

# BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

MAY 2020

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Day 122 - May 1

Pneumatology: The Filling of the Spirit

### **Ephesians 5:18-21**

It has been said by many that sometimes the best theology is written in negation. This is a fancy way of saying that there are subjects that are perhaps complex or ambiguous about which it is helpful for us to first define what it “isn’t” before we understand what it “is”. Perhaps the theology of being filled with the Spirit is one such topic.

In our day, there are many abhorrent theologies about what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Some equate Spirit filling as a permanent yet subsequent experience with the Holy Spirit that “unlocks” a new and more in-depth walk with Christ. Often you will hear this kind of theology referred to as a “second baptism” of the Spirit. Others equate the filling of the Spirit with crazy, ecstatic emotional experiences. We see this often in Pentecostal and other similar streams of thought. In contrast with both of those false beliefs, the Bible clearly teaches that the filling of the Spirit is available for all believers, at any time, and invariably leads to self-control instead of unbridled emotion.

Over the next few days, we will examine Ephesians 4, 5 and 6. There is much to glean from this passage, but let’s begin with the reality that Paul clearly contrasts drunkenness with self-control while equating self-control with the command to be Spirit filled. In the text, the apostle states that believers are not to be drunk with wine. Why? Well, in light of this text the obvious answer is that the apostle expects believers to utilize their minds, under the control of the Spirit, to encourage one another and glorify God by singing meaningful, theologically rich songs to the Lord. Further, Paul expects a type of humility to be evident amongst the people that absolutely demands sobriety and self-control.

These characteristics, people who are sober minded, diligently and meaningfully worshipping the Lord while patiently submitting to one another, are elevated as indicative of men and women who are filled with the Spirit.

### **Putting This Together**

To be filled with the Spirit is not, biblically speaking, equated with esoteric and emotionally unbridled experiences. Instead, those who are filled with the Spirit seek to glorify God with their bodies while praising Him in song and loving their brother and sister in the Lord. God’s design in sending the Spirit, therefore, is not wild and exuberant occasions that reflect the behavior of drunks in a bar. His plan and commands instruct us so that we would evermore be controlled by truths that channel our energy into meaningful praise of Him and concern for the well-being of our brother.

Church, its time that we stop equating the whacky and bizarre with the Spirit of God, instead, we must exalt the temperate and controlled. We must point to the man who is full of love, patience and peace (amongst other things) as the real exemplar of the Spirit. In so doing, we provide a right and true witness of our Lord to a watching world and a good example for those behind us to attempt to emulate as we grow up into Him who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

Day 123 - May 2

Pneumatology: The Filling of the Spirit

### **Ephesians 4:5**

Yesterday we studied one unfortunate error regarding the filling of the Spirit. Today we will turn our eyes to another unfortunate misunderstanding of this doctrine. Many of today's most popular "preachers" advocate for a second baptism of the Spirit. Typically, they ground this teaching in the book of Acts, particularly the day of Pentecost, when the disciples of Christ received the Spirit of God and then commenced their ministry. Their teaching is that this text constitutes the normative experience of a disciple in that each person who received the Spirit became a believer prior to this subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit. They say that this means that we are saved in one moment and then, at some future moment, we are baptized in the power of the Spirit whereby we receive the full power of God.

There are many problems with this position. As noted above it is unfortunate to make the day of Pentecost normative. Acts 2 records a time of transition when Jesus ascended and the Spirit descended. Jesus operated as the Lord and leader of the saints until He sent the Spirit in His place. What this means is that those who had submitted to Christ were not empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill their ministry until after He ascended. This makes sense of Jesus' admonition to them to "wait here" until they would "receive power". The problem, of course, is that believers from that point on in history did not begin their journey with Christ in the flesh; instead, their salvation began through the regenerating work of the Spirit. This means that the disciples lived in a transitional time unlike believers today or any time in history after Pentecost.

Now, this is all moderately helpful but what we ought to seek is a text in which to ground our assertions. One such passage is found in Ephesians 4:5 where Paul says there is "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism". The baptism that Paul speaks of here is clearly the baptism of the Spirit of God into the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). While our physical ordinance of baptism is important, we must understand that physical baptism is a sign of what we believe the Spirit has already accomplished in the souls of men.

### **Putting This Together**

Our point for today is quite basic: Paul does not state that there is one baptism of the Spirit... followed by another! Instead, he is quite clear that the church is united in the single act of salvation whereby the Spirit of God regenerates us in the spiritual act of baptism. Paul's call to unity is grounded in this reality. There are no "second class" believers; instead, we are unified as a church because we share all things in common, including our salvation in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The point then is quite simple, if you are a believer today, you've been given all the Spirit you need, and all the Spirit you are going to get! Our responsibility is to submit to the Spirit of God in obedience and, by our compliance, we are filled with the Spirit who already inhabits our souls. It is to this idea of "filling" that we will turn over the next several days.

Day 124 - May 3

## Pneumatology: The Filling of the Spirit

### **Ephesians 5:17-18**

We've helped debunk some incorrect thoughts regarding the filling of the Spirit, but we haven't offered a definition in order to help us rightly understand the meaning of being "filled with the Spirit". Ephesians 5 helps us once again in understanding two truths regarding the filling of the Spirit.

First, verse 17 teaches us that Paul's command here to be "filled with the Spirit" is intimately connected with the command to know what the "will of the Lord is." As we move on down this passage, we will find that the will of the Lord is submission to Him chiefly, which is manifested in praise to His holy name and in love and concern for our brother, spouse, children, etc. So, context leads us to the conclusion that the "filling of the Spirit" is a process where we recognize and submit to the will of the Lord, as communicated by the Spirit, in the sanctification process. When we are "filled with the Spirit" we are led to obedience. Stated in the negative, no one is filled with the Spirit if they are living a life of sinful disobedience.

Second, verse 18 teaches us that this is not a one-time occurrence; rather, it is an ongoing discipline in the life of the believer. The phrase "filled with the Spirit", or the command to be filled, suggests a one-time experience in the English. As we read Paul's words, we could wrongly understand them to mean that once we are filled with the Spirit, we have no need to be "refilled". This would be an unfortunate and incorrect understanding of the text. You see, in the Greek, this phrase is written in the present imperative tense. I recognize this may mean nothing to most of us, but if we understand this tense rightly, we will come to see that it does not describe a one-time filling but a lifestyle or ongoing act of submission which leads to filling. The life of the believer is meant to be a continual commitment to obeying the Spirit which leads to His filling and empowering our lives to obedience.

### Putting This Together

The apostle's point is that we are filled with the Spirit as we submit to God's will in our lives, which leads to intimacy with the Father and power to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. This is not a one-time deal; instead, it is an ongoing way of life where we repeatedly present ourselves to the Lord as obedient servants, which results in Spirit empowerment to manifest His character and righteousness in our own personal lives.

So, are you filled with the Spirit? If so, your life will exude faithful obedience and temperance that is indicative of the fruit of the Spirit. Over the next few days, we will examine some of this fruit as outlined in Ephesians 5 and 6.

Day 125 - May 4

Pneumatology: Evidence of the Filling of the Spirit

**Ephesians 5:20 & 1 Thessalonians 5:18**

Today's devotion seeks to put a little meat on the bone as we consider some practical results or signs that we are being filled with the Spirit. Now, we could rightly argue that the ultimate evidence of being filled with the Spirit is a life that yields, in ever-increasing abundance, the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5. While this should be enough, the instruction Paul gives to the Ephesians, combined with our text from 1 Thessalonians, helps us see how this fruit manifests itself in the believers' everyday life.

Our verses today both emphasize the necessity of giving thanks in all circumstances. They teach that it is necessary, and even commanded, for believers to be grateful for all of God's blessings. What is of particular note is the proximity of Paul's command to be filled with the Spirit and the exhortation to give thanks in all things. The connection is a basic one but it must be made. Those who are filled with the Spirit are able to give thanks in all seasons.

Obviously, the question we must ask is why? What is it about being "Spirit filled" that lends itself to a thankful disposition? The answer is as simple as the question: those who are filled with the Spirit live their lives in close and intimate fellowship with God, which both assures them of His presence in difficult times and alerts them to His activity in all seasons of life. As we are reminded that God is near, we are enabled to be thankful for all things.

**Putting This Together**

When we read commands like the one found in Ephesians 5:17 we need to do the hard work of examining our own lives to ask if we are operating in accordance with the exhortation. In this case, we need to ask if we are being "filled with the Spirit". One practical way we can answer this question is by examining the state of our hearts or disposition. Believer, are you giving thanks today? Interestingly enough, I am writing this devotion in the midst of a rather challenging season. It's not necessarily easy or natural to give thanks in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. However, those who are believers can rest in the knowledge that their God is near and, as we walk together, we are alerted to the myriad of ways that He is providing for us and teaching us even in some pretty horrific moments.

Day 126 - May 5

Pneumatology: Evidence of the Filling of the Spirit

**Ephesians 5:21-6:9**

We will return to this text in several months to attempt to understand some of the more specific commands given to wives and husbands. Nevertheless, the context of this passage as it relates to the immediately preceding text is instructive for us today. Folks, I know we've said this many times, but please remember that no verse or passage is written in a vacuum. Instead, all of the Scripture flows together and, therefore, its individual parts must be understood in light of the whole.

This passage records exhortations given to: wives, husbands, children, bondservants, and their masters. You will note that what unites all of them is a call to sacrificial humility. Wives are to submit to their husbands, husbands are to sacrificially love and serve their wives, children are to obey their parents, bondservants are to serve their masters, and masters are to remember that they, likewise, have a master in heaven.

If we place this text in its context, we will see a remarkable connection. The Bible teaches us that those who are filled with the Spirit are to live humbly amongst all of their contemporaries. Regardless of rank or prominence, a truly Spirit-filled individual will live in light of the obvious reality that we all are servants of our great Lord and Savior and that His sacrifice for all kinds of people requires that we display the same love for them even as we value their lives as souls Christ died to redeem.

Putting This Together

You show me a proud person and I will show you someone who is not walking in the Spirit. Some people have, unfortunately, used this text to justify a domineering attitude toward those who fall underneath their authority. This is nowhere as evident as it is in the marriage. I've heard of husbands demanding silence from their wives and forcing them to do various things that are either illegal or immoral. However, this text rightly teaches that husbands who are in step with the Word do not use their authority to bully their wives or children; instead, their place in the home must be stewarded to display humble service with the desire that the wife flourishes and the children prosper. After all, this is exactly how Christ utilized His authority in serving and redeeming His children. In so doing, He displays for us in the Gospel the way that we are to live and relate to those in our lives.

The Gospel is a fantastic message of hope, but it is also a statement of our inability and unworthiness. Further, the Gospel is a declaration that those from every walk of life constitute or comprise our heavenly family. Finally, the Gospel demands that we submit to those in authority just as Christ submitted to the authority and declarations of His Father in heaven. As we keep these realities in front of us, we are always reminded and encouraged to walk in true humility as the Spirit of God fills and empowers us along the way.

Day 127 - May 6

## Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts

### 1 Corinthians 12:1-7

1 Corinthians 12 is an absolutely critical passage for our understanding of the origin and usefulness of spiritual gifts. Over the next several days we will dive into the “why” of spiritual gifts but today I want to answer the question who? Specifically, who has been given a spiritual gift to use?

In passing, we will note in verse 7 that it is the Holy Spirit who gives us our spiritual gifts. These gifts are not natural talents that lost people equally obtain, instead they are supernatural gifts or dispositions that help us serve the body of Christ. Now, this does not mean that our gifts manifest themselves in miracles. It means that they are entrusted only to God’s people to accomplish God’s work. To be sure, many, if not most, spiritual gifts seem rather mundane to the outside world, but when used properly they produce supernatural outcomes.

Now, for our time today I want to focus on the little phrase “to each is given”. The idea that Paul is making known to the church is that each and every individual believer has been entrusted with at least one spiritual gift for the good of the church. Now, we must understand that the Bible, being God’s inspired Word, is not prone to hyperbole. When the Apostle says “each” he doesn’t mean “most” or the “vast majority”. He literally means each and every person in the body of Christ at Corinth, and abroad. This means that if you are a believer you have a gift! There is no such thing as a member of the body of Christ without a purpose and a contribution to the overall ministry of the church.

### Putting This Together

There are two practical points of application today. The first is that we have a responsibility to discover our gifts. Some of you may honestly have no idea what gift you’ve been given. If this is the case, I’d encourage you to do two things: first, serve in various areas until you find something you enjoy! It’s okay to try things and discover they’re not for you! Second, consult other believers. One joy and benefit of the body of Christ lies in the reality that we are surrounded by brothers and sisters who also have the Holy Spirit and, therefore, can speak much wisdom and truth into our lives regarding how they’ve seen God use you and make your gifts known!

The second point of application is that the body of Christ is not and cannot be healthy apart from each of its members contributing to the ministry. God has designed the body of Christ to function like your body in that each member (or part) must function or “serve” in the way it is designed.

Folks, this is as simple as I can state it: if you are not serving in the body in some capacity we are not as healthy as we should be! You have a gift but it is not up to your discretion whether or not you will use it! Instead, each of us will be held accountable for the way we stewarded the resources and abilities God has given us. There is no such thing as a Christian spectator; all of us are to join together in service to our Lord as we serve Him collectively.



Day 128 - May 7

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts

**1 Peter 4:10-11**

We have biblical basis for the belief that each person receives at least one spiritual gift at conversion but we still have to answer why God has given us these gifts. To be sure, there have been many conflicts in the history of the church over the utilization of spiritual gifts. In fact, one of the prominent themes in 1 Corinthians relates to the incorrect use of gifts for personal glory and fulfillment. Unfortunately, due to the very present vestiges of sin in the lives of every believer, good and honorable spiritual gifts can often be leveraged in dishonorable ways.

In order to combat our propensity to utilize gifts in an unworthy manner, Peter reminds us that each gift has been given not for our own glory but for the glory of God alone. Peter strikes at the very heart of the matter when he teaches us that we have been given these gifts in order that God may receive the glory. The fundamental motivation for our service should be God's glory and recognition alone!

Notice here that Peter mentions both the "public" gifts like teaching and the more "behind the scenes" gifts like service. The point he is making is quite clear, all of us can use the gifts we've been given for God's glory regardless of whether or not it is noticed or celebrated by our fellow believers. Make no mistake, folks, if you are serving, God is gaining glory even if it doesn't seem like a big deal to you!

Putting This Together

This has many ramifications, but let me hit on two of the most important. First, if we are to use our gifts in service to God for His glory, then we must ensure that the message and heart behind every act of service is oriented to God's renown alone. Brother and sister, many of the problems that plague the church are grounded in the unfortunate reality that so many of us want our own recognition. We might be willing to serve, but if no one "notices", or if we are not publicly congratulated or thanked, we sometimes feel as if our service was for naught. This is, unfortunately, a betrayal of the condition of our hearts! If we serve for God's glory alone, we can rest in knowing that our gifts are serving His ultimate plan. This provides freedom and joy in all means of service.

Second, we need to make sure that we use the gifts God has given us in the way that He has prescribed. It is very possible, if not probable, that sinful men can profit from these gifts in an unwholesome manner. Now, I do not mean that you cannot utilize your gifts for God's glory in the secular sphere, nor does the Bible teach that it is categorically wrong to use your gifts as a means of sustaining yourself, but when the gift becomes a means to our own selfish ends instead of a means to make much of the Father, we are careening down a destructive path. Each and every time we use the gifts we've been given we must ensure that we are evaluating whether or not our utilization of the gift furthers the point, which is God's glory.

Day 129 - May 8

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts

### **1 Corinthians 12:7**

We said yesterday that the Spirit gives spiritual gifts for the purpose of God's glory. Today we are going to reflect on the truth that God's glory is inescapably linked to the health of His church. The argument is quite simple: God is glorified on earth when His church is healthy and strengthened both as a corporate body as well as in each individual part. What this means is that the gifts of the Spirit are given in the context of the body of Christ so that we can collectively work for each other's encouragement and maturity which leads to an increase in God's glory as we reflect Him, individually and together, more accurately to a lost world.

This is Paul's point in verse 7 as he says that each gift is given "for the common good." You and I have been entrusted with gifts, not for our own fame but for the good of each and every person in our fellowship. Practically, this works itself out every week! I heard of a church one time that wanted to illustrate the necessity of each member using their own gifts. In order to display the need for MANY different people the pastor chose to ask each person who was not paid by the church to cease from service for one week. The result was absolute chaos! No one was present to pass out bulletins or take up offering, the sound was poor, there was no band or choir, the children's department only had two or three paid workers, there was no one working at the welcome center and so forth.

The point that was made is quite clear: in order for the ministry to proceed and God to gain glory, the church needs many different people with a multitude of gifts!

### **Putting This Together**

Truthfully, we could use the same lessons we've learned over the past few days as a reminder, but I'd like to go in a slightly different direction. In our culture today, there is a great deal of consumerism. By that I mean we tend to evaluate everything based on what we think we can gain. This is ingrained in us by our society but it is the exact opposite approach of biblical Christianity. Folks, when you join a church you are doing so in order to partner with that fellowship for the glory of God as you commit to serving. So many of us choose the places where we will be "best served" but this misses the point. Your absence from the fellowship on a Sunday morning might be far more destructive to a brother or sister who sorely needed ministry from you than it is to your personal life and development. How many of us think about others when we neglect the duty to serve? How of us walk into a time of worship or approach the ministry that we belong to with the mentality of "what can I do?" instead of "what can I get"?

Day 130 - May 9

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts

### **1 Corinthians 13**

Some of you may be surprised at the text today. In fact, most of us have heard this passage read at weddings almost exclusively. 1 Corinthians 13 is known as the “love chapter”. In context, this passage is not specifically about marriage; instead it is directly applicable to the attitude you and I should have as we exercise our spiritual gifts.

Notice in verses 1-3 how Paul lists several spiritual gifts only to state that the exercise of each of them, without love, is useless! The point that he is making is that an attitude of love and concern for our brother or sister **MUST** accompany all of our service to the Lord.

Furthermore, we see that even the most incredible feats and displays of devotion, without love, are useless. Paul’s point in this passage is not to teach on “the tongues of angels”; instead he is purposefully reaching for the most majestic manifestations of any gift in order to illustrate the point that without love none of it matters. He isn’t saying “strive to speak in tongues of angels”, he’s saying “you better make sure you are full of affection for God and others or even your most incredible moments will be empty.”

This kind of love values others over self, exercises flexibility when there is disagreement, it does not harbor ill will and it endures difficult moments. Think for a moment if our church was marked by this kind of loving service. I literally get goose bumps thinking about the way the church would operate and thrive if its members were selfless, flexible, and enduring. Church, what if in love we decided to humbly offer our help instead of boldly insisting on our way? What if our mentality was one of selfless concern for others instead of prideful desire for recognition?

#### **Putting This Together**

Church family, your ability is only effective with the right mentality. To be honest, some folks are harder for us to love than others, but we cannot expect to see supernatural blessing and strengthening in a fellowship devoid of love. This means that we should devote a considerable amount of time examining our hearts before we serve. Do you love the church? Do you love difficult people? Are you patient with others? Do you really desire for others to benefit over your recognition?

Day 131 - May 10

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts, Evangelist

### **Ephesians 4:11**

Over the next few days we are going to look into a few of the listed gifts in order to understand more fully what they are and how they are to function. Before we do however, I'd like to give two important disclaimers. First, most scholars agree that the list of gifts we find in texts like this one, 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, etc. are not exhaustive. This means that the point of the biblical authors was not to name every possible gift of the Spirit, instead it was to instruct us as to how to use them (for God's glory and the good of the church). Second, our time will not be spent diving into each individual gift as listed. We've picked out a few that are somewhat easily misunderstood or misapplied in order to clarify the point and purpose of each gift.

Today's gift is evangelism. You will note that in verse 11 and following, the title of evangelist is listed amongst other positions in the church. Paul evidently has in mind here a man who is skilled in evangelism. In that day, there were men who were called "evangelists" who would proclaim the Gospel and often travel from town to town (think Timothy). This would be one whose gospel presentations are specifically fruitful and who, therefore, spend a great amount of their time proclaiming the gospel (even at times vocationally).

Now, the misunderstanding of this position is not so much in function as it is a misunderstanding of how this gift changes our role as believers, many of whom do not have the gift of evangelism. Unfortunately, several in our churches today have allowed the gifted evangelists to do all of the evangelism! The mentality has been that since many of us are not as gifted as these men, we ought not try to share the faith. Instead, much of what has passed for "evangelism" in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century American churches is just an invitation to hear someone else preach the Gospel.

To be clear, we are not arguing against such invitations and we celebrate the ministry of fruitful evangelists. However, our Lord evidently intended for all of us to share the Gospel as is evidenced in texts like the Great Commission where all followers are commissioned to "make disciples".

This means that the gift of evangelism does not preclude the rest of the church from the responsibility of sharing the Gospel; instead it points to the reality that God has blessed some with an inordinate ability to share the truth in order for many to be saved through their words.

### **Putting This Together**

We should celebrate and learn from the evangelists in our midst, but their presence should not deter us from sharing our faith. While God has gifted certain individuals with the ability to share the Gospel powerfully and clearly, He has called all of us to partner together to declare the truth of what Christ has done.

Day 132 - May 11

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts, Exhortation

**Romans 12:8**

Today's text is nestled into a context that should be quite familiar to us by now. The Apostle Paul is once again instructing believers on the necessity of utilizing their gifts for the good of the body which leads to the glory of God. In the midst of his admonition, we find a mention of the gift of exhortation.

Exhortation is a synonym of encouragement. It speaks to the truth that some people just have a supernatural ability to encourage and give hope in the midst of difficult times. My guess is that even as you read that last sentence you thought of a person or two who has the gift of exhortation. These are people who are marked by positivity and empathy. They love to get into the battle with those who are hurting and walk with them as the chief cheerleader during times of trial. All of us need encouragers! Some pastors have the gift of exhortation, but more often than not those who are truly encouragers are embedded in the body. We find them in small groups and prayer meetings. They are constantly looking for ways to strengthen and embolden those in the body who need their help.

While we are grateful for these men and women of encouragement, the larger point we want to make today is that exhortation should be something all of us practice. To be sure, many people are not as positive as most encouragers. Some of us just aren't going to be as effective in the work of exhortation, but this is another gift that really is given in more proportion to one while it is expected of all of us.

Putting This Together

I will admit that this devotion is probably more pastoral than intricately theological, but it is imperative that we understand the need for each believer to encourage and strengthen the rest of the body. Folks, there is no place in the body for discouragement or apathy. The Lord was gracious to us to entrust the gift of exhortation to a select few in our midst, but, much like the gift of evangelism, the mere presence of this gift in the lives of others in the body does not excuse us from coming alongside of our brothers and sisters with encouraging words in their time of need.

Instead of simply allowing the "positive" or "helpful" people to handle difficult situations, we should take the time to learn from these gifted folks so that all of us can emulate, to one degree or another, their ministry in our midst. May we endeavor to be a people of exhortation even as we have a select few lead the way!

Day 133 - May 12

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts, Faith

### **1 Corinthians 12:9**

Almost every heresy and unbiblical belief out there arises out of an unwillingness or inability to reconcile passages of Scripture. For instance, some heresies fixate on Christ's human characteristics (He slept, ate, grew in wisdom, etc.) to the detriment of the passages that testify of His divinity (John 1, Matthew 17), and in so doing arrive at a faulty view of Christ that overemphasizes one aspect of the incarnation to the detriment of another. In the same way, when we read that the gift of faith is a spiritual gift that belongs only to a few, we might draw wrong conclusions.

Ephesians 2 teaches us that we are saved by grace through faith. This means that each and every person who is a true believer in Christ has saving faith. This faith is universal in the true church and, therefore, cannot be what Paul is discussing here in 1 Corinthians 12. The gift of faith as described here refers not to faith in Christ but a special endowment of faith that leads to trusting God in the midst of difficulties, particularly pertaining to difficulties in ministry or tasks.

The man or woman with the gift of faith is the first one to step out onto the proverbial water and trust God when making difficult life decisions. They're the ones who seem to easily trust God for financial assistance or divine intervention in the midst of otherwise bleak circumstances. They are the folks who are not averse to following God into tough assignments because of their fundamental trust in His sovereignty and faithfulness.

These people serve as an asset to the church as they display the kind of trust that emboldens the rest of the body to move forward. They pray in earnest hope and expectation of miracles and they remind the rest of the believers that our God is indeed a mighty and trustworthy God.

### **Putting This Together**

Absolutely every believer must have faith; it is a prerequisite for salvation! Like the spiritual gift of faith, saving faith is a gift from God but it is necessary nonetheless. The gift of faith as described in 1 Corinthians 12 is therefore not a universal gift. It is an earnest trust in God in the midst of difficult times or challenging tasks that serves to encourage the church and equip the saints to move forward.

Now, all of us should be working to develop this faith and, by God's grace, we do as we step out in faith and see God deliver time and again. The people with the gift of faith serve the body by encouraging us to step out and by displaying faith while we gain our spiritual footing.

One note of clarification: it is imperative that people with the gift of faith serve in a congregation. Folks with this gift can get carried away, particularly when it comes to the necessity of establishing God's will. Faith is faith in God, and only faith exercised in accordance with God's plan is blessed! This is why we need men and women of discernment (we will get there in a day or two).

Day 134 - May 13

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts, Giving

**Romans 12:8**

Over the past few days, we have covered a few gifts that fall into the category of universal in some respect while unique in other manners. Today's text describes another manifestation of universal/unique gifts as Paul briefly discusses those who have the gift of giving.

The believer will immediately recognize the truth that Paul seems to single out those who give as if they are somehow set apart from the rest of the church. We obviously know that all of us as believers are called to give of what we've been entrusted by the Lord. This text does not suggest otherwise, instead it calls our attention to the reality that there is a certain subset of people who gain joy through giving in an unusual way.

The text suggests two realities regarding people with the gift of giving. Often times, these people have been entrusted with more financial or material means. This is not categorically true of each person who gives, but it certainly operates within the framework of God's sovereignty to bless certain individuals who find particular joy in blessing the church corporately and each individual member additionally. Second, we see that this type of giving is not compelled by exterior forces, instead it ought to be a product of each person's own generosity. God gains glory through our giving when we are not under compulsion but give out of an abundance of joy, thanksgiving and faith that our God can meet all of our needs.

**Putting This Together**

All of us are called to give a portion of what we've been given to the ministry of the body for the glory of the Lord. However, there is a special subset of people who are often (not always) entrusted with more resources for the purpose of joyfully and generously giving of what they've been given for God's glory and the good of the church. Each believer should be aware that God is not impressed with the money in your bank account. In fact, He is the One who put it there! Instead, God is honored and blessed when we give out of joyful faith.

One more principle should be applied to this subject and that is this: those who are generous with much would be generous with little! So many people seem to believe that if they had more they would be more liberal with their giving, but this is simply not the case. Instead, what we find is that giving is a product of the disposition of a heart that is ready and willing to pass along whatever resource we have for the glory of God. As always, the church has been blessed with these generous folks with the gift of giving in order to inspire us and bless us with what we need to continue in the ministry that we've been called to fulfill.

Day 135 - May 14

Pneumatology: Spiritual Gifts, Discernment

### **1 Corinthians 12:10**

We will end our rather brief tour through some of the listed spiritual gifts with a gift that the universal church seems to need desperately. Several years ago, I attended a conference with Dr. R.C. Sproul as one of the teachers. Dr. Sproul was, and is, one of my theological heroes even as he has now gone on to be with the Lord. After his message, there was a brief question and answer period where people from the audience were allowed to ask Dr. Sproul various questions.

While many different inquiries were made that evening, one stands out in my mind some decades later. A gentleman asked Dr. Sproul this question, "What is the greatest need in the church today?". The question caught my attention because of how broad it was but also because of its relevance to me as a very young youth pastor at the time. I will never forget the answer, both because of its simplicity as well as because of how quickly Dr. Sproul answered. Without a moment's hesitation, R.C. said "discernment!" Having ministered now for several years, I wholeheartedly agree with Dr. Sproul's assessment.

Discernment is a necessary gift in our time. The Bible defines discernment in this passage as the ability to distinguish spirits. This is a somewhat foreign way of describing the gift of discernment but by this summary Paul is testifying to the need for people to take what is being taught and distinguish between those things that are of the Holy Spirit, and therefore true and in accordance with God's Word, and those things which are from other spirits, and therefore false and in contradiction to the Word of God.

Evidently, Paul saw the need for and existence of a group of folks who were given the supernatural gift of determining truth from falsehood. These men and women would be an asset to any church as they help to call out those things that are from the "father of lies", Satan himself. They are also necessary to help guide the flock toward solid doctrine which grows everyone into mature disciples and creates unity amongst the people.

### **Putting This Together**

Our final gift is one that is particularly near and dear to me! In fact, my hope is that your reading through these devotions will help each of us distinguish the spirits. All believers need discernment but by God's grace, there are men and women who have been given the supernatural gift of wisdom and insight so as to help us navigate the minefield of a fallen world. Do you know people who are discerning? Are there people who have helped you along the way to distinguish good and evil? If the answer is yes then rejoice and seek to be like them. If the answer is no then earnestly pray that God would place those with the gift of discernment into your life!



Day 136 - May 15

## Anthropology: Created in God's Image

### Genesis 1:27

Well, today we turn the corner yet again as we tackle another subset of theology, anthropology. The word anthropology, when used in terms of biblical theology, means the study or knowledge of man. I would argue that one of the most convincing arguments in favor of the Christian worldview lies in the Bible's insightful and penetrating teaching on the characteristics of mankind. We will see that the Scripture has an extremely pessimistic view of man's ability when marred in sin, but this is balanced with the truth that the Bible ascribes to man a worth and glory that is high above the rest of creation. Today's devotion will begin to address why mankind is considered the crowning achievement of our great God.

Genesis 1:27 teaches us that God created man in His image. This is a complex subject which would require volumes of writing to truly explore to any degree; however, there are a few basic truths that we must understand in order to form a solid base for future study on the subject. Today, I would like for us to note that being created in God's image is not limited to one gender.

The text clearly teaches that God created mankind in His image. Mankind is a word that we are using here to incorporate both men and women. The Bible is clear that all people, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity are endowed with or stamped by the very image of God. Obviously, this means that God has ordained two, and only two, distinct genders. The fact that this would even need to be articulated is alarming; nevertheless, there is great debate in some arenas in our culture.

The larger point for us today is that all people are stamped by the distinguishing mark of their Creator. The Bible, therefore, not only places a high value on men, it is a book about the crowning creation of all humanity!

### Putting This Together

While we certainly affirm the biblical teaching that men and women have distinct roles within the church and the home, we do so while continuing to uphold the equally important biblical instruction as to the equal worth and value of men and women. Unfortunately, over the years sin has created societies where one gender, women in particular, are treated as second class citizens. In recent times, the pendulum has perhaps swung in the opposite direction, but both errors are unbiblical and immoral. God's image rests on every man and woman, and every boy and girl, irrespective of their gender or any other social hierarchy.

Day 137 - May 16

Anthropology: Created in God's Image

**John 17:24-26**

Even as we read Genesis 1 and 2, we come across various allusions, as faint as they may be, to the Trinity. Perhaps the most obvious example is when God states, "Let Us make man in Our image". For a new believer, this is an odd statement, but we realize that this is actually an affirmation of the Triune nature of our God. Our God is one in essence but three in Persons!

As you can imagine, there has been much debate over the years as to how to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly as it pertains to mankind being made in God's image. What does it mean for us to be in the image of God? Well, it can't mean that we are physically like God, as the Bible clearly teaches that God is Spirit (John 4:24). Instead, the Scriptures would teach us that being made in God's image encompasses more fundamental realities than our sheer physical presence. Over the next few days we will unpack some, emphasize some, of the characteristics that constitute our being image bearers of God.

For today's devotion we will focus in on the truth that we were created for community. You will note all the way back in Genesis that God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." Now, obviously man was not totally isolated as there were creatures that inhabited the garden with him, nevertheless, Adam needed a companion.

Genesis 1-2 teaches us that our need for community is ingrained in us! Adam's "loneliness" was not a product of the fall of man; instead, it was a product of being created in God's image. This is where John 17 comes into play. You see, in this text, Jesus sheds light on the truth that He and His Father (and by extension the Spirit) enjoy intimate fellowship with one another! Furthermore, His mission was to come to restore our right relationship and community with the Triune God.

Putting This Together

Folks, community is a necessary reality in the Christian life because we were created by a communal God in His image! To be sure, some of us are more extroverted than others, but all of us have an insatiable desire to know and to be known. This intense longing is one of the fundamental proofs that we have been created in the image of a God who is constantly communing within Himself. To be in God's image, therefore, is to enjoy fellowship with one another. Furthermore, because we are created in God's image, we have a fundamental desire to commune with our Creator. This is why mankind is largely restless and listless. It also explains Augustine's famous quote, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Amen.

Day 138 - May 17

Anthropology: Created in God's Image

### **Genesis 1:26-28**

Yesterday we saw our innate desire for community as vestiges of the divine in our lives. Today we will see that our calling and ability to use and subdue the earth for our well being and sustenance is another window into our existence as God's image bearers.

Verse 28 records God's commands to mankind to fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it. Contextually, it is imperative to note that the declaration in verse 27 that mankind is made in the image of God immediately precedes this verse, which details what being made in God's image entails. If yesterday's devotion was about who we were created to know, today's is about what we were created to do in order to be God's image bearers.

There are two terms mentioned in this passage; the first is "subdue". The word means to bring a people or land into subjection so that it serves the one subduing it. In this case, the context is clear that God is referring to the land, which means that man has been given the capacity and authority to work the ground to provide for himself and to shape the land in such a way that it is pleasing to his eyes. This is one fundamental difference between mankind and the rest of creation. Yes, I realize that some creatures have developed systems to provide for their needs, but only mankind has created ingenious and highly sophisticated tools and resources in order to cultivate the land. There are no biology or horticultural classes offered in the animal kingdom! Those disciplines and areas of study belong solely to mankind, and they exist because of the ability and calling God has given us to subdue the ground.

The term dominion is a synonym of "subdue" but it also suggests derived authority. Obviously, no authority exists save that which is God's but, in this text, we read that God has given us the task of exercising rule over creation in a responsible manner. In this way, we "image" God as we go about the task of representing His rule as His chief creation to the rest of the created world. Now, this is not to say that mankind does a good job of being God's image bearers, but it does mean that God has rightly commissioned us to be the authority over the larger creation.

### **Putting This Together**

Have you ever wondered how man can subdue such amazing and powerful creatures as lions, tigers, bears oh my (sorry I couldn't help it)! The answer lies in the commission and ability given by God to subdue all of creation. We are certainly not as physically powerful as many creatures, but we have the intellect and ability to think critically that sets us apart from all other creatures. As we subdue the land and exercise dominion over all creation (plant, animal, etc.) we are displaying our God-given ability and calling to image God.

Day 139 - May 18

Anthropology: Created in God's Image

### **Revelation 5:10**

One of my favorite characteristics of the Bible is the circular nature of the narrative. In a very real sense, the Bible begins in paradise. This paradise is quickly lost, but the rest of the Scripture is about God's redemptive plan to regain and restore His creation to its original, beautiful state. Revelation 5:10 is a prophecy about the coming eternal bliss that all believers will experience. Specifically, it refers to the day when believers in Christ will reign with Him for all eternity.

The point that we want to draw out of this text is that the idea of dominion is not temporal but eternal. To be sure, even now, we exercise dominion only in a limited sense. We are never truly "in charge"; instead we represent God who is able and willing to intervene as necessary. However, many would expect that our position of reign would cease when the Son returns to rule this earth at the second coming. This assumption makes some sense but, biblically, it is false. Instead, the clear biblical teaching is that you and I, as believers in Christ, will reign with Him for all eternity. This means, among other things, that our desire to exercise dominion is not temporal but eternal. We will worship our Triune God forever as we subdue Creation with His reigning Son.

Folks, I want you to see how this is the full-circle plan of God. Remember, in Genesis 1, mankind is given the commission by God to subdue the earth before sin enters into the picture. It was, and is, God's plan for His image bearers to exercise authority as His representatives over His creation. This means that Revelation 5 is not a new idea but an absolutely archaic reality. God's salvation and restoration will include redeeming us as those who are to display to Creation the rule and reign of God.

### **Putting This Together**

Now, to be clear, we are not saying that we will be on equal footing with Jesus. Instead, we are understanding that we will gladly reign underneath His authority as image bearers of God who are no longer tainted by sin but are accurate and glorious representations of His character and might. There is coming a day when we will see Jesus again and, on that day, we will be restored to perfect relationship with the Father and commissioned to exercise our created job to reign under and with Him for all eternity.

Day 140 - May 19

Anthropology: Our Origin, the Necessity of God

**Acts 17:24-28**

Paul's address in Areopagus is one of the most famous and wonderful examples of Gospel witness in the midst of a pagan society. The Bible tells us that Paul has walked amongst their various temples and shrines to their gods in the moments that have led up to this mini-sermon. In so doing, Paul states that he perceives that they are religious people but their religion is, in itself, a denial of the One True God. This God, according to Paul, is the Creator of all things but He is also the sustainer of everything and everyone. Notice here how Paul connects the reality of God's hand in creation with the truth that every person is now upheld by God as well.

Verse 24 states categorically that all things were made by God and then verse 28 affirms that it is in this God that we "live and move and have our being." There is a false ideology that has been around for centuries called deism. Deism is the stated belief that a god created all that we see but, subsequent to creation, he has now backed out of any governance allowing creatures to control or attempt to steer whatever happens.

Verse 28 tells us that Paul was absolutely not a deist! Instead, he affirms that we not only owe the beginning of our lives to a Creator, but we owe the fact that we are breathing in the moment to His providence as well.

**Putting This Together**

One of the chief and most repeated sins of humanity lies in our propensity to act as if we are independent, totally without a need for anything or anyone. Many people celebrate the idea that they are "self-made" men or women but this is simply not the case. It is God who sustains and it is God who, in His mercy, entrusts us with all of the days and abilities we enjoy. This God demands our worship, and it is in our denial of Him that we exude the very depth of our sin and depravity.

Unlike many in our culture today, as believers we must testify to the reality that we are in desperate need for this God! He is the giver of every good gift and, consequently, He deserves the praise and adoration of His creatures.

Day 141 - May 20

Anthropology: Our Origin and the Glory of God

### **1 Corinthians 10:31**

1 Corinthians 10 is one of my favorite chapters in all of the Scriptures. This text is a practical and imperative passage that teaches us the attitude we should have toward our life in its entirety. Unfortunately, many in our world today have segregated their lives between spiritual and physical. We live as if our church lives are governed by one set of rules and our working or “day-to-day” lives operate by a different standard. 1 Corinthians 10 obliterates this teaching as Paul clearly communicates a vision of the necessity that all of our activities ought to bring God the glory He deserves.

The connection between this devotion and yesterday’s is crucial to make. The fact that God created us and that we are totally dependent upon Him for all of our lives and abilities lends itself nicely to the truth that we owe our lives to God and therefore should live for His glory alone. Think of it this way: if a person saved your life or gave you food, water or medical help that you were desperate for, would there not be some sense of a debt to be paid? Furthermore, would you not be willing and even naturally inclined to bring them honor? The answer to both questions is a resounding “of course!” In an exponentially more applicable way, God deserves glory because, among other things, He is the very source of our lives and the giver of every good thing.

### **Putting This Together**

You will note that the context provides us with some instruction regarding when and where we are to give God glory. Paul clearly picks various mundane, and even necessary activities (such as eating and drinking) to show that literally everything we do should be inundated with a deep desire to love and glorify God.

Believer, I want you to remember two things: first, think of every act of yours as one of worship. If something does not and cannot bring glory to God, then simply don’t do it! Even more to the point, remember to glorify God with your attitude and actions in all arenas of life. Unfortunately, we have sometimes neutered these acts of worship by making them almost robotic. We don’t glorify God, for instance, when we say a rehearsed prayer that we’ve repeated over and over again without any thought or passion before we eat our meal. We do bring God glory when we partake in good food and erupt in joy at the thought that God has given us such a good gift! Second, remember that all of life is to be enjoyed. God is most glorified when we enjoy the gifts He has given. Christianity is far from the passionless religion that many have painted it out to be over the years. Instead, we believe that life can and should be enjoyed, and that our very enjoyment brings God pleasure. So, whatever you do, glorify God in your bodies!

Day 142 - May 21

## Anthropology: Our Origin and the Responsibility of Obedience

### James 1:22

If yesterday was the positive result of the reality that God is our Creator and Sustainer, today's text constitutes the warning for those who attempt to live outside of the knowledge of God's authority and reign as our Creator. Worship is the wonderful joy that all of us get to participate in as we glorify God in all areas of life, and obedience is the fruit of a life that sees God as glorious and exalted. The simple truth is that God's standing as our Creator and, therefore, the Lord of all things brings with it certain responsibilities for us as His creation. You see, we are obligated to obey God only if He is truly the authority over us. His authority is displayed in His power and design in Creation, which means that you and I are obligated to submit to the One who created, sustains, and has rights over all that He made, including every man!

Since God is the authority in all of creation, and because He is our Creator, we are rightly compelled to a lifestyle of obedience. James 1 provides a warning that those who merely hear the Word of God (which is the way He expresses His will to us) and do not obey it are deceived. Their disobedience, even in light of clear biblical commands, actually testifies to the reality that these men and women do not understand the dynamics of their relationship to our Great God. The sin in our lives always leads to a desire to be our own god. This is why we create false gods in our image, and it is even the reason behind Adam and Eve's temptation in the garden. However, sin distorts the true dynamic of our relationship with God.

In other portions of Scripture, the metaphor is used of the potter and the clay. In this case, we are considered the clay which is totally at the mercy of the potter. The potter is not obligated to the clay, but the clay must conform to the potter. The fundamental reality is that we are unable and unqualified to give any instructions to God, but God is totally justified in His expectation that we heed His counsel and directives.

### Putting This Together

Our obedience is the ultimate sign of faith. Those who are faithful to obey the Lord are the ones who testify by their actions that they have come to understand and know the God of the universe. This is one of the reasons why James draws the straight line between obedience and faith. Those who claim to have faith and lack obedience do not believe in the One True God.

Now, I don't want you to miss this as it is crucial to our understanding of how to put these last two devotions together: our joy and obedience are inextricably tied together. Some folks like to think that we can either be happy or obedient, but this is to miss the biblical truth entirely. You will never find lasting joy apart from God's will and plan for your life, conversely you will find great joy even in submission to the Lord because His plan is for His glory but also our good. When you and I walk in obedience to our great God we find our purpose in life as we bring Him glory, and we come to know Him intimately, experiencing all of the blessings in life that sin can never deliver. So, glorify God in all you do! Enjoy God's good creation, and remember that as you are obedient to a good Father who exists for His glory and your good.

Day 143 - May 22

## Anthropology: The Constitution of Man, the Body

### Genesis 1:26-31

Today marks the beginning of a relatively short walk through the “constitution of man”. What we mean by “constitution” can be summarized as the various parts that combine to form the essence of our being. We will see that man is comprised of both body and soul.

One of the most prevalent heresies in church history is the false belief system of Gnosticism. Gnosticism intersects with several important biblical doctrines, but its fundamental disagreement lies in the divergence regarding the physical. Gnostics essentially believed that the spiritual realm was full of good things while the physical realm was evil. While I don’t know many true Greek Gnostics (not one to be exact!) there is a sense in which their beliefs have infiltrated some minds regarding the subject of our physical body.

The Scripture is quite clear that Creation, in and of itself and especially prior to sin, was good. This creation includes the body as we see in Genesis 1:26-31. In fact, you will note a subtle but very important alteration to the overwhelming pattern of the chapter. The Bible describes the first five days in this way: God speaks, something is created and God deems it “good”. However, in this text we see that God does more than merely speak and proclaim things “good” when creating the body of man and woman. In fact, Genesis 2 teaches us that God goes through a more elaborate process in the formation of man as He forms Adam out of dust and breathes life into his otherwise dead body. Furthermore, woman is created out of a rib of man. This process shows us the great care of God in His crowning achievement, which also illuminates the difference between mankind and the rest of creation. Finally, Genesis 1 notes that God did not merely pronounce creation “good” after everything was made; instead He deemed it “very good”.

This might seem like a small reality, but it does testify to the truth that our bodies are “good” in that the body of mankind was absolutely in existence at the time of God’s pronouncement. This means that what we have, in our bodies, is not some throw away or worthless tent, instead it is intricately designed and created by God and is “very good” in its original sense.

### Putting This Together

Some of you might wonder if this has practical implications. The answer, of course, is yes! One such conclusion we should draw is that our bodies are to be cared for, as they are entrusted to us by God who took great concern in their design. Your body is not yours to destroy; it is yours to care for out of respect for the masterpiece that it is by God’s sovereign design.

Now, we obviously know that once sin enters the picture our bodies are drastically impacted by the corruption and erosion that has now beset creation. In fact, we will have to reflect on this truth in detail in just a few days. Nevertheless, the body is not representative of some lower form of God’s creation to be shunned at the very first opportunity. It is a masterful work of the Father which, as we will see, will exist in a redeemed and incorruptible state in our future.



Day 144 - May 23

Anthropology: The Constitution of Man, the Body

### **1 Corinthians 6:19**

One reason why Gnostics are confused about the nature of the physical lies in the observation that so much of what is physical today is marked by evil and corruption. Unfortunately, the Bible is clear that the greatest evil of all actually resides within our natural bodies. When left to our own devices, devoid of the regenerating and renewing work of the Spirit, our hearts are desperately wicked. This truth can lead some to the false conclusion that our bodies must be inherently evil, but this is not the biblical teaching at all! In fact, the Bible would teach us that when salvation comes to a man or woman, the body is not discarded; instead it is inhabited by God the Spirit.

Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 6 is that God the Spirit literally indwells the bodies of His people! Therefore, God and, by extension good, does not merely exist "out there" somewhere. Instead, for the Christian, God literally lives "in here"!

This has absolutely massive implications for how we view our bodies. Perhaps the chief conclusion we must draw lies in the statement God is making by inhabiting our physical bodies. You see, we believe that God is good; and therefore, whatever He inhabits is sanctified as well. When God comes into your body through the Spirit, He is declaring to you that He is able to redeem and restore your spirit while occupying space in your flesh. Far from evil, the body, therefore, is the very temple or dwelling place of God!

### **Putting This Together**

The profound implication from this reality is that we must work to sanctify our bodies in light of who now lives within each and every one of us! When I was a kid, my mother would work tirelessly to clean up a typically less than tidy house when company was due to arrive. Her desire was to display honor to our guests and ensure that they can enjoy our home while they fellowshiped with us. As I've lived longer, I realize that this is typically standard practice as we understand that cleaning our home is a show of respect and concern for those who would visit. The application is clear, if we are willing to clean our physical homes for less distinguished guests, should we not work even harder to sanctify the very dwelling place of the God of the universe as He dwells within? Further, ought we not respect the body that God deems acceptable to inhabit? The answer, of course, is yes!

Day 145 - May 24

Anthropology: The Constitution of Man, the Body

### **Philippians 3:21**

The last portion of Philippians 3 is a glorious proclamation of our coming reality as believers in Christ. The text teaches us that we are, even now, citizens in heaven who will eventually enjoy eternal life with Christ Jesus in heaven. If you are a believer, none of this is particularly new to you; however, there is a portion of this text that is applicable to our understanding of the body. You will note in verse 21 that Paul clearly states that our body will be “transformed”.

The point of the passage is clear as Paul acknowledges the problems with our current body as he refers to it as “lowly”. It is lowly in the sense that it is marred by sin and, at the moment, gradually perishing. However, Paul looks forward to the day that our body is transformed by Christ into one that reflects His current body.

There is much speculation as to what our “glorified” bodies will be like in heaven. We have but a small glimpse into their composition as we read passages about Christ in His resurrected body after the crucifixion. In those accounts we see that His body was not limited by various obstacles (He walked through the wall to see His disciples), but we also understand that His body was still marked by some familiar traits. For instance, He allowed Thomas to put his hands into the wounds of Christ signifying the presence of a physical body. Jesus’ presence was not mere illusion; He really was in the midst of His followers. Second, we read that Jesus ate in front of the disciples which teaches us that our glorified bodies, if they are to be like Christ’s, will be capable of ingestion, which is good news if you ask me!

### **Putting This Together**

The larger point we can glean from this passage is that our bodies will be with us for eternity. They will most certainly be transformed in the most glorious manner, but we will exist for all eternity in physical bodies. This is the ultimate proof that physicality, in God’s economy, is not inherently evil.

Furthermore, this text provides encouragement that our bodies will be altered for the better. Philippians 3 is a marvelous encouragement to all of us but particularly those who struggle with their bodies at the moment. Brother and sister, there is coming a day when our great Savior will transform your aching, throbbing and uncooperative bodies into something that will last for all eternity in joyful paradise! Oh, how we all long for that day!

Day 146 - May 25

Anthropology: The Constitution of Man, the Soul

**Matthew 10:28**

Classic Christian theology has posited two components that comprise the totality of man. The first component is the body and the second is the soul. We see in multiple passages that the body and soul are combined in one person and yet remain distinct. While the body is the tent or external shelter that houses the person, the soul is the entity that gives us life and vitality while shaping our actions and dispositions. The soul is the immaterial portion of a person that dwells within the body.

We see Christ make this distinction in Matthew 10 when He acknowledges that man can kill each other bodily, but only God can kill the soul. This text must be understood in light of the rest of the Scripture. Jesus is not teaching annihilationism (the belief that those who are not saved and therefore ushered into God's presence are just destroyed). Instead Christ is referring to an eternal judgment often called the second death where the soul lives in eternal pain and torment.

The point that we are trying to drive home today is that Jesus sees man as comprised of both body and soul. The body will perish, save Christ's imminent return, but the soul will live forever. The soul is evidently untouchable by mankind as well. Only God can punish the soul, and only God can perform a work of salvation that transforms the soul thereby changing our destiny from hellacious torment to heavenly bliss.

Putting This Together

Obviously, we now understand that there is coming a future day in which the dead in Christ will rise and we will be fitted with resurrection bodies as is taught in Philippians 3. Nevertheless, we believe that at this moment, while bodies lie in the ground, souls are living in one of two localities. Some people wonder if those who have died in Christ, or died without Him for that matter, are simply unconsciously biding their time, but they need not ask. The Bible is quite clear that to be absent from the body (meaning people who have passed from this life) is to be present with the Lord, or present in torment away from Him. This means that those people who have died in the Lord are spending their time in His presence as their soul rejoices in His company while waiting for the day of their reunion with a body that will be transformed by God's might into an eternal and joyous dwelling place for the soul for all eternity.

Day 147 - May 26

## Anthropology: The Constitution of Man, the Soul

### Revelation 6:9

Today's text just serves to reiterate the truth we learned yesterday: that the soul lives in God's presence even while bodies remain in the grave, until such time as God sees fit to restore them and give them back to each person.

We see in this text a description of the throne room of heaven as God has commenced His judgment upon earth. Specifically, we read of the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God and their witness, crying out for vengeance.

The symmetry in the Bible is just remarkable. In this text there is a fascinating connection to Matthew 10 in that these are the men and women who, evidently, heeded Christ's exhortation not to fear those who could only kill the body and were rewarded! The Bible teaches that their lives were lost but their souls preserved for all eternity, while those who refused to repent of their gross sin are now paying the consequent to the One who can kill both the body and the soul. This is a fascinating picture and reminder of the reality that those who fear God might experience momentary heartache, but the faith that sustains is the faith that rewards with treasures that dwarf any earthly preservation we attempt to secure.

The larger point for today is to see the obvious confirmation of what we understood yesterday: that the soul of believers continues to live in God's presence even as it is momentarily separated from the body.

### Putting This Together

There is no reason to believe that you and I will not experience the same things as the slain souls of Revelation 6. While they are certainly martyrs and we, quite possibly, will not be killed for our faith, the truth remains that heaven, as it currently stands, is the place where our souls dwell in joyous praise until the time that Christ returns and restores us to our bodies. We have much reason then to fear the God who dictates where we spend our eternity. Furthermore, we have confirmation in His Word that this momentary journey of life is not our final destination. May we live in light of eternity, nourish our souls with the truth of our hope and revel in the truth that we have a sure reward that is incomprehensible yet obviously glorious.

Day 148 - May 27

Anthropology: Our Problem, Sin

**Genesis 3:22-24**

A week or so ago I stated that one of the most convincing arguments for the validity of the Bible lies in the insightful way that the Bible describes the condition of fallen humanity. Christianity is unique in many ways, but perhaps chief among them is the teaching that only Christ followers espouse of our helplessness before a holy God. To be fair, there are many different faiths in the world with a variety of answers as to how to “achieve” eternal life, but all of them have this in common: they rely and trust in man’s ability to earn their standing before God.

In Islam that is achieved by doing more good than evil, in Buddhism it is achieved by divorcing oneself from passions of the world, and on and on it goes. The fundamental flaw in all of these faith systems is that it places the power and desire in man to achieve salvation. Christianity stands alone in its pessimistic view of the human heart and, conversely, in its good news of God’s achievement through Christ on our behalf.

We will get to soteriology (the study of salvation) in several weeks, but today we want to tackle the clear biblical teaching regarding man’s sin. Today’s text describes the immediate ramifications of sin as Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden and forbidden from re-entering. To refresh your memory, Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of the serpent to disobey God’s commands regarding eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The consequence of this action is incredibly cataclysmic. Man and woman’s God-given tasks are frustrated, the earth is cursed, and, most importantly mankind is separated from the giver of life, God Himself.

The text for today records a description of the state of man after sin. Where Adam and Eve once walked with God in pure fellowship, now they were separated from Him. This separation had momentary ramifications but, chiefly, it resulted in their alienation from the giver of life which led to eternal death.

#### Putting This Together

Folks, the lesson is simple: sin separates. Sin severs our tie with God and, according to the Scripture, all of us are guilty of sin even as we are born with sinful natures. You and I are descendants of Adam and Eve, which means that the very state of their hearts as sinful creatures has been passed along to us. By virtue of their sin and ours we are separated from a holy God, and because we have violated His law, we have no recourse to reconcile with Him in and of ourselves. God’s standard is perfection and we are far from perfect.

The teaching of sin and separation flies in the face of the rest of the world’s (false) religions. Each faith system teaches that there is some way to bridge the chasm but this simply isn’t the case. Instead, we stand powerless to affect our situation, which means we need a Savior!

Day 149 - May 28

Anthropology: Our Problem, Sin

### **Jeremiah 17:9**

Before we jump into a rather self-explanatory text of Scripture, I'd like to answer a question that some of you might have. Why talk about sin so much? To be sure, there are several churches and denominations that have chosen to shy away from this biblical doctrine. They have different explanations, but all of them boil down to a desire to be "positive" and not needlessly berate already hurting people. I will assume that some of these folks are well-intentioned (many are not) but they are categorically wrong about the purpose and need to talk about sin.

Think of it this way: in order to truly look outside of ourselves for salvation we need to see the depth and severity of the storm. Furthermore, our gratitude and praise for God's gracious act of redemption is fueled and enriched when we come to grasp the perilous place we were in prior to His intervention.

Today's passage is one of the clearest and most succinct passages in all of the Scripture about the depravity, or sinfulness, of mankind. Jeremiah says that the human heart is "desperately wicked". The phrase means that our heart is almost unimaginably depraved. Furthermore, Jeremiah asks this rhetorical question, "Who can know it?" The question should resonate with us because of its desired effect. The implication of this passage is that we can't really know the true depth of our sin. In fact, even things we think are righteous are tinged with sin! Every fiber of our being is marred and our very soul is plunged into a state of total depravity.

### **Putting This Together**

When Jeremiah describes the natural human heart, he has absolutely nothing positive to say. Instead, he emphasizes the truth that our hearts are more sinful than we've ever imagined. One point of application might help drive this home, I've found in ministry that the more spiritually mature a person is, the most aware they are of their sin. As we spend time with our Righteous Father, our carnality continues to come to light. Inversely, those who would describe themselves as "a good guy" have no concept of the holy standard of God nor their total inability to keep His commands. Folks, we are not good, no one is good save God, yet in His goodness has made a way for us to be reconciled to Him and in the process, He gives us a new heart which grows more and more in holiness. Praise God for His gracious and powerful salvation! May we be brought low in order to lift our exalted God higher and higher!

Day 150 - May 29

Anthropology: Our Problem, Sin

### **Ephesians 2:1-3**

We come now to perhaps the most succinct and powerful passage on the impact and universal nature of sin in the lives of people. Ephesians 2 is a text that begins in a less than encouraging manner, but as we have seen, the reality of sin gives way to the glorious beauty of salvation.

There are several realities that must be brought to light in this passage. For our purposes today, let us consider the condition of our naturally sinful hearts. Paul says that we “were dead in our trespasses and sins”. Obviously, Paul does not refer here to our physical life; instead, we are dead spiritually. Our hearts, or the center of our spiritual being, is darkened and hardened to the point that we are totally unable to respond to God’s commands without divine intervention.

This is the point that Paul makes in verses 8 and 9 teaching that we were saved totally by grace which is the gift of God. Folks, this might seem obvious to you but it bears mentioning, dead people don’t do anything! In order for a dead person to live, he or she must be enlivened or resuscitated by an outside force. God is the giver of life and He is the One who overcomes our sin by changing our hearts and breathing life into our otherwise cold and sinful souls.

Some of us view salvation as God helping us out, but this misses the point entirely. God didn’t just throw you a lifeline; God dove to the depths of the sea, picked up your lifeless corpse, swam to the surface and breathed life into your body. There was no hope of life otherwise and you added no works to the act of grace you received (the point of verses 8-9).

### **Putting This Together**

The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. This means that the effect of sin on our soul is catastrophic and eternal UNLESS our God decides to work a miracle on our behalf. There are many possible points of application but perhaps the most pertinent reality to consider is this: sin is far more serious than most of us have ever dreamed! We ought not “wink” at sin in our lives as it is truly destructive.

There is no such thing as “insignificant” cancer; instead we understand that even one renegade cell is enough to eventually ravage our bodies. In the same way, we must realize that even the so-called “white lie” is a sign or a symptom of a heart that is in desperate need of both grace and transformation. Praise God that, in His mercy, He has offered and accomplished a means for our salvation while we were yet marred in this sin!

Day 151 - May 30

Anthropology: Our Problem, Sin

### **Ephesians 2:1-3**

There is a popular belief out there today that mankind is not born corrupt but that we are corrupted by our surroundings or the culture that nurtures us. Many see this as a more palatable and less “extreme” position than biblical Christianity. The idea does not deny the rampant nature of sin, but it does teach that we are not “naturally” evil, that we are brought up to be evil, even from the crib. While this might seem appealing to many, it totally contradicts the clear teaching of the Scripture on the subject.

Notice in our text today that Paul states that we (all of humanity) were “by nature children of wrath”. The term “nature” refers to the very essence of our being. Paul is saying that upon birth, when we were brought forth in our human nature, we were already children of evil.

The term “children of wrath” refers to those who are underneath the power and control of Satan, the prince of the power of the air, according to this text. These people deserve the wrath that is to come against Satan and all those who abide by his rule.

The passage teaches us that we are not corrupted by outside forces, even though outside cultural influences often don’t help, instead we sin naturally. If you are a parent, you should have very little trouble believing this truth. I never had to teach my three children how to be dishonest, or selfish, or angry when they didn’t get their way. Instead, even at a young age they displayed the truth that they were by nature sinners. Now, I’m not saying we shouldn’t love our children, but I am saying that a biblical worldview demands that we accept the truth that our children are sinners who are in desperate need of grace. Their need should drive us to our knees in prayer for their salvation!

### **Putting This Together**

There is no doctrine that is more hated by the world than this one. No one wants to hear that they are sinners and, therefore, evil in their natural state. Nevertheless, the teaching is clear in the Scripture. You and I, and everyone else, are brought forth in iniquity. The reason for our sinful natures lies in our connection to Adam. Just as Adam and Eve fell and therefore plunged themselves into a life of sin, so you and I as descendants of theirs and, therefore, inheritors of their natural condition, are characterized by our sin.

The consistent biblical teaching is that we are in need of transformation through salvation. The good news is that the Bible doesn’t just tell us about our need, but it also tells the beautiful story of how God has worked to meet that need through Christ. God did not leave us in our sin, even though He would’ve been justified in doing so; instead He pursued us in Christ. What a mighty and gracious God we serve!



Day 152 - May 31

Anthropology: Gender

### **Genesis 1:27**

We move now to what is admittedly a rather controversial subject in our moment in history. Today's society is in the midst of a rather large debate on the subject of gender. Many of you know that the news is truly inundated with stories about gender pronouns and individuals who have "chosen" to change their gender identity from one sex to the other. Even more stunningly, there is an increasingly loud minority who are pushing for scrapping the old definition of gender altogether. These people say that there are many different genders, not just the "traditional" two of male and female.

As believers, we need to be in the habit of consistently and rigorously asking ourselves "What does God say?" As we set out from the very beginning of our journey together, we believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word to us, as it is literally His revelation of Himself. Furthermore, we affirm that God is the authority in all things, and therefore, whatever He says on the subject is the final word... period. Now, to be fair, there are subjects in which God in His sovereignty has chosen not to explicitly reveal His thoughts. However, gender is not such a subject.

Genesis 1 is, by now, a familiar passage to you. There are great nuggets of truth to glean from this text regarding creation and God's might and wisdom. Today's teaching, however, is as clear as it is basic as God affirms that there are in fact two genders. The text says that God created mankind in His image, as male and female.

### **Putting This Together**

This text helps us logically and clearly refute two historic errors. The first error is listed above. The Bible simply has no category for any other gender identity. While this is basic, it is also foundational. In the coming days we will see some of the reasons why God has created men and women to be His image bearers. Second, we can refute the unfortunately common misconception that one gender is superior to the other. Historically, the belief that men are somehow better than women has dotted the landscape. This text teaches us that every human being is made in the same image and, therefore, has the same value. Folks, God's pleasure in you does not rise and fall by your gender, instead He has made each and every person in His image for His glory.

As we hearken back to previous devotions, we can begin to understand that, while many take "image" to mean physical and equate masculinity with superiority based on the pronouns the Bible uses for God (i.e. God is described as "He" therefore the "he's" must be better than the "she's"), this thinking misses the biblical teaching of being made in God's image entirely. Humans made in the image of God has a far more fundamental and weighty sense than our reproductive organs. Instead, being made in God's image refers both to our standing amongst Creation and our ability to exercise dominion. As we will see, it takes both men and women to fulfill our God-given mandate.