When we come to know Jesus, our life situation will not necessarily change. When I came to have faith, it was not all sunshine and rainbows. Still some days today are not the greatest. But I have learned to be happy wherever God has placed me and in whatever situation He has me in.

There is an issue of food being offered to idols. Some people think it is sinful to eat meat that was offered to an idol first. Others are okay with it. I am in the camp that thinks it is not bad. After all, it is not as if that idol is an actual god. So there is no real harm in eating the meat offered to idols. However, it is harmful if it causes another believer to stumble in their walk. As believers, we are not just connected to Christ, but we are connected to one another. The things we influence the other believers in our lives. We must be careful not to be a stumbling block to anyone.

December 1: 1 Corinthians 9-11

The issue of pay is brought up. Paul does not accept pay, but he has the right to since he is doing the work of ministry. Paul was a tentmaker by trade and he spent his “free” time making tents to support the ministry. He also explains that he lives his life to be an example for them. Everyone runs the race, but only one person receives the prize. He encourages them to run in such a way to win the prize. Each believer should be giving their best effort. We went to the state cross country meet last weekend. As the racers at the end of the pack were passing by, we continued to cheer. Then Reagan said that he always hated the pity cheers when he ran at track. I explained that the cheers aren’t pity cheers. Those runners, even though they aren’t in first, are still giving it everything they’ve got to get to that finish line. Are we living our lives in the same way? Are we giving God all of the energy we have?

Paul warns of poor behavior by citing past events in Israel’s history. The Israelites in the wilderness had walked through the Red Sea. They had seen the pillar of cloud leading them in the desert. They had received the manna from heaven, but they still managed to sin. They still managed to leave God and follow their own sinful ways. No one is immune to falling into these traps. As believers, we must be on guard against falling into sin. “Whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall”.

They are warned to flee from idolatry. Idolatry was a common practice back then. No one was going to think anything bad about them if they had an idol set up in their home. However, God would not be pleased. As believers, we cannot serve two masters. We must pick. Do we serve Jesus or something else?

Paul gives instructions on proper observance of The LORD’s Supper (Communion). Not everyone is getting fed during the ceremony because of division among the members. Some go hungry while others get drunk. The elements for communion are to be evenly distributed among the believers. Further, whoever comes to observe the LORD’s supper should examine himself or herself before partaking. If they come in an unworthy way to eat the bread and drink the cup, they bring judgment on themselves.

December 2: 1 Corinthians 12-14

We read about spiritual gifts. As we have talked about before, God has given each of us a unique gift to be used for His glory. These gifts we have may all be different, but they are all from the same Spirit. There is great diversity to these gifts, but that is what gives the church strength. When we are all using the gifts that God gave us in an appropriate manner, then the church is unstoppable. That is one of the reasons we saw such tremendous growth in the first few chapters of Acts.

Paul gives them instructions about love. As Christians, when we do things, it must be done in love. When we serve the poor and destitute, it must be done in love. There is a trend where people are going to homeless people and filming themselves while they give them money or food. This is an act not driven by love for another human. Instead, it is driven by love for self. That is what Paul is getting at in his instruction about love. If these things are not done with love as the intent, then it is just flashy and annoying. It won’t draw anyone to God, but will instead turn them away. Whatever we do, love should be the motivator.

Paul reminds them that they are to build one another up at the church meetings, not tear each other down. They are to maintain proper order in church meetings to ensure their edification. They should not compete with one another when it comes to speaking in church.

December 3: 1 Corinthians 15 and 16

Paul gives instruction about the resurrection. There are some that make the claim today that the resurrection is not necessary for the Gospel. This is not true. If Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and remained in the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea purchased, then our faith would be in vain. Christ demonstrated His power over death when He resurrected. Paul is right when he says that our faith is in vain if Christ has not been raised. We know that Jesus has, though. His victory over death also guarantees our victory over the grave.

Without the resurrection, then we have no hope for eternity. That is why Paul says if the “dead are not raised, let’s eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”. Without eternity, then we can be encouraged to live for the moment and chase the pleasures of the flesh. The worldly authorities are telling us to enjoy our lives now and do whatever we want. We should not believe that lie. Instead, we should grow in the Spirit, becoming more like Christ every day.

Paul closes First Corinthians by giving instructions on the collection they have taken. He also details his travel plans. When he makes it through Macedonia, he plans to stop by and possibly stay through the winter. Paul informs them that he will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost because there is effective ministry despite the opposition he is facing. He reminds them to keep the faith and be strong, doing everything in love. My hope and prayer is that we, as believers, will do everything out of love. My prayer is that people will know that we are Christians by our love.

December 4: 2 Corinthians 1-4

Second Corinthians gives a strong defense to Paul’s authority and ministry. It gives us insight into the heart and spirit of Paul’s ministry. The letter also teaches a lot of important doctrine. Paul opens the letter with a greeting and then speaks about God’s comfort despite affliction. At first, he writes about the discomfort he had in his visit with the Corinthians. Apparently, it was a painful visit. However, it was not nearly as bad as the affliction Paul experienced in Asia. He was almost killed there! Paul explains that he intended to visit them, but had to postpone his trip.

One main reason for postponing the trip is because he cannot bear another painful visit with them. Paul had spent time giving them correction and teaching them. On the surface this seems like that should not have caused pain. However, the problem is that most people do not like to be corrected. I do not like to be corrected. My kids do not like to be corrected. My kids sometimes complain about a teacher saying, “Ms. So and So doesn’t like me.” When I ask why, they say that they corrected them for talking in class or being on the phone. Correction, even when it is gentle, can sometimes feel like an attack.

There is an issue of some false teachers asking for letters of recommendation. Paul states that these letters are not necessary for him. His competence from ministry comes from God. It is not a letter of recommendation that makes a minister fit, it is the Spirit. Prior to being called to ministry, I could not fathom how a person could come up with a sermon every single week. It made no sense to me. Since I have been in ministry, The LORD has provided.

Paul speaks of affliction. There are trials, there are temptations. Though our bodies are weak and fragile, like a jar made from clay, we have power from God. “We are pressured in every way, but not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned.” When we come to faith in Christ, our problems are not automatically wiped away. However, we have the God of the Universe to walk through these problems with us.

December 5: 2 Corinthians 5-9

We read about what our future looks like when we pass from this earth. One thing is for certain, every person on earth is mortal. Unless the LORD comes back, we will all die one day. Though our time on earth is temporary, we have an eternal dwelling in heaven. So, we walk by faith and not by sight. This blessed assurance gives us great comfort as we go through this life. We have been reconciled to the Father through Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Since we know Him, we are a new creation.

Paul encourages the Corinthians, and us, to not receive God’s grace in vain. We have been unshackled from the yoke of sin. We are no longer prisoners to the sins of the world, so why would we return to it? Since we have been freed, we should remain free instead of going back to it. As a result, believers should not be mismatched with unbelievers. This is not to say that we should not have friends that are unbelievers. It does mean that they should not have influence over how we live our lives. When I was in high school, my unbelieving friends encouraged me to go against what God teaches. When I was in the Navy, my unbelieving friends encouraged the same. As believers, Christ should influence our behavior, not the world.

The churches of Macedonia were congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Paul teaches about the curious case of giving in these churches. These churches were extremely limited in their finances. However, the limitations did not impede their ability to give. Paul makes it clear that once they had given their hearts over to God, they had no problem giving their wallets to Him. They gave out of their poverty and trusted God to provide for their needs. Paul is not trying to chide the Corinthians into giving more than they already are. Further, he is not doing that to the modern audience either. We know that because he reminds us that God loves a cheerful giver. He tells them that they should not give reluctantly or out of necessity. Do we give because we feel forced to or because we want to?

December 6: 2 Corinthians 10-13

There is a major shift in the tone of the letter beginning in chapter 10. Paul writes about his apostolic authority. He comes to them with humility while in their presence, but he writes boldly to them. When he returns, he will challenge people that are acting in an unspiritual way. He will have to be bold in this confrontation. There is disobedience and Paul is ready to punish that

disobedience. However, Paul will not punish the disobedience until the obedience of the Corinthians is confirmed. If the wrong things are being taught by the leaders in the church, who is responsible for their disobedience? The leaders are and the punishment does not land on the person that is following the false teaching. When I was in the Navy, we had a program called 3 M (Maintenance, Material, and Management). When I was the 3M coordinator and gave training on basic maintenance, I told the Sailors to follow the Maintenance Requirement Card (MRC) to the letter. Even if the MRC had the wrong procedures, if they followed the procedures exactly as they were written, they could not be held at fault. They were simply following the instructions, even though the instructions were wrong.

Paul writes about his vision of the third heaven. In this context, the first heaven is the atmospheric sky. The second heaven is the planetary sky and universe. The third heaven is God's dwelling place. The vision took place "14 years ago" which would have made the year 42 AD, if 2 Corinthians was written in 56 AD. That means Paul's vision of God's dwelling place happened before he began spreading the gospel message throughout the Mediterranean. Paul refers to his "thorn in the flesh" that was given to him so that he would not exalt himself. We do not know what that thorn is. Some believe that he was going blind, others think it might have been palsy. Whatever the ailment was, it did not stop Paul from fulfilling his mission because God has given him sufficient grace.

Throughout the Gospels, we see many examples of Jesus healing people. However, we are not given details about those that were not healed. Paul is a servant to the great physician and God could have healed him, but it was not in God's will. Though God might not heal us from our physical afflictions, we know that He has healed us from our sin. We also know that our physical ailments should not keep us from serving the LORD's. Paul's ailment did not stop him, why should it stop us?

Paul closes by informing them he is coming to visit a third time. All the accusations brought to him have to have at least two or three witnesses to be determined truthful. He was lenient the last time he visited, but when he comes again, he will not be as gentle.

December 7: Romans 1-3

Paul wrote this letter to the Romans while he was in Corinth. His intent with this letter is to help the readers grow spiritually. He begins the letter, stating that he is a slave to Jesus. He also informs us that we have received grace and apostleship through Him to bring about obedience of all nations. Paul expresses his desire to visit Rome. He has planned many times to come and visit, but his plans had been thwarted each time.

Paul proclaims that he is not ashamed of the gospel. We might ask ourselves why he would have to make such a statement. However, considering all of the flak he received from Jewish officials about his faith in Jesus, we can see it would have been easier in the near term for him to stop boldly proclaiming Christ. We live in a world now that looks upon Christianity with scorn. Does that stop us from boldly proclaiming Jesus and doing His will?

He reminds the Roman Christians not to judge because if they do judge others, they are without excuse, bringing condemnation on themselves. Judgment is reserved for God and God alone. "He will repay each according to his works" (Romans 2: 6).

Paul lists many advantages of being a Jew in Chapter 3. In the modern context, it is advantageous for a person to have Christian parents, attend a church, be baptized, attend Christian school, and to read the Bible. While all of these things give Christians an advantage, they do not save us. We are saved by Christ alone. Paul reminds us that everyone is under judgment because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We can only stand justified before The LORD is through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Therefore, we have no reason to brag. If we are going to boast, it should be about Christ and what He has done for us.