



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Sept 27th - Oct 3rd

Sermon: September 26th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

September 27

1 Corinthians 2:11,16: James 1:5

How do we move forward in these unusual days here in America? I think it is fair and safe to say that our current culture is a dark and tangled set of circumstances. I see these days almost like I view a chess match. When playing chess, you have to be thinking 2 or 3 moves ahead. There is no doubt that there is a satanic influence and power behind the ungodliness that is pervasive in America today. How is the church to respond and how are we as individual Christians to respond and make decisions that will not ultimately make matters worse? You see, I believe that we are being baited into making poor decisions that if made, will make things far worse and will allow the current power structure to further institute repressive measures that take more of our rights away. We must not respond in anger, and we must keep our heads about us. As Doug Wilson said, "Don't take the bait."

It takes great wisdom and the ability to think well. Knee jerk reactions and surface level response are not the order of our day. Cooler heads must prevail, and they must be "minds" that are shaped and informed by the Holy Spirit. He alone knows the mind of God and desires to share that with His children (1 Cor. 2:16). Beloved, we have what it takes to navigate wisely these times simply and solely because the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God and reveals that to us. Now, the key is that we seek and ask for that wisdom from on high. That is where we turn now in our point to ponder for today.

James wrote in 1:5, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." It is important that you take note of where this admonition falls in light of the context of this chapter. It follows James's writing about trials and events that test your faith (v. 3); think about the flow. Hard times have come which often bring confusion and temptation to respond in inappropriate ways based on wrong interpretations of the event. So, James quickly interjects that we are to ask God for wisdom that we might rightly interpret and react under pressure. We are then encouraged with the promise that God is willing to give wisdom to us generously because He possesses wisdom in abundance. Note what James adds concerning the nature of wisdom in chapter 3:17, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy." Isn't that fantastic? God desires to provide in abundance this type of wisdom.

Beloved, Satan is setting traps for us to fall into. Bad decisions and wrong responses are part of what can hurt the church and the cause of Christ today. This is not the time for revolution but rather reformation directed from a place of wisdom from provided to us from on high. I heard it said once that revolutionaries tend to trust the fire that they set to burn down the capital believing that will somehow bring change. I believe that misses the real problem. Reformation should be the cry of our day and that takes wisdom and a personality that is as gentle as a dove but is as shrewd as a serpent. Oh, that God would raise up men and women with minds controlled by the Spirit of God and wisdom that understands how to walk through the minefields victoriously defeating the schemes of the evil one. He is no match for our King.

September 28

2 Corinthians 7:1

We celebrated twenty years together over the past couple of Sundays. I wanted to certainly take one quick look back at how we got here, but the goal for Sunday's message was *where do we go from here and how do we get there?* The chosen text for today contains so much of what it takes to bear fruit in ministry and for the glory of God. Paul writes, "Therefore, having these promises beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Paul had just quoted promises found in the Old Testament in verses 6:16-18. There he reminded the Corinthians, and us, that God had promised to dwell among them (believers are His temple), to walk with them, and to be a father to them. All they needed to do was be obedient to His commandments as they pursued holiness. So then, he says in 7:1 that since we have these promises, we should pursue holiness rather than the sins of our flesh.

You might be tempted to think that because God has made promises that He will not break that we would be inclined to sin even more. Shucks, if we are already going to be forgiven, why not just jump right in and indulge the desires of the flesh? The truth, however, is just the opposite of that. When we consider the promises of God, they are not intended to cause us to become more lax in holiness but more adamant in our pursuit of holiness. We must remember that our pursuit of holiness can only be accomplished in Christ so to pursue holiness is to pursue Jesus Christ. The promises of God are intended to create in us a deeper love for God because we stand in awe of His goodness.

Ultimately, what I am writing about today is faith. At the end of the day, the question that remains is, do you believe the word, in this case the promises, of God? You see, if you read a passage of Scripture and in it you find a promise of God, do you believe it? For example, He says that He will dwell with us and walk with us. Do you believe that He actually will or does do that? Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is God also. So, when the Spirit is indwelling us, God is indwelling us. When He promises to be a father to us, do you believe that He is? If you do, then everything changes. Think of some scenarios for a moment. If I am walking through a dark place in my life, He promised to be with me. When I am facing something difficult, He promised to give me strength. When I stand in need of provision or protection, He promised to be a father to me. The Bible tells me that He is all-powerful and owns everything in the universe, so why do I need to worry about anything. Since I am actually a son of God, then I know that He will take care of His own and I have an awesome inheritance in my future.

You see beloved, the point is that the promises of God are there to drive us to holiness. To be willing to let go of our sinful desires and take God at His Word. If He tells me that it is better to be faithful, to be honest, to be a man of integrity, and hard work, then I am going to believe that His way is the best way and will choose to obey rather than doing anything that I think is best or feels right. Without faith it is impossible to please God but with God all things are possible. What do you say we accomplish the next part of our ministry together the same way we did the first twenty years – BY FAITH!

September 29

Matthew 10:16

I want to pick up with the passage that I ended yesterday with. Matthew writes, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men....” Let me be clear when as I write this – wolves intend to destroy the church! Jesus was preparing His disciples for the what the world, that rejected Him, would be like for His followers. This passage telescopes past their day and into ours as well. Let’s spend a little of our time today thinking about the nature of sheep. Surely you see that “we” are the “sheep” that are being sent out. As a matter of fact, Matthew says, “I send you out *as* sheep.” What are they (we) like?

First of all, sheep are easily frightened and will often panic when startled. They are edgy animals and have little in the way of self-defense. About the only thing they can do is run and if you have noticed, they are not all that good at running. I’ve never looked at a sheep and thought, “They look like they are made for running.” The fact is that without a good shepherd, the sheep are doomed. The shepherd is responsible to keep them safe from eating the wrong food, the weather, all sorts of diseases, and other predators. In our passage for today, the enemy to be avoided is the wolf. It is bad enough to be sheep who are fearing wolves but that is not what the text says. It says we will be sheep in the midst of wolves. They are all around and we find ourselves among them. It is true that Jesus is our Shepherd, but it is also true that He is sending us into a world that hated Him and will hate us too as His children. Paul reminded his friends that when he left them, “ravenous wolves would rise up from among them, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29).

Before you run and hide in fear and shock, remember that even though we are going out as the sheep among the wolves, that does not mean we lost. It means that we are helpless and totally dependent upon our Good Shepherd and we better never forget that or try to minister in our own strength. Jesus gave His life for His sheep and He will still defend us today. The wolves, although instruments being manipulated by Satan, are simply men who have rejected Christ. But, don’t be surprised when people tear you to shreds with words, deeds, rejections, etc. They will be vicious towards us not because they hate us but because Satan hates God and we are the target as His kids. So how do we respond? What does it mean to be gentle or innocent AND shrewd as a serpent?

First of all, know that we must be wise. That was yesterday’s point to ponder. Be wise like Jesus when he answered the question about taxes. Be wise like the Hebrew midwives when dealing with Pharaoh. With our wisdom we are to be harmless – like a dove. This carries with it the idea of pure and innocent. We must not slip into sin in our responses to wolves. We must be alert and watchful. We need to be sharp and perceptive. We also need to remain calm in the midst of the trials (v.19). Dear ones, our deliverance may come in death but we cannot nor will not lose. Our Good Shepherd will see us home, but in the meantime, we have got to learn how to live in this world with a cunning shrewdness to our actions combined with a gentle, pure, innocence for His glory.

September 30

Colossians 3:12-13

When I think about our journey together over the years, I am humbled and grateful that we have shared our lives together. I think if we were honest, we would probably admit that there were some absolutely wonderful times and then there were times when things were more challenging. I know there were times when I made mistakes, never intentionally, but mistakes, nonetheless. There were times when I hurt your feelings for your own good and then other times when I just “got in the flesh” and messed up. I have needed your forgiveness at times through the years and I am thankful to you and to the Lord for willingness to extend grace and mercy to me. There were other times when some of you hurt or disappointed me too. Again, when you needed forgiveness, I am grateful the Lord taught my family and I how to forgive like Jesus forgave us and like you forgave me. No doubt that some of our motivation came from verses like Matthew 6:14 & 15 that says, “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” That passage in itself should be enough to cause us to forgive each other as necessary, but I believe, for us, it was more than simple duty or fear. It was genuine love that flowed from our kinship and fellowship in Christ.

Here is what Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae, “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone.” Dear brothers and sisters, I cannot emphasize enough how you have lived this out over the years with me as your pastor (now one of your pastors). Your ability to put on the traits of men and women who have been chosen by God is a clear indication and ample evidence that you are children of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit. You see, those characteristics mentioned in Colossians 3 are the fruit produced in a believer by the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The beauty of your love and support for my family over these two decades screams of the transforming power of Christ in us.

A few weeks ago, I said in a sermon that we are to make the Gospel visible to others in our own transformed lives. You have done that. Smyrna folks, I don’t know if you realize it or not, but the fact that we have stayed together for so long and have accomplished quite a bit for the advancement of the Kingdom and the glory of God from our little spot in Dinwiddie bears witness to what God can do in the lives of those who humbly submit to His Lordship. Thank you, my precious church family, for demonstrating to our neighbors what church is supposed to look like. Thank you, dear ones, for showing them what the relationship between a pastor and his family and the church should look like. You have done well in your testimony of sacrifice and service through the years.

We all know that like marriage, staying together this long is not without challenges, disappointments, and heartbreak. But we have demonstrated the need to bear with one another – to put up with each other. To bear with each other is to be patient and to extend grace, mercy, and understanding. It is to give grace when we mess up and forgiveness when we sin. You have done that well and my family and I are forever grateful and are forever transformed by your gentleness with us through our journey of serving our King. I love you, dear brothers and sisters, and am in many ways the man and pastor that I am because you have helped me grow in Christ. God bless and thank you from the bottom of my heart.

October 1

1 Timothy 6:6-12

I don't know if I've told many of you, but many years ago I received a phone call from a large church asking if I would submit a resume for the senior pastor position of that church. Their beloved pastor was leaving to take another ministry position and he was encouraging them to consider me for the pastorate. I had been pastor of Smyrna for around 5 years and things were going well. We had doubled in size, had added a second service and were beginning to be "noticed" by our state convention. Some of you might recall that they came out and did a video about what God was doing in our rural community. That video was aired in Roanoke at the state convention in front of thousands of people. I actually did send them a resume at his request but later spoke to the chairman of their pastor search committee and removed my resume from the search. It was actually a defining moment in my ministry at Smyrna Baptist church in Dinwiddie, Va.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that I was not immune to climbing the ladder and wanting to be known as someone with a "name" and a "position." The problem with that is it can lead a person to lose focus on what really matters and cause him to be motivated for the wrong reasons. Fame, fortune, and notoriety are powerful lures for the flesh of most people. I am thankful that God gave me a deep love for the people of Smyrna and the ministry that we were called to here. The trait that replaces the lust of the flesh is contentment. The Bible says, "But godliness is great gain when accompanied by contentment" (1 Tim.6:6). Paul went on to say, "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim. 6:9).

Folks, how does a person reach a place of contentment? How do you finally let go of worldly desires for fame and fortune and learn to truly be happy in your station in life? The answer lies of course in Christ. The peace that we are all looking for is a direct result of believing that God is in control of all things, and He can open any doors for you that He knows is best. He can give you any amount of money that He wants, and He can give you fame and notoriety across the world if He wants to. So, if He doesn't it is because He has chosen not to. If He chooses not to, then we must believe with our whole hearts that there is good reason for giving us what He gives us and keeping from us what He keeps from us. There is a Bible verse that is used in the Crown Financial Ministry Bible study from 1 Chronicles 29:12. It says, "Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone." Brothers and sisters, everything is in God's hand and He decides what, where, and how He distributes it.

I remember the day a man said to me, "I believe I'm just not get the opportunities that I deserve." Can that be? Friends, do you really believe that there are forces in this world that can literally stop God from doing what He wants to in your life? If you do, then you don't know God and the God that you claim to know is not the God of the Scriptures. Church family, the day that I learned to rest in God and let Him decide the size and impact of our ministry together at Smyrna is the day that I found perfect peace in serving as your pastor for as long as He wants me to. If God wants me to be somewhere else, then He will have to move me there Himself. He knows my love for you and my pursuit of godliness *with contentment* that has made this a rich journey. By the way, my prayer for you is that you have found peace and contentment in your station in life too. Never forget that God can open any doors for you that He wants and if He doesn't it is for your own good.

October 2

2 Peter 3:8-13 (v.11)

I hope that I was at least able to touch on this thought that I had as I prepared this week to preach. If not, this is one of the reasons that we write *Points to Ponder*. There are many thoughts and topics that simply cannot be covered in one single Sunday morning message. So, with that in mind, I want to talk a bit today about the value of the local church body in assisting each of us in our pursuit of holiness. I want you to consider His very character and our need to represent Him well as we seek to draw others to Him for salvation.

Given our Romans 7 experience and living life in a fallen world, make it extremely difficult to live holy lives. We must not be “okay” with putting our holiness on like a Sunday suit and taking it off when we get home. Dear ones, we must fight against the tendency and the ease of becoming so much like the world that we provide no contrast to ungodliness and no answers to a world full of people groping in darkness. The witness that is supposed to set us apart from those around us is fading and growing ever dim. Conformity of life to the world is the final step in the silencing of our witness. As the world grows worse, we must determine now what sort of people we ought to be.

One of my desires as a pastor is to help lead you to a life of greater holiness. This certainly cannot be done solely by your pastors. It requires, and is designed by God, that we help each other. One of the best means that God has given to aid us in this journey is expositional preaching. You cannot get all that you need to advance in holiness by sitting on the beach looking at the ocean. I like that too, but God Himself says we must live not on bread alone but on every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We need the whole counsel of the entire Word of God. You see, in the Bible we will learn who God truly is. Our goal is that you will grow to know Him so that you will have a big view of God. Since God is holy, we should understand that holiness in our lives is godli-ness in our lives. Dear friends, verse 11 in my chosen passage for today says, “What sort of people are we to be?” Peter is writing about the unraveling of the world and how we as Christians are to live all the way to the finish. Sitting under expositional preaching helps transform us into His image.

Folks, it is important that we understand why we must be exclusive as a church family. Our exclusivity is based on our convictions that we must live in accordance with God’s Word. We are to be set apart; we are to be holy. There must be a difference between how we live in comparison to how lost people live. If there is no difference, then they see no reason to change. They will see no reason to believe they are living an offensive life to God. If we make them feel like they are okay, we are okay, and everybody is okay then where is the impetus to repent and pursue Christ. We must be salt and light in their lives which means we must be different. As we hold to the doctrines of God’s Word, we are, by definition, going to be exclusive when it comes to who can be members of the Body of Christ and who cannot be. Don’t let that scare you! Be exclusive with love.

Now, one way that we live faithfully through these tumultuous and godless days is to keep our eyes on the future that is promised to us in Christ. We all know life is not easy and there are days when we feel like giving up on faith, but we must know that many of the promises of God point to a day beyond this one. But when too many of those days are strung together with no relief or no encouragement, the best of us may stumble and fall. This is where we need to hold each other up. This is one way the church is so important. We are going to need to be dug in together when the arrows fly and the enemy attacks. We will need to constantly remind one another who we are, who we are to be, and who we belong to. It’s got to be a communal effort.

October 3

Romans 1:16

Charles Finney, a pastor and evangelist of the 19th century once said, "If Christians would do their job of evangelism, they could win the world to Christ and bring on the millennium in 3 months." That may thrill you, but it should actually appall you. It is ridiculous to say, and it absolutely fails to understand or accurately represent the truth of God's Word and His methods. Our society has become so enamored with big numbers that somewhere along the way the church and pastors decided the best way to define success was to have big numbers. This led to methods based on crowds and speed rather than the slow, hard work of building relationships and community one convert at a time.

It has been said that numbers never lie but that is itself a lie. Numbers lie often. We look at large congregations and determine they are successful, but we have no idea if the Lord is pleased or if those people are even Christians. God called Noah to a work that took years. He called Abraham to a promise that took decades to fulfill. Hannah prayed for years for a child. You can rest assured that God was teaching them valuable lessons of faith and perseverance through the years of waiting while serving. The fulfilling of the Great Commission has been going on for centuries and will continue until Christ returns. We must understand that the work God has called us to is a long, slow work that must be sustained by the joy of seeing true evidence of God at work in people's lives over a long period of time. We must not rush our ministries for statistics because then we end up with weak churches full of people who are weak in faith at best and most likely not saved at all. There is an allure today of something that may appear great but pulls us away from the slow, plodding work that will produce the true great works of God. We must fight against a ministry method that is no more than putting makeup on a corpse. We must avoid the techniques that sweep unbelievers into the membership of the church. They must be first redeemed by the truth of the Gospel. Big numbers with speedy methods may well be a lie.

Now, a grave battle that we face today is trying to present the truth of the Gospel to people who have tasted, for years, a watered-down version and are no longer interested, believing they have already tried it and was not all that amazed. They think they have tasted the real thing when in fact they have been duped with a counterfeit version. It would be like me bragging to someone about how good a real Mt. Dew is only to have them taste one that was half Dew and half water. I would be hard pressed to get them to try it again after they were misled with a fake. This is one reason reaching people in our communities is so challenging. They think they have already tasted but they have not. They think we are offering the same old watered-down version of the half-truths they have already heard that did little to change them. They are not interested.

Beloved, we have to be convinced and committed to sharing the Gospel and the whole truth of God's Word through relationships that we build over the long haul. When we have spent time getting to know people and watching the transformation take place over an extended period of time. This will become the joy that sustains us to the end. Even when we suffer, the real experiences of growing and being transformed together will serve as endurance for the race. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe." May we move forward through this next decade, trusting the Word of God and being content to do the hard, long, slow work of serving our Lord so that others will be saved.