



2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 27th - Aug 2nd

Sermon: July 26th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community > equipping believers > serving Jesus

July 27

Luke 12:35-48

This might strike you as odd, but I will confess that some of my favorite passages of Scripture are introductions to Pauline epistles. The reason is that they typically include scores of rich, doctrinal and Christ-exalting truths. The book of Titus includes a mere 4 verses of this kind of introduction, but it is filled to the brim with theological depth which should enrich the faithful student. This week, I would like to take a few of the Words of this opening passage and study them a bit further to catch a greater glimpse of the truths that Paul is trying to express to his protégé Titus.

Today's term is "servant". Paul introduces himself as a "servant" of God in the opening line of his letter. This little word might appear to be easily grasped as we utilize the word servant all the time in our modern world. However, a little bit of a deeper dive will show us that this term is a bit more severe than many would initially think.

"Servant" is an English rendering of the Greek term "doulos". The word is often translated as servant, but it can also be rendered "slave". In fact, our parable for the day demonstrates how these two terms can be understood in a mutual way that enriches both. Today we read the story of the master and his servants (same Greek word). Jesus makes it very clear that the servant who is faithful to the master will be rewarded but those who are lax in their duties will be punished. In fact, the passage is so exact that Christ describes the punishment that will be unleashed on the wicked servant as a "beating"!

What's the point? The point is that this servant is one who owed immediate and total obedience to his master. A servant was not understood to be the kind of employee who could simply find another job on a random Tuesday, instead he was committed and obligated to fulfill all the duties that his master required under the penalty of serious punishment.

Paul understood himself to be such a servant underneath the Lordship and authority of Christ. The Apostle did not serve the Lord as a freelance hireling; he served Christ underneath the conviction that Christ was his eternal and enduring master. Paul's ministry was not informed by his own desires or plans, his ministry was empowered by his commitment to faithfulness.

Are we this kind of servant to our Lord? Does He call all the shots in our lives? Are we willing and able to ascribe to Him not only all the glory but also all the authority? Remember, Christ told us that all authority in heaven and on earth was given Him (Matthew 28:16) and this reality grounded His commandment. Do we believe this? If so, then we will have no problem understanding and embracing our title as "servant" or "slave" of the Lord!

July 28

Matthew 10:2; Acts 2:42 & 1 Corinthians 15:9

We come to a term today that is hotly debated amongst many in our 21st Century Christian world. My assumption is that many of you have encountered supposed “apostles” in our culture today. I actually went to college with someone who now claims to not only be a pastor of a church but also an “apostle” in the Atlanta area. What does this mean? Is he correct?

Today’s text reminds us that Paul was an apostle but this actually complicates matters just a bit if we are going to think through the biblical definition of an apostle. The term itself can be understood generically. In its most wide sense, an apostle is simply one who is sent with a message. Some have attempted to muddy the biblical waters by claiming that this is all that God intends when He inspires the use of the term in Scripture. The problem with this kind of thinking is that this is not the way that the Bible itself utilizes the word and we see this in our texts for today.

First, notice in Matthew 10 that the term “apostle” is reserved for a specific subset of Jesus’ followers. In fact, Matthew names the 12 that qualify! This means that there is a biblical difference between an “apostle” (generally) and an “apostle OF Jesus Christ” (specific). When the Bible utilizes the term “apostle” as it does in Titus 1:1, the second, more specific, idea is in play.

Second, notice that apostles had a very specific teaching ministry. In fact, Acts 2 tells us that the apostles were the ones who initially taught the church. This function of teaching the gathered saints is further affirmed in Ephesians 2:20 when we read that apostles teaching was designed to be a larger part of the foundation upon which the church was built.

Third, notice that Paul considered himself an apostle but “the least of the apostles”. What does this mean? It more than likely means that Paul understood his commission to be a messenger of God as an apostle but also realized and grieved over his sin of persecuting the church in his past.

This understanding helps us realize why Paul would add this title to his letter. He was functioning in his role as a teacher of the church and his biography gives credence and weight to his words! Believers should listen to the Apostles of Christ and we will seek to understand why a bit further in tomorrow’s devotion as we consider the qualifications of an apostle.

July 29

Matthew 10:2

I started yesterday's devotion by acknowledging that I know at least one individual who claims to be an apostle today. My assumption is that most of you have seen church signs or billboards (so-called apostles in our world today don't appear to be the humblest among us) advertising a church led by a supposed "Apostle". What should we think of this? Well, the simple answer is that an "Apostle of Christ" (recall those last two terms, "of Christ", provide a very important modification and further definition of the term) constitutes a very specific, and passed, group of men.

We see the specificity of the group when we read passages like Matthew 10. Matthew shows us that the apostles, at that moment in history, were limited to the names that were listed. This is not to say that there were not other disciples (or followers) of Christ, but it is to remind us that the term apostle was reserved for a defined subset of the larger group.

What is it that made a person an apostle? As is usually the case, R.C. Sproul helps the reader immensely writing, "In the New Testament, twelve disciples were commissioned as Apostles. After Judas's death, the church replaced the vacancy by selecting Matthias, as Acts records. To this number Jesus added the Apostle Paul as the special Apostle to the gentiles. Paul's apostleship was a matter of some debate because he did not meet all of the requirements for apostleship set forth in Acts. The criteria for apostleship included being: (1) a disciple of Jesus during His earthly ministry, (2) an eyewitness of the Resurrection, and (3) called and commissioned directly by Christ. Paul was not a former disciple, and his vision of the resurrected Christ occurred after Jesus' ascension. Paul was not an eyewitness of the Resurrection in the same way the other Apostles were. Nevertheless, Paul was directly called to the office by Christ. His call was confirmed by the other Apostles, whose apostleship was not in doubt and was authenticated by the miracles God performed through him, attesting his authority as an Apostolic agent of revelation."

This definition helps us gain a clear guideline to define who is, and who isn't, an apostle. Apostles were disciples of Jesus Christ during His ministry. Do any modern-day men meet this qualification? Absolutely not! They were eyewitnesses of His resurrection. I know some gentlemen who are a bit aged, but nobody I know is anywhere close to 2,000 years old! Finally, apostles were called directly by Christ. Some of the apostles in the world today claim this to be the case, but this is dubious considering the other qualifications.

July 30

1 Peter 2:9

Today's term is the word "elect". If you've been at Smyrna for any time, you know that we have spoken to this issue of election (or predestination as it is sometimes called in biblical phraseology). I do not want to do an entire devotion on the theological underpinnings of God's Sovereignty in salvation for the simple reason that we have done it many times and I'm not sure that we would adequately cover Paul's basic intent when using this word in Titus 1.

You will notice that Paul does not define or elaborate on the term "elect", instead he assumes that we would know that he has a very specific, intended audience in mind. We know this because the term "elect" simply means those who are chosen and, in this context, the idea of chosen denotes God choosing His children. The elect are the group of men and women who have been chosen by God for salvation.

Now, some of you might think I have played a bit fast and loose with the definition. After all, some might say, why should we take your word for the idea that God has chosen us? Could it not be that the elect are those who God identified as those who would eventually choose Him? Let me give you two responses to that.

First, I want you to read our text for today, thoroughly. Do you see the word "elect" in this passage? The answer is no! The English word "elect" is not present but the same Greek word which is rendered "elect" in Titus 1 appears. The same word rendered elect in Titus 1 is translated as "chosen" in 1 Peter 2. Now, this leads us to an obvious question... who is the main actor? Or, to put it more specifically, who is it that is doing the choosing? The answer, according to Peter, is that God is the One who chooses!

This leads to the second objection; some would say that God chooses only as a response to our choosing! This seems to avoid a difficulty that some like to imagine but it must lead to a greater issue! If God "looks down the corridor of time" to see what I will do and then chooses me based on my actions, then we must posit that God has learned something from me! He sees what I do and, based on what He comes to understand, He responds by choosing me because I chose Him. This has two mammoth problems. First, it suggests that God can learn something and, if this is the case, then we no longer have an all-knowing (omniscient) God. Second, John 15:16 records the Lord's Words when He is speaking to His disciples. In that precious text Jesus says, "you didn't choose me, but I chose you." Jesus came to "seek and to save the lost". He is the seeker, He sets His eyes on those He will redeem, and this is why Paul writes to those who have been redeemed and calls them God's "elect" or "chosen".

July 31

Ephesians 4:13

Today's devotion will include one term, but I want us to consider its connection to another word in Titus 1. The word we will study is "knowledge". Admittedly, this is not a hard word to understand as there is no nuance to it as it is utilized in Titus 1. Paul literally means knowledge! Nevertheless, there is a connection he makes here between faith and knowledge that is incredibly important and, I pray, helpful.

Notice that Paul says that he is writing for the sake of faith AND their knowledge of the truth. Evidently, there is a connection between faith and knowledge. Stated differently, we cannot be saved by earnestness if we do not believe that which is true. Ephesians 4 reminds us that the goal of teaching is to attain the unity of the faith in the knowledge of the truth. This means that our goal in gathering to hear the Word is for our faith to be strengthened and exercise in a way that leads to unity around Christ.

Folks, the Gospel is news! This means that those who are saved by faith in the Gospel of Christ are those who comprehend what Jesus has done for them on the cross. There is no getting around the reality that this is cognitive. Now, we are not claiming that salvation is exclusively intellectual. Obviously, there is a heart level transformation that takes place and affections and emotions are part of the equation, but sincerity of heart does not equate to salvation unless the mind grasped the truths of who Christ is and what He has done.

This connection explains Paul's ministry and the purpose of his writing. He did not write these epistles to show off his superior intellect; he wrote them for the purpose of building up the church in the faith. Everything that we have written for us is geared towards this purpose. God has revealed Himself, chiefly, in a book and that revelation is intended to be studied and obeyed and when we come to comprehend what He has said to us in His revelation, our faith is strengthened.

Please don't buy the lie that growing in knowledge is evil or not worth your time. Lean into the truths that God has revealed and trust that in so doing you will come to be strengthened and anchored more and more into the truth of God that will hold you in every season of life.

Aug 1

James 2:26

Today's word is one that most likely would not be picked out by most readers as significant, but I think the relationship it denotes is exceedingly helpful for those who wish to think further on knowledge in our faith. Yesterday, we noted the connection between knowledge and faith. Faith is based on knowledge! If we don't know that Christ died for our sins and rose again, there is no hope of our saving faith in Him. If we don't know who God is and what He commands, then our faith is going to be weak and/or false.

Today, I want to consider how knowledge is linked to holiness. Stated differently, what we know is intended to guide how we live and this is where the word "accords" comes into play. You will notice that Paul says that knowledge "accords with godliness". What does this mean?

The term accords means to "go with" or "coincide". In this case, the Apostle is clearly teaching us that knowledge is intended to be accompanied by holiness. In other words, we do not learn so that we can be puffed up intellectually, we learn so that we can be righteous in our conduct.

Here is how this is supposed to work: you and I read the Scriptures in order to grow in our understanding of who God is and what He expects and then we are to put that knowledge to use (in the power of the Spirit) to live in a way that affirms His Lordship in our lives and demonstrates His holiness.

When you study, do you look for ways that God would direct you to live? Are you attempting to grow in your intellectual understanding so that you can live a more holy life? If the answer is "no" then you can rest assured that God will not be approving of mere intellectual accomplishments! Conversely, if your desire is to make much of Him and to honor Him in the ways that He has ordained, then your study will be richly rewarded.

It seems like there is a very strong contingent of Christians who would like to sever the relationship we are speaking about here. There are people who somehow think that intentional study of the Word gets in the way of worship but the truth is that there is no greater worship than faith-filled obedience and our obedience is deepened when we come to know more of what God expects and when we come to savor more of the God who has revealed Himself in the Word.

Aug 2

Numbers 23:19

Today's devotion is not a word study, instead it's a reflection upon the character of God which should encourage us to continue in our faith and study as we seek to know and honor the Lord who has revealed Himself. Notice that Paul tells us that God is a God who "never lies". This is a profoundly important and magnificent statement!

I've known many people in my life that I would describe as honest. These are people who I would trust and believe that they are telling the truth in all scenarios but even the most honest individual I have ever known has lied. None of us have always told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We exaggerate and fib and, at times, tell the massive lies!

This reality highlights one of the ways that God is so much higher than us. He is to be trusted in all things (big and small). Whatever He guarantees will come to pass because He is incapable of sharing a falsehood. This should invigorate our study and our faith.

We should be interested to study the Word of God in light of God's character because we can trust that whatever He says in this book is to be trusted. There is not a single promise in the entire Word that will not be fulfilled. There is no warning that will not be carried out and no guarantee that will be neglected. God is a trustworthy, holy and, therefore, honest Being.

Second, this should energize our faith. All that we learn about God can be trusted. There is never another shoe to drop with Him. He is always the same and He is always telling the truth. Have you read things in the Bible that seem too good to be true? Remember, God cannot lie. Have you read things in the Bible that seem harsh? Remember, God is a God who is never dishonest. Are there things in the Bible that are hard to believe? Recall that God is a God who can do the seemingly impossible and all that He has said has either come to pass or will come to pass.

Friends, we have a treasure trove of truth that is at our disposal and for our good. It is full of beautiful promises and glorious realities that can be relied upon in every season of our lives. Would you study it? Today, you have the opportunity to join us in corporate worship around this Word. May we come to the sanctuary ready and hungry to learn more truth from the God who never says anything but the truth!