

Adult Christian LIFE

Unit I- The Measure of Faith
Unit II- Standing in the Faith
Unit III- Experiencing Hope

2Q24 (APRIL-JUNE)

ADULT
QUARTERLY

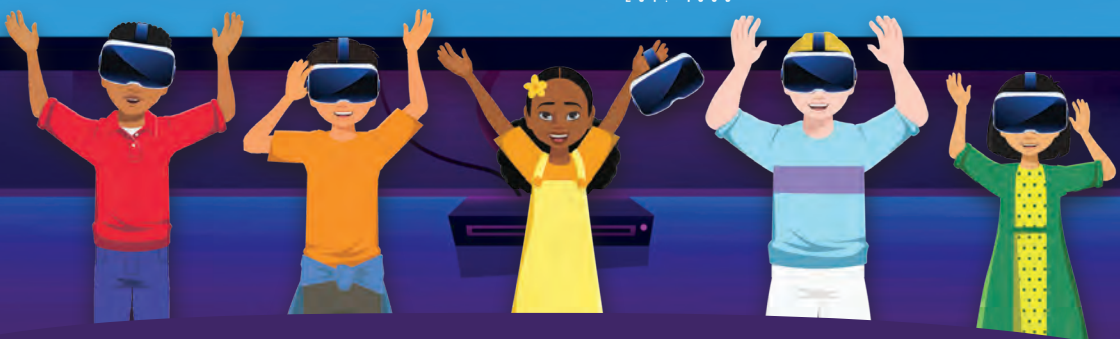
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Adult Christian LIFE

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Adult Christian Life contains Sunday school material for mature believers. The exposition of the Scripture, with life-centered insights, is preceded by an introduction to the lesson designed to help learners gain a greater understanding of the text under discussion relative to context, content, and meaning of life.

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INSIDE ADULT CHRISTIAN LIFE

The *Adult Christian Life* quarterly has many features that appeal to adult students.

Printed Scripture Passage: The *King James Version* and the *New Revised Standard Version* are listed side by side so learners can compare traditional and contemporary translations of God's Word. The main thought verse is highlighted in bold text.

Suggested Opening Exercises: This feature, standard to all R.H. Boyd Publishing Corporation Sunday school quarterlies, remains popular among learners and leaders alike.

Quarterly Overview: This gives a general description of the lessons to be studied during the quarter.

Know It: Contextualizes the lesson and expands on its truths to stimulate additional questions, interest, or action on the part of the learners.

Remember It: Summary section that emphasizes the most relevant points of the lesson and highlights how the lesson applies to learners.

Hear It: An opportunity to listen to the relevant message of the lesson through music.

Live It: Suggestions for learners to take specific action to make the lesson a personal opportunity for spiritual enlightenment.

Share It: Suggestions for learners to spread the Bible truth learned through various mediums, such as social media or one-on-one talks.

Daily Devotional Readings: Daily Bible readings to prepare learners for the Sunday lesson experience.

Online Extras: Activities, quizzes, and additional resources for outside study via www.rhboyd.com.



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2. Prayer (Closing with the Lord's Prayer)

3. Singing (Songs to be selected)

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School: He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.

Director: How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.

School: They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.

Director: My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

School: He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

Director: In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

All: Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

Recitation in Concert:

Psalm 62:9–12

9 Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.

10 Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

11 God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

12 Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

CLOSING WORK

1. Singing

2. Sentences: Psalm 33:18–21

18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;

19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield.

21 For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.

3. Dismissal with Prayer

HELPING A FRIEND IN NEED

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: LUKE 5:17–26

PRINT PASSAGE: LUKE 5:17–26

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. Luke 5:18–19, KJV

Intro

Ideally, to be a member of a Christian church is to be part of a community of believers bound together by faith in Christ. While this is how it is supposed to be, for many the unfortunate reality is that the people are bound together more by tradition and routine, where the concept of faith has been reduced to the means to secure blessings from God.

The true essence of faith is much more than a formula for prosperity; it is the currency of communion that we are invited to spend on God.

As the pure expression of our relationship with God, our faith is where intimacy with the Lord, the reality of our circumstance, and the confidence we have that He is able to do all things converge under the banner of hope. If the church were to adopt such a disposition regarding faith, it would establish itself as a place for healing and deliverance.

Today's lesson is an example of what can happen in a community of believers when Christ is at the center of everyone's attention and the example of faith is at work. We should take this lesson to heart and ask the Spirit of God to move on us. How could we be taking action in our congregations to bolster faith? Have you been living a lukewarm lifestyle? Ask God to crank up your fire!

Think About It

In the lesson, the men successfully got their friend to Jesus, who upon seeing their faith, healed him. But who fixed the broken roof?

1. The Context for Faith (Luke 5:17)

King James Version

AND it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

New Revised Standard Version

ONE day while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were sitting nearby, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

Know It

Prior to and since His rejection at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30), Jesus has been widely accepted in the villages of Galilee for His works of healing the sick and casting out demons. The beginning of chapter five, however, changes the tone as it marks the first of a series of conflict stories that begin to reveal some opposition to His growing popularity.

At the time in the text, Jesus is teaching the people in Capernaum, one of the villages of Galilee. As usual, large crowds gather in a house to hear Him, so much so that according to Mark 2:2, there wasn't enough room to accommodate the number of people. To say that it was "standing room only" would be a significant understatement. The crowds that came to hear Jesus had grown so large that any house He commandeered and turned into a make-shift classroom would be immediately packed to capacity, and by the end of His sermon, overflowing with spectators on the outside.

Luke notes that among the crowd were "Pharisees and teachers of the law who came from every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem," which also happens to be all of the places where Jesus' fame had spread. They came to observe Jesus, looking for opportunities to discredit Him in front of the people. Jesus' notoriety was perceived by the religious establishment as a fomenting threat to their authority.

Yet, despite their presence, "the power of the Lord" was also present. Luke emphasizes this when he culminates the verse with a set-up to exploit the contrast between the institutional authority of the Law—which the religious leaders represented—with the ultimate power of the Lord that was present to heal.

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2. A Demonstration in Faith (Luke 5:18–20)

King James Version

18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.

19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

New Revised Standard Version

18 Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus,

19 but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

20 When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you.

During the sermon, verse 18 records that some men carrying a paralytic sought to bring him to Jesus so that He might heal their friend. Beyond Mark's description of there being four men carrying the one, Luke's account is silent regarding who they were, whether they knew each other, or how far they had traveled to get to Jesus. What is certain, however, is that they were bonded by a common faith in Jesus that He could heal the man's disease. The men demonstrated this in verse 19 by their insistence to get to Jesus despite the crowd thronged around Him. Rather than give up when they could not find a way to navigate through the people, they instead went up on the housetop, dismantled the roof, and let him down with his bed through the tiling.

Motivated by their collective conviction of what Jesus could do, the four men worked together to create opportunity for the one who was paralyzed to be healed. Their actions not only confirmed a unified faith, but also showed love, community, and commitment.

When Jesus saw their faith, He acknowledged their actions and incorporated it as part of His teaching. With the use of the possessive plural pronoun "their," Luke implies that all five men were regarded by Jesus as having shown their faith, not just the one needing the healing. Sacrificing their own opportunity to get close to Jesus, the four men instead worked together to ensure the one who needed Him most did. Upon seeing their actions, Jesus focused His attention to the man who was paralyzed and said, "Your sins are forgiven." Once the man let the burden of his sin go, he was able to be made whole. Through this act, Jesus directly exposes the theological fallacy that one's sin is directly related to an illness and replaces it by showing the power forgiveness has to heal.

3. Evidence of Faith (Luke 5:21–26)

King James Version

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

25 And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

New Revised Standard Version

21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

22 When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?"

23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'?

24 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your stretcher and go to your home."

25 Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.

26 Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen incredible things today."

By proclaiming to forgive the man of His sins, Jesus arouses the suspicions from the religious leaders. To forgive someone of their sins puts them (the one doing the forgiving) on an equal level with God, given only God alone can forgive sins. Therefore, the internal thinking of the scribes and Pharisees saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies..." is understandable. For them, a statement like this was sacrilege.

However, according to Luke, in verse 22, Jesus was aware of their unspoken grievance against His claim and addresses it and them directly. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus asks them, "Why are your reasoning in your hearts..." which was an invitation for them to express their discontent rather

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than keeping it to themselves. To address their silent disapproval, Jesus furthers His query and asks, “Which is easier: to say, ‘your sins are forgiven...’ or to say, ‘rise up and walk?’” Which is to ask: What is easier to do? Say that “one’s sin is forgiven” or that “one is healed” knowing that the legitimacy of the former cannot be disproven, but the latter can, if there is no healing? Since Jesus is the Son of God, one of these tasks is not more difficult than the other. They’re equally easy to accomplish; however, one is of more significance when it comes to the eternal soul of the paralyzed man. Therefore, Jesus was much more concerned with forgiving his sins than simply healing him and walking away. If Jesus was a really nice healer or doctor, that would be great in the short-term, but what matters is the state of our souls. His focus was always on forgiving sins first; healing and other miracles were secondary to His main mission: salvation of the world.

Without waiting for their rebuttal, Jesus tells the paralyzed man, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” The logic behind Jesus’ actions was to establish, for His opponents, His authority to forgive sins by demonstrating His power to heal the sick. That the man was able to get up on his own proved not only that Jesus had the power to heal, but because of His ability to heal, it also proved that God gave Him the authority to forgive. If Jesus had said He was going to heal the man and then didn’t, they would also doubt His ability to forgive sins since there is no physical proof of that. But since He healed the man’s legs and he was able to walk immediately, the logic stood that his sins were also forgiven immediately. Thus, Jesus proved that He had the power of God and was, in fact, the Son of God, as He so claimed.

In response to Jesus’ command, in verse 25, the man got up, took what he had been lying on with him, and departed to his own house. His healing, which was verified in front of all to see, not only restored his body but also empowered him to reclaim his life in that he was able to return to his own home rather than to that of a caretaker. He would no longer be a burden or someone who was pitied or mocked; but rather, he was welcomed back into society as a contributing member. He was no longer an outcast.

If you’ve accepted Jesus into your heart, then you’ve received this same divine healing and forgiveness as well!

Remember It

While this passage focuses attention on the controversial act of Jesus forgiving the paralytic man which necessitated his healing, the context for the miracle was established by the shared faith of men who delivered the man to Jesus.

A church can only claim to be a place for healing when its congregants gather around a shared faith in God. As in today’s lesson, when believers are united by their conviction that God can do all things, a culture is created that invites possibility for miracles. Their example proved that a shared faith helps to create community, cultivate commitment, and ensures that Christ is at the center. May we strive to be such a church.



Share It • Live It • Hear It

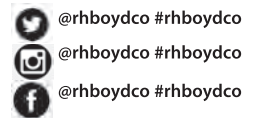
For a musical complement to today’s lesson consider: “Press” by Maranda Curtis.

Assess and determine how your faith shapes defines your life.

Assess and determine how your faith is defined in community with other believers.

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DDR

Devotional Readings for April 8–14, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Accept What God Has Made Clean	God’s Servant Enlightens the Nations	God Is Praised among the Nations	Christ Is All and in All	Nations Shall Entreat God’s Favor	All Flesh Shall See God’s Salvation	Jesus Helps a Righteous Gentile
Acts 10:1–15	Isaiah 42:1–12	Malachi 1:10–14	Colossians 3:1–11	Zechariah 8:18–23	Luke 3:1–14	Luke 7:1–10

FAITH OF A CENTURION

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: LUKE 7:1–10

PRINT PASSAGE: LUKE 7:1–10

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. Luke 7:7, KJV

Intro

When we as believers describe our faith, there is a tendency to explain it as the means to acquire a favorable outcome on a matter that has been prayed to God for or about. Albeit the most popular, this is only one perspective of faith. The truth is, faith in God consists of so much more!

In addition to its people, the Christian church is comprised of symbols that express our theology and faith in God. Mature faith, however, is when one's confidence in God is so certain that symbols, rituals, and traditions are not necessary for belief. Instead, it is the conviction of certainty reinforced by regular communion and relationship with God.

Today's lesson demonstrates faith from this perspective. When Jesus healed the sick, He was usually in their presence when doing so. And like the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:43–48), those who were infirmed would try to touch Him, believing that making contact with Him would automatically render the healing they needed.

Though the Bible is silent about it, for many this didn't effort work. Not because the power to heal wasn't with Jesus (Luke 5:17), but rather because they, even with tangible access, lacked faith to believe. In contrast, the centurion had enough faith to believe without access to Jesus. In other words, he had faith from a distance, and as a result his servant was healed from a distance.

Think About It

Healed from a distance is about the reach of our faith that is determined by the personal proximity of God's presence.

1. The Appeal for Jesus (Luke 7:1–5)

King James Version

NOW when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

New Revised Standard Version

AFTER Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

2 A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly and who was ill and close to death.

3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.

4 When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him,

5 for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us."

Know It

Verse one opens at the conclusion of one of Jesus' sermons. After dismissing his audience, Jesus returns to Capernaum. Though it was a small village on the seashore of Galilee, Capernaum was an administrative center of commerce, accommodating about 1,500 people. Because of its location, fishing and trade became essential industries of the economy. Along with it being Jesus' base of operations for ministry, Capernaum also held a Roman garrison and served as a polling station for tax collection.

At a certain point while in Capernaum, Jesus was approached by some elders of the Jews, begging Him earnestly to heal a certain centurion's servant. It is important to note that the term "elder" in this context does not refer to age, but rather to their being religious officials of the local Jewish community and not to members of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. The use of the expression "of the Jews" further affirms that the author of Luke and the audience he was writing to were Gentiles.

The centurion, on whose behalf the Jewish elders were speaking, had a servant "who was dear to him," who was sick and ready to die. Customarily, when a servant was unable to

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perform his or her duties for the master and/or mistress, the servant would be traded. Apparently, the centurion's servant was more than a replaceable cog in the machine that ran his household. That the servant was "dear" to him suggests that he was highly esteemed, as though a member of the centurion's family.

From local gossip, the centurion had heard about Jesus and the healings He performed throughout village and beyond. So, in desperation he sent Jewish elders to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant. He was willing to try anything, much like the other people whom Jesus healed during His time on earth. They had tried countless doctors or healers, and were desperate enough to try anything to receive healing. That's why people who weren't even Jewish would appeal to Jesus. They were at the end of their ropes and had nowhere else to turn. They were willing to cross any societal or ethnic boundary if it meant that their woes would be removed.

When the elders make their appeal to Jesus, they do so with ringing endorsement of the centurion's reputation, saying "the one for whom He should do this was deserving." Their description of the centurion being "deserving" should not imply that he was worthy of his request to be granted, but rather that he is an ally to the Jews and doing this favor for him would only strengthen that alliance.

To persuade Jesus to grant the centurion's request, the elders further advocate in verse five, saying that "he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue." Despite being a Gentile, the centurion's love for the "Nation" encompassed not just the people, but possibly their God as well, which is perhaps why he used even his own resources to build a synagogue for them.

Given the Roman presence in Capernaum, it was not uncommon for there to be social interactions between the soldiers and Jews, at least to some degree. Though they were under the political occupation of Rome, the Jewish people didn't view all of Rome and its soldiers as an enemy; some, like the Jewish elders in the text, saw it as an opportunity. They realized the need to establish and maintain positive relationships with power, and this centurion was a perfect means to that end. Since this centurion was open to the Jewish faith and house of worship, maybe that's why he was also open and receptive to the idea of Jesus healing his servant.

2. Confidence in the Lord's Authority (Luke 7:6–8)

King James Version

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

New Revised Standard Version

6 And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof;

7 therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."

It didn't take much convincing for Jesus to comply with the elder's appeal to go see the centurion because, according to verse 6, the elders returned and Jesus was with them. En route, not far from the house, Jesus is met with a second delegation sent by the centurion. Rather than a request, this time he sends personal friends to convey a direct message. Speaking as if it was himself present before Jesus, the centurion says "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof...."

The Aramaic equivalent of "Lord" was a title of respect in the setting of Jesus, but the title took on greater meaning after the Resurrection. The centurion's words demonstrate the humility and sincerity he had for God's people. His felt unworthiness referred to the respect he had for the Jew–Gentile boundaries. For a Jew to enter a Gentile's home would defile him ceremonially. The centurion knew this and did not want to subject Jesus to ritual impurity. Though he was a social superior of a conquering people and had the right to make a demand for Jesus to see him, he instead surrendered his authority to honor Jesus. In addition to being unworthy to host Jesus in his home, the centurion did not even think himself worthy to come to Him in person, not wanting Jesus' purity to be defiled by associating with a Gentile. Instead, he had enough faith that Jesus could heal from a distance.

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3. An Example of Great Faith (Luke 7:9–10)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
<p>9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.</p> <p>10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.</p>	<p>9 When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and, turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."</p> <p>10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.</p>

NOTES:

Upon hearing the words of the centurion, Jesus marveled and turned around to address the crowd that followed Him and said, "I have not found such great faith even in Israel." The centurion's words demonstrated a unique faith in Jesus, one that required a deep conviction of who He is and what He can do. This type of confidence in Jesus exceeded that of the Jewish elders who saw Him heal yet refused to follow Him. He demonstrated confidence that went beyond that of the crowds who often only followed hoping for another miracle or sign. His faith, according to Jesus, was found in no one "... not even in Israel."

In Luke's context, the centurion became a symbol of believing Gentiles who stood in contrast to unbelieving Jews. This affirmation of the centurion's faith served as support and encouragement for the later acceptance of Gentiles into the church. This man and his faith were something to be admired and looked up to, even though he was a Gentile. That's good news for us who are fellow Gentiles! Throughout the Bible, we have repeated examples that God doesn't show favoritism to Jews over Gentiles or consider Gentiles second-class citizens. The free offer of salvation He gives to the Jewish people is the same offer He gives to every person on earth, no matter their background.

Though there were no actual words of healing delivered by Jesus, verse 10 indicates that by the time those who were sent returned to the house, they discovered that the servant who had been sick had already been healed. The assumption is that at the moment the centurion's words of faith were expressed to Jesus his servant was healed.

Remember It

When Jesus addressed the crowd and told them that He hadn't found faith like the centurion's, it implied that He had been looking. The kind of faith the centurion showed is apparently the kind that not only impresses Christ, but is what He is looking for in His followers. This necessitates examining certain aspects of the centurion's faith so as to duplicate it in our lives. First, the centurion sought the presence of Jesus. Another component of the centurion's faith consisted of a practical understating of God's authority. Finally, the centurion's faith was public. Going public with our faith is to not be ashamed to live our beliefs in God out loud. It is to be known by others as one who is guided by faith born from a real relationship with the Divine.



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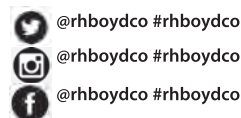
For a musical complement to today's lesson, consider: "Presence" by Maranda Curtis.

How would you describe your level of faith maturity?

Give explanations and examples to the class as to what qualifies your faith maturity ranking.

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Devotional Readings for April 15–21, 2024

DDR

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Jesus' Compassion for the Grieving	Sing Praises to God's Name	Confession, Prayer, and Healing	God Pardons Iniquity and Transgression	God Is Good and Forgiving	No Condemnation in Christ	Jesus Forgives a Sinner
Luke 7:11–18	Psalms 92	James 5:12–20	Micah 7:7–20	Psalms 86:1–7, 11–17	Romans 8:1–16	Luke 7:36–50

HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME?

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: LUKE 7:36–50

PRINT PASSAGE: LUKE 7:36–39, 44–50

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.
Luke 7:50, KJV

Intro

Love is the ultimate motivator. As the greatest force on earth, love (or some iteration of love) drives all human action. Consider the love of money that motivates human actions to acquire it, often by any means necessary. The love of companionship that drives us into relationships with one another, despite the pain and heartache that can come along with it; the love of life that makes us avoid anything that may compromise the preservation of it. Whether right, wrong, or indifferent, love is at the core of all we do and the reason why we do what we do.

As it relates to our relationship with God, love is the ultimate motivator—at least it should be. Our initial connection with God starts with the belief that He not only made us, but also that He loves us. As our belief in God's love is deepened through the experience of being in relationship with Him, the more our capacity grows to love God in return. Eventually, our love of God rather than just His love for us becomes the primary motivator of our actions. In essence, there is a point at which our spiritual maturity evolves wherein faith and love become the foundation for our relationship with God.

What does that look like? Today's lesson serves as an example. Though nameless, the actions of this so-called "sinful" woman demonstrate for all believers how the natural marriage between faith and love is expressed through worship.

Think About It

Cheap oil was often offered to guests as a gesture of hospitality and meant to be used on the head to freshen up. But to show the degree of devotion the woman had for Jesus, she offered instead an expensive, perfumed oil that she poured on His feet. Her worship had a cost.

1. Determined to See Jesus (Luke 7:36–39)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

AND one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

ONE of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and when he went into the Pharisee's house he reclined to dine.

37 And a woman in the city who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment.

38 She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair, kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner."

Know It

Ironically, in the wake of Jesus scolding the Pharisees for rejecting His and John the Baptist's message, one of them invites Jesus to have dinner at his home. So, Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and sat down to eat. That they reclined at the meal indicates it was a banquet or Sabbath meal. It was quite common to invite a visiting rabbi or teacher to the Sabbath meal after he had taught in the synagogue. If it was a banquet meal, Jesus may have been invited because of His reputation as a prophet.

Verse 37 introduces a woman in the city known for being a sinner. Though an uninvited guest, she was allowed to participate in the meal, as it was a special public celebration. During such times, outsiders could enter the open door, sit by the wall, watch, and perhaps beg for leftover scraps. Though it's not mentioned, the woman was labeled as a "sinner" possibly due to her occupation.

NOTES:

NOTES:

The woman not only came to see Jesus, but also to anoint Him. Knowing where Jesus sat at the table, she positioned herself to have access to His feet and anointed them with oil from an alabaster flask she brought with her. Alabaster is a soft stone that was frequently used to make perfume containers. The cost of one jar filled with the fragrant oil was equivalent to a day’s worth of wages. While the use of expensive perfumed oil on the feet would have been considered wasteful, for this woman it was a gesture of love that expressed her gratitude to and high regard for Jesus. She wept and began to wash His feet with her tears. She wiped them dry with her hair, emphasizing the degree of appreciation she had for Jesus. It is possible that her activity had gone unnoticed until the strong scent of the oil called everyone’s attention to her as she poured it on Jesus’ feet.

When the Pharisee who invited Jesus saw what the woman was doing, and that He had allowed her to do it without rebuke, he spoke to himself of his concerns. Rather than share his suspicions of Jesus openly and run the risk of embarrassment, he instead questioned the validity of His calling in silence. He thought that if Jesus were really a prophet, He would have known who and what manner of woman was touching Him; she was a “sinner.” Of course, Jesus knew exactly what this Pharisee was thinking.

2. The Contrast of Love (Luke 7: 44–46)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

44 Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet.

46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

After Jesus asks Simon (the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner) the parabolic question of which debtor loved their creditor more (vv. 41–42), He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman...” lifting her up as the example in the lesson. In the parable (Luke 7:41–42), the behavior of the two debtors toward the creditor is analogous to the behavior of Simon and the woman toward Jesus. While looking at the woman, Jesus addresses Simon and said, “I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet.” While this courtesy wasn’t mandatory, it would have been a kind gesture for the host to have water available for guests to take off their sandals and wash their feet as they came off the dusty roads and into the house. Given that meals were shared lying down with one’s feet near the face of another, such a practice was an important for maintaining proper hygiene.

To contrast Simon’s neglect of common courtesy, Jesus refers to the woman who “washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.” Different than Simon’s, the woman’s honor of Jesus’ presence went above and beyond appreciation. For her, it was an opportunity for worship. Even if Simon had offered water for Jesus to wash His feet, it would have been provided to Him in a basin or a bowl no doubt drawn from cistern. But this so-called “sinful” woman offered her own tears that flowed out of a well of deep contrition.

Continuing with the contrast, Jesus said to Simon, “you gave Me no kiss...” which was a common form of greeting, like a handshake and a hug today. “But...” He adds, “...this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in.” To emphasize the point further, Jesus goes on to say, “You did not anoint My head with oil...,” another overlooked courtesy of the host, “...but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.”

3. Faith Defines Love (Luke 7:47–50)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
<p>47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.</p>	<p>47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little.”</p>
<p>48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.</p>	<p>48 Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”</p>
<p>49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?</p>	<p>49 But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”</p>
<p>50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.</p>	<p>50 But he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”</p>

NOTES:

The first word in verse 47, “therefore” initiates Jesus’ explanation of the lesson. While looking at the woman, and still addressing Simon, Jesus tells him “her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.” Just as the debtor in the parable loved his creditor more than the other because he had the most debt to be forgiven, this woman loved Jesus more than Simon because her sins were many. This is not to suggest that Simon sinned less, but rather that the woman was more aware of her sins and her need for the Lord’s forgiveness, in comparison.

The impression Luke infers for his readers is that Simon, though a Pharisee, was not as burdened by his sin as the so-called “sinful” woman was by hers; therefore, he didn’t share the same level of appreciation in Jesus’ presence as she did. To Simon, Jesus was just a high profile guest, a religious celebrity. But to the woman, He was her redemption. Jesus sums it up as He culminates the lesson “...but to who little is forgiven, the same loves little.” In essence, according to Jesus, the love we express toward Him is the proper response for being forgiven of our sins. And the more aware we are of our sins and our need to be forgiven, the greater capacity we have to love.

Jesus then focuses His attention on the woman directly and tells her “your sins are forgiven.” He ignores the disapproving stares from those who sat at the table, witnessing Jesus’ actions and saying to themselves “Who is this man who even forgives sins?” Instead, Jesus dismisses the woman in peace with the assurance that her faith has saved her. Jesus not only associates the woman’s demonstrated love for Him as what validated her faith, but He also rewarded her determination by forgiving her sins.

Though unnamed in the text, the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair will be forever remembered for her actions of deep devotion to the Savior. Demonstrating a love for Jesus that was expressed through worship and rooted in faith, the woman’s actions provide a format for believers today as to how we too can deepen our devotion to the Lord.

The reason for her love, we learn in verse 50, is because of her faith, which consisted of two qualifying implications: the awareness of sin; and the confidence of being forgiven of those sins. Jesus saw these qualities in her and was moved by her love.

Remember It

Whatever the woman’s sin was didn’t matter; what mattered was her awareness of it. Her conviction made her realize her unworthiness and at the same time fueled her desire to be in Jesus’ presence. A fair assumption can be made that though Jesus was the object of her focus, she viewed Him through the lens of personal self-examination and need of grace.

Along with the awareness of her sin, this woman was sure of her forgiveness. Perhaps her worship was the result of the immediately-felt assurance of being forgiven the moment He told her she was. Regardless of what the actual motivation was, faith validated her deliverance. What a beautiful example she leaves behind for us today.



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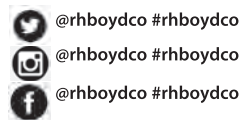
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Alabaster Box” by Cece Winans.

What is the cost of your worship?

How do you show its worth?

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DDR

Devotional Readings for April 22–28, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
God Provides for a Gentile Woman	God’s Authority over Life and Death	God Blesses Whomever God Wills	Hear My Cry, O God	May God Grant Your Heart’s Desire	God Gives Grace to the Humble	Jesus Hears a Desperate Mother’s Plea
1 Kings 17:8–16	1 Kings 17:17–24	Luke 4:24–30	Psalms 61	Psalms 20	James 4:1–10	Matthew 15:21–28

HELP FOR AN OUTSIDER

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: MATTHEW 15:21–28

PRINT PASSAGE: MATTHEW 15:21–28

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. Matthew 15:28, KJV

Intro

As African Americans, ours is a rich history of heroes and heroines who have faced immense suffering and yet found strength and resilience through faith to not only survive, but also to accomplish great things for the glory of God. Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) for example, despite being born into slavery, became an influential abolitionist. Drawing strength from her faith, she delivered powerful speeches that highlighted the experiences and resilience of the Black woman living in America.

Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), who was also born into slavery, became a world-renowned writer, speaker, and advocate for the abolition of slavery. His faith in God played a significant role in shaping his worldview and inspiring his fight for justice. Nat Turner (1800–1831), relatively unspoken about in the Black Church and unknown to its members, was still enslaved when he invoked the powers of his faith. Believing he was called by God to do so, Nat Turner led a famous rebellion in Virginia in 1831, killing between 55–66 enslavers.

Faith in God is a gift for those who believe. It is the primary resource that connects us to the Source in times of crisis and need. The discipline to live by faith promotes a deeper and more intimate awareness of God's presence; an awareness that endows us with an assurance of His power.

The woman in today's lesson is an example of someone who dared to believe in God, despite not being part of the so-called "chosen" people of God. May we learn from her bravery.

Think About It

Was Jesus' insult of the woman justified? Why or why not?

1. The Audacity of Faith (Matthew 15:21–23)

King James Version

THEN Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

New Revised Standard Version

JESUS left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."

Know It

Verse 21 opens with Jesus withdrawing to the region of Tyre and Sidon. These were port cities that today are parts of Lebanon and Syria. It is likely that He was coming from Gennesaret, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. From there it would have been a forty-mile journey on the Mediterranean coast to reach Tyre and another twenty miles farther north to reach the coast to Sidon. It is probable that Jesus' venture into Gentile lands was an effort to escape Jewish opposition as well as to find some solace from the crowds. Nevertheless, even in Gentile territory, huge crowds were attracted to Him.

Geography was important for Matthew in this passage as it sets the stage for Jesus' encounter with the woman from Canaan who came from that region. As Tyre and Sidon represented paradigms of old enemies against God's people, Matthew quickly establishes this unnamed woman as being linked to them. Conjuring up long-standing animosity with the roots of Israel's history, she is identified as a Canaanite, whom the Jewish people were commanded to keep a distance from. Of all the Gentile nationalities, those of Canaanite descent would have been among the most abhorred by the Jews. The Canaanites were one of the idolatrous nations Israel was instructed to exterminate when they entered the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 7:1–2).

The woman came to Jesus and cried out saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!" The woman's petition

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gives remarkable insight into Jesus’ messianic authority. It recalls, for Matthew’s readers, the account of another Gentile who also exhibited an exceptional understanding of Jesus’ authority (8:5–13). In both episodes, the faith of a Gentile stands in stark contrast to the unbelief and blindness of Israel.

Which camp do you fall into? Jesus says that even the faith the size of a mustard seed is enough to move mountains, so don’t feel bad if you think your faith is too small.

The woman appeals to Jesus about her daughter who is severely demon possessed. Viewed as a unique situation in which an evil spirit takes control of an individual, demonic possession was often associated with being the cause of various diseases and illnesses such as epilepsy. That this woman violated Jewish social codes to get to Jesus amplified the severity of her daughter’s illness and the intensity of her desperation to get help. Despite her bold request however, Jesus answered her not a word.

One would think that with such a desperate plea from the woman, Jesus would have responded with urgency. That He did not, suggested that His silence was deliberate and dramatic. Perhaps He was waiting to see if she would continue to seek help on behalf of her daughter. It could have been a test of her determination to receive intercession.

She did keep asking, and the disciples seemed to react with annoyance. Since there was already animosity between these two people groups, they may have been offended by her petitioning Jesus in the first place. They told Jesus to send her on her way. On the other hand, perhaps they meant give her what she wants so that she’ll go away, like shooing away an annoying fly.

2. The Challenges of Faith (Matthew 15:24–25)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

As a means to justify His silent rebuttal to the woman's request and seemingly align Himself with the disciples, Jesus reiterates the limitation of His mission: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel..." His statement refers to the covenantal relationship God has with Israel, wherein His people are given priority in the blessings for humanity. Yet, Jesus ignored this limitation when He obliged the prayer of a Gentile centurion in 8:10. It can be argued then that Jesus' hesitation in addressing the woman's need was not due to limitations but rather an attempt to elicit a deeper belief from her.

By His silence, Jesus created opportunity for the woman to demonstrate her conviction of hope along with a commitment to follow Him. Her actions served as the basis for inclusion of Gentiles in the blessings reserved for the Jewish people. With her words and actions, she expressed the intensity of her desperation, determination, and total dependency on Jesus to address her need.

From this Canaanite woman, we learn how to pray as a dedicated intercessor. It involves an acknowledgement that we cannot solve our own problems, or even the problems of loved ones, but rather, that Jesus is the ultimate Source of truth, provision, and deliverance. She took on the request as if she was asking for her own healing; she was so committed to interceding on behalf of her daughter. When was the last time you prayed for someone else as if praying for yourself?

3. The Reward of Faith (Matthew 15:26–28)

King James Version

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

New Revised Standard Version

26 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that moment.

NOTES:

The woman's persistence in worship finally gets Jesus' attention. In verse 26, He stops ignoring her. But His hard-sought reply was arguably worse than giving her the silent treatment. Jesus tells the woman "it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." This implies that the blessings (bread) of Abraham that have been promised by God (the Master) are for the Jewish people (the children) exclusively, not the Gentiles (little dogs). In essence, Jesus was calling this woman a dog who is unworthy of the healing!

As insulting as it seemed, the derogatory label of "dog" even was a common epithet that most Jewish people used to describe non-Jews. Like the common perception of dogs during that time as wild dirty animals, the Jewish people regarded anyone who wasn't under the Abrahamic covenant as unclean and unworthy of association—dogs.

But was this the attitude of Jesus toward the Canaanite woman? Of course not. Jesus' purpose in calling her a dog was not only to test her resolve of faith in Him, but also to show how mature it was in comparison to the children who sit at the master's table. If a "dog" can worship, it emphasizes her debased status among God's people, which in turn accentuates the strength of her faith in Jesus, despite knowing her unworthiness. In other words, she demonstrates, in the face of opposition, rejection, and even insult, the discipline to bow down rather than back off when it comes to her belief. Her tenacity is confirmed in verse 27, when she responds to Jesus' insult with a statement in faith, saying, "yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." The woman worded her response not as a contradiction of what Jesus said, but rather as an extension of His analogy. By taking the insult on the chin, she displayed humility that occasioned wisdom to appeal to God's compassion, as the Lord promises blessings to each and every nation.

The woman's response impressed Jesus. She has amply proven her faith, and He, as a reward, praises her openly by saying, "O woman great is your faith..." and then assures her that her desires have been granted. Healing for the woman's daughter was immediate, "from that very hour." Jesus' praise of this woman's actions and the granting of her request is meant to contrast Jewish standards of uncleanness and ethnic boundaries.

Remember It

Because faith is an essential component of our spiritual development, the adversary aspires to dismantle it. As believers, we should take our cues from the Canaanite woman as to how we can practice our faith in a way that pleases God. First, faith that pleases God is initiated by the relationship, or the attempt to draw closer to Christ. Our faith begins at the point of realizing how broken we are and how much we need God to fix us. Thirdly, it was also nurtured in worship. Fourth, rather than turn away in disappointment because Jesus ignored her at first, she instead doubled down in her worship of Him. Finally, the woman’s faith was defined by a changed perspective.



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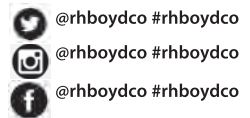
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider Rev. Milton Biggham – “We’ve Come This Far By Faith.”

Examine the strength of your faith: what makes it strong? What makes it weak?

Discuss ways in which our personal faith can be leveraged to help others.

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DDR

Devotional Readings for April 29–May 5, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Vindicate Me, O Lord My God	Blessed Are They Who Fear God	Repent and Turn to God	God So Loved the World	Lord, Lead Me in Your Righteousness	Christ Our Atoning Sacrifice	Atonement by Christ’s Blood
Psalm 35:1–7, 22–28	Psalm 112	Acts 3:12–26	John 3:1–8, 13–17	Psalm 5	1 John 1:1–2:2	Romans 3:21–30

NO NEED TO BOAST

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 3:21–30 PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 3:21–30

*RESOURCES: New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School*

KEY VERSE: Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:22–24, KJV

Intro

The Apostle Paul knew that in order for the Christian community in Rome to serve as the base for his ministry, it needed to be convinced of the purpose and power of the Gospel—the very Gospel he was preparing to take to Spain and beyond. The believers there would need to understand its power to save both Jew and Gentile because all stood equally condemned before God. They would need to be clear on how one receives salvation. They would need to know what salvation looks like in the life of the believer (sanctification) and they would need to understand why it was imperative that the Gospel be spread beyond Rome to the Gentile nations, and how his mission related to the promises of God.

Without this corpus of understanding, hostility could easily develop between the two factions—Gentile and Jewish portions of the Roman church as it already had in other places. Finally, the church would need to understand how the Gospel has power to bring greatly diverse peoples together into one body that loves and serves and supports one another while furthering the Great Commission.

Paul's theological view, however, was a sharp departure from the conventional understanding of God for both the Jews and the pagan gods of the Gentiles. The Jews had been convinced for centuries that their heritage made them exclusively entitled to God's righteousness. Further, what their heritage did not cover, their works of righteousness according to the Law would. Gentiles, on the other hand, had no specific knowledge of the true God.

Think About It

How can one boast as having attained something that was given as a gift?

1. Righteousness through Faith (Romans 3:21–26)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

BUT now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

BUT now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets,

22 the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;

24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;

26 it was to demonstrate at the present time his own righteousness, so that he is righteous and he justifies the one who has the faith of Jesus.

Know It

After conclusively demonstrating that every human being, Jew and Gentile alike, is unrighteous (1:18–3:20), Paul now presents the contrast. In verse 22, he writes that the righteousness of God is available to all who believe. This justification is apart from the Law, meaning it is meant to be received by God rather than earned by compliance to religious instruction. Though the prophets of old preached about the importance of compliance to it, the righteousness of God is no longer mediated through the faithful observance of the Law, but rather through faith in Jesus Christ. Before the crucifixion, justification was granted based on one's obedience to the prescribed requirements of the Law as they represented God's standards of holiness. After the crucifixion, however, righ-

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teousness is made available to all who believe in Christ, the incarnation of God’s holiness. According to Paul, everyone is eligible for this grace, Jew or Gentile. Everyone needs it as all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

With this bold declaration, Paul challenges both the relevancy and efficacy of the old sacrificial system of sin atonement. To atone means “to cover.” A sacrifice was the means by which God “covered” sin so that the broken relationship between God and humanity could be repaired. To facilitate the ritual, the high priest was to take the blood of the sacrificial animal and sprinkle it on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, representing God’s moral and righteous standards, which had been broken. But when the sacrificial animals were killed and their blood sprinkled over the cover of the Ark, the broken laws of God were atoned for by the death of the animals instead of the death of the Israelites.

God took it upon Himself to initiate the exchange of life by the shedding of blood—the life of a “sinless” animal for the life of a sinless Human. God did this, according to verse 25 to demonstrate His righteousness. Why would such a demonstration be needed? Because it would seem that God, in justifying sinners, would not be true to His own law’s requirement that sin must be punished (Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15). God’s failure to consistently punish sin throughout the Old Testament era may have raised questions regarding the integrity of His justice. How could He claim to be a righteous and holy God and at the same time forgive sins by leaving them unpunished? But when Jesus is set forth as the atoning sacrifice, it is clear that God is punishing sins after all, albeit in the person of His only begotten Son, who suffers the penalty in our place.

2. Boasting Not Included (Romans 3:27)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

27 Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. Through what kind of law? That of works? No, rather through the law of faith.

Because those who have faith in Christ are justified by God's grace and not by works, Paul challenges his readers with a rhetorical question: Where is boasting then? He uses this rhetorical device to address a common perception held among devoted followers. For those faithful to the Law, compliance to its holy statutes served as a source of prideful self-adulation (Rom. 2:17). Their boasting was not only in regard to their strict obedience to the Law, but also, and perhaps more overtly, that they are chosen by God for a special role in the drama of redemption. They believed their covenant faithfulness gave them a special place in God's heart.

For Paul, however, the answer to his question is that boasting is excluded. There's no room for it when the Gift of redemption has been made available to all. It would be the same as receiving a valuable birthday present and then insulting the giver by insisting on paying for it yourself. Once the item was paid for by the recipient, it ceases to be a gift. But when the item is paid for by another, and received, not only is it a gift, it automatically concedes the right for the recipient to boast about how they acquired it.

Paul contends that prior to Christ's redeeming work on the cross, the system of salvation was defined by observation of the Law. Now, under grace, the system of salvation has been redefined by a new law, the law of faith. Verse 27 can be paraphrased like this: "Where, then, is boasting? It has been excluded. Through what system of salvation? The Law system, in which one is justified by works? No, on the contrary, through the grace system, in which one is justified by faith."

3. Justice for All, by Faith (Romans 3:28–30)

King James Version

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

New Revised Standard Version

28 For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of gentiles also? Yes, of gentiles also,

30 since God is one, and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

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Verse 28 restates Paul's basic premise that he has maintained throughout chapter, declaring that by faith, a person is justified apart from the works of the Law. To show the universal scope of this basic truth, Paul asks his readers another rhetorical question: Is God the God of Jews only?

No Jew of Paul's day would have denied that God was the God of all people in the sense of being Creator and Judge, so the obvious answer Paul anticipated was, "Of course not." This sets up nicely for him to ask a follow-up question: Since there is one God for all people, then is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Given there is only one God and if He were only for the Jewish people, what God is there for the others? These rhetorical inquiries of Paul were meant to reinforce to his readers the redemptive concern God has for all people, not just a chosen few. All of those whom God will justify, both Jews and Gentiles, will be justified in the same way—by faith alone.

It's not that we're justified by faith plus whatever other good deeds we do or commands of the Law we follow. Going to church for 52 Sundays in a year will not save you any more than tithing a certain dollar amount or delivering X number of meals to a homeless shelter. Those are all nice things for Christians to do, but they're not what saves us. These acts are what prove our faith to non-believers, but they are not the saving grace. It is only faith in God that can save, point blank, period.

Since there is only one God, He justifies every person in the same way—through their faith. He doesn't have a certain standard for Jews and a different standard for Gentiles. We are all treated equally in His eyes and the Jews are not entitled to special treatment, which Paul was trying to emphasize repeatedly. We receive faith in the same way and are justified in the same way. The Jews struggled with this concept because there was a long-standing animosity with the rest of the world and a general feeling of superiority. But God makes it clear over and over throughout the Bible that He is for everyone, not just the Jews. The Jewish people were meant to be the conduit of His love and grace to the rest of the world. They were the starting point but they were by no means the stopping point. If you are a Christian today, it is due to the faithfulness of Jews hundreds of years ago proclaiming the Good News to the entire world rather than keeping it to themselves.

Remember It

Paul’s intent was to dismantle the divisive constructs of religious heritage between the Jew and the Gentile. He wanted to demonstrate God is no respect of persons as we all have sinned and fallen short of His glory. His righteousness requires a level playing field so that all may have equitable access to His grace. The means to access God’s grace of righteousness and acceptance comes through faith, not works, according to Paul. Referring to the believers’ efforts to earn the gift of God’s righteousness through faithful adherence to the Law, “works” are necessary, though not enough. Faith, on the other hand, refers to the conviction one has to hear and respond to the voice of God.



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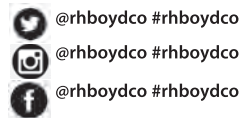
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Goodness of God” by Cece Winans.

Discuss ways to respond to the grace of God’s righteousness.

How would others describe your faith maturity? Explain why.

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DDR

Devotional Readings for May 6–12, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
God Is Generous to the Unworthy	A Great and Blessed Nation	A Promise of Countless Heirs	Little Children, Your Sins Are Forgiven	God’s Abundant Forgiveness	Trust God, Who Justified the Ungodly	Christ Was Raised for Our Justification
Matthew 20:1–16	Genesis 13:14–18	Genesis 15:1–6	1 John 2:12–17	Psalms 32	Romans 4:1–12	Romans 4:13–25

FOR OUR SAKE

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 4

PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 4:13–25

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Romans 4:20–21, KJV

Intro

Nat Turner was an enslaved plantation preacher who led the only effective, sustained slave rebellion in U.S. history. He was born on October 2, 1800 in Southampton County, Virginia, where he learned to read and write, and became a religious leader among his fellow enslaved people. He believed that God had chosen him to free his people from bondage, and he was inspired by signs and visions to start a revolt.

For Black Christians living in an America, Nat Turner is much like our Abraham. For the Jewish people, Abraham is the father of faith because of his unwavering belief in God and in the promise of deliverance for his people. In like manner, Nat Turner—fueled by a conviction of faith in God and the hope of freedom—never wavered in his determination to fulfill God's will. He sacrificed his life. His faith in God and hope in the promise of freedom ultimately became a match that lit the flames of Civil War, which eventually brought about Emancipation. He and countless others gave their lives in faith so that today we enjoy the freedoms we have. In other words, our enslaved ancestors believed in God, not just for their sakes, but for ours as well.

In his attempt to provide further evidence of the need for and eligibility of the righteousness of God, Paul turns his attention to the Law of Moses in comparison to the promise of God. This he does to establish for his readers that the promise of God is for all people—both those under the Law and those outside of it. The key to acquiring it, however, is through faith—a faith such as Abraham's and Nat Turner's.

Think About It

Through faith, Abraham lived in the assurance of God's promise, so much so that God's promises outlived him.

1. The Law vs. the Promise (Romans 4:13–15)

King James Version

FOR the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

New Revised Standard Version

FOR the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

Know It

Verse 13 begins with Paul's declaration that the promise of God given to Abraham as the heir of the world was acquired not through Law, but rather, through faith. The promise he is referring to is the blessing of Genesis 12:1–3, where God vowed to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and eventually to bless the entire world through the heritage of his seed. Paul cites the Pentateuch in this correspondence to the Christians in Rome as an attempt to stress the difference between having faith in the promise of God versus having confidence in the Law of Moses.

Because Paul is writing to a mixed Jew-Gentile audience, the question of who they and what is required of God's people needed to be addressed, particularly since Jews had been identifying themselves exclusively as God's people. They assumed that because of their faithfulness in following the Torah, their obedience automatically made them righteous and acceptable by God. On the contrary, Paul contends in verse 14, that if those who are heirs of the Law are made eligible to receive God's promise because of their faithful compliance to it, then their faith is made void and the promise of God is meaningless. From Paul's perspective, the Law of Moses and the promises of God are incompatible in that they are mutually exclusive. Both have their place but are not meant to function within the same capacity of God's grace. Law language ("you shall") demands obedience, but promise language ("I will") demands faith. What God said to Abraham was not "Obey this law and I will bless you," but "I will bless you if you believe in my promise."

According to Paul, the transgressing the Law draws God's anger and demands His wrath in response. Since the only purpose of the law is to reveal transgression, it is incapable of being the basis for fulfilling promises. Once the Law has been violated, the promise would be retracted automatically. But where there is no Law, says Paul, and the inheritance of the world is based on promise instead,

there is no transgression. This means in the Law's absence there can be no violation of it triggering God's wrath and disqualifying one's eligibility to receive His promise. The root of sin isn't in breaking the law, but rather in breaking trust with God. He created the commandments as a loving Father trying to discipline His children. But when we break those rules, we're implying that we don't trust Him and that we know better than He. This kind of arrogance is what got Adam and Eve in trouble in the Garden of Eden, and we still struggle with this arrogance today.

2. The Faith of Abraham (Romans 4:16–21)

King James Version

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

New Revised Standard Version

16 For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us,

17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So shall your descendants be."

19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

After demonstrating how the Law of Moses and the promises of God are not compatible, verse 16 shows how grace and faith are compatible. According to Paul, believers are made eligible for the promise of God through faith according to grace. While the Law punishes, grace forgives. By grace the transgressions that trigger God's wrath and void His promise are omitted. God's grace is expressed through forgiveness that He has made available to the seed of Abraham, those who are of the faith and those of the Law.

To Paul, Abraham is the father of us all, Jew and Gentile. Those who are of Jewish heritage have grown up under the tutelage of the Torah and are followers of Christ. They are considered by him as "people of the Law." According to them, their lineage (which can be traced back to Abraham) legitimizes their claim to God's promise. Gentiles, on the other hand, who have no knowledge of Law or direct heritage with Abraham but believe God based on belief, are also eligible for the promise. They are those who Paul identified as "people of faith." Different than the Jews, their connection to Abraham is not by lineage, but rather, by faith.

Using the patriarch's example, Paul emphasized the intensity of conviction that should undergird one's faith in God. Abraham, he writes, believed God. After calling his attention to the multitude of stars in the heavens, God said to him, "So shall your seed be." Abraham was more than 75 years old and Sarah, his wife, was 66 at the time. Being well-aware of their advanced age, Abraham did not consider his own body or the deadness of Sarah's womb as an impediment to the promise of God. On the contrary, Abraham had hope in God's promise, which cannot die. He had a hope contrary to hope, meaning that he had a hope that went beyond natural expectation of fulfillment. His was a hope so resolute that even without evidence to validate a reason to believe, Abraham still had confidence that God would be true to His promise.

Different than our current understanding of wishful thinking for a desired result, hope, in Scripture, is the expectation of a preferred future outcome based solely on the conviction of God's promise. It was in this assurance that Paul says Abraham did not waver at the promise through unbelief. Abraham's belief meant that he did not allow unbelief to position him as a judge wherein he would weigh evidence to make a logical decision. Instead, he strengthened his resolve to believe in faith, giving God the glory.

3. For Our Sake (Romans 4:22–30)

King James Version

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

New Revised Standard Version

22 Therefore "it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

23 Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone

24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

25 who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Abraham's faith in God was accounted to him as righteousness, meaning that his faith in God not only graced him with an heir (Isaac), but also established him as being made righteous in the sight of God. His experience of faith in the promise of God and the grace of receiving the blessing was not for his sake alone, but for ours as well, says Paul.

Those who believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead, after being crucified for the sins of humanity, also will be made righteous, as Abraham was. Jesus died on our behalf and was resurrected for the right to be made justified in the sight of God.

It's not enough to believe in the historical account that Jesus was a real man, or a real teacher. It's not enough to believe that Jesus was a good guy who performed nice deeds for people during His lifetime. It's not enough to say He had good ideas in His sermon, or that He demonstrated a positive way for people to live their lives. We must have faith in what He did on the cross—that He was sinless yet died the death of a criminal and rose again three days later. Without this fundamental truth, our entire religion loses its legs to stand on. This is pivotal for any believer, which is why Paul hammers home this point repeatedly.

Paul also wanted to point out that the Resurrection in no way contradicts the Old Testament or makes it obsolete. Rather, the Gospel is the fulfillment of Old Testament Law and prophecy. Just as Abraham was justified through faith, so are we.

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Remember It

Jesus died for our sake; not just to offer blanket forgiveness of sin, but also to provide for us the covering of grace under which we currently live.

There are three themes in today’s lesson that Paul emphasizes as factors that establish our connection with God: faith, grace, and promise. By His grace we have been made eligible to receive God’s promise of forgiveness, salvation, etc. But it’s only through faith that these promises from God can be claimed. Grace and promise come from God, but faith requires participation on our part. Different than the Law, faith is predicated upon one’s personal conviction of belief that can only be nurtured within the context of a personal relationship with God.



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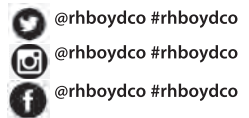
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “You Paid It All” by Wes Morgan.

Who are the heroes and heroines in your life that have inspired your faith?

How can you be the inspiration of another’s faith?

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DDR

Devotional Readings for May 13–19, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Trusting in God Brings Perfect Peace	The Penalty Has Been Paid	God’s Spirit Poured upon All Flesh	The Firstfruits of Reconciliation	Brothers at Long Last Reconciled	May God Bless Us with Peace	through Jesus Christ
Isaiah 26:1–11	Isaiah 40:1–11	Acts 2:1–4, 14, 16–24, 36	Acts 2:37–47	Genesis 33:1–15	Psalm 29 Peace with God	Romans 5:1–11

REMAINING STRONG

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 5:1–11

PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 5:1–11

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1, KJV)

Intro

Because its origins can be found within the ancient language of the biblical text, the term “faith” is usually associated with being a product of religion. But this is not the case. Though religion is designed to nurture faith, it is not the source of it. Faith is ultimately about having an awareness of God and a personal conviction regarding His will. Regardless of one’s religious affiliation or any affiliation for that matter, faith is not restrictive to anyone or limited by anything.

Our enslaved ancestors demonstrated faith through the fundamental belief that one day God would deliver them from the cruelty of their enslavers and grant them freedom. It was a belief not based on what they read in the Bible, given that most didn’t know how to read, but rather, on their desperation for deliverance. Despite the inhumane conditions they endured, their trust in God remained vigilant. In their own unique ways, our ancestors practiced communion with God through the connection of community.

Unwittingly, our enslaved ancestors provided for us a great example of what faith looks like when lived out loud. It’s not about religious affiliation and much stronger than a casual belief. Faith is the confidence of conviction that strengthens the resolve to live according to those convictions even in the face of peril. This is, at least in part, Paul’s agenda with his letter to the Christian community in Rome. After explaining the availability everyone has to be justified by God, Paul explains God’s grace in a way that permits believers to engage in a more intimate communion with God.

Think About It

It is a fair question to ask: which is most accurate? Justification by God’s grace through faith or justification through faith because of God’s grace?

1. Faith Brings Peace (Romans 5:1–5)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

THEREFORE being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

THEREFORE, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

3 And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance,

4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Know It

All of what Paul has written so far (chapters 1–4) is summarized in the first few words of the opening verse, “Therefore, having been justified by faith....” It undergirds the overall objective of the letter. Paul wanted to reinforce the availability and eligibility of God’s grace of forgiveness and justification for both the Jew and the Gentile. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the whole world stands under the present and future judgment of God, but is also worthy of His grace. But God has responded to the need of humanity by offering justification in a way that preserves the integrity of His own innate righteousness—through sending His Son to be the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

Because of this assurance of faith, Paul says that we have peace with God. The peace he is referring to involves the state of inner tranquility born from a relationship of deep communion with the Divine. According to Paul, our sinful state prohibited such intimate access to God, as He cannot have anything to do with sin. But through Jesus and His sacrifice, the bridge of peace has been erected between our unworthiness and God’s acceptance. Because we have been granted

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access by faith into this grace, we have reason to rejoice. In our celebration, we rejoice in the hope of His glory.

Just as he encourages rejoicing in the hope of God’s glory, Paul also urges his readers to glory in their tribulations. The idea is that the believers’ joy is not just something they hope to experience in the future, but also a present reality in times of trial and distress. While hope is generally understood as the confident expectation of something not yet seen (Heb. 11:1–2), Paul posits an additional thought: hope is knowing that God is never absent in our waiting for its fulfillment. While we wait, He is working in our hearts, building our character and transforming us into becoming more like Him.

According to Paul, tribulation produces perseverance, which means difficult circumstances occasion opportunities to believe in God and witness His power to deliver. The patient endurance of trials builds the believer’s confidence in God’s ability to deliver. In turn, this developed trust in God enhances our ability to tolerate uncomfortable situations while strengthening our overall resolve to hope.

The hope of God’s glory does not disappoint, says Paul, it will not let the believer down. His explanation as to why this is true is simple: God floods our hearts with His love through the Holy Spirit who was been given to us. In other words, hope is rewarded with an enhanced awareness of the incomprehensible love of God. The Holy Spirit, who enters the believer’s life in response to faith, is at work helping to provide insight into the reality of what it means to be encircled by the love of God.

2. Faith as a Bridge (Romans 5:6–8)

King James Version

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

New Revised Standard Version

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.

8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Being bound by sin and destined for an eternity apart from God, we were helpless and without strength to do anything to save ourselves, says Paul. No amount of struggle on our part could free us from condemnation. Prior to our salvation, all of humanity was mired in this state of moral sickness. But in due time, Christ died for the ungodly and for a new state of existence for believers, a state of grace.

As a means to emphasize the depth of love Christ has for us to make such a sacrifice on our behalf, Paul compares the likelihood of one's willingness to give his or her life for another. He writes it is unusual and therefore unlikely for someone to give his or her life for a righteous person, and more unlikely that one would dare to die for a good person. Yet, though we were neither righteous nor good, Christ died for us. God demonstrated His love toward us, that while we were guilty and unworthy to be accepted by Him, He gave the best that He had to cover, through grace, the worst of who we are.

How is this a demonstration of His love? Because Jesus was His only Son! Can you imagine for a moment offering your only child as a sacrifice for the world's sins? Any parent would say no immediately out of love for the child. But God's love was so great for the entire world that He was willing to make this incredible sacrifice. It boggles the mind if you stop and truly ponder these implications.

3. Faith as a Relationship (Romans 5:9–11)

King James Version

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

New Revised Standard Version

9 Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

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Paul continues with his explanation of what it means to be reconciled to God in last verses of the passage. In verse nine, he says that by the blood of Jesus we are now put right with God, implying that until His death, we were misaligned with God. The access we are now eligible to have with God rivals the kind of connection Adam and Eve enjoyed with Him prior to the Fall.

Different than justification, which is a forensic term establishing the legal basis upon which the believer is freed from sin, reconciliation is a relational concept. When two parties are reconciled, it means they are no longer hostile toward one another. Whatever had been a matter of difference between them has been removed. They have reconciled their differences and are prepared to move into the future together. According to Paul, we were God's enemies, but through the death of His Son, He made us His friends. Our reconciliation with God is expressed through personal relationship; it cannot be a unilateral action on the part of God alone. He has provided forgiveness for all people through the once-and-for-all death of His Son. Only when that forgiveness is accepted by faith is the compact completed and reconciliation takes place. God's part is finished; our part is a matter of individual decision.

Both justification and reconciliation are accomplished through the death of Christ, but the former focuses on death while the latter on life. It is for that reason that Paul says (verse 10) that having been reconciled, we will be saved by Christ's life! At the heart of God's redemptive plan stands one solitary figure—Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior. Through His death, He has made it possible for those who believe to receive forgiveness for their sins and enter into an eternal relationship of joy with God the Father.

According to Paul, God's grace expressed through justification and reconciliation not only validates our faith, but through faith, it invites a deeper awareness of His love for us. More than a strong belief of God, our faith deepens our belief in God and in His will for our lives. The difference is proximity to His presence. The more aware we are of God's invitation to get closer to Him, the more our faith draws Him closer to us. To exercise our faith, then, is not just to hope in the fulfillment of God's promise, but also to anticipate the experience of His presence. How will you draw closer to Him this week?

Remember It

Faith is about being in relationship with God. This was the thematic centerpiece of Paul’s message to the Christian community in Rome. Before Paul, the concept of faith, for most Jews, was understood as a transactional arrangement between God and the believer. Though their commitment to God was sincere, it was filtered through an interpretation of Mosaic Law and sustained by strict compliance to it. Paul’s explanation of faith, however, disabused believers from the burden of compliance to Law and put in its place a Gospel of grace. By grace through faith believers are given opportunity to forge a new arrangement with God, one that engages the heart more than the head.



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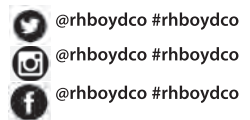
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Only One Night Tho,” by Tye Tribbett.

Explain how you live your faith.

Discuss how you share your faith based on how you live it.

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Devotional Readings for May 20–26, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Call On God and Be Saved	Striving on the Basis of Faith	All Israel Will Be Saved	God’s Word Is Very Near	Do Not Fear, Only Believe	A Beautiful Announcement of Salvation	Confession and Belief Lead to Salvation
Joel 2:28-32	Romans 9:14–16, 25–33	Romans 11:1–4, 17–27	Deuteronomy 30:11–20	Mark 5:35–43	Isaiah 52	Romans 10:1–17

HEARING AND BELIEVING

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 10:1–21

PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 10:1–17

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9, KJV)

Intro

You have heard the saying that “seeing is believing.” Well for the believer, hearing is believing too. Hearing by faith is not something we do with the ears, but with the heart. It is a spiritual discipline, undergirded by a relationship with God, that enables an awareness of His divine direction for our lives. As an essential feature of the believer’s walk with God, faith serves as certainty in uncertain times. It is the constant assurance, amid the influences of doubt, that God’s presence, power, and promise is accessible to all who believe. Such confidence, however, can only be confirmed through a relationship with Him. A key point, not easily recognized by those who are more religious than relational.

Unfortunately, religion can get in the way of our relationship with God when tradition is the only thing that connects us to Him. For many believers, there is no difference between God’s voice and God’s word in that, for them, compliance to Scripture is the same as being in relationship with God. This was the exact concern Paul had for his people, according to the letter he wrote to the Christians in Rome. They believed in God, but their understanding of Him was filtered through the Law of Moses. Like too many evangelicals today, the Jewish people in Paul’s day believed righteousness must be earned by strict obedience. According to Paul, their deep devotion to the Law precluded them from receiving God’s grace, guaranteeing rejection in the Day of Judgment. So he wrote them a letter to correct their misguided thinking and to encourage them to stop striving for something they couldn’t attain.

Think About It

How do those who can’t speak confess their sins? Are they still eligible to be saved?

1. Israel's Stumbling Block (Romans 10:1–4)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

BRETHREN, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

BROTHERS and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

2 For I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not based on knowledge.

3 Not knowing the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness.

4 For Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Know It

Paul expresses deep and abiding affection for his fellow Israelites in verse 1. After all, he also belonged to that special race of people to whom God revealed Himself through history. The reality of his love for them is demonstrated when he says that it is his heart's desire and prayer to God is that they be saved, implying that those who held fast to their Jewish traditions were not where they thought they were in relation to their acceptance from God.

For Paul, salvation involved God's deliverance from the ultimate consequence of sin in exchange for His loving acceptance and eternal life. Such an experience can only happen according to God's grace, through faith, and apart from the Law. As a former Pharisee who once upon a time fought to preserve the integrity of the law, Paul now regards it as the primary obstacle preventing access to God's righteousness.

Paul makes it very clear in verse 4 that devotion to the law is actually what prevents God's approval and acceptance. This is because Christ is the end of the Law, which is to say that the Law has fulfilled its purpose by leading believers to Christ. Upon His death and resurrection, Christ nullified the relevancy of the Law and replaced it with grace, making God's righteousness available to Jews, Gentiles, and all who believe.

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2. Not Law, but Grace (Romans 10:5–10)

King James Version

5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

New Revised Standard Version

5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them."

6 But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down)

7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim),

9 because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation.

To reinforce his argument, Paul contrasts two kinds of righteousness in verses 5–6. First is the kind that Moses had written about, which is righteousness of the Law. Citing Leviticus 18:5, he references a statement from Moses speaking on behalf of the Lord to His people saying: "You shall therefore keep my statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them." Paul paraphrases it like this: "the man who does those things shall live by them." This statement from Moses was a terse summary of the way to salvation. In its immediate application, the Law represented the covenant responsibilities God had imposed on the Jews as His special people. Complete compliance to the Law was the condition for not only acquiring God's approval, but also for what makes one eligible to live in the light of His promise and blessings.

The problem, however, was that no one is able to live up to the requirements of the Law. Although it pointed believers in the right direction, the Law offered them no power to achieve its directives. The Law was never meant to be used as

a way to merit God's favor. Nevertheless, that didn't prevent Jewish leaders and legalists' perversion of the divine intention of the Law, giving the false impression that only through personal merit that one can truly be saved.

The other kind of righteousness Paul references is a righteousness of faith, which he cites from Deuteronomy 30:12–14. Different than the righteousness that's "earned" through human effort, the righteousness of faith is available to everyone because of the all sufficient work of Christ.

In its original meaning, righteousness referred to the accessibility and comprehension of the Law, given to Moses by God for the people to live by. According to Moses, there was no need for heroic actions to know what the Law required, since it was conveniently provided for them through Moses.

Using Moses' statement about access to God's law, Paul reinterprets its phrasing to better demonstrate his point. He offers a rhetorical question for his readers: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" Which is to say, don't ask yourself what great work must you first perform to secure justification before God. One does not need to go up to the heavens (as if it were possible) as did Christ, who came down from heaven, or descend to the depths of earth, from which Christ was raised after His death. In other words, there is no human action that can match what Christ has already done to secure our salvation.

The same sentiment Moses expressed in his proclamation to the people of God in Deuteronomy, Paul now applies to his readers in Rome. Just as the people had unrestricted access to the word of Law, Paul explains the word of faith that replaces the word of Law is also available for believers. It is as close to them as their mouths and hearts. The word of faith is not a word in the literal sense, but rather, a "message"—essentially a condensed summary of the Gospel. It is the message that a person must accept in order to be saved. Different than the word of Law, the word of faith doesn't require an intermediary (like Moses) to validate justification, but rather, a confession with the mouth and a belief with the heart that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Specifically, in the case of Israel, the word of faith was a message that hit at the heart of their religious beliefs. The phrase "Jesus is Lord" is thought to be the oldest Christian confessional statement, and was a clear expression of the deity of Christ. For a Jew to confess that "Jesus is Lord" would be to ascribe deity to Him, which was the source of the Jewish outrage that led to His crucifixion.

When Paul writes that it is with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, he is not speaking of two separate processes. Righteousness and salvation are being used interchangeably in this context. To believe with the heart is to be committed, at the deepest level, to the truth of Christ as revealed and experienced personally. To confess with the mouth is to admit externally the reality of an inner conviction and change.

3. Hearing is Believing (Romans 10:11–17)

King James Version

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

New Revised Standard Version

11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

16 But not all have obeyed the good news, for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

Though there are clear differences in terms of heritage and religious affiliation between Jews and Gentiles as it relates to sin, there is no difference between the two groups. God is the same Lord over all who believe in Him, and everyone who calls on Him for help will be saved. So Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions in verse 14 that reveal the reasons why. He presents a chain of contingencies that must precede the act of calling on God's name that have been ignored by some of the Jewish people. How can they call on God, asks Paul, if they don't believe? How can they believe if they haven't heard of the kind of grace He has to offer? How can they hear of this grace without a preacher? And how can a preacher teach about this grace unless they are first sent by God?

The message of God's grace produces faith, and as faith develops, it in turn naturally becomes the living expression of the message.

Remember It

Those of us who are saved are familiar with the requisite formula needed to secure eternal life: confess with the mouth “the Lord Jesus” and believe with the heart that God has raised Him from the dead. When one confesses, that person acknowledges the truth regarding a particular matter.

Our confession of Christ is our internal acknowledgment of two essential truths necessary for establishing a relationship with God. First, is the admission of our existential predicament, that we are broken in a way that cannot be fixed by human effort. Second is the admission that the only One who can fix us is Christ, and only through our acceptance of His grace are we assured to be made whole.



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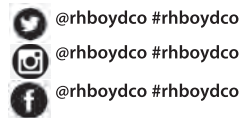
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Nobody Greater” by Vashawn Mitchell. Reflect on God’s greatness in your life as you listen to the words or sing along.

Recount the moment you accepted Christ as your Savior. How did you feel and what did it mean to “say the words?” How did your relationship with Christ evolve over the years following your profession of faith?

How do you invite others to accept the Lord into their hearts? Are you comfortable sharing God’s plan of salvation with a nonbeliever?

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DDR

Devotional Readings for May 27–June 2, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
God’s Witnesses	Praise the Lord!	God’s Children in Christ through Faith	The Lord’s Blessing Makes Rich	Your Treasure Is with Your Heart	Seek First God’s Kingdom	Christ, the Most Precious Gift
Isaiah 43:8–13	Psalms 113	Galatians 3:19–29	Proverbs 10:19–25	Matthew 6:19–24	Matthew 6:25–34	Colossians 1:24–2:3

HOPE AMIDST SUFFERING

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: COLOSSIANS 1:19–2:5 PRINT PASSAGE: COLOSSIANS 1:24–2:3

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:2–3, KJV)

Intro

A commitment to Christ involves having to endure the inevitable reality of suffering. As it is a part of life, suffering is the term we use to describe any prolonged experience that involves severe pain, trauma, grief, agony, and the like. While we suffer in different ways, we will all eventually suffer in this life.

Though it is an uncomfortable experience, suffering is a crucial part of our spiritual formation. Suffering is as essential as fellowshiping with the saints, reading the Bible regularly, attending church, and even the service done in ministry. As an indispensable feature of the Christian life, our suffering is meant to help define our identity in God and with God.

Given that God can do all things, a fair question could be: “Why must we suffer?” This is a profound and difficult question that has been debated by philosophers, scholars, theologians, and people in general for centuries.

Christ followers are destined to suffer because He suffered; and to live like Christ is to suffer in His name. The good news, however, is that we don't have to suffer alone. Because we have chosen to suffer for Christ, He becomes the center of our hope in the midst of our suffering.

The Christian church in Colossae during the time of Paul certainly had their share of suffering. In addition to social despair, they also were persecuted by the Roman Empire and Jewish authorities who opposed their beliefs and practices. They were pressured by surrounding influences of pagan lifestyles and culture.

Think About It

Something we can hope for amidst our suffering is the confidence in knowing that our pain helps to produce purpose.

1. Sacrifice for Christ (Colossians 1:24–29)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

WHO now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

I AM now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

25 I became its minister according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

26 the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.

27 To them God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

29 For this I toil and strive with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Know It

In verse 24, Paul transitions from talking about the supremacy of Christ to what it means to suffer as did Christ. Because he had never been seen by the people of Colossae, it was important that Paul inform them of the nature of his ministry. He needed to establish his authority to address more significant theological points. In reference to the trials and tribulations he had to endure to spread the Gospel, Paul tells the people, "I now rejoice in my suffering," as it was necessary for their sake. According to Paul, the afflictions he endured throughout his work was how he identified with and participated in the work of Christ. His desire to fill what was lacking

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in the affliction refers to his readiness to continue suffering for the sake of Christ and for the sake of His body, which he describes as the church. Paul was willing to suffer on behalf of the church because he saw himself as a servant of the church whom God had commissioned to proclaim the Gospel of hope. He did not take this position of his own accord, but rather because God had called him to it.

Paul suffered in two ways. He suffered personal attacks at the hands of the people in Colossae who were against the Gentile believers' acceptance of God. He also suffered at the hands of Jews in neighboring cities who sought to stop the advancement of the Gospel in general.

In verse 26, Paul explains his role in the administration of God's plan, which is related to the mystery that has been hidden from generation for the ages. In Pauline terminology, a mystery is a truth that lay hidden in the pages of the Old Testament and its explanation awaited another day. The day of understanding came with the death and resurrection of Christ and the mystery was revealed to all believers. The content of this mystery is that Christ resides in the heart of the believer, and with Him the hope of glory. So though the Jews had access to the Torah and other stories of the Old Testament, it was impossible for them to fully understand what salvation would look like until Jesus came onto the scene. He revealed the mystery. That's why believers can go to the Old Testament today and see all the allusions and prophecies about Jesus that have been fulfilled and make the connections that the Jewish people never could. Jesus is the key that unlocks the treasure trove of information in the Old Testament, and reveals how God had a plan for the entire world all along.

This is the essence of Paul's message, according to verse 28. Referring to the message of the Gospel as the embodiment of Christ, Paul says "it is Him we preach." His message serves as wisdom that warns against false teaching that rejects God's grace and provides instruction for those open to it.

Paul's primary purpose was to present every person as perfect in Christ. He thought in terms of the return of Christ and the desire to see each Christian mature in the Lord. To this end, Paul labored intently using the strength that Christ supplied to him to accomplish this task.

Paul connects the general toil and difficulty inherent in

2. All About Christ (Colossians 2:1–3)

King James Version

1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

New Revised Standard Version

1 For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face.

2 I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ,

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

the work of ministry to the specific struggles he endured on behalf of the Colossians. He wanted the people to know how great his conflict was as a means to articulate his concern for them, those who haven't seen his face in the flesh, and the nearby community of believers in Laodicea. This extends to believers today. We have never seen Paul in the flesh; we merely have his words in front of us that we take to heart as God's message to us from thousands of years ago. Though we haven't met Paul personally, we trust in God's word and that it is inerrant. Therefore, we can trust Paul's authority, as did the Colossians who had never met him. His attention to suffering was also meant to show what can be expected when one serves for the sake of Christ.

Yet, amid the inevitable struggles believers will face, according to Paul, being knit together in love and having the assurance of understanding regarding the hidden knowledge of God insures deliverance from them. When we're in the midst of suffering, it's easy to become discouraged and downcast, and when we're in that state of mind, it's all the easier for the devil to prey upon us. So, rather than dwell on the suffering, Paul wanted to send an encouragement to the believers that our suffering is for a good cause and we can take hope in that.

His reference to being knit together in love spoke of a call to unity. God makes it clear repeatedly that He is all about relationship and communion. Therefore, as believers, it's important to our spiritual health for us to be relational! This

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means spending time seeking God's truth together, praying with and for one another, and fellowshiping. God's truth would bring them together, but if they listened to false teaching or doctrine, this would divide them.

Paul also emphasizes that a believer's full assurance in God brings them real riches, unlike earthly riches that will pass away. If someone is struggling in their faith and doubts that God is real—or believes He exists but doubts that He's good or loving—then they are missing out on the riches that come with the full assurance that God is good, loving, and desires a personal relationship with you. Believers who are confident in God and their relationship with Him experience a fuller, richer Christian walk. This is what Paul desired for the Colossians to experience.

Once again, Paul touches on the mystery of God being revealed in Christ. In this context, Paul says that it's impossible for us to understand and know God's character without Jesus. God revealed Himself to humanity through His Son. Jesus is how God demonstrated His love, His goodness, His patience, etc. All of these things the Jewish people may have experienced in the Old Testament, but it became flesh and tangible through the life of Jesus.

In these verses, Paul is refuting a false doctrine that was circulating around Colossae. False teachers were encouraging the people to seek knowledge and truth, but *not* Jesus. This is a dangerous position to take because anything that promises truth without Jesus is a scheme of the devil. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). That means He is the ultimate Source of truth and knowledge. Too many people today would rather believe in knowledge and have put science on a pedestal or idol. But without the acknowledgement that God created science and is the Divine mind behind it, the picture is incomplete and they will never have the full knowledge that they seek.

Paul wanted the Colossians to know that whatever questions the people had about God or how they should live was answered in Jesus: the mystery revealed. If Jesus didn't live it or say it, then they were following a false doctrine. Paul once again compares this knowledge to precious treasure and riches, reminding the Colossians how worthy God's truth is and how it's worth seeking at any cost. Suffering in life is inevitable, but Jesus invites us, without reservation, to come to Him.

Remember It

The narrative of our religious heritage begins with the phenomenon of the “Invisible Institution.” As a template for the modern day Black Church, the Invisible Institution was a community of enslaved Africans and Caribbeans who gathered together under a refuge of hope amid their suffering to worship God in secret. The Invisible Institution was ground zero for more than just the Black church; it is also the context within which the African became an African American. Just as Paul encouraged the people of Colossae to be knit together in love with a sure understanding of God, so was the community of the enslaved through the phenomenon of the Invisible Institution.



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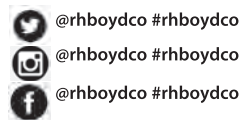
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Take Me to the King” by Tamela Mann.

Think of a time you suffered. How did the hope of Christ get you through? Share a passage of Scripture that encourages you to stay strong in your faith and maintain hope during difficult times.

How would you encourage someone else who is suffering with something? What Scripture passages would you encourage a suffering person to read. How would you encourage him or her to pray?

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Devotional Readings for June 3–9, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Boldly Proclaiming the Kingdom	The Awesome Presence of God	The Consuming Fire	The Lord’s Blessing Makes Rich	Your Treasure Is with Your Heart	Seek First God’s Kingdom	Christ, the Most Precious Gift
Acts 28:23–31	Exodus 19:9–11, 16–25	Hebrews 12:18–29	Proverbs 10:19–25	Matthew 6:19–24	Matthew 6:25–34	Colossians 1:24—2:3

REFLECTING GOD'S SPIRIT

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1–18 **PRINT PASSAGE:** 2 CORINTHIANS 3:5–18

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV)

Intro

When one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the Spirit of the Lord lives within that person. Upon surrendering ourselves to the Holy Spirit and His direction, we are led to do God's will and to represent His character in our lives. In other words, we are called to reflect God's Spirit in the world.

But what does that mean? How do we reflect God's Spirit, if we aren't sure what God's Spirit really is? That is a good question, an one that has challenged many believers in the faith. The Holy Spirit is just as much a part of the Trinity as is Christ and the Godhead. He is the expression of God's presence, power, and purpose in this world and the One who abides within the heart of the believer. To reflect the Spirit of God is to demonstrate His character of love, justice, and peace.

Paul explains to his readers in Corinth that the source and nature of his and Timothy's ministry is to spread the Gospel. He acknowledges that their competency to carry out this divine work is not something that comes from within themselves, but rather, their sufficiency is from God. It is God, according to Paul, who has made them fit to be ministers of the New Covenant. Because Paul took this calling so seriously and left behind these letters for us to learn from today, we are able to take up this calling as well. This is part of living our faith in God and Paul gives us the template to follow through Jesus.

Think About It

Elaborate upon the condition of one's gift when God's blessings are taken for granted.

1. Sufficient in Christ (2 Corinthians 3: 5–6)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

NOT that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;
6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

NOT that we are qualified of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our qualification is from God,
6 who has made us qualified to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Know It

The expression “new covenant” appears in the New Testament as a designation for the arrangement established between God and His people on the basis of Christ’s death and resurrection. The church derives the expression “New Testament” from this phraseology, which has its roots in Jeremiah 31:31, where the prophet described the restoration period after Israel’s exile as the time of “the new covenant.” The term “new” did not mean entirely new. It connoted “renewed” or “made anew.” God promised to renew His people to fresh and sincere covenant life after the exile.

By clarifying that this sufficiency is not of the letter but of the Spirit, Paul is articulating the nature, character, and power of this new covenant in contrast to the old. The letter and Spirit refer to the two different ways of rendering service to God under the two different covenants. The one is carved in letters on stone tablets, which required obedience, while the other is written on human hearts and impels surrender to God’s divine agency. The letter of the Law referred to the literal interpretation of the written regulations, regiments, requirements, and rituals given to Moses by God for the people to obey. Those who live under the Law live under its condemnation, which is why the letter of the Law kills.

Conversely, the Spirit of God gives life and righteousness to those who believe in Him. Rather than condemn, the Holy Spirit convicts as He cultivates a relationship between God and the believer. While the letter of the Law focused on the externalized interpretation of God’s commands, the Spirit deals with its internalized intent for promoting a deep and abiding relationship with Him.

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2. New vs. the Old Covenant (2 Corinthian 3:7–11)

King James Version

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

New Revised Standard Version

7 Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses's face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside,

8 how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?

9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory!

10 Indeed, what once had glory has in this respect lost its glory because of the greater glory,

11 for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

In verse seven, Paul argues that the glory of the Old Covenant cannot compare to that of the new. Describing it as the ministry of death written and engraved on stones, Paul contrasts the Old Covenant (commandments that God wrote on stones and gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai) and the glory associated with it in his own ministry along with the glory that comes through the preaching of the Gospel.

During the wilderness journey, the glory of the Old Covenant was evidenced by a supernatural light that would illuminate Moses' face while he delivered the dictates of the Law to the people. The glory of his countenance was so bright and convicting that the children of Israel could not look steadily at Moses when he spoke the decrees. A veil had to be worn on Moses' face when confronting the people so as not to frighten them.

Eventually, however, this uncomfortable light faded, proving Paul's argument that the glory of the Old Covenant was temporary and, therefore, was

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passing away. Replacing the fading glory of the Old Covenant is the ministry of the Spirit, according to Paul, which is more glorious and permanent. It refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in and throughout the life of the believer.

What Paul contrasted as the ministry of death and the ministry of the Spirit in 3:7–8, he now calls the ministry of condemnation and the ministry of righteousness in 3:9. Both words, “condemnation” and “righteousness,” are employed as courtroom language outside the New Testament and are frequent in Paul’s theological vocabulary of salvation. “Condemnation” means that the defendant is judged guilty of the crime and is sentenced to be executed. “Righteousness” is used to declare the defendant innocent and, thus, set free. Praise the Lord that we no longer have to fight against God or struggle in vain to achieve something that could never have been achieved in the first place. God made it so easy for us by sending His Son to die in our place. He took on the punishment that we deserved so that we might no longer be at war with Him. What an incredible concept!

Though the Law came from God, it only served to highlight the sin of the people, pronouncing them irrefutably guilty before His presence. For them, it emphasized the need for mercy, grace, and salvation from the Lord to be applied on their behalf. Ironically, the language Paul uses to describe the Old Covenant (i.e., the ministry of condemnation and of death) is apropos because believing all that was needed to acquire salvation from the Lord was compliance to the Law would in fact guarantee eternal condemnation and death.

Conversely, the ministry of righteousness (i.e., of the Spirit) serves to lead people to depend on Christ and, upon doing so, they are justified and accepted by God. This, according to verse 10, exceeds much more in glory than the Law. The glory that comes with the ministry of the Spirit is so infinitely superior to that of the Law that it makes the former glory associated with the Old Covenant look as if it had no glory at all in comparison.

Paul’s point is not just that the relevance of the old covenant gradually dissipates, but that its obsolescence was built into it from its inception, evidenced by the need for a veil to cover the glory of Moses’ face. It has now been abruptly replaced by the coming of a superior glory open for all to see in Christ through the Gospel. This glory comes uncovered from the beginning indicating that it is everlasting and never to be replaced.

The New Covenant reveals God’s love and grace through Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God and the exact representation of His nature. By it, believers are guaranteed eternal life and freedom through the Spirit of God.

To accentuate the contrast between the Spirit’s superiority to the Law, Paul entices his readers with the alluring claim that if they thought the glory of the Old Covenant (which is temporary and passing away) was something special, the glory of the New Covenant (which is permanent and perfect) will blow your mind! Every believer should be anxiously anticipating this future glory that will be ours when God deems the time is right.

3. Unveiled Boldness (2 Corinthians 3:12–18)

King James Version

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

New Revised Standard Version

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with complete frankness,

13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.

14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, the same veil is still there; it is not unveiled since in Christ it is set aside.

15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds,

16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Paul's boldness of speech to spread the Gospel is analogous to lifting the veil and revealing God's glory to the people, like Moses did in the wilderness. But unlike Moses, who also used the veil to conceal the glory as it faded, Paul preaches the counter—that the veil is no longer needed, because it is taken away in Christ. And when one who was once blinded by the veil of the Old Covenant turns to the Lord, it is taken away and they are exposed to the glory of God.

To be exposed to God's glory is to realize that the Lord and the Spirit are one. Though He functions as an independent part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is also the expression of God's power, glory, and presence amid all creation. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. According to Paul, this wasn't just freedom from sin and the Law, but also freedom to boldly radiate the glory of God in spreading the true Gospel of Christ. Paul closes this section by addressing all believers with unveiled faces, meaning those who are bold enough to approach God without fear or shame.

Remember It

There is something to be said about Moses’ use of the veil to conceal the light of God’s glory. While it served a practical purpose, sparing the children of Israel the discomfort of God’s convicting light, it also obstructed their view of and prevented their access to God’s glory. Perhaps this is why it eventually faded. When one attempts to hide God’s glory, it diminishes the worth we once ascribed to being in His presence, in that we take Him and His blessings for granted. A life unveiled is one that boldly reflects the Spirit of God in all that we do. It involves having the courage to spread the Gospel of Christ through the prism of personality; that is, to live in the light of Christ’s character of love.



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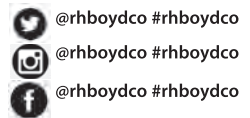
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Oil and Water” by Travis Greene.

Commit to revealing the character of Christ in your actions.

How can the light of God’s glory through you shine more brightly?

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DDR

Devotional Readings for June 10–16, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Servant Leadership	You Shall Receive Power	Anointed by God	How Pleasant to Live in Unity	Bear with One Another in Love	Embrace the Mind of Christ	Prayer for Hope, Joy, and Peace
Luke 22:25–30	Acts 1:1–11	Isaiah 61	Psalms 133–134	Ephesians 4:1–7	Philippians 2:1–13	Romans 15:1–13

HOPE AMIDST DIFFERENCES

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 15:1 –13 PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 15:1 –13

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5–6, KJV)

Intro

The modern idea of race emerged in the late 15th and early 16th centuries when European explorers and colonizers endeavored to oppress people of different continents and regions, and began to categorize them according to their perceived differences. With the invention of race, the phenomenon of “whiteness” surfaced and eventually came to define America as only white. It is the social and institutional reinforcement that this country and the systems governing its people were designed by and for the advantage of white people.

In essence, the cure for racism is the intentional act to form authentic relationships, not only with God, but also with each other. Establishing authentic relationships takes work, as it involves love, courage, patience, vulnerability, and most importantly, time. As believers, an aspiration to develop authentic relationships with one another should be a natural extension of our worship.

For the Roman believers, unity as an outgrowth of liberty and love was Paul's goal. As he aspired to visit the community of faith, he wanted to find within it a unified and loving fellowship of believers, regardless of differences, that would unite with him in extending the Gospel to Spain and the regions beyond. His message was not academic—it was a practical one that believers today need to hear and heed. Unity is at the heart of the Divine.

Think About It

To be united by a common hope in Christ is to celebrate the blessing of difference.

1. Strong and Weak Believers (Romans 15:1–6)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

WE then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

WE who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.

3 For Christ did not please himself, but, as it is written, “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

5 May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus,

6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Know It

Continuing in the admonishment that weak and strong Christians should live together in harmony, when speaking of the “weak,” Paul likely refers to those who feel compelled to observe prescribed rituals and dietary regulations. They were members of the faith community who were predominantly Jewish converts. Conversely, the “strong” were believers who, through faith, recognized they were not bound to the regulations of the Law; therefore, they served God with a greater degree of liberty. The majority of members who made up this group were Gentile converts.

Rather than pleasing themselves, the strong believer should aspire to please his or her neighbor for the neighbor’s good, with the hope that the selfless service demonstrated will result in the neighbor’s salvation. Of course, the greatest example of selfless service is evidenced in the person and work of Jesus

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Christ, as stated in verse three. Paul's intent was to show that if Christ, the Son of God, did not order His life to please Himself, how much more should believers forgo all personal advantage and follow the path of the Suffering Servant?

In verse five, Paul encourages like-mindedness toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, among the believers. While he is not implying that they should all be of one consciousness, he encourages his readers to strive for a unity of perspective, one that encompasses Jesus Christ as the ultimate model for Christian conduct. Paul's mission was to unite and strengthen the church for the future purpose of launching an outreach ministry to the regions beyond Rome.

His thinking was that as each member of the church drew closer to Christ, each would simultaneously draw closer to one another. This unity, fused by worship, would produce a symphony of praise wherein all of the people would glorify God with one mind and one voice. What a beautiful aspiration for us to continue to strive for today! Paul repeatedly hones in on this idea of Christianity being a family of many members, but all beloved by God.

2. One in Christ (Romans 15:7–12)

King James Version

7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

New Revised Standard Version

7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors

9 and that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles and sing praises to your name";

10 and again he says, "Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people";

11 and again, "Praise the Lord, all you gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him";

12 and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the gentiles; in him the gentiles shall hope."

Paul further counsels his readers to receive one another, just as Christ received them (v. 7). His admonishment was for them to treat each other with hospitality, respect, and kindness. He appealed to every believer's personal experience of being accepted by God's grace to serve as a guide for how they should accept each other. Paul wanted to assure that they would adopt an openness to embrace those who were different from them in love, without discrimination or judgment, and to regard each one as a brother or sister in Christ. Paul needed to be assured that they knew the Gospel has the power to bring diverse people together into one body that loves serves and supports one another, while furthering the Great Commission of Christ.

In support of the universal scope of God's redemptive work through Christ His Son, Paul cites four Old Testament Scriptures (vv. 10–12). The first is found in 2 Sam. 22:50 and then in Ps. 18:49. David vowed to praise God among the Gentiles, to sing in honor of His name. Israel was to be the instrument through whom God's redemptive work would extend to the Gentiles. The second is from Moses' great hymn celebrating God's victory over Pharaoh and his army: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people" (Deuteronomy 32:43). The third is from Ps. 117:1, where the writer called upon the Gentiles to lift their voices in praise to the Lord. Paul references this text in support of his position that the salvation of the Gentiles was on God's mind from the very beginning, rather than it being something He decided at a later time. Finally, Paul cites the well-known messianic promise from Isaiah 11. The Messiah will come as a root of Jesse and He who shall rise and rule the nations; and in Him, the Gentiles shall hope.

3. Hope Amid Difference (Romans 15:13)

King James Version

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

New Revised Standard Version

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's prayer for the believers at Rome was for God to fill them with all joy and peace, believing that they may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's admonition for his readers to learn to live together in unity is not an easy thing to do—certainly not something to be accomplished in the power of human ability. Joy and peace are supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and any hope they have of learning to love those of a different racial and ethnic background can only come through Him. Overall, Romans 15:13 is a prayer for the spiritual well-being of the believers, expressing the apostle's desire for them to experience the transformative power of hope, joy, and peace to change hearts and minds through their relationship with God.

Remember It

As believers, hope comes naturally; but as Christians, accepting those who are different than us does not. Unfortunately, Paul’s admonishment to the believers in Rome—to live in harmony, following the example of Christ who did not please Himself, but instead served others and endured suffering for God’s glory—seems to have gone unheeded in the modern day Christian church.

In many places, uniformity rather than unity is a more accurate description of the way the average evangelical church gathers together for worship. We must be a part of the change that is needed. We must go back to the biblical basics and throw out the religious fallacies that hinder us from unity.



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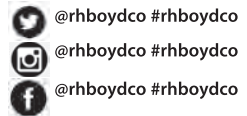
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Way Maker” by Maranda Curtis.

Define the hope that guides your commitment to God.

How do you accept those who believe and live differently than you? Do you have meaningful relationships with people who live/believe differently? Why or why not?

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DDR

Devotional Readings for June 17–23, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Hope in God Our Help	Whoever Has the Son Has Life	Boldness in Christ for Prayer	The Lord Is My Shepherd	Trust in God Our Salvation	Maturing in Christ	Trust God’s Promises
Psalm 42	1 John 5:1–13	1 John 5:14–21	Psalm 23	Isaiah 12	Hebrews 6:1–8	Hebrews 6:9–20

GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: HEBREWS 6:9–20

PRINT PASSAGE: HEBREWS 6:9–20

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
(Hebrews 6:19–20, KJV)

Intro

Faith in God is meant to be a practical resource for the believer, particularly in times of extreme challenge. This is because our faith is not only composed of belief rooted in hope, but it is also made up of our experiences being in relationship with God. To be sure, it is usually during the moments of our greatest difficulties that we find the most comfort in knowing that God can deliver us. This is what faith is: a constant knowing that God is trustworthy to fulfill His promise to protect, provide, and preserve. The trustworthiness of God is an overarching theme for the writer of the Hebrews.

The people to whom this letter was addressed were a group of Christians who had a Jewish background and were familiar with the Old Testament. They were facing persecution because of their faith, and thusly, the temptation to abandon their faith in Jesus Christ. They had ceased to grow as Christians and had begun to fall away from the faith. The readers of Hebrews may have been in danger of returning to Judaism or to mixing it with Christianity as a way to cope with the difficulties they were facing. The letter was probably written before 70 A.D., when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The exact location of the recipients and the author is uncertain, but some scholars suggest that they were in Palestine or Rome. Though there is much unknown about the author of Hebrews, the letter cannot be overestimated regarding the worth it has in understanding the nature of God, Christ, and the new covenant.

Think About It

Trusting God should be as natural for the believer as turning on the light switch and expecting the light to come on—well, when the light bill has been paid.

1. Warning Against Abandoning the Faith (Hebrews 6:9–12)

King James Version

BUT, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

New Revised Standard Version

EVEN though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation.

10 For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.

11 And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end,

12 so that you may not become sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Know It

Verse nine begins with the writer of Hebrews transitioning from giving a warning to his readers to encouraging them. He quickly assures the recipients of the letter that he did not regard the extreme description (vv. 4–8) of those who abandoned the faith as applicable to them. Instead, he was confident of better things concerning his readers, things that accompany salvation. The writer's confidence in them is qualified by their works and labor of love that they have shown toward God's name.

Their labor of love included concern for others, righteous living, and other demonstrations of godly virtues. According to verse 10, they have participated in providing ministry to the saints both in the past and now.

The writer's claim that God is not unjust highlights his position that in the face of such overwhelming moral evidence, it seemed inconceivable that God would overlook the works and the love that were evident products of His divine grace. Not that God has any obligation to the readers, nor did they have any claim on Him. Salvation is not granted by works; nevertheless, but God does not overlook those who do His will. God is faithful and righteous, and He will reward His people for the deeds of service and kindness done to others that are motivated by their love for God. This the writer includes as a way to encourage his Christians readers who were facing persecution and were tempted to abandon the faith.

2. God's Oath is Sure (Hebrews 6:13–15)

King James Version

13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself,
14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.
15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

New Revised Standard Version

13 When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,
14 saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you."
15 And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.

Abraham is mentioned in verse 13 to show the reliability of God's promises. God had confirmed His promise to Abraham with an oath. Genesis 22:16 claimed that God made a promise and supported it with His own personal oath. He could swear by no one greater than Himself to whom He could appeal in an oath. God's word by itself is a foundation strong enough for their trust to be grounded in. When God added an oath to His word, the addition made the promise even more certain.

Citing the quote, "surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you," the author of Hebrews is referring to God's oath to Abraham. In Genesis 12:2–3, and again in 17:6–8, God promised Abraham that His blessing would come upon the patriarch and his descendants. After Abraham responded with obedience to the command, God reinforced the earlier promise with an oath (Gen. 22:17–18). The promise to Abraham involved the multiplication of his offspring and the blessing of the nations of the world through his offspring.

Abraham endured the challenges of the trial concerning Isaac. He became an outstanding example of someone who patiently endured and obtained the promise. Abraham himself provided a pattern that the readers of Hebrews could profitably imitate. God's promise to Abraham was not fulfilled quickly or easily. In fact, it took such a long time that Abraham and Sarah at one point decided to take the promise into their own hands and manufacture a child through a hand-maiden. That decision turned out poorly. Mercifully, redeemed that situation (Genesis 16). Despite that error in judgment and impatience, God was faithful to His promise. He allowed Sarah to become pregnant and bear the child of promise herself. Millions of Jews are alive today because of God's faithfulness to Abraham. There is no doubting that God was true to His word. And if He was true to His word back then, we can be confident that He is still true to His word today. We know that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. What a blessing that we don't need to doubt God or His promises! He is faithful!

3. From Faith to Promise (Hebrews 6:16–20)

King James Version

16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

New Revised Standard Version

16 Humans, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute among them.

17 In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath,

18 so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us.

19 We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain,

20 where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The writer returns to discussing the significance of an oath in verse 16. According to him, human beings swear by the greater beings to back up their statements because the promise of a human being is not reliable enough for trust. To show more abundantly the unchanging nature of His counsel, God makes an oath to Abraham.

The ultimate fulfillment of that oath is found in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and the son of Abraham. Through Him, all nations are blessed because He died and rose again for our sins.

God's oath is based on two immutable things, according to verse 18: His word and His nature. His word is unchangeable in that it is impossible for God to lie. It is therefore true and reliable. God's word reveals His will and His works. It contains His promises and prophecies and testifies of His faithfulness and power. This is confirmed not just by His actions and signs, but also by the fulfillment of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. God's nature is unchangeable because it is perfect.

Remember It

God is trustworthy! For the believer, living in and with this awareness is the primary factor in determining one’s spiritual development. Disappointment, betrayal, and disloyalty are common realities among people. Being conditioned by the world to distrust everybody and anything, it is difficult to surrender ourselves completely to the care of God. This lesson, therefore, provides hope as to how we can strengthen our resolve to trust in God during times of trouble. First, consider what His word says. The Bible is a great resource in that it establishes the fundamental basis of God, His nature, and His promises. Second, we can take inventory of the experiences encountered with God.



Share It • Live It • Hear It




For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Jireh” by Elevation Worship and Maverick City.

Identify what might be some difficulties that prevents trusting in God.

How would you encourage another believer to trust in God? How would you encourage an unbeliever?

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DDR

Devotional Readings for June 24–30, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
My Heart Shall Not Fear	The Treasure of Knowing Christ	Jesus Makes a Difference	God Will Help the Fearful	The Wise Shall Shine Brightly	Encounter with Christ	A New Creature
Psalm 27	Philippians 3:1–14	Galatians 1:13–24	Isaiah 41:1–15	Daniel 12	Acts 9:1–9	Acts 26:1–11

HOPE IN GOD TRANSFORMS US

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ACTS 26:1–11

PRINT PASSAGE: ACTS 26:1–11

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors (Acts 26:6, KJV)

Intro

To be called into the ministry of the preached Gospel can be a daunting experience. It is an intimidating prospect for one to think that he or she has been chosen by God to speak on His behalf. While there are a number of challenges one would first need to acknowledge and address in accepting the call to preach, perhaps the greatest of them is our realized unworthiness to do the job. God and His word/voice is holy. We, on the other hand, are not—far from it. Any preacher is a perfectly imperfect vessel carrying within him or her a word from God for the people. When the light of God's word illuminates within, it radiates through the cracks of their imperfection so that those who see the light receive God's word with grace.

Preachers should offer the word with the hope that the light of God's word will transform both the messenger and those who have ears to hear. The intimidation they may feel is a constant reminder of the holy work God has called them to do. Each time they are faithful to do preach, they are transformed to look more like Him. The preacher's faithfulness to God and God's call is how hearers are able to grow our own faith.

The Apostle Paul is a great example of a broken vessel God used to spread His word. He was a preacher for God despite formerly killing God's people, all in the name of God. Yet, despite his past, God used Paul and his writings to establish the foundation for what eventually became our Christian tradition. Just as Paul's hope in God transformed him, our hope in God can also transform us.

Think About It

Since the substance of our hope is a relationship with God, the more intimate our relationship with God, the greater our hope.

1. Paul's Appeal (Acts 26:1–3)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

THEN Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

AGRIPPA said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself:

2 "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews,

3 because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently.

Know It

The first three verses in this chapter comprise a formal introduction to the speech Paul is about to give. Continuing in the solemnity of the occasion already set by the ceremonious arrival of the distinguished audience and Festus' presentation of the case against Paul (25:23–27), King Agrippa now formally grants Paul permission to speak on his own behalf. Paul then motioned to the audience to indicate the beginning of his address and stretched out his hand, like a Greek orator, maintaining this posture throughout his duration of his address.

Paul begins with a formal appeal to curry the favor with the king and the distinguished audience. He was pleased to appear before King Agrippa, as it was an essential factor for his dramatic appeal. As the Jewish king, Agrippa would be familiar with Jewish customs and points of dispute. He was also a thoroughly Hellenistic king who lived a Roman lifestyle. He was thus in the unique position to give his opinion on both the Jewish and Roman legal aspects of Paul's situation. Festus knew that, and was therefore eager for the king to hear Paul and give his opinion on the case. The Jews accused Paul of preaching a false doctrine; namely, that Jesus rose from the dead. Given this was a religious issue involving theological belief and practices, Festus knew he would be incompetent to deliberate such matters. Agrippa, however, was in a better position to judge.

NOTES:

2. Paul's Early Life (Acts 26:4–6)

King James Version

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers:

New Revised Standard Version

4 "All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem.

5 They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors,

Paul began his testimony (v. 4), by referring to his upbringing and the manner of life he lived from his youth, at first in his own nation and then in Jerusalem. He went on to share how he was reared among his own people, who knew how he lived according to the strictest sect of his religion as a Pharisee.

Paul shared all of this to impress upon King Agrippa that he was not unknown in Jewish circles. Indeed, he began his career as a high-profile Pharisee serving the Sanhedrin by persecuting and imprisoning Christians. He was "a Pharisee of the Pharisees," and as a Pharisee he believed in the hope of the promise made by God to "the fathers." It is for this, Paul says, that he was being judged; more specifically, it was Paul's belief in the resurrection. The hope of the promise is realized through Christ and His resurrection. But those Jews (Sadducean) who did not believe in the resurrection viewed Paul's preaching as heretical and subsequently brought charges against him.

Appealing to the Pharisees in the audience, Paul asks the rhetorical question: Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed in God's ability to resurrect the dead. Though they did not automatically believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, the Pharisees' belief in resurrection was consistent with Paul's argument. His claim was that since God is almighty and faithful, He can and will raise the dead, as He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. Paul asserted that he was not guilty of any crime, but rather, he was a faithful Jew who believed in the promises that God made to the ancestors of Israel.

In his speech, Paul is attempting to prove that he wasn't saying anything heretical; he was simply expounding on the very beliefs that were fundamental to the Jewish faith. He knew that Jesus was the key to everything the Jewish people were already doing, and the moral code they strived to live under. If he could make that connection, he would prove his innocence.

3. Hope in the Promise (Acts 26:7–11)

King James Version

7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

New Revised Standard Version

7 a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, Your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews!

8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

9 "Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death.

11 By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme, and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

Paul then cites the promise for the twelve tribes who earnestly serve God night and day (v. 7), to refer to the oath God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would bless them and their descendants. He promised that through their offspring all nations of the earth would be blessed. This promise was later confirmed by the prophets who foretold the coming of a Messiah, who would be a descendant of David and bring salvation to the world.

Paul says that the twelve tribes of Israel, which are the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons, were hoping to attain this promise, as they earnestly worshiped God. The twelve tribes were not literally present in Israel at that time; however, Paul uses this term to refer to the whole nation of Israel as God's chosen people who were waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. He concludes by explaining his history as a Pharisee who killed and imprisoned Christians to demonstrate that he was once blinded by the letter of the Law. He wants to clarify that he understands the plight of the Jewish people because he was once on that side of the aisle. But having found freedom, he wanted to free them as well.

Remember It

There is perhaps no greater conversion story in the Bible than that of Paul’s encounter with Christ. It served as the centerpiece of Paul’s missionary activity and theological development. As a result of seeing a blinding light, Paul fell to the ground. It was at that moment he heard the voice of the Savior. His conversion on the road to Damascus became ground zero for the Christian movement. Paul’s story shows us how hope in God can transform a person’s life. He went from being an enemy of God and His people to being a friend of God and His messenger. He was transformed from being a proud and violent man to being a humble and gentle man; from hopeless and lost to being hopeful and found.



Share It • Live It • Hear It

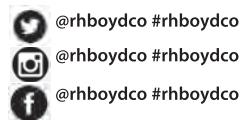
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider singing the hymn “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less.”

How do you define hope in your life?

How do you exhibit this hope in life?

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DDR

Devotional Readings for July 1–7, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Forgive Us Our Trespasses	An Evil King Seals Judah’s Fate	God’s People Are Cast into Exile	Boldly Approach the Throne of Grace	God Will Remember Sins No More	Joy Comes with the Morning	Hope in God’s Steadfast Love
Matthew 6:9–15	Jeremiah 52:1–15	Jeremiah 52:16–30	Hebrews 4:12–16	Hebrews 8:6–13	Psalms 30	Lamentations 3:1–24

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