

Clearly Seen

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

– Romans 1:20 –

My father was a man of diverse talents. One of those was his artistic ability. While I was growing up, he was a technical draftsman by occupation. But he was truly an artist. His drawings, sketches, and paintings were the work of someone who could have made a living by it. When I was in elementary school, he would draw a picture on the blackboard for me each day before he went to work. That blackboard was on the wall outside our kitchen. Every morning, as I would groggily move into and then out of the kitchen while getting ready for school, I would stop for a moment and consider the chalkboard display. I was perhaps too self-absorbed at the time to understand that what was before me each day was much more than an intriguing picture. It was a loving reminder that my father had taken the time that very morning, prior to going off to earn a living, to invest himself in the creation of a unique display, the purpose of which was simply to remind me he was thinking of me and encourage me to embrace the day afresh.

God has similarly left many “chalkboard works” for mankind. He has graciously “drawn” the universe in such a magnificent way that even the most self-absorbed person should be able to recognize His unique and carefully crafted handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. He has framed the worlds by the word of God so that the things which are seen are not made of the things which do appear. We ourselves are fearfully and wonderfully made. The vastness of space, the mysterious ocean depths, the teeming variety and fecundity of earthly life, the beauty of creation, and the immense power in the forces of nature are all intended by God to make us stop and ponder – “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?”

This fact that God’s existence, yea, even his eternal power and Godhead, can be “clearly seen” universally via His creation by all men should make us as His ambassadors stop and consider *the propensity of the human heart toward its Creator*. While sin has man at enmity with God, *it does not erase man’s proneness toward belief*. Only the fool has said in his heart there is no God. Even most self-professed “atheists”, if you listen to them long enough, actually do believe in God – they simply have tried to convince themselves that they do not believe in Him because they do not like Him (perhaps because they have not made any real effort to trust Him). This ought to encourage us in our evangelistic efforts. Bridging the chasm between belief in His existence and faith in His work and character is the duty and privilege of those of us who have enlisted in His ranks.

Unregenerate men are looking for answers to the mounting chaos in the world. Despite the increasing hardness of the heart of our generation, the fields are yet white unto harvest and our commission still stands. Because God has made Himself evidently searchable, we have a large head-start as we lovingly live and share the good news with our fellow man.

May our Father grant us the ability to translate His clearly seen work into the hearts of those with whom we have influence today.

Will of the Gentiles or the Will of God

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles...

1Peter 4:3

As long as we have contact with people, we will always be subject to the power of influence. Family, friends, school, work, and church are just a few of the areas where conversations, ideas, and examples are shared. Some influences are deliberately exercised, while others are transferred more subtly. We all entered a world that has been corrupted since the fall of man, and blindness to the ways of God has spread throughout the earth. Mankind's exercising of their self-will has affected and influenced toward a way of life that caters to the carnal nature. Today's text refers to it as *the will of the Gentiles*. This will of the Gentiles is so ingrained in our culture that outrageous behavior is accepted as normal. People who refuse to conform to the will of the Gentiles are viewed as strange and often maligned. This lifestyle promises temporary pleasure to the flesh, but eventually leads to heartache, broken relationships, lack of peace and contentment, physical ailments, and a host of other problems.

God sent His son into this fallen creation to give His life for sinful man, and also to deliver us from the all-pervading corrupting influence of this present evil world. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; and by repenting, we take the first step on the pathway of doing the will of God. The scriptures teach that God has a perfect will for all us. By not conforming to the influences of this world and allowing ourselves to be influenced by the Lord we are able to find true purpose in this life. Immersing ourselves in His word will nourish our soul, and also shed light on the path our feet are to travel. Proverbs tells us that if we walk with wise men their wisdom can affect us. As we begin doing His will, His plan starts to unfold before us, and as we follow His path by faith our path shines more and more until that perfect day.

By being delivered from the will of the Gentiles we are now free to submit to the will of the Lord. May we delight to do His will today.

JDE

This Present Time

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18

The events recorded in the Bible help guide us in this present day to live according to God's plan; and they also give us an eternal hope for the future. At this moment we are each an eternal soul that lives in a temporal earthly tabernacle. Because of this condition, it is sometimes difficult to grasp the reality of eternity. We relate to time, we measure time, we schedule time, and yet our God is timeless and he operates from the realm of eternity. Our loving Lord is concerned about and meets our daily needs, yet His greatest interest is in our eternal well-being.

Today's text reminds us that suffering is part of our earthly experience. The book of Job affirms this by saying that "man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble". The sufferings of this present time have caused some to doubt God's love or even His existence. It would seem that much disillusionment and questioning occur due to suffering because we can only see it from our earthly perspective. In the midst of intense and severe suffering it may be difficult to understand that God describes our affliction as light and only for a moment when compared with eternal joy. Though we are not able to see or comprehend the indescribable wonders of heaven in that moment in our life, if we perceive by faith the magnitude of those wonders it can help to ease the pain of the greatest of trials. All of us experience this in less intense circumstances of our lives. Because of the passing of time or when our situation has improved, we can sometimes laugh at past painful experiences. The Bible illustrates this in John 16 when Jesus says that a woman in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

For the moment our lives are going to have their painful struggles; but there is coming a day when time will be no more and the Lord will make all the crooked things straight as the former things pass away. Till that glorious day, it is comforting to know that suffering is just for this present time.

JDE

Man limit God?

*Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.
They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.
Psalm 78:41-42*

This has to be one of the more enigmatic statements that we find as we read through our Bible. The notion that mere man should limit the omnipotent God of creation seems to be a contradiction of our general understanding of God and man. Yet the inspired writer of this psalm clearly makes the statement as he describes the disobedient history of the Israelite people that God had chosen. So we must seek to understand this statement in its context. How could they possibly have limited the sovereign God? This psalm, along with other passages of scripture, describes the cyclic history of Israel with respect to their relationship to God. The initial law and testimony that He gave them from the beginning was filled with promises of blessings. However, the blessings were connected with faith, which is evidenced by obedience. In addition, there were also promises of cursings for disobedience. Elementary faith is believing God's word. Their refusal to follow God's law demonstrated that they did not believe what He promised. While God's promises of blessings were potentially boundless, the opportunities to pour out those blessings upon His people were few. By their unbelief, they limited the degree of blessing that would come to them from God.

In the New Testament, we marvel at the people of Jesus' own country and house, when "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." We see then that the limitation of God has nothing to do with His power, but with the unwillingness of people to surrender to the conditions of His blessings. And how do we today limit God? Do we read His word and go our way, forgetting what manner of God He is? And especially dear reader, do you limit the ultimate blessing of abundant and eternal life that is powerfully available from Him, because you refuse to believe the promise of His only begotten Son? Let us all examine our hearts and remove the limits of unbelief, that His abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Luke 19:30-31: Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him.

Thus were the words of Zechariah fulfilled "*behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*" Over the centuries of time since the Lord appeared, volumes have been penned outlining the exploits of the men and women that God had used to accomplish His sovereign will. God had brought them to the "*kingdom for such a time as this*" because the Lord had need of them. We must not leave out the patent fact that the Lord also used animals to accomplish His will. One could look to Jonah who spent three days in the midst of a sea creature that God prepared for that express purpose. Elijah would have starved had not the Lord sent the raven to provide viands in the time of famine. Balaam had his lesson taught to him by the articulate donkey. We can only imagine what relief the ram in the thicket brought to Abraham and Isaac. So it is a sublime thought that the creator of heaven, earth and every living should be in need of this lowly colt.

If we look a bit deeper into the text we may see that this donkey presents a vividly accurate portrait of the sinner saved by grace. "*Job 11:12: ...though man be born like a wild ass's colt*". The stubborn Adamic nature is always asserting itself in rebellion against God's commands. This mule-like intransigence resists taming and insists on it's way. Further we note that no man had ever sat on it and so we can deduce that the spirit had never been broken. The command was to "*loose him*" because it was tied. Many are the bands with which we are bound to inveterate sins before Christ commands our liberation. The owner would prevent this loosing with vociferous protestations but at the end the devil has no permanent claim on any soul: he must surrender his goods when a greater than himself exercises the ultimate authority.

And so the Savior mounts the colt and to everyone's astonishment the young ass's volatility is instantly dissolved into manageable docility. Now the wild untamed creature is reigned in by the Master who travels the circuitous paths of Olivet and descends into the valley of Kidron and then the precipitous ascent of Zion. Yes the believer is glad to have the sure and certain leadership of the King, who guides through the perils and vicissitudes of life: it's serpentine windings, it's treacherous valleys and it's exhilarating heights. Everywhere we go we carry the Lord with us and exalt him as Lord and we his lowly servant. We stand in thankful awe that He has need of us to carry Him to a lost and dying world.

And then at His command the gates of that eternal city shall open and He shall bring us to our expected end in that New Jerusalem. Upon dismounting we may happily hear the Master's welcomed approbation "*well done, thou good and faithful servant*".

Have a blessed Week,

Pastor

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



His Workmanship

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

– Ephesians 2:10 –

Our birth and our re-birth in Christ are not mutually exclusive. We are prone to draw a line of demarcation in our lives, separating our pre-conversion era from our life in Christ. This tendency is legitimate and biblical to a point – for we are not what we once were, but have been washed, renewed, sanctified, and made meet for the Master’s use. Sin no longer owns us, and the Holy Ghost now guides us into all truth. There is a very true and palpable difference between the old life and the new, indeed. But this does not mean that our Christless past, though dead and buried, is not useful to our Lord’s purpose. The same God who reigns in our hearts today was not absent during our earlier years. Though we were willfully estranged from Him in bygone days, He was nevertheless working all things together both for our personal good and for the edification of His cherished Bride.

Our text states plainly that we are His workmanship. The Greek work translated “workmanship” is *poiema* and means in its strictest sense a masterpiece, a work of art, or a poem. *It implies the full investment and jealous care of the craftsman over the entire course of the creation of the finished piece.* The sculptor sees the finished work before he ever strikes the rock. The composer hears each note and harmonizes them across all octaves before the symphony is birthed to the ears of others. The painter translates what resides within his mind’s eye from the first stroke of the brush. The poet carefully orchestrates an array of words into phrases and then weaves those phrases into meter in order to express his innermost thoughts – thoughts too valuable, deep, and precious to share in more common forms of communication.

Our Lord sees each of us as His unique workmanship. We are each His specially crafted piece with specific purpose in His larger design. As such, He has been molding us over the course of our lives to meet out in time what He has ordained for us from eternity. Our gifts, our talents, our resources, our personalities, our strengths, our weaknesses, our experiences – the totality of our lives – are either directly from Him, or redeemable through Him. If we belong to Him, all that was lost is found. He does not waste.

Many Christians feel they do not have much to offer their Master toward the advancement of His Kingdom. They are thankful to be redeemed but uncertain of how they can be of use to the plan and purpose of the Christ Who purchased them. This is a grievously wrong perspective. Every blood-bought child of God is His workmanship, possessing a unique sphere of influence, a specific set of abilities, and a host of opportunities to impact men for time and eternity. In this sense, let us all resolve to be “comfortable in our skin” – not comparing ourselves against others, but fully persuaded that our Master has work that only we can do for Him.

Let us find those good works today that God has ordained that we should walk in, drawing upon the totality of our life experience. May we continue to permit Him to refine His work within our hearts while He expresses His love toward fallen humanity through each of us, His peculiar workmanship.

Always Seeking

Seek the Lord, and His strength: seek His face evermore.

Psalm 105:4

When giving witness of their conversion to Christ, believers will often say “I found the Lord”. This expression is used because of the Holy Spirit touching our heart and encouraging us in that journey to find the only answer that can bring peace and hope to our life. But finding Christ is vastly different from finding some item that we have lost. When we find something we have lost, the search is over. However, when we seek and find the Lord, in reality it is just the beginning of a lifetime of seeking Him. We will learn to seek him for meeting our daily needs, as well as spiritual strength to fight the powers of darkness, and answers to our most desperate prayers. All good and right things for which to seek the Lord.

But in this Psalm, we are specifically instructed to seek His face evermore. Though we draw close to Him at the time of our conversion, there is still so much more to learn and experience. Throughout the scriptures we understand that God is invisible and that His face cannot be seen, and yet that is what we are told to seek. The face of God is euphemistic language that represents the fulness of all that He is. It is true that we are made in the image of the Lord of all creation, yet His essence is so completely different from us, for He is the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God who is to receive glory and honor forever and ever. We could spend a lifetime, yea, an eternity seeking him and never complete our understanding of Him. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and yet if we seek His face the depth of these treasures only begins to be revealed to us. The thought that we are encouraged to seek His face is an extreme honor, while at the same time very humbling. When we waken in the morning, seek His face; when going about our daily activities, seek His face; when met with joy or sorrow, seek His face, when our pride overrides His will, seek His face; when on our knees in prayer, seek His face; when nearing the end of our earthly journey, seek His face; when drawing our final breath, seek His face. Because when safely landing on heaven’s shore, we will surely SEE His face!

If you don’t know the Lord, keep seeking Him, if you have found the Lord, you’ve only just begun a journey filled with wonder. Seek His face evermore!

JDE

FBBC Devotional for Friday, August 14, 2020: Becoming Holiness

Faith Bible <fbbc150@gmail.com>

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Becoming holiness

Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

Psalm 93:5

Holiness in its basic sense refers to being set apart, or literally “other than.” God defines holiness because there is none other like Him. Therefore, its meaning is expanded in the Bible by other attributes of God, such as righteousness. Holiness becomes, or is appropriate and suitable for, the house of the Lord, because the house of the Lord is where His presence abides. The house of the Lord has been at once a literal and symbolic expression. The Old Testament people of God referred to the house of the Lord, first in the tabernacle, and then in the temple. They witnessed the awesome display of the shekinah of His presence in both places. Scripture refers to these as the places where God chose to put His name. All of the artifacts associated with those houses were deemed to be holy, not because of the quality within them, but because of their association with Him.

In our New Testament times, the house of the Lord has been misunderstood by many to be a building. But scripture is abundantly clear that the place where God chooses to put His name under this new economy is the body of His people. The house, or building, of God’s presence is the spiritual household of those whose faith and eternal life is in Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; I Peter 2:5). And the truth of our text remains very sure, that holiness is fitting and appropriate for His house. It also remains that the holiness comes from His presence in the house, not from the house or its elements of their own accord. As we are admonished to pursue holiness (Hebrews 12:14), we should not think that we do so by performing holy acts. God is not holy because He does holy things. He does holy things because He is holy. So we, as the household of God through His Holy Spirit, ought to pursue the power of His abiding presence in our lives both individually and corporately, so that river of living water may flow out of us in life that behaves in ways becoming of His holy presence.

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Pastors Thoughts of the Week

2Corinthians 11: 23 in prisons more frequent,

The preaching of the gospel brought its accompanying persecutions. Paul was no stranger to the dungeon. The deprivations of Roman incarceration were unimaginably severe though Paul had frequented varied accommodations depending on the city of his detention. He was chained in a common holding cell in Philippi (Acts 16:23– 30), imprisoned in probably better conditions in the praetorium at Caesarea (Acts 23:35), and held in relative comfort while in house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16). In Rome, Paul was responsible for maintaining himself during his imprisonment, including his meals and clothes (Acts 28:30). Conditions of imprisonment were closely linked to the status of the prisoner. Non-Roman citizens, even of high status, were often harshly treated. In contrast, house arrest was typically more comfortable for the prisoner, who was usually physically chained to a guard but could still host visitors.

Paul was probably placed in an underground cell somewhere in Rome before his execution. It is possible that he was then imprisoned in the Roman Mamertine Prison in the Roman Forum. The ancient historian Sallust said it was twelve feet underground and described its appearance as: "disgusting and vile by reason of the filth, the darkness and the stench." This was where major convicted enemies of the state were strangled or kept before being thrown off the Tarpeian Rock on the Capitoline Hill.



To Timothy, Paul writes his last will and testament from this cell where he not only exhorts him to "preach the word" but also includes his request for items of necessity. A cloak, his treasured books, but "especially the parchments". // *Timothy 4:13* In this desperate season of want the apostle would find his comfort in a tattered coat, his primitive commentaries and especially the scrolls of Old Testament scripture.

In some ways our recent COVID quarantine has afforded us some perspective in this mandated house arrest in which we find ourselves. It is a far cry from the severity of Paul's sufferings but it can give us all some awareness of what has been so suddenly taken away from us. Within the breast of the courageous apostle was an unquenchable passion that a Roman chain could never extinguish. Rather than languishing in self-pity he chose to redeem the time by the study of the Word, incessant prayer, and witnessing, as he eludes to in *Philippians 1:13*: *So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places*; Paul was intent on finishing the course and receiving the crown of righteousness. That course is often fraught with disappointments and hardships that are seemingly inexplicable to us. Paul would have much preferred pursuing his peripatetic ministry all the way to Spain if given liberty, but the steps (and the stops) of "a good man are ordered by the Lord".

In the immutable, inscrutable counsels of the Almighty God, Paul would be shut in but not shut up. He received inquirers, instructed the guards and penned the fourteen epistles that would edify believers for the proceeding centuries of Christian thought.

Let us be found as he, redeeming this strange time in which we find ourselves.

Have a blessed week,

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God's Overwhelmingly Marvelous Declaration

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

– John 1:18 –

Our text above is a summarizing statement, closing the prologue of the apostle's gospel. In his treatise on the person, character, and work of Christ, John categorically sets forth a unique perspective of the Savior, coinciding in many aspects with the synoptic writers, yet more distinctly focused upon the divinity of our Lord. John's gospel presents to us the *Logos*, the Word made flesh, dwelling among us, full of grace and truth.

As a young Christian, I found John's foundational title of Jesus – "the Word" of God – a puzzling one. In search of clarification, I studied commentaries, consulted Philo, etc., all of which resulted in providing me but a vague understanding. It was really this summary statement of John's which, via meditation and dependence upon the Spirit for illumination, radically codified for me the depth of meaning in John's introductory appellation of the Master.

"He [Jesus] hath declared him [God]." The Greek word translated "declared" could be transliterated "exegeted". In laymen's terms, "explained". *Jesus is the fullest, most comprehensive explanation of God's thoughts and desires regarding humanity.*

If we were left to know God without the incarnation of Christ, we would forever possess but an oblique understanding of Him – a progressively painted canvas, never to be completed. Does not the Old Testament show this to be true? The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork, and yet, that simply substantiates that God is immense and intelligent. The Law of Moses plainly sets forth the infinite chasm that separates sinful man from a holy God, and yet presents us with no way to adequately or permanently bridge that gap. The inspired words of the prophets, though deep and wide, reveal God to man, but only incrementally so, and from a distance, leaving us hopeful for His mercies yet certain of His justified wrath. Yes, we find in the Old Testament that God is holy, infinite, omnipotent, and just. We understand that we are created in His image and after His likeness, *but we are left wondering about his inmost thoughts about us individually and personally...*

When the second Person of the triune Godhead stepped out of eternity and into time, He did more than simply don the mantle of humanity. *He once and forever fused humanity with divinity.* He took not on Him the nature of angels. He dwelt among *us*. Jesus reveals to us the mind of God toward man, specifically that the thrice holy God of the universe *loves* us. Mankind is more than merely accountable to Him – we are the precious focus of His deepest affections! We are deserving of His wrath, but pre-qualified for His mercies. We are lost but being sought. We are fallen, yet not forsaken. Jesus is the *Logos* – the logic, the expression, the explanation to man – that God is seeking to restore and renew paradise for every heart that will listen and sovereignly receive Him. And as many as receive Him, to them He gives the power to be transformed from the fallen sons of Adam into the very sons and daughters of God!

Brethren – because of Jesus, we live in the daily reality that the God of the universe is our *Father*, His only begotten Son is our *Friend*, and His eternal Spirit is our resident *Comforter and Guide*. May we humbly yet confidently live today as sons and daughters of the Most High!

Drawn by His Lovingkindness

Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Jeremiah 31: 3

Hebrews chapter one states that in the past God spoke at sundry times and in divers manners. In other words, in separate revelations and in different ways the Lord used His servants to convey His message. Sometimes the message could be one of a hopeful promise, or it could come in the form of a strong warning or rebuke. Also, there were times when God would use difficult external circumstances in an attempt to speak to the heart of a wayward person or nation. With a heart motivated by love, God's design is always by any means to draw His people back or closer to Him. A circumstance that might appear to be harsh and judgmental in reality was a loving means of getting His people to listen to him, and in doing so their lives would be better.

When we look at our own conversion or specific seasons of drawing near to our Lord, we can see that He often used harsh or even painful circumstances to accomplish His purpose. When dreams crumbled, disappointments mounted, relationships became difficult or terminated, or hope seemed distant; it was then that we saw that loving hand reaching out to us, drawing us closer to Him. Our loving Lord allows us to come to the end of all our fleshly resources so that we might find that heavenly consolation of being under the watchful care of our Good Shepherd. Did not our Lord use a thorn in Paul's flesh that he might learn that God's strength is made perfect in weakness? Jacob's name became Israel when the angel touched the hollow of his thigh so that he would learn to lean upon the Lord. The death of Ruth's husband provided an opportunity for her to cleave to the people of God and be added to the lineage that would eventually produce our Savior.

All things are of God, so remember in the next season of trials or hardship that there is a loving hand drawing us closer to Him.

JDE

Inside Out

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

– Matthew 23:25-26 –

Two of my least favorite chores while growing up were cutting the grass and cleaning the windows. The house where I was raised had a “lawn” that was all hill and consisted of what seemed to be little more than weeds and clover growing out of a thin layer of topsoil that rested on shale. We also had a huge, predominant picture window in our living room, the outside sill of which was about twelve to fifteen feet above the sloped landscape below, so it could not be reached on a ladder. It was therefore necessary to do some serious acrobatics in order to clean it without plunging to an untimely death below!

Cutting that weedy lawn and cleaning those windows were always on the to do list. And they could not be haphazardly executed – no! My mother’s perspective was that the neatness of a property’s exterior indicated to all passers-by that the inside of the home was clean. Our interior was always spotless, and she wanted to make sure that everyone knew that by the shaved yard and the glistening windows! Little did I know it at the time that, while I might not have shared in her zeal back then, there was nonetheless a significant, translatable spiritual wisdom in her practical homestead philosophy - “People know how clean your house is by your grass and your windows.”

Jesus excoriated the Pharisees for hypocrisy. It is an egregious affront to a holy God and an impeccable Christ to live a life of ostentatious religion veiling a proud, self-righteous, and impenitent heart. Yet, do we not often miss the sublime counter truth that our Lord presents here, namely, that internal righteousness should birth a corresponding external holiness? The inside should be attended to “first”, yet not exclusively. Rather, once the conversion and cleansing of the heart is present, then “the outside...may be clean also.”

What is the “outside”? The remainder of the New Testament makes it clear that after cleansed, the totality of our lives (for the remainder of our lives) are to continually and increasingly reflect the change within. Those things (vices) in which we walked in time past are to be put off. Egregious sin is to not be once named among us, as becometh saints. And these are merely the most obvious items. A careful meditation through the epistles will undoubtedly impress the serious believer that, as Christians, how we carry, adorn, and manage our bodies, which are the temple of His Holy Spirit, as well as how we comport ourselves in all manner of communication, whether verbal or visual, should be easily recognizable by an unsaved world as “clean”, “modest”, “sober”, etc.

The Lord God looks upon the inward parts. Let us ever eschew hypocrisy, attending always and foremost to the condition of our hearts before Him. Yet men do not own immediate access to that inner chamber. Their primary assessment of our character comes via our “grass and windows.” Appearances matter. May we therefore find ourselves careful to maintain those outward things that enhance our witness with lost souls, that we may be able to lead them to the One who can make them every whit whole as well!

Longing souls

Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

Psalm 107:8-9

This refrain, repeated four times in this psalm, reflects a common consternation that comes from considering the reality of man's general response to God's goodness. The descriptions of the interactions of God and men that precede each of these exclamations reveal the dullness of human hearts to recognize the multiplied grace and mercy of the Lord. Even as he opens, the psalmist must exhort even the redeemed of the Lord to confess the need to give thanks unto the Lord for his goodness and enduring mercy. With the psalm's recurring exhortations reinforcing this truth upon our minds and hearts, we can hopefully be awakened out of our own dullness to recognize the magnitude of God's patient kindness.

We are in many cases surrounded by longing souls who bring multiple complaints about their circumstances in life, often looking for someone to blame for their plight. They long to be filled but don't understand for what they are longing. Thus, they tumble further into the abyss of the anarchy of the soul. This attitude has always been a very contagious pandemic among humans, and it is especially detrimental to those with weak or unregenerate hearts.

The refrain of our text states the remedy that is not far from any of us. A rehearsal of God's wonderful works and the recognition of His lovingkindness will satisfy the longing soul, because He is the supreme fulfillment of what mankind has been missing since the fall in the garden. When we find ourselves in danger of contracting the attitude of blame, let us remember to rehearse the Lord's goodness and wonderful works toward us and toward all, and cultivate the healing power of thanksgiving in our souls. The power of gratitude can fill the hungry soul with goodness. Above all, as the psalm concludes, when we have received the gift of righteousness from Christ, we are given the ability to recognize this and rejoice, and the wisdom to observe and understand His lovingkindness. Let us declare His works with rejoicing!

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

JActs 2:23-24: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Sin brings with it an accompanying bondage and with this bondage an accompanying pain of death. The Master, being the creator of life, had to come to our rescue and loose us from it's inextricable captivity. The titanic struggle of the cross found our Savior in direct conflict with the contradiction of our sinful nature. He willingly adopts that nature in becoming "sin for us who knew no sin", earning him the right to the keys of death and hell with which he could liberate all those bound by sin.

The miserable internees of Hitler's hideous concentration camps could not restrain their emotions when they witnessed the American liberators storming the death camps and scattering their conscienceless captors. Like walking skeletons, the emaciated captives embraced their emancipators falling into their arms with irrepressible gratitude. These who were but days from the inevitable fires of the hellacious ovens, were now saved from, what seemed to them to be, an inevitable fait accompli.

Believers in Christ likewise embrace their Great Savior, seeing that He alone possesses the power to loose us from our iniquity and save us from our inexorable damnation. The process whereby this is accomplished remains shrouded in spiritual mystery. No human mind can plumb the depths of this divine transaction that accepts the death of the "just for the unjust". I Peter 3:18: For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

Death could not deny our glorious champion His victory. In sublime and almost simplistic explanation, the text explains that the demons of hell and their perverted prince of darkness had no authority to thwart the overcoming power of His resurrection over death. It simply "was not possible that he should be holden of it."

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Loosed

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Have a blessed week,

Pastor

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

*By faith, Abraham...obeyed...sojourned...looked...offered...
By faith, Isaac blessed...
By faith, Jacob blessed...and worshipped
By faith, Joseph...made mention...and gave commandment...
– Hebrews 11:8-22 –*

Our text is part of what has been called the “Faith Hall of Fame” found in Hebrews 11. This chapter forever immortalizes so much about how God views individual humanity. Perhaps the largest, most overwhelming lesson of this chapter, propounded by an overwhelming and inexhaustible parade of example after example, is that *true, God-pleasing faith is active*. Read the chapter fully, carefully, and critically and you will find that from Abel to the unnamed company at the chapter’s end, a wide array of verbs abound, reminding us that *faith does not and cannot lie dormant within the breast of a believer but will always motivate and drive some kind of ongoing, life altering action as he lives out his days under the sun*.

Integral to all of the action of Hebrews 11, though, we also find the remarkable and encouraging lesson of the *legacy of four unbroken familial generations of vibrant, God-honoring faith* in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. In Genesis, God said of Abraham, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment, that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” (Genesis 18:19). In this divine observation, God used His covenantal name, YHWH (Jehovah, translated LORD). It was therefore His intention to progressively reveal Himself to Abraham’s posterity first and foremost through the vehicle of Abraham’s personal faith.

The Genesis record of Abraham, like the remainder of the Bible for that matter, does not give us every detail in the life of each of its subjects. We are not granted access to every day and hour that comprised the life of Abraham, just the ones sufficient to relay the unbroken narrative of a life of learning to increasingly trust God. Yet we are also clearly to assume that Abraham is a member of Adam’s fallen race just like us, and as such, it is not difficult to imagine some of those undisclosed building blocks of his family life in light of what we do know. How he must have relayed his interactions with Jehovah and the remarkable journey from Ur of Chaldees to young Isaac! Bed-time stories, “supper table” lessons, and work-day conversation were all likely borne and bathed in a rehearsal of God’s promises, so much so, that when it came time to be tested on Mount Moriah, Isaac himself was willing to offer his life in faith to the God of his father.

But God would ultimately also reveal Himself personally to Isaac as well, who in turn no doubt educated his twin sons as to their family’s special place in the purposes of the Almighty. Jacob’s vague understanding of those promises motivated his scheming heart to steal the blessing from his brutish brother, making him a fugitive until the day, many years later, he would finally be broken by and surrendered to that very same God of his father and grandfather, Who condescended to strive with him at Peniel. And Joseph must have received an early education in the things of Jehovah, because decades in Egypt did not relinquish his trust that God would visit his family and move them back to the land promised to his great-grandfather, Abraham.

Brethren, God delights to work in and through families. He has something to do today with Abraham, tomorrow through Isaac, next week via Jacob, ultimately preparing Joseph for the coming famine. Abraham could not have possibly foreseen all of that. He just knew to command his household after him and live his faith before them.

Let us rest confidently that true personal faith begets personal faith. Cast your bread upon the waters. It will return.

Confidence in His Word

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness

2 Timothy 3:16

It would seem conclusive that a strong foundation in reading is the most important thing we ever learn in our education. Every individual has preferences as to what their favorite subjects are, but reading is what opens the door to gaining information about those subjects. In books, newspapers, magazines, or whatever source is available today, the words that we read can be informational, entertaining, and even to some degree inspirational; but it is good to remember that the writings of men and women are still just that.

The Bible stands apart from the writings of mankind in that it is inspired, or literally God-breathed. As to the veracity of the Scriptures, you can find books that are critical of the Bible as well as those that are apologetic defenses of the Bible. One's belief in the Bible, like belief in God, goes beyond scientific and historical evidence. Though biblical events can be verified historically or proven scientifically, our confidence in the inspirational truth of the scriptures does not solely depend on external proofs. Faith along with the witness of His Spirit with our spirit confirms in our heart the truth of the Lord. The Word that is quick and powerful penetrates our souls, discerns our thoughts, and convinces us by the Holy Spirit of our need for salvation and a right relationship with God in our life. When we begin reading the word and retaining it in our thoughts, we will observe it being fulfilled not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of all those with whom we have contact. We can observe in everyday life the law of sowing and reaping, the power of Christian love, the transformation of a lost soul, peace that passes all understanding, deliverance from the fear of death, and a host of other truths found in the scriptures. If we read the Bible with expectant faith, we will clearly see that the Bible excels and exceeds all other books.

Each day we have the great privilege of being able to open and read the words of this Book of books. When you finish your daily reading, you can confidently know the truth of "thus saith the Lord".

JDE

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JDE

Pure, Good, and Unfeigned

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

1 Timothy 1:5

There are many aspects to living out our Christian faith. Praying, reading the Word, and sharing the gospel probably play the most significant role. But along with these three there are many other ways that following Christ is manifested. Developing a pattern of good works and demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit in our daily interactions with people can speak volumes about our redeemed life and our devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's text, though Paul is charging Timothy to warn others not to get caught up with false and useless teachings, the apostle also summarizes what characterizes basic and true Christianity. The first thing Paul mentions is charity that emanates out of a pure heart. Paul is reiterating what our Lord said was the greatest commandment, which is that we are to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and then to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is to be the first and foremost reason why we do what we do. This love is not self-manufactured, but results from a grateful life that has been transformed by God's love. Our conscience is that part of us from which we cannot hide, and it should be characterized by goodness. When that conscience has been sharpened by the presence of the Holy Spirit, it should cause us to strive to keep it clear and clean. In the Book of Acts Paul states that he exercised himself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and man. We should certainly insert this into our daily spiritual exercise routine. Paul also mentions that our faith is to be unfeigned, that is, thoroughly sincere. Though at our conversion we became a new creation, our old sinful and selfish nature was not eradicated, so it must be yielded to the new Spirit within us. That old nature can rise to the surface and warp our motives and desires as we live out our faith. If we nurture God's Spirit within us by humbly seeking to glorify Him, it will help to keep our faith sincere. When we do this, our faith can have that childlike nature that is pleasing to Him and effective in its purpose.

Our Christian faith is not to be compartmentalized into small segments of our schedule and lives; instead it is meant to be an everyday, moment by moment, reality in our lives. Today is another opportunity to practice basic Christianity to His glory.

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JDE

Undefined

O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!
Psalm 119:5

This magnificent ode to the word of God begins with a blessing upon the “undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” The psalmist continues to describe these undefiled as he comes to verse 3, “they also do no iniquity.” By this time, many readers may have already thrown in the towel on qualifying for the number of the undefiled. There can be a similar response to the New Testament pronouncement by the Apostle John that “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.” It is important to note that these descriptions each occur within a context, and even in our text the psalmist must admit his personal frustration with his own ways. Is there a contradiction? Not in the least. Even in John’s epistle, he earlier made it clear that if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and claim God to be a liar. How do we reconcile these things?

Just in the first five divisions of Psalm 119, the psalmist repeats his resolutions of what he “will” do and what he “has” done, along with many requests for God to work in him, to help him accomplish these desires. The Greek scholars also tell us that the word for “commit” in I John 3:9 means habitual practice. The message is consistent: the child of God loves His word and His way because of the transforming work of God in his heart, as John describes, “because His seed remaineth in him.” That seed, called the “new man” by Paul, cannot sin. Therefore, the vestiges of the “old man,” which result in occasional sinful stumbles until we are glorified, cause our redeemed spirit to desire with the psalmist that our ways were continually directed by the new man. This is one way that His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. The word “delight” is used more times in Psalm 119 than in any other chapter in the Bible, as it describes this attitude toward God’s statutes. As such, let us relish the exhortations and example of the psalmist to love His word with such desire that allows its rule in our heart, mind, and life.

A Lack of Knowledge

Hosea 4:6: My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:

A Lack of Knowledge? This may seem to be a bit hard to imagine since we are living in the "Information Age". Though we are inundated with knowledge just as Daniel foretold ("But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased") yet this wisdom is not from "above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish".

The corrosive effects of such knowledge is manifest throughout the land. From day care centers to university classrooms, academicians have been sown the corrupt seeds of egoism, perverted lust, evolution, skepticism, socialism, narcissism and countless doctrines of devils and have gone forth infecting society with their evil propaganda.

Relativism has replaced absolutism, nihilism has superseded optimism, inertia has supplanted aspiration, and worst of all agnosticism has deposed faith. An alarmingly large percentage of millennials are identifying as "Nones" when asked about their religious affiliation. Much leaning has indeed "made us mad".

True knowledge is unattainable without a personal relationship with Him who is the repository of all truth. Colossians 2:3: In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is a trivial pursuit to try to acquire knowledge without first becoming acquainted with its author. Like the dog that futilely chases his tail, so is the person who is "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. II Timothy 3:7".

We ask the question along with James : "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?"

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

Therefore Will Not We Fear

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

– Psalm 46:1-2 –

I have been a “worry wart” by nature since I was a little boy. As a youngster, I would worry about everything. I was always being warned that one day I would have a stomach ulcer because of my fretfulness about all of the “what ifs” of life. That tendency made me a planner. As an adult, I try to make it a way of life to plan for the potential unknown, in hopes of avoiding the problems it can bring if it arrives. That might be all well and good, but the fact remains that there are many things bigger than us which cannot be foreseen and whose threat cannot be mitigated. In the end, I find that I am still susceptible to fear. Threats to our safety and security in this life abound. Trouble will find us now, and it will find us again in the future.

There is, however, a marvelous and vanquishing weapon against worry and fear – *faith*! The psalmist reminds us that in every trouble, God Himself is our refuge, strength, and *very present* help. As a result, we have the unique ability as believers to *choose not to fear*.

The scriptures are replete with examples of common men and women who chose faith over fear. Jacob had to choose to trust the God he wrestled with at Peniel, which mastered his innate and justified fear of meeting Esau. Moses, surrounded by a nation gripped with fear because the Egyptians enclosing them against the Red Sea before them, chose to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. David chose to run toward the giant Goliath rather than be paralyzed with dread like Saul and the armies of Israel. Elijah in faith chose to face down the prophets of Baal and the wrath of the king rather than discreetly concealing his faith like the compromiser Obadiah.

Fear need never master the heart of a child of the living God. No matter how great or small the trouble, no matter how imminent the danger or powerful the threat, fear can be vanquished *precisely because our God is present*. “*Therefore, will not we fear.*” Fear is a reaction, faith is a choice. Fear invades, faith repels. Fear paralyzes, but faith awakens. Fear retreats, faith advances. Fear imprisons, faith liberates. Fear destabilizes, while faith secures. Fear falters, but faith is and must always be victorious because of the God in whom it is placed.

Dearest friends, the world is spiraling, and many are fearful. Let us, the children of God, boldly show them the divine antidote, and thereby lead them to the Author and Finisher of our *faith*.

-- DCM