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Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Acts 1.⁸⁻¹¹

⁸“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

⁹And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; ¹¹which also said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

Questionary

-
- ? When you imagine Jesus' ascension into heaven, what do you see in your mind?
 - ? When you imagine Jesus' return to earth, what do you see in your mind?

Acts 2.¹⁻⁴

¹And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Questionary

- ? What is the significance/meaning of “a sound...as of a rushing mighty wind” and “cloven tongues like as of fire”?
- ? How are they symbols of God’s presence in the Church?
- ? What “seasons of Pentecost” have you experienced in your own life in which you could understand and speak in ways that were beyond your natural abilities?

Acts 2.¹⁴⁻²¹

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, “Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet a Joel;

¹⁷And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God,

I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh:
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams:

¹⁸And on my servants and on my handmaidens

I will pour out in those days of my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy:

¹⁹And I will shew wonders in heaven above,

and signs in the earth beneath;
blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

²⁰The sun shall be turned into darkness,

and the moon into blood,
before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

²¹And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Questionary

This reading is the first in a series entitled, “The Sermons of Acts,” in which we examine the earliest public Christian sermons as reported in the Book of Acts. This reading is the first of four readings that examines the first recorded sermon (Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶).

1. The very first recorded Christian sermon begins with an Old Testament quotation from the Book of Joel (2.²⁸⁻³²). Before this short sermon of twenty-three verses is over, Peter will have quoted two more times from the Old Testament.
 - ? What, if anything, does it suggest to you that the very first Christian sermon began with a scripture quotation and followed it up with two more?
 - ? How central to your gospel understanding and your perception of the world around you are the scriptures?
2. In quoting Joel, Peter asserts that God intends to “pour out” His spirit “upon all flesh, young and old, male and female, free and enslaved alike.”
 - ? What is the significance of this message of inclusion in Peter’s day?
 - ? How has the Gospel of Jesus Christ been an ever-expanding kingdom of inclusiveness?
3. In the second part of his quotation of Joel, Peter speaks of “wonders in heaven” and “signs in the earth.” He mentions,
 - blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:
 - the sun shall be turned into darkness,
 - and the moon into blood
 - ? What comes to mind when you read of these particular “wonders” and “signs”?
 - ? How do they relate to the “signs” and “wonders” with which God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt?
 - “And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders... (Dt. 26.⁸)

“And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, “What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, “We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: and the Lord shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers” (Dt. 6.²⁰⁻²³).

- ? What was the ultimate purpose and result of the “signs” and “wonders” that God performed in and against Egypt?

When we think and talk of “signs” and “wonders,” especially of those of the latter days, we tend to focus on the nature of “signs” and “wonders” rather than their purposes.

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that God’s “signs” and “wonders” are intended to lead individuals and groups out from under the tyranny of superior individuals, groups, and nations (It is unlikely that “Israelites” were the only group Egypt dominated and enslaved. Given the economic and cultural weakening impacts of the “signs” and “wonders” performed against Egypt, it is likely that other groups also found liberation from Egyptian tyranny.)?
- ? What do you think and feel when we suggest that God’s latter day “signs” and “wonders,” whatever their nature, are intended to liberate individuals and groups from the tyranny of the kingdoms of this world and their unjust reign?

Acts 2.²²⁻²⁴

²²Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: ²³him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: ²⁴whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Questionary

This reading is the second in a series entitled, “The Sermons of Acts,” in which we examine the earliest public Christian sermons as reported in the Book of Acts. This reading is the second of four readings that examine the first recorded sermon (Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶).

1. Peter speaks of Jesus as “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the significance of the fact that God’s “approval” of Jesus is seen in the “miracles and wonders and signs” he did and showed?
 - ? What “miracles and wonders and signs” performed and displayed by Jesus have been most meaningful to you.
 - ? What “miracles and wonders and signs” has Jesus performed in your life?
2. In the first reading in which we examined the first part of Peter’s sermon (2.¹⁴⁻²¹), we noted Peter’s use of a quotation from Joel in which Peter reminded his audience that God works by means of signs and wonders to deliver his people—the signs and wonders of the Exodus being the classic and foundational example. He then speaks of God working through Jesus by means of “miracles and wonders and signs.”
 - ? How is the deliverance Jesus brought into the lives of those he encountered during his earthly ministry like the deliverance God brought about through Moses?
 - ? We know what signs and wonders God worked to deliver Israel from Egyptian oppression and bondage. What are some of the signs and wonders Jesus used during his earthly minister to deliver individuals from various forms of personal oppression and bondage?
 - ? As you consider Jesus’ miracles as recorded in the Gospels, fFrom what types of personal oppression and bondage did Jesus deliver those in whose lives he worked by means of “miracles and wonders and signs”?
3. Peter speaks of Jesus “being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God” and of the “wicked hands [that] have crucified and slain” him.
 - ? Ultimately, who killed Jesus and who bears the responsible for his death—God or humans? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Why does God’s “fore-knowledge” not imply that he is responsible for Jesus’ death?
 - ? Why is it important to recognize that humans and human wickedness are responsible for and bear responsibility for Jesus’ death and not God?
4. Speaking of Jesus and his resurrection, Peter says, “whom God hath raised up.”
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection resulting from God’s, presumably, his Father’s efforts, labors, and power?

Acts 2.²⁵⁻³¹

²⁵For David speaketh concerning him,

“I foresaw the Lord always before my face,
for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

²⁶therefore did my heart rejoice,
and my tongue was glad;

moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:
²⁷because thou wilt not leave my soul in a hell,
neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

²⁸Thou hast made known to me the ways of life;
thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”

²⁹Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. ³⁰Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; ³¹he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

Q

uestionary

This reading is the third in a series entitled, “The Sermons of Acts,” in which we examine the earliest public Christian sermons as reported in the Book of Acts. This reading is the third of four readings that examine the first recorded sermon (Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶).

1. During our examination of the first 8 verses (14-21) of this sermon, we considered the meaning and implications of Peter’s beginning his sermon by quoting the Old Testament (Joel 2.²⁸⁻³²) and then of his use of two more quotations from the Old Testament (vs. 24-28... Ps. 16.⁸⁻¹¹ and vs. 34-35... Ps. 110.¹). That’s 10 Old Testament verses quoted in a 23-verse sermon!
 - ? We ask you again to consider: To what extent do the scriptures shape the way you think, the way you live, and the way you view the world around you?
 - ? To what extent do you utilize the scriptures as you try to communicate your thoughts, your manner of life, and how you respond to the world around you?
 - ? What could you do to make the scriptures more central to your life, a more profoundly shaping influence upon you, and a more often used tool as you teach others?
 - ? How do you feel about Peter’s heavy use of the Old Testament to provide evidence for Jesus’ Messiahship and the legitimacy of the movement he commenced because of him?
 - ? How do you respond to the fact that the Book of Psalms is the New Testament’s most frequently quoted book of all the Old Testament books and is the book most often quoted by Jesus?
 - ? What experiences and insights have you had with and from the Book of Psalms?
2. It is relatively obvious how verse 27 can be applied to Jesus of Nazareth.
 - ? But, how about the other verses from Ps. 16? Do you see instances when they, too, could be applied to Jesus’ life? What instances come to your mind?
3. Accepting the Davidic authorship of the 16th Psalm, Peter refers to David as both “patriarch” and “prophet.”
 - ? What do these two titles mean to you in terms of David?
 - ? Have you thought of David as a “prophet”? Why do you answer as you do?

Acts 2.³²⁻³⁶

³²This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. ³³Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. ³⁴For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself,

The Lord said unto my Lord,
Sit thou on my right hand,
³⁵Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Questionary

This reading is the fourth in a series entitled, “The Sermons of Acts,” in which we examine the earliest public Christian sermons as reported in the Book of Acts. This reading is the last of four readings that examine the first recorded sermon (Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶).

1. Peter began his sermon by reminding his audience that Joel had prophesied that God would “pour out in those days of my [God’s] spirit.” In this reading, Peter informs his audience that having been resurrected and enthroned at the right hand of God, Jesus had “received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost” and that as a consequence, disciples were experiencing the benefits of the Holy Spirit.
 - ? What role does Jesus play in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit?

John the Baptist was informed that “Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (Jn. 1.³³).

 - ? How does this support and enhance what Peter teaches about the role Jesus plays in our receiving the Holy Spirit?
2. This is the first of many times that the Book of Acts speaks of Jesus being seated at the right hand of God.
 - ? What is the significance of the “right hand”?
 - ? What does Jesus do at the right hand of God?
 - ? What is the significance in your life of Jesus being exalted on the right hand of God?
 - ? What does he do for you there?
3. According to the quotation from Psalm 110, Jesus is to remain seated at God’s right hand until He has made Jesus’ foes his “footstool.”
 - ? What do you envision when you imagine a footstool before Jesus’ throne?
 - ? What do you envision when you imagine and people/ nations who oppose God and Jesus being made a footstool?
 - ? What does it mean to you that God’s enemies are “footstools” under Jesus’ feet?
 - ? How do you feel about this imagery?
4. Peter refers to Jesus as “Both Lord and Christ.”
 - ? What do these two titles suggest to you?
 - ? How does Jesus play the role of “Lord” in your life?
 - ? How does Jesus play the role of “Christ” in your life?

Acts 2.⁴²⁻⁴⁷

⁴²And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴And all that believed were together, and had all things common; ⁴⁵and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. ⁴⁶And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, ⁴⁷praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Questionary

-
- ? It is of tremendous interest to see what the very first generation of Jesus' followers felt was most central to their faith. What central principles do you pick out of Peter's statement?

Acts 2.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵— just scripture

⁴⁴And all that believed were together, and had all things common; ⁴⁵and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Questionary

- ? Today, I would suggest that the reader spend a little time examining the Law of Consecration as it is heavily discussed in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Acts 3.²⁻⁸

²And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; ³who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. ⁴And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, "Look on us."

⁵And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. ⁶Then Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

⁷And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. ⁸And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

Questionary

- ? What do you see in your mind, and how do you feel in your heart when you read that after being healed the lame man entered the temple "walking, and leaping, and praising God"?
- ? Think about "worship." When is it appropriate to worship "in solemnity," and when "with exuberance"—he "leaped"!?

Acts 3.¹²⁻¹⁸

¹²And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, “Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. ¹⁴But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; ¹⁵and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. ¹⁶And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. ¹⁷And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

Questionary

This reading is the fifth in a series entitled, “The Sermons of Acts,” in which we examine the earliest public Christian sermons as reported in the Book of Acts. In our first four readings, we examined the first recorded sermon found in Acts Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶. This reading is the first of two in which we examine the second recorded sermon as found in Acts 3.¹²⁻²⁶.

1. The sermon follows immediately upon Peter’s and John’s healing of a man at the temple. Take a moment to read the account of the healing in Acts 2.¹⁻¹¹.
 - ? How do you feel about Peter when you hear him confess, “Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?”?
 - ? What other ministers of God and scriptural passages come to mind where there is an attempt to deflect attention from the minister to God?

Peter goes further in deflecting the audience’s attention away from him and toward God/ Jesus. “And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”

- ? Why, do you feel, is it so important that human beings who act in the name of God to deflect attention from themselves and be clear that power and holiness belong only to God?
2. As part of his attempt to deflect attention from himself and point his audience’s mind to the power and holiness of God, Peter testifies to the truth that “God hath raised [Jesus] from the dead.”
 - ? What is the relationship between God’s power in raising of Jesus from the dead and our ability to tap into that same power?
 - ? How does the following passage connect God’s power of resurrection with the power He exercises in our lives?

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and *what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church...*” (Eph. 1.¹⁷⁻²²).

- ? How do you feel about having access to the same power by which God 1) rose Jesus from the dead, 2) “set him at His own right hand,” 3) placed him “above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion,” 4) “put all things under his feet,” and 5) “gave him to be the head over all things”?

3. Peter does not attempt to lessen the guilt or sooth the conscience of his audience. He makes repeated accusations.

“Ye delivered up [Jesus], and denied him in the presence of Pilate.”

“Ye denied the Holy One and the Just”

“Ye... desired a murderer to be granted unto you”

“Ye... killed the Prince of life”

- ? How do you feel about Peter’s willingness to confront his audience like this with repeated accusations of guilt?
- ? Why, do you feel, did Peter feel to do this?
- ? What do you think, feel, and learn when you hear Peter refer to Jesus’ death as a “murder”?
- ? How do you feel about making God responsible for Jesus’ death when you hear Peter refer to it as a “murder”?

4. Peter suggests that God had foreseen Jesus’ rejection and murder and had revealed that rejection and murder to prophets, “Those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.”

- ? Does the fact that God foresaw Jesus’ rejection and murder mean that he desired, required, condoned, or is responsible for the death?
- ? How can Peter assign blame to the human’s who killed Jesus if it was His desire that Jesus be killed?

Acts 3.¹⁹⁻²⁶

¹⁹Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: ²¹whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

²²For Moses truly said unto the fathers, 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. ²³And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.' ²⁴Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

²⁵Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, 'And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.' ²⁶Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Questionary

This reading is the sixth in a series entitled, "The Sermons of Acts," in which we examine the earliest public Christian sermons as reported in the Book of Acts. In our first four readings, we examined the first recorded sermon found in Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶. This reading is the second of two in which we examine the second recorded sermon as found in Acts 3.¹²⁻²⁶.

1. The first half of Peter's sermon at the temple was dominated by Peter's attempt to divert attention away from himself and John after they had healed a lame man at the temple and pointing his listeners' mind to Jesus.
 - ? As you read this second half of his sermon, is there a theme or principle that runs through it? If so, what theme or principle do you find?
2. Peter admonishes his listeners to "Repent ye therefore, and be converted."
 - ? What does it mean to you to "repent" and "be converted"?
 - ? How are they different?

The Greek word translated as, "repent," means literally, "to change one's mind or view." The Greek word translated as, "convert," means "to turn to [or against]," "to change."

- ? Does this alter or enhance your understanding of repentance and conversion? If so, how?
- ? What do you think it meant to his original audience to "repent" and "be converted"?
- ? What role does the "therefore" play? How does it connect Peter's admonition for a change of mind and a turning to?

We can think of repentance and conversion in a big, universal way, but Peter's "therefore" might lead us to think in more restricted and local terms.

- ? What would their more local meaning be?
 - ? Peter has just described how Jesus was rejected and killed. Because he was rejected and killed by some, others carry on rejecting him, assuming that his rejection and murder was somehow justified. How would you feel about hearing in Peter's "repent" a more restricted and local meaning of "change your mind and attitude about Jesus"?
 - ? How would you feel about hearing in Peter's "be converted" a more restricted and local meaning of "turn to Jesus"?
3. Peter offers as a reason for changing their mind about Jesus and turning to him, "that your sins may be blotted out?"
 - ? What role do your attitudes about Jesus and your willingness to turn to him play in our own forgiveness of sins?

4. Peter speaks of “the times of refreshing”?
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What more do you think about “the times of refreshing” when we note that the Greek word means “to relax, to rest, to feel relief”?
 - ? What is the significance of this “relief” coming “from the presence of the Lord”?
5. Peter also speaks of “the times of restitution of all things”?
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What does it mean to “renew” or “reconstitute,” or “make as new”?
 - ? What does it mean that you, as part of all things, will be “renewed,” refreshed,” “made like new”?
 - ? The opposite of “new” is “old.” The opposite of “fresh” is “stale, rotten, worn, used, old.”
 - ? What do these antonyms of “fresh” add to your appreciation of the meaning of your being “refreshed”?
 - ? We often speak of the world being “renewed.” What does this mean to you? How is the world different before and after this “renewal”?
6. Peter testifies that God “raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”
 - ? How does Jesus “turn” us “away” from our “iniquities”?
 - ? What role do his teachings play in this?
 - ? What role does his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension play in this?

Acts 4.⁸⁻¹²

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them,
“Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, ⁹if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; ¹⁰be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. ¹¹This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. ¹²Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Questionary

This reading is the seventh in a series entitled, “The Sermons of Acts,” in which we examine the earliest public Christian sermons as reported in the Book of Acts. In our first four readings, we examined the first recorded sermon found in Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶. In the fifth and sixth readings, we examined the second recorded sermon found in Acts 3.¹²⁻²⁶.

We use the word, “sermon” loosely here, as it is more a short statement of defense against unjust accusations. Like the second sermon, found in Acts 3.¹²⁻²⁶, these words have Peter and John’s healing of a lame man in the temple as their context. Whereas that second sermon was presented at the temple where the miracle took place, this sermon was delivered in an unknown location before a small and unofficial tribunal of prosecuting high priests.

1. As he did in his temple sermon, when Peter acknowledges the miracle, he deflects attention from himself to Jesus.
 - ? How does he do this?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the consistence with which Peter deflects attention from himself to Jesus?
2. Peter speaks of “the impotent man,” and of his being “made whole” through Jesus’ intervention.
 - ? How is the man symbolic of all of us in both his individual impotency and his wholeness through Christ?

Paul uses the imagery of Abraham’s sexual impotency and Sara’s menopausal infertility as symbols for all of our spiritual impotency. Speaking of Abraham, Paul says,

“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.’ 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 Sara’s womb: 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...

Now it was not written for his sake alone... but for us also...” (Rom. 4.^{18-21, 23-24}).

- ? What makes this imagery such an effective symbol of our spiritual impotency?
3. In his temple sermon, Peter explicitly laid the blame for Jesus’ murder on his listeners. Now, using different language, he also lays the blame on the religious leaders. Jesus was “the stone which was set at nought of you builders.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate Peter’s boldness in making such a direct accusation?
 4. Finally, Peter asserts “¹²Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”
 - ? How do you feel about this assertion?

Acts 5.²⁹⁻³²

²⁹Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. ³¹Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give [to gift, endow, grant] repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Questionary

Today's is the 2nd reading for Lent/ Easter 2024

After being hauled into prison and then miraculously rescued from that same prison, Peter was forced to appear before the Jewish Council and explain why, after it had “straitly command[ed] you that ye should not teach in this [Jesus’] name,” he was found again preaching the good news about Jesus in the temple (See Acts 5.²⁸). Today’s reading contains Peter’s reply to the council’s mystified and indignant inquest.

1. Peter makes an assertion—one that is repeated often in Acts—that God, the Father “raised up Jesus.”
 - ? We often say that Jesus had power in himself to raise himself from the dead. So, how do you understand Peter’s assertion?
 - ? If we assume that Peter meant to say that Father gave Jesus the power to raise himself, why did he not say it that way?
 - ? What other role might Father have played in Jesus’ rising from the dead other than simply bestowing power to raise himself?
 - ? The Psalmist tells of a time when he was rescued from Sh^ol, which is death/ hell. How might it relate to today’s reading?

“The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
and the Highest gave his voice;
hail stones and coals of fire.
Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them;
and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.
Then the channels of waters were seen,
and the foundations of the world were discovered
at thy rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.
He sent from above, he took me,
he drew me out of many waters.
He delivered me from my strong enemy,
and from them which hated me:
for they were too strong for me” (18.¹³⁻¹⁷).

2. Peter says that God “exalted” Jesus in order to “give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Here, to “give” means to “gift” or “grant,” or “endow.” We often speak of Jesus “giving” or “granting” forgiveness of sins. We see it as a gift bestowed.
 - ? But what do you think and feel when you consider that even the ability to repent is not something we “invent” but was “gifted” to us by God?
 - ? What does this truth do to our occasional pride at having pulled ourselves up by the bootstraps to repent?

Amulek teaches that Jesus “bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance” (Alma 34.¹⁵).

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that without Jesus’ Atonement, even if you were inclined to repent you would be unable to muster the faith to do so?
- ? What, do you suppose, are the chances that you would want to repent if Jesus had not come to

- earth to reveal his Atonement?
- ? In the final analysis, who is it that is the initiator of repentance... God or us? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What does knowing that God is the initiator of repentance impact the way you think of repentance?
 - ? We ask, again, what does the truth that Amulek reveals do to our occasional pride at having been “insightful enough to repent”?
3. Speaking of Jesus, the KJV reads: “Him hath God exalted *with* his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.” Some translations read “Him hath God exalted *to* his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior.”
- ? What would be the significance of these two different readings?
 - God exalted Jesus with his right hand.
 - God exalted Jesus to his right hand.
 - ? What would be the significance of and importance to you to have Jesus sitting exalted on “the right hand of God”?

Acts 7.²⁻⁸

²And he said, ‘Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, ³and said unto him, ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.’

⁴Then came he out of the land of the Chaldæans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. ⁵And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. ⁶And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. ⁷‘And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge,’ said God: ‘and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.’ ⁸And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

Questionary

This reading continues our series on “The First Christian Sermons as found in Acts.” It is the 1st of 7 readings that examine a sermon that Stephen—one of seven men assigned the task of overseeing the distribution of assistance to poor believing widows and, likely, other poor members—delivered in a Jewish “council” that investigated him for blasphemy, and recorded in Acts 7.²⁻⁵³. Acts 6.¹¹⁻¹⁴ reports on this council.

- “Then they suborned men, which said, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.’ And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, ‘This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: and we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.’”
- ? These verses make it sound as though witnesses were lying about Stephen’s attitude toward the temple and the Law of Moses. As you read this sermon, consider what Stephen does feel and say about the temple and the Law and how they might sound to orthodox Jews.
 - ? How do the opening words of Stephen’s sermon found in today’s reading address the charges brought against him?
 - ? In each reading, we will ask about Stephen’s mood or tone as he delivers his message—impassioned? dispassionate? accusatory? erudite/ didactic? instructive? angry? sad? disappointed? etc. What is his mood or tone in this reading?
1. Stephen quotes the words God spoke to Abraham as follows: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.”
 - ? Stephen might simply be narrating a historical encounter. However, Stephen might also see this divine command as applicable to his own life and the Christian experience. How might these word apply to Stephen and the Christian experience?
 - ? How does God call us out of our comfortable, but often false traditions and surroundings?
 2. Stephen reminds his audience that God “gave [Abraham] none inheritance...no, not so much as to set his foot on” and that for much of his life, Abraham “had no child.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the man, whose descendants were to “be a blessing” to the world, himself lived much of his life without the blessings of land and family that most see as signs of divine blessedness?

Speaking of Abraham, Paul taught

“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.’ 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 Sara's womb: 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. 18-21).

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider Abraham's patient faith in God and hope for the future?
- ? What sorts of challenges do you face in your life that require patience, faith, and hope?
- ? How does Abraham's example help and strengthen your commitment to endure the absence of anticipated blessings.

Acts 7.⁹⁻¹⁶

⁹And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, ¹⁰and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

¹¹Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. ¹²But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. ¹³And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. ¹⁴Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. ¹⁵So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, ¹⁶and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

Questionary

This reading continues our series on “The First Christian Sermons as found in Acts.” It is the 2nd of 7 readings that examine a sermon that Stephen—one of seven men assigned the task of overseeing the distribution of assistance to poor believing widows and, likely, other poor members—delivered in a Jewish “council” that investigated him for blasphemy, and recorded in Acts 7.²⁻⁵³. Acts 6.¹¹⁻¹⁴ reports on this council.

“Then they suborned men, which said, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.’ And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, ‘This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: and we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.’”

- ? These verses make it sound as though witnesses were lying about Stephen’s attitude toward the temple and the Law of Moses. As you read this sermon, consider what Stephen does feel and say about the temple and the Law and how they might sound to orthodox Jews.
 - ? In each reading, we will ask about Stephen’s mood or tone as he delivers his message—impassioned? dispassionate? accusatory? erudite/ didactic? instructive? angry? sad? disappointed? etc. What is his mood or tone in this reading?
1. As suggested in our first reading from this sermon (vss. 2-8), Steven’s recapitulation of Israelite history is about more than history. It is also meant as a kind of type of the present conditions as Stephens views them.
 - ? How does Stephen’s narration about how “the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt” relate to the Jews’ rejection of Jesus?
 - ? How do you feel about Stephen’s narration of this part of Israel’s history being used as a criticism of Israel and of its present conditions?
 2. After telling how Joseph’s brothers rejected and turned on Joseph, Stephen narratives how Joseph with his position in Egypt was able to deliver Israel from famine.
 - ? How are Joseph and Jesus similar in the benefits they bring to Israel?

Acts 7.¹⁷⁻²⁹

¹⁷But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, ¹⁸till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. ¹⁹The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. ²⁰In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: ²¹and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. ²²And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

²³And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. ²⁴And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: ²⁵for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. ²⁶And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, 'Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?'

²⁷But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, 'Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?' ²⁸Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

Questionary

This reading continues our series on "The First Christian Sermons as found in Acts." It is the 3rd of 7 readings that examine a sermon that Stephen—one of seven men assigned the task of overseeing the distribution of assistance to poor believing widows and, likely, other poor members—delivered in a Jewish "council" that investigated him for blasphemy, and recorded in Acts 7.²⁻⁵³. Acts 6.¹¹⁻¹⁴ reports on this council.

"Then they suborned men, which said, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.' And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, 'This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: and we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.'"

- ? These verses make it sound as though witnesses were lying about Stephen's attitude toward the temple and the Law of Moses. As you read this sermon, consider what Stephen does feel and say about the temple and the Law and how they might sound to orthodox Jews.
 - ? In each reading, we will ask about Stephen's mood or tone as he delivers his message—impassioned? dispassionate? accusatory? erudite/ didactic? instructive? angry? sad? disappointed? etc. What is his mood or tone in this reading?
1. Steven reminds us that the Egyptians used infanticide to control and dominate Israel.
 - ? What thoughts do you have when you consider this extreme form of coercion?
 2. Steven also reminds us that an Egyptian woman raised Moses, a foreigner's child, as her own son.
 - ? How do you feel about this woman and the example she set?
 3. Steven also reminds his audience that Moses acted to help a man oppressed and mistreated by another?
 - ? What does this suggest to you about Moses' character?
 - ? Is this only about Moses defending "one of his own" or is it indicative of a more diverse regard for justice and fair treatment? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How does the fact that Moses later tried to defend one Israelite from another Israelite influence your response to the proceeding question?
 - ? What do you make of Moses' use of violence and homicide to stop the oppression?

4. When Moses later defended one Israelite against another, the offender replied, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?”
 - ? How might this response to Moses stand, for Steven, as a kind of representation of the Judaism of his day and its response to all the prophets, including Jesus, who demanded just treatment of others—Israelite and foreigner alike?
5. The Israelite who was mistreating his fellow Israelite responded to Moses’ intervention with “Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?”
 - ? What, do you think, might have been the impact of this question upon Moses?
 - ? From this response, Moses knew that his homicide was known. But could the question also have made Moses question the use of violence... how far did it go and how many would need to be killed for oppression to end? Why do you answer as you do?

Acts 7.³⁰⁻³⁶

³⁰And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. ³¹When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, ³²saying, “I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. ³³Then said the Lord to him, “Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. ³⁴I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.”

³⁵This Moses whom they refused, saying, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge? The same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Questionary

This reading continues our series on “The First Christian Sermons as found in Acts.” It is the 4th of 7 readings that examine a sermon that Stephen—one of seven men assigned the task of overseeing the distribution of assistance to poor believing widows and, likely, other poor members—delivered in a Jewish “council” that investigated him for blasphemy, and recorded in Acts 7.²⁻⁵³. Acts 6.¹¹⁻¹⁴ reports on this council.

“Then they suborned men, which said, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.’ And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, ‘This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: and we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.’”

- ? These verses make it sound as though witnesses were lying about Stephen’s attitude toward the temple and the Law of Moses. As you read this sermon, consider what Stephen does feel and say about the temple and the Law and how they might sound to orthodox Jews.
 - ? In each reading, we will ask about Stephen’s mood or tone as he delivers his message—impassioned? dispassionate? accusatory? erudite/ didactic? instructive? angry? sad? disappointed? etc. What is his mood or tone in this reading?
1. Upon seeing the burning bush and then hearing God’s voice, Moses “trembled, and durst not behold.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read of Moses’ hesitancy, perhaps fear of looking at and seeing God?
 - ? Why, do you think, would Moses react like this?
 - ? Is this a reaction you see yourself having at the presence of God? Why do you answer as you do?

Consider the Psalmist’s feelings about being in the presence of God.

“One thing have I desired of the LORD,
that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to enquire in his temple...

When thou saidst, “Seek ye my face;”
my heart said unto thee, “Thy face, LORD, will I seek.”

Hide not thy face far from me..." (Psalm 27.^{4, 8-9}).

- ? How do you explain the apparent difference between Moses' response to God's presence and that of the Psalmist?
 - ? Which best captures your own feelings about being in the presence of God?
2. God's message to Moses was, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them."
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the infinite God, ruler of the universe takes notice of the discomfort of a small and insignificant group?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the infinite God, ruler of the universe not only takes notice of human suffering, but actually acts to alleviate it?
 - ? What groups need God's intervention today?
 - ? How has God acted in your life to show his awareness of affliction and then acted to address it?
3. Earlier in his sermon, Stephen reminded his audience that the initial responses to Moses was negative and dismissive. He reminds them again in this reading by quoting the original response to Moses: "Who made thee a ruler and a judge?"
- ? In this sermon, what is the impact of repeating this inclination to derect and dismiss Moses?

Acts 7.³⁷⁻⁴¹

³⁷This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.”

³⁸This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: ³⁹to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, ⁴⁰saying unto Aaron, “Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”

⁴¹And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Questionary

This reading continues our series on “The First Christian Sermons as found in Acts.” It is the 5th of 7 readings that examine a sermon that Stephen—one of seven men assigned the task of overseeing the distribution of assistance to poor believing widows and, likely, other poor members—delivered in a Jewish “council” that investigated him for blasphemy, and recorded in Acts 7.²⁻⁵³. Acts 6.¹¹⁻¹⁴ reports on this council.

“Then they suborned men, which said, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.’ And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, ‘This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: and we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.’”

- ? These verses make it sound as though witnesses were lying about Stephen’s attitude toward the temple and the Law of Moses. As you read this sermon, consider what Stephen does feel and say about the temple and the Law and how they might sound to orthodox Jews.
 - ? In each reading, we will ask about Stephen’s mood or tone as he delivers his message—impassioned? dispassionate? accusatory? erudite/ didactic? instructive? angry? sad? disappointed? etc. What is his mood or tone in this reading?
1. In verse 37, Stephen references Deuteronomy 18.15-18, and God’s promise to send others to do as Moses does.
 - ? What does Stephen mention in this reading as being something Moses did?
 - ? In what ways was Jesus like Moses and act similar to him?

In the referenced passage, we are made to understand that Moses, and, by implication, prophets who would follow him, received oracles because the people were fearful to receive their own revelation:

“Let me not a hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.”

- ? How do you feel about the people’s attitude and fear?
 - ? Do you share this fear of personal revelation and encounter with God? Why do you answer as you do?
2. Steven seems to have partaken of the tradition that an angel delivered most of the Law of Moses to Moses: “This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina...”
 - ? How do you respond to the fact that there were different traditions about this and many other occurrences in Israel’s history?
 - ? What different traditions are found in your faith tradition?

3. Stephen reminds his audience that “our fathers would not obey [Moses], but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt...”
 - ? Looking back at previous portions of Steven’s sermon, how many times is it, now, that 4 Stephen has reminded his audience of their fathers’ rebelliousness and disinclination to trust Moses?
 - ? What is the impact of this repetition?
 - ? What, do you think, is Stephen’s intent in coming back over and over again to Israel’s recalcitrance?

4. Stephen reminds his audience that as part of their rejection of Moses and God the Israelite made and worshipped a gold bull. In speaking of their worship of this bull, Stephen says that they “rejoiced in the works of their own hands.” In this perspective, idolatry is the worship of and inordinate appreciation for one’s own skills, abilities, achievements, acquisitions, possessions, etc.
 - ? What skills, abilities, achievements, acquisitions can serve as idols in today’s world and in your life?

Acts 7.⁴²⁻⁵⁰

⁴²Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, “O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? ⁴³Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.”

⁴⁴Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. ⁴⁵Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; ⁴⁶who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

⁴⁷But Solomon built him an house. ⁴⁸Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, ⁴⁹“Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰Hath not my hand made all these things?

Questionary

This reading continues our series on “The First Christian Sermons as found in Acts.” It is the 6th of 7 readings that examine a sermon that Stephen—one of seven men assigned the task of overseeing the distribution of assistance to poor believing widows and, likely, other poor members—delivered in a Jewish “council” that investigated him for blasphemy, and recorded in Acts 7.²⁻⁵³. Acts 6.¹¹⁻¹⁴ reports on this council.

“Then they suborned men, which said, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.’ And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, ‘This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: and we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.’”

- ? These verses make it sound as though witnesses were lying about Stephen’s attitude toward the temple and the Law of Moses. As you read this sermon, consider what Stephen does feel and say about the temple and the Law and how they might sound to orthodox Jews.
 - ? In each reading, we will ask about Stephen’s mood or tone as he delivers his message—impassioned? dispassionate? accusatory? erudite/ didactic? instructive? angry? sad? disappointed? etc. What is his mood or tone in this reading?
1. In today’s reading, Stephen reviews the early history of Israel’s tabernacle and pre-exilic temple.
 - ? What do you learn about the temple and Israel’s early cultic (not in a pejorative sense, but its real sense) history from this review?

In verses 42 and 43, Stephen suggests that Israel had resorted to idolatry and idolatrous sacrificial systems from its earliest stages to its latest stages.

? What evidence do you find in the Old Testament for this assertion?

Stephen speaks of Moses’ tabernacle right along side Israel’s early idolatry

? What evidence do you find in the Old Testament that even this revealed tabernacle and its ordinances, and then the pre-exilic temple had been corrupted?

2. In verses 47-50, Stephen discusses Solomon’s temple building project.
 - ? What does he suggest about Solomon’s temple and God’s feeling toward it?
 - ? What are the implications of God’s questions to Solomon about the building of the temple?
 - Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me?
 - What is the place of my rest?

God essentially asked, Solomon, “Will *you* build *me*, creator of all things and dweller in heaven, a house? Isn’t it more that *I* will build *you* a house?”

- ? How do you feel about God’s implied charge of hubris on the part of Solomon?
- ? What is the force of the “howbeit” in Stephen’s “Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands”?
- ? At the very least, Stephen seems to possess skepticism about attitudes about the temple that were current in his time.
- ? How do you feel about his temple skepticism?
- ? How does Stephen’s skepticism of the temple compare with that of the Hebrew prophets?

Acts 7.⁵¹⁻⁵³

⁵¹Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. ⁵² Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: ⁵³who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Questionary

This reading continues our series on “The First Christian Sermons as found in Acts.” It is the 7th of 7 readings that examine a sermon that Stephen—one of seven men assigned the task of overseeing the distribution of assistance to poor believing widows and, likely, other poor members—delivered in a Jewish “council” that investigated him for blasphemy, and recorded in Acts 7.²⁻⁵³. Acts 6.¹¹⁻¹⁴ reports on this council.

“Then they suborned men, which said, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.’ And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, ‘This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: and we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.’”

? These verses make it sound as though witnesses were lying about Stephen’s attitude toward the temple and the Law of Moses. As you read this sermon, consider what Stephen does feel and say about the temple and the Law and how they might sound to orthodox Jews.

1. In each of our readings of Stephen’s sermon, we have asked the reader to consider Stephen’s mood or tone to consider whether it felt impassioned, or dispassionate, accusatory, erudite/didactic, instructive, angry, sad, disappointed, etc.

? We ask again, then, what mood or tone do you find in this reading?

? What words or phrases in the reading lead you to feel this mood or tone?

Stephen speaks of his audience, a counsel of religious leaders, as stiffnecked, uncircumcised in their ability to hear, feel, and understand, resistant to the Holy Spirit, persecutors, betrayers, and murderers. It is impossible to miss the accusatory tone in today’s reading.

? How likely is it, do you think, that Stephen’s audience was taken by surprise by this accusatory tone, having not sense it earlier in the sermon?

It seems unlikely that this accusatory tone came out of nowhere. It seems unlikely that it only entered here at the end of his sermon.

? How likely, do you think, is it that this tone has been present throughout his sermon? Why do you answer as you do?

? Go back and review the entire sermon. Do you find indications of this accusatory tone elsewhere?

? Are there other places in the sermon where it seems that Stephen thought and spoke of his audience as stiffnecked, uncircumcised in their ability to hear, feel, and understand, resistant to the Holy Spirit, persecutors, betrayers, and murderers without coming right out with such words? If so, where?

? What do you think and feel when you contemplate the likelihood that Stephen delivered the entire sermon in the spirit of accusation and that his audience fully felt accused throughout?

? How do you feel about Stephen being so confrontational?

? When is it appropriate to be as direct and confrontational as Stephen was in this sermon? Why do you answer as you do?

Acts 10.²⁸

And he said unto them, “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”

Questionary

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- ? What does it mean in your own life and in your relationships with others that no one is to be called “common or unclean”?
 - ? How well do you live this principle?
 - ? Are there those whom you call “common or unclean”?

Acts 10.³⁴⁻⁴³

³⁴Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
³⁵but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. ³⁶The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)
³⁷that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

³⁹And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: ⁴⁰him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; ⁴¹not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²And he commanded us to a preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. ⁴³To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Questionary

This reading is another in our series examining the sermons found in the New Testament Book of Acts. These words were delivered at Caesarea in the house of the gentile, Cornelius, who, at an angel’s encouragement, sent messengers to Peter to request that he visit them and preach to them. Upon having his own vision, Peter accompanied the messengers to Cornelius’ house where he found a small gathering prepared to hear his message.

1. Peter begins with, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.”

? What tone/ mood do you hear/ feel in these opening words?

The word “perceive” (understand, grasp) is in a form of the word that indicates intensity or suddenness, the latter often with an element of surprise. Note the element of surprise when Christians of Jewish descent witnessed the Holy Spirit minister to gentiles.

“And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the a Gentiles also was poured out the b gift of the Holy Ghost” (10.⁴⁵).

- ? Why were Peter and those with him surprised that God would work among and save gentiles?

An early LDS apostle had the following to say about the difficulty Peter had in wrapping his brain around the idea of God accepting gentiles into the church.

“The angels, a choir of them, were bold enough to sing- ‘We bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people!’”

“What a big saying for Jewish shepherds! Why, they must have enlarged their hearts, and wondered at this very strange news. Why Peter had hardly got his heart sufficiently enlarged to believe these glad tidings many years after they were proclaimed, although he had preached so much.”

“It swelled by degrees, and contracted again I suppose, and at last he had to have a vision, and a sheet let down from heaven, and things shown him, and explained to him over and over again, to get him to realize the truth of the glad tidings sung by angels at the birth of the Saviour.” [sic]

“It was showing so much; it was too broad a platform, such a boundless ocean of mercy! It was making such a provision for the human family that Peter could not comprehend it” (Parley P. Pratt, *JD*. Vol. 9, p. 210-11).

- ? How do we underestimate God’s expansive willingness to reach out and save?
? What doctrines and principles have since been taught that should make us more open minded about God’s willingness to reach out to individuals and groups that seem, to us, outside his

reach.

? What does it mean to you to be a “respector of persons”?

The phrase literally means, “to take/accept the face.”

? How do we let “appearances” (not physical but social) dictate how we think and treat others and now we think God thinks of and treats others?

2. Peter goes on to say that God “accepts” individuals “in every nation” who “feareth him, and worketh righteousness.”

? What does it mean to you to “fear” God and “worketh righteousness.”

It makes little sense to read “righteousness” here as “gospel righteousness” since God has agreed to minister to these gentiles before they even know what the gospel entails. Consistent with the Greek, we should read something more like God accepts those who “reverence him and act ethically.”

? What do you think and feel when you think of God accepting individuals who are reverential and possess basic goodness?

3. Peter goes on to teach that God was “preaching peace by Jesus Christ.”

? What do you think when you contemplate Jesus—his life, ministry, and teachings—as the Father’s living sermon on obtaining peace?

? How does this relate to John’s teaching that Jesus is “the Word of God”?

4. Peter goes on to speak of Jesus as one “who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.” Everywhere we turn, Jesus’ calling and power to reduce Satan’s power over individuals is central to any understanding of him.

? What do you think and feel when you think of Satan as an oppressor?

? What do you think and feel when you consider that stopping the oppression of the devil is a central part of Jesus’ calling and power?

? If his undermining the oppression of the devil is so central to Jesus’ call, the problem of being oppressed of the devil must be common. Are you in need of this central aspect of Jesus’ work in your life? Why do you answer as you do?

5. Peter tells the small gathering that God “commanded us to a preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick [living] and dead.”

? Keeping in mind that this is the first that this group has heard of Jesus and his gospel, what do you make of this statement about Jesus’ called as judge?

? How central to your personal feelings about Jesus is his role as your Judge? Why do you answer the way you do?

? Why is it important to identify Jesus as our judge?

? What kind of judge of people does Jesus show himself to be during his earthly ministry?

6. Peter follows up his testimony about Jesus being judge and concludes his remarks, with, “through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

? How does Jesus’ remission of sins relate to his role as judge?

To remit is to “hurl,” “to let go,” “to let be.”

? What comes to your mind as you consider each of these readings: “to hurl sin away,” “to let sin go,” “to let sin be.”

? How do these two passages relate to these meanings for the remission of sin?

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103.¹⁰).

“As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103.¹⁴).

Acts 11.⁵⁻¹⁰

⁵I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: ⁶upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. ⁷And I heard a voice saying unto me, “Arise, Peter; slay and eat.”

⁸But I said, “Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.”

⁹But the voice answered me again from heaven, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

¹⁰And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

Questionary

This reading is another in our series examining the sermons found in the New Testament Book of Acts.

1. In this reading, Peter relates the thrice repeated vision he had received while in Joppa (See, Acts 10.⁹⁻¹⁷).
 - ? Is there any significance to the fact that the common/unclean life forms were “let down from heaven” and then “drawn up again into heaven” beyond the fact that the vision itself came from heaven? Is so, what might that significance be?
 - ? Given Peter’s upbringing, was it unreasonable for him to refuse to eat the unclean? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Given Peter’s upbringing, was it unreasonable for him to assume some people were by the nature of their race/nationality/gender/culture/religion unclean and unworthy of his concern, love, devotion, and service? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How does our upbringing condition us to place individuals into clean/worthy and unclean/unworthy categories based on questionable criteria?
 - ? How does Peter’s vision put the lie to these false classifications?
 - ? How can you avoid falling into this error?
 - ? How has God revealed the divine nature of people of all races, nations, genders, cultures, religion, etc to you?
 - ? To what examples would you point as examples of the world denying the cleanliness/worthiness/divinity of others based on race, nationality, gender, culture, religion, etc.?

Acts 11.¹¹⁻¹⁷

¹¹And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. ¹²And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: ¹³and he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; ¹⁴who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

¹⁵And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, "John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." ¹⁷Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

Questionary

This reading is another in our series examining the sermons found in the New Testament Book of Acts.

After summarizing the thrice repeated vision he had received while in Jappa (See, Acts 10.⁹⁻¹⁷), Peter reports his response to the vision and what he experienced at Caesarea.

1. Immediately upon his beginning of preaching to the gentiles gathered at Cornelius' house, Peter observed that "the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." He then asked this question:

"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?"

- ? What are the implications of Peter's question?

Peter was challenged to respond to gentile conversions in a way that he characterizes as "withstanding God."

- ? How, exactly, did those who questioned Peter's actions with the gentiles want Peter to respond to gentile conversions?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the desire to restrict gentile access to the gospel and salvation?

Acts 13.¹⁶⁻²⁵

¹⁶Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. ¹⁷The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. ¹⁸And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. ¹⁹And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

²⁰And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. ²¹And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. ²²And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will."

²³Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: ²⁴when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵And as John fulfilled his course, he said, "Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose."

Questionary

This reading is another in our series examining the sermons found in the New Testament Book of Acts. This reading reports the first recorded sermon of the apostle Paul.

1. In his sermon found in Acts 7, Stephen began with a historical prologue as Paul does in this sermon.
 - ? What purpose, do you think, did such historical prologues have?
2. Paul reminds his audience that "God... exalted the people [Israel] when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt."
 - ? What is so important about Israel's deliverance from bondage that it seems to be at the center of the Hebrew Bible's message and is so often the beginning point of historical prologues concerning Israel?
 - ? What lessons was Israel to learn from this "exaltation" and subsequent deliverance from bondage?
 - ? What was Israel's experiences in Egypt supposed to teach Israel about 1) God, and 2) about foreigners living in one's land?
3. Paul mentions that God "suffered... their manners."
 - ? To what does this refer?
 - ? What were Israel's "manners" during the wilderness wanderings? What examples come to your mind when you think of their "manners"?
4. Paul very quickly goes through the history of the judges, Samuel, Saul, David, and John the Baptist before finally coming to Jesus. We should perhaps understand this to be doing more than "setting the stage."
 - ? What other purpose might this brief historical survey have?
 - ? Through its history, testimony, and behavior, the world was to learn something about God and His relationship and dealings with Israel. What are your thoughts and feelings when we suggest that Jesus is the culmination of Israelite history and its greatest manifestation of God?
 - ? What does the world learn about God through Jesus, his life, ministry, and teachings?

Acts 13.²⁶⁻²⁸

²⁶Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. ²⁷For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. ²⁸And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

Questionary

This reading is another in our series examining the sermons found in the New Testament Book of Acts. It is a continuation of Paul's first recorded sermon that began in verse 16.

1. Paul says that Jesus was killed because "they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? When we think of the Hebrew prophets speaking of Jesus, we think of the prophets making predictions concerning his future mortal ministry. But how else do the prophets point to Jesus character?
 - ? The Hebrew prophets speak to the sort of behavior that identifies one as a true follower of God. How should Jesus' life have demonstrated his godliness to those who knew or heard of him?
2. In speaking of Jesus' death Paul says that "they found no cause of death in him."
 - ? In your mind, what is the significance of Jesus being innocent of the charges against him, yet being executed?
 - ? What does it suggest about justice in the Roman empire?
 - ? How does it serve as a warning to all governments about the conviction and execution of innocent people?
 - ? We often think of Jesus' innocence as making it possible for him to be a "substitute" for all sinners, but how does Jesus serve as a stand in for all innocent victims?

Acts 13.²⁹⁻³⁷

²⁹And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. ³⁰But God raised him from the dead: ³¹and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. ³²And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, ³³God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” ³⁴And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” ³⁵Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, “Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” ³⁶For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: ³⁷but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

Questionary

This reading is another in our series examining the sermons found in the New Testament Book of Acts. It is a continuation of Paul’s first recorded sermon that began in verse 16.

1. In one of his first recorded sermons (Acts 2.¹⁴⁻³⁶), Peter quoted Psalm 16.⁶⁻⁸ as a prooftext of Jesus’ resurrection. In that same sermon, Peter quoted from Psalm 110. Paul also utilizes Psalm 16.⁸ for the same purposes in his current sermon. Paul also quotes from Psalm 2.⁷. In fact, the Book of Psalms is the most frequently quoted book in the New Testament. The early church held a very high opinion of the Book of Psalms.
 - ? Why, do you think, was the Book so influential in early church doctrine and worship?
 - ? What is your opinion of the Book of Psalms?
 - ? What have you found in your own readings in the Book of Psalms that confirms the Book’s value?
 - ? Take a few minutes to read Psalm 16 in its entirety. How does it apply to David? How does it apply to Jesus?
2. This reading principally focuses on Jesus’ resurrection.
 - ? What do you learn about Jesus’ resurrection from this reading?
 - ? Paul says that “God raised him from the dead.” What does this mean to you? What is its importance?
 - ? Take a moment to consider and then perhaps even record your testimony concerning Jesus’ resurrection and what it means to you?
3. In this sermon, Paul quotes from Isaiah 55.³, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” Take a moment to read Isaiah’s entire 55th chapter.
 - ? What manifestations of mercy do you find in the chapter?
 - ? How was God merciful to David? How did David’s experiences with God bear witness to a merciful God?
 - ? How did Jesus reveal a merciful God?

Acts 17.²⁴⁻²⁹— just scripture

²⁴God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.' ²⁹Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

Questionary

1. Today's reading is a portion of a longer discourse that Paul delivered on Athens, Greece's "Mars Hill." There is much that could be mined from this discourse, but, today, we want to focus on three phrases found in it.

"He [God] is Lord of heaven and earth"

God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."

"We are the offspring of God"

- ? How does Paul's view of the world compare to yours?
 - ? Can you—and if you can, how can you—square these three truths spoken by the apostle Paul with the current "Put America First" doctrine?
 - ? How, do you suppose, God, Father of all mankind, feels about this "America First" doctrine?
 - ? What is suggested by, and how do you feel about my suggesting that this economic and military ideology of "America First" is a "doctrine"?
 - ? If you cannot square this modern doctrine with those taught by Paul, what is your responsibility to teach and live Paul's doctrine and resist the modern doctrine?
 - ? What will you do?
- ? As you contemplate the brotherhood of all mankind, be they of whatever nationality or race, what do you suppose God's feelings are toward nationalism, especially when nationalism has always been a source of distrust and hatred, violence, war, and death?

Romans 1.¹⁻⁷

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—²the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

⁵Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ⁶And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

Questionary

1. Paul names Jesus “a descendant of David,” “the Son of God,” “Christ,” and “Lord.”
? What do these designations mean to you, considering especially how each actually impacts your everyday life?
2. Paul speaks of “obedience that comes from faith.”
? What is the nature of “obedience that comes from faith” as opposed to simple conformity?
3. Paul speaks of those “who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”
? What do you think of when you think of one person “belonging” to another?
? What kind of “owner” is Jesus?

Romans 1.⁸⁻¹⁵

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; ¹⁰making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. ¹³Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was a let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Questionary

1. Paul speaks of serving God “with my spirit.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to serve God with one’s spirit?
 - ? What is found in your life to suggest that you serve God in this way?
2. Paul looks forward to visiting the Roman church and being “comforted together... by the mutual faith both of you and me.”
 - ? Have you had a relationship with another of which it could be said that there was “comfort together... by mutual faith”?
 - ? What was it about the relationship that made this possible, and produced this result?
3. Paul says that he is “debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Bararians; both to the wise, and the unwise.” Being a debtor is usually viewed as something to be avoided.
 - ? What does Paul mean by being a debtor to these groups?
 - ? How do you feel about Paul accepting the state of debt?
 - ? To whom are you indebted in the sense in which Paul speaks of it—having an obligation toward?

Romans 1.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Questionary

1. Paul says that “the righteousness of God” is “revealed” in “the gospel of Christ.”
 - ? What does he mean by the “righteousness of God”?
 - ? How does the “gospel of Christ” reveal the rightness of God’s actions toward humankind?
 - ? Put differently, how does the good news of Christ’s commitment to humanity evidence that God acts rightly?
 - ? What would you think if we suggested that “the righteousness of God” could also be read, “the righteousness that comes from God”?
 - ? How does the “gospel of Christ” reveal the correctness we can achieve, a correctness that is in harmony with God’s own correctness?
 - ? How does the Father’s good news about Christ produce in the believer a life of acting rightly or correctly?

Romans 1.¹⁸⁻²³

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

²⁰For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

²¹because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

Questionary

After greeting the Romans and expressing his frustration at not having yet been able to visit them in person (1.¹⁻¹⁵), Paul launches into his primary thesis: what he sees as the most fundamental human problem (1.^{16-3.20}). He succinctly states it in 3.⁹: “Both Jews and Gentiles... are all under sin.” And, again in 3.²³, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” It is this truth that Paul begins to establish at 1.¹⁶. Having established it, Paul then turns his attention to what he sees as the solution to this fundamental human problem (3.^{21-5.21}).

1. In today’s reading, Paul begins to focus on the nature of sin.
? What sins do you find in this reading?
2. Paul seems to lay the blame for much human misbehavior squarely at the feet of idolatry.
? What is idolatry?
? What do you think and feel when we suggest that idolatry is *the sin* while the behaviors he discusses here and following are merely *symptoms* of the underlying sin?
? How does misunderstanding or refusing to understand God’s true nature and character cause or allow us to engage in behavior that is contrary to his teachings and detrimental to human society in the present and the eternal future?
3. Paul believes that creation can teach us much about God (“the invisible things of him”) and his nature: “even his eternal power and Godhead.”
? What do you learn about God from nature?
4. Paul speaks of the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”
? This is a mouthful. After taking a moment to reread this and the surrounding lines, rewrite the line in your own words?

Consider the NIV translation. “...the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness...”

- ? How does wickedness, especially that of those who claim to believe, serve to “suppress the truth”?
- ? To what examples of this would you point?
- ? To what extent does your conduct further or suppress the truth?

Romans 3.^{9-20, 23}—Atonement

⁹... We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; ¹⁰as it is written,

“There is none righteous,
no, not one:

¹¹There is none that understandeth,
there is none that seeketh after God.

¹²They are all gone out of the way,
they are together become unprofitable;
there is none that doeth good,
no, not one.

¹³Their throat is an open sepulchre;
with their tongues they have used deceit;
the poison of asps is under their lips:

¹⁴Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

¹⁵their feet are swift to shed blood:

¹⁶destruction and misery are in their ways:

¹⁷And the way of peace have they not known:

¹⁸there is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin....

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

Qquestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Fall: Our Need of Atonement.” *

1. In today’s reading, Paul uses passages from the Hebrew Bible’s Book of Psalms to describe the sinful and rebellious nature of humanity.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read Paul’s unapologetic and uncompromising assertion that “There is none righteous, no, not one” as he evaluates mankind?
 - ? Do you agree or disagree with Paul’s estimation of human character and inclinations?
 - ? What evidence do you use to agree or disagree?
 - ? To what examples and evidence would you offer in support of Paul’s assertions that
 - There is none that understandeth
 - Their throat is an open sepulchre
 - Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness
 - Their feet are swift to shed blood
 - The way of peace have they not known
 - There is no fear of God before their eyes
 - ? Is there another Paul’s statements that impresses itself upon you? If so, which one and why?
2. Consider King Benjamin’s statement in which he states that even at our very best we are yet “unprofitable servants.”

“I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2.²¹).

- ? How well does Paul’s statement that “They are together become unprofitable” comport with that of King Benjamin?
 - ? How does our reaction to the Book of Mormon making such assertions compare with our reactions to those such as that made by Paul? Why do you answer as you do?
3. Paul teaches that “all the world” is “guilty before God and that “by the deeds of the law,” or through obedience, “there is not flesh” that can be “justified” in the sight of God.
- ? What does it mean to be justified?
 - ? What are your thoughts and feelings if you consider “justification” to mean being “right,” “acceptable,” “innocent” or “not guilty”?
 - ? Why is it impossible to observe the Law of Moses in such a way as to be thought right, acceptable, innocent, or not guilty in God’s eyes?
 - ? How is Paul’s statement about it being impossible to be justified through obedience to the Law of Moses, true of any and every law, including under any that we may currently be under?
 - ? How do the demands for obedience that law or commandments make end up putting an end to any self-righteousness we might possess and pronounce us “guilty” rather than “innocent” in the eyes of God?
 - ? How does the witness that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” influence your desires and efforts to come unto Christ and apply his atonement?
4. Paul says that “knowledge of sin” comes “by the law”?
- ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about Paul’s assertion that we could not know or, indeed, commit sin if not for the law’s stipulations and demands?
- ? How does today’s reading apply and relate to the theme of “Fall: Our Need for Atonement”?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Romans 5.⁶⁻¹¹—Atonement

⁶For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. ⁸But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. ¹⁰For 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. ¹¹And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Questionary

Paul can be difficult to understand. Other translations can often be helpful. Here is the NIV translation.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

1. We have placed this reading in our atonement reading entitled, “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.” * In Paul’s thought, Jesus personally suffered and revealed his and his Father’s love and attachment to us long before we could respond to it, long before he could know how we would respond to it, and while we were still unrepentance sinners or “ungodly.”
 - ? How does his atonement, revealed long before we even knew of it or went looking for it in mortality, serve as an “invitation” and act to draw us to him?
 - ? How do you feel about being labeled “ungodly” before such time as you learned of and came to Christ?
2. The KJV speaks of the time when we are “without strength.” The NIV speaks of a time when we are “powerless.”
 - ? When is this time of powerlessness?
 - ? What would our eternal state be without Jesus and his atonement?
3. Paul speaks of the rarity of someone suffering and even dying to benefit even the best of people.
 - ? How common, then, is it for someone to suffer and even die for the benefit of someone deemed bad, especially when the results of such suffering and death are unknown and when the suffering and death are unlikely to produce any good or positive results?

Paul reminds us that Jesus did that most rare thing of all: he suffered and died for “the ungodly,” and “enemies” who “were yet sinners.”

- ? How does this speak not only to the idea of Jesus’ “invitation,” but to the “generosity and earnestness” of that invitation?
 - ? What do you feel when you hear yourself described as “ungodly” and as an “enemy”?
4. We are accustomed to thinking and speaking of being “saved.” In doing so, we usually think of the future benefits, especially the potential for eternal life with God. But, Paul speaks of being “saved *from* wrath” reminding us that to be “saved” is to be “rescued” from something, some present danger.
 - ? What do you think of when you think of being “saved from *wrath*”?

5. Paul asks us to consider, “if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, [how] much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved.”
 - ? What does this suggest for those who have chosen to have faith in and follow Christ?
6. Paul teaches that “we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read this?
 - ? How does Jesus’ atonement teach us to rejoice in God rather than fear and avoid him?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
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 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Romans 6.³⁻¹¹— atonement

³Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

⁶knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. ⁷For he that is dead is freed from sin.

⁸Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: ⁹knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. ¹⁰For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

¹¹Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Glorification: The Savior’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement”*

1. Jesus’ resurrection, of course, makes it possible for us to live in happiness eternally. However, his resurrection also impacts the quality of life we can live while still mortal
 - ? According to today’s reading, what are the implications of Jesus’ resurrection for our life here on earth?
2. Paul says that “like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
 - ? What does it mean to you that Jesus “was raised up from the dead *by the glory of the Father*”?
 - ? What role did the “glory of the Father” play in Jesus’ resurrection?
 - ? We are to “walk in newness of life” in the same manner that Jesus was resurrected. In what manner was he resurrected?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read Paul’s admonition as follows: “like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life *by the glory of the Father*”?
 - ? What role does the “glory of the Father” play in our walking “in newness of life”?
 - ? How does one invite and then experiences the Father’s participation in our desire and attempts to “walk in newness of life”?
 - ? What is likely to happen if we do not have his participation?
 - ? What could you do to invite “the glory of the Father” into your life so that you can “walk in newness of life”?
3. Paul says that when we “walk in newness of life” we should no longer “serve sin.”
 - ? What does it mean to “*serve sin*”?
 - ? Is one failing to walk “in newness of life” if sin and weakness continues to be found in their lives?
4. Paul speaks of being “freed from sin” and being “dead... unto sin.” He also speaks of “the body of sin” being “destroyed” through Christ.
 - ? What does all this mean to you?
 - ? How would you know if you are either “serving sin” or “freed” from/”dead unto” sin”?
 - ? What does all this mean in relation to the individual—every individual—who still struggles with weakness and yields to temptations more than they would like?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Romans 8.¹⁴⁻¹⁷— atonement

¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. ¹⁵For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry,

“Abba, Father.”

¹⁶The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ¹⁷And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement.”*

1. As Jesus did during his earthly ministry, Paul refers to Heavenly Father as “Abba.”
 - ? If you need to, look this word up. What does this word mean?
 - ? What do Jesus and Paul want to suggest and have you understand by referring to and calling upon Heavenly Father as “Papa,” or “Daddy”?
 - ? Are you comfortable addressing Heavenly Father in such intimate terms?
 - ? What does your answer to the previous question suggest about your relationship with Heavenly Father?
 - ? How does the Savior’s atonement reveal the truth of Heavenly Father’s feelings of intimacy with us?
2. Paul suggests here, as he does elsewhere (see, for example, Ephesians 1.5), that we are “adopted” children of God.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about being an “adopted” child, rather than a “natural born” child?
 - ? What do you suppose Paul is teaching through this choice of language?
3. Paul suggests here that we are “children,” “heirs of God,” and “joint-heirs with Christ” “*if so be that we suffer with him.*”
 - ? What, do you think, does it mean to “suffer with him”?
 - ? How do you feel about the necessity of “suffering with him” in order to possess the promised blessings?
 - ? What role does the Spirit play in our understanding God’s feelings of intimacy with us, in our feeling intimacy with him, and in our understanding of our worth?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Romans 8.²⁶⁻²⁷

²⁶Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Questionary

1. Paul asserts that “we know not what we should pray for as we ought.”
 - ? How do you feel about this assertion?
 - ? what examples in your own life can you point to as a demonstration of the truth of this assertion?
2. Paul seems to teach that without the Holy Spirit, our prayers are less effectual because of our inability to really know what we ought to be praying for.
 - ? How do you feel about needing the Holy Spirit to assist you in prayer so that you know what and how to pray?
 - ? When have you experienced such divine assistance in the course of a prayer?

Romans 8.³¹⁻³⁴

³¹What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? ³²He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

³³Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

³⁴Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Questionary

Today is our 52nd and final reading for Lent/ Easter. In our last reading from Luke 24, Jesus' disciples witness that he was "carried up into heaven." Though we usually think of Jesus' revelation of Atonement in terms of his suffering, death, and resurrection, I would suggest that it is not actually complete until he has entered heaven, there to sit enthroned on the right hand of God as Friend and Advocate. Today's reading, explores his enthronement in heaven and what he does from his place of intimacy.

1. In today's reading Paul asks a series of questions. Take a few minutes to consider and then answer each of the following questions that Paul poses.

- If God be for us, who can be against us?
- He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?
- Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?
- Who is he that condemneth?

? What is the relationship between having someone who is "against us," having some "lay" a "charge" against us, and having someone "condemn" us?

? Who plays this role of "prosecutor" or "accuser" in your life?

? How often do you play this role in your own life?

From his place at the right hand of God, Jesus serves as an "intercessor," "advocate" or "defense attorney" in our behalf.

? What experiences have you had with Jesus defending you?

? How has he "defended" you against your own self-recriminations?

? How has he "defended" you against others', including Satan's accusations?

? How would you respond to the suggestion that Jesus never has to "defend" us from accusations made by Father, because Father is no more inclined to accuse than Jesus and is every bit as ready to defend us as Jesus?

? How do you feel knowing that because of Jesus' "defense" of you, you stand innocent or "not guilty" in the eyes of God?

Romans 8.³⁵⁻³⁹

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, “For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” ³⁷Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Questionary

Today’s reading is the 17th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

1. Paul goes through a long list of things that threaten to “separate us from the love of God.”
 - ? What are some of these threatening things?
 - ? How do such things enter our lives?
2. Paul expresses his complete confidence that nothing can “separate us from the love of God”?
 - ? How do you feel when you read the confidence that Paul possesses?
3. Notice Paul’s language when he speaks of “the love of God, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Heavenly Father expresses his love for us most powerfully and clearly through Jesus Christ?
 - ? How does Jesus serve as such a powerful manifestation of Father’s love?
 - ? As you read and ponder the traditional stories, scriptures, and hymns associated with Christmas, how do they manifest Father’s love that is manifest in Jesus?

1 Corinthians 1.¹⁻³

¹Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, ²unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: ³grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q

Today's is the first of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.¹⁻³). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.⁴⁻⁹). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians addresses the conflict.

1. Paul speaks of "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus" and "called to be saints."
 - ? What does it mean to be "sanctified"?
 - ? What is the relationship between sanctification and being a "saint"?
 - ? What does it mean to be "sanctified *in Christ Jesus*"?
 - ? What role does Jesus play in our sanctification?
2. Paul twice speaks of Jesus as "Lord."
 - ? What does "Lord" mean?
 - ? What is its significance above that of a title?
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus being "our Lord"?
 - ? How does his Lordship impact our daily lives and the way we live our daily lives?

1 Corinthians 1.⁴⁻⁹

⁴I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; ⁵that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; ⁶even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: ⁷so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁸who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questionary

Today's is the second of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.1-3). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.4-9). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians addresses the conflict.

1. We discussed "grace" in our first reading, identifying it as a Divine character trait indicative of God's accepting and welcoming nature.
 - ? How does Jesus serve as the giver, or revealer of grace, or Divine acceptance?
 - ? What is it about Jesus that makes him such an effective bestower or revealer of God's acceptance?
2. Paul prays that through Jesus we are "enriched" "in all *utterance*, and in all *knowledge*."
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the word, "enrichment"?
 - ? How has your "utterance" been enriched through Jesus?
 - ? How has your "knowledge" been enriched through Jesus?
 - ? How have you used this enrichment to benefit others?
3. Paul also prays that we "come behind in no gift."
 - ? What sorts of gifts do you suppose Paul has in mind?
4. Paul speaks of our "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - ? What, do you think, is involved in "waiting for the coming of our Lord"?
 - ? Do you find yourselves consciously "waiting for the coming of our Lord"?
 - ? If so, what impact does it have on your daily life? If not, why not?
5. Paul says that we "were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? Do you feel that you have fellowship with him?
 - ? If so, what are the signs and benefits of that fellowship?
 - ? If not, why not? And if it is something that appeals to you, what might you do to work toward having fellowship with him?

1 Corinthians 1.¹⁰⁻¹¹

¹⁰Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

Q

Today's is the third of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.¹⁻³). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.⁴⁻⁹). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians addresses the conflict.

1. In today's reading Paul turns his attention to one of the main reasons for his letter—his concern over the disunity that exists in the church. In addressing this problem of disunity, Paul admonishes members

“That ye all speak the same thing”

“That there be no divisions among you”

“That ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”

- ? How do you feel about these admonitions?
- ? What is it, exactly, that Paul is hoping for?
- ? What are we to think of the inevitable differences in personality and the differences in thought and judgment that come with them?
- ? How well are you and those with whom you worship doing in the area of unity?
- ? What would be needed for improvement on your part? On the part of others?
- ? What are we to think and do when there are differences, even sharp differences, in “judgment”—for example, on the advisability of following a political leader such as tRUMP, being vaccinated, wearing a mask to protect others, etc. (conversations about which enter our discourse with each other in meetings and on social media)?

1corinthians 1.¹²⁻¹⁶

¹²Now this I say, that every one of you saith, “I am of Paul;” and “I of Apollos;” and “I of Cephas;” and “I of Christ.”

¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; ¹⁵lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. ¹⁶And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

Questionary

Today's is the fourth of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.¹⁻³). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.⁴⁻⁹). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians addresses the conflict.

1. Paul begins to address the fact that contention has arisen in the Corinthian church.
 - ? What is the nature of that contention, as you understand it from today's reading?
 - ? How does this sort of pitting one Church leader and their teachings against another and their teachings manifest itself today? What specific examples come to mind?
 - ? How does Paul attempt to draw the attention of contenting members away from any particular Church leader and toward Jesus Himself?
 - ? How do you keep yourself grounded in Christ and avoid becoming overly enamored of any individual Church leader or group?

1 Corinthians 1.¹⁷⁻¹⁸

¹⁷For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. ¹⁸For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Q

uestionary

Today's is the fifth of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.¹⁻³). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.⁴⁻⁹). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians addresses the conflict.

1. Paul speaks of "the preaching of the cross" and his hope that the manner in which he preaches will not cause "the cross of Christ" to "be made of none effect," i.e. loss its power.
 - ? How do you feel about Paul effectively using the language of "the cross" as a stand in for speaking of "the gospel"?
 - ? How compatible with your own thoughts and feelings is Paul's near equivalency of "the cross" with "the gospel"?
 - ? Do you share Paul's high estimation of the importance of Jesus' experience of "the cross"?
2. Paul says that those who "are saved" find "the cross" and "the preaching of the cross" to be "the power of God."
 - ? In your mind, how is the crucifixion of Jesus a demonstration of God's power?
 - ? How does this reality militate against any diminishment of the importance of Jesus' experience on the cross?
 - ? How has your own readings concerning Jesus' crucifixion and your own pondering and meditations on it, brought "the power of God" into your life?
3. In today's reading, Paul continues to address contention that has arisen in the Corinthian church over discipleship toward particular Church leaders.
 - ? How does today's reading address this contention?
 - ? How does a focus on Jesus, and especially on "the power of God" that "the cross" brings into our life, give balance to one's gospel understanding and assist in avoiding thinking overly much of any Church leader?

1corinthians 1.¹⁹⁻²¹

¹⁹For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

²⁰Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Questionary

Today's is the sixth of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.¹⁻³). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.⁴⁻⁹). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians address the conflict.

- ? How does today's reading address the Corinthian church's conflict in regard to members of the church giving priority to one Church leader or another over others?
- 1. Among the many things that the gospel of Jesus Christ does, it seeks to “destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What evidence do you see that God is doing this?
 - ? What does Paul mean by “wisdom”?
 - ? What worldly “wisdom,” “understandings,” “values,” “judgements,” etc. does the gospel seek to “destroy” and expose as “nothingness”?
- 2. Paul says that God cannot be known through worldly wisdom, intelligence, or principles but through what he calls “the foolishness of preaching.”
 - ? Why does Paul call “preaching” “foolishness”?
 - ? What examples of “preaching” can you point to that have been beneficial, inspiring, life-changing, and life-shaping in your life?
 - ? How have you come to know what you do know of God?
 - ? What do you do to increase your knowledge and appreciation of God?

1 Corinthians 1.²²⁻²⁵

²²For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: ²³but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ²⁴but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. ²⁵Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Q

Today's is the seventh of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.¹⁻³). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.⁴⁻⁹). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians addresses the conflict.

- ? How does today's reading address the Corinthian church's conflict in regard to members of the church giving priority to one Church leader or another over others?
1. In the previous reading (1 Cor. 1.¹⁹⁻²¹), Paul asserted that the ways in which the world usually learns things are useless when it comes to understanding the gospel or God.
 - ? According to him, how do the Jews seek to understand and confirm truth?
 - ? According to him, how do the Gentiles seek to understand and confirm truth?
 - ? Why do sign seeking and philosophy come up short in these pursuits?
 - ? For someone who has come to know God, what role, if any do, "signs" and "philosophy" play in their life?
 2. Paul seems to suggest that rather than using signs or philosophy to bring others to a knowledge of God, he preaches "Christ crucified."
 - ? What is it about the message of "Christ crucified" that is so revelatory about God as one seeks to know him?
 - ? What is it about the message of "Christ crucified" that Jews stumble over?
 - ? What is it about the message of "Christ crucified" that "gentiles" consider foolish?
 - ? How does God demonstrate his "power" and "wisdom" in Christ, and in his being crucified?
 - ? If we understand God's "wisdom" to be that knowledge and instruction that teaches how to live in this world and what values and actions are necessary to live in the next one, how does "Christ crucified," reveal such knowledge and instruction?
 - ? What can you do to tap more deeply into the power and wisdom of God through the message of "Christ crucified"?
 3. Paul says that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."
 - ? We know that God is neither "foolish" nor "weak." So, what is Paul saying here?
 - ? Try rewriting this verse in your own words to express the point that you feel Paul is trying to make?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding Paul to be saying something as follows: "God, at his least powerful and least wise (though he possesses no such weakness) is more powerful and wiser than man at his most powerful and wisest"?
 - ? How do you feel about the power and wisdom of such a God?

1 Corinthians 1.²⁶⁻³¹

²⁶For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: ²⁷but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹that no flesh should glory in his presence.

³⁰But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: ³¹that, according as it is written, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

Questionary

Today’s is the eighth of 8 readings taken from the 1st chapter of 1 Corinthians. The chapter begins with a greeting (1.¹⁻³). This greeting is followed by a prayer (1.⁴⁻⁹). In the remainder of the chapter, Paul addresses a conflict that has arisen in the Corinthian church. In fact, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians addresses the conflict.

- ? How does today’s reading address the Corinthian church’s conflict in regard to members of the church giving priority to one Church leader or another over others?
- 1. Earlier, Paul asked, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer [philosopher] of this world?” In today’s reading Paul suggests that not many “worldly wise,” “mighty,” or “noble” people were called to leadership roles in the church.
 - ? How does this compare with the Church as you have experienced it?
- 2. Paul goes further to assert that God calls those deemed “foolish” by the world, those who are “weak” as the world judges “power,” those who are deemed “base” or common, lowly, as Church leaders.
 - ? How do you feel about God calling such people?
 - ? Is this consistent with your Church experience?
 - ? Why would God call such people to lead?
- 3. Paul ends the chapter with the admonition that “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”
 - ? How does God’s calling of people who are “foolish,” “weak,” and “base” rather than “mighty” or “noble” to lead in the Church assist individuals to avoid the evil of creating idols of their leaders?
 - ? What is it that is so antithetical to the Lord’s purposes for humans to “glory” in fallible leaders?
- 4. Consider the following passage.

“And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—the weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—but that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth; that mine everlasting covenant might be established; that the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers” (DC 1.¹⁸⁻²³).

 - ? How does this reading demonstrate that God feels the same today that he felt in Paul’s time?
 - ? How does the calling of “weak things” to lead in the Church, make it more likely that individual’s faith and power with God increase?
 - ? What is meant by “every man [and woman] speak[ing] in the name of God the Lord.”
 - ? How does God’s calling of “weak things” to lead in the Church make it more likely that each

- individual will learn to rely on personal revelation?
- ? Again, how does God's calling of "weak things" to lead in the Church assist us from inappropriately developing grandiose ideas about those leaders?

1corinthians 2.²

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

Questionary

1. The crucifixion is central to the Easter message. Yet, sometimes LDS people and theology seem to downplay its importance—"I believe in a living Christ, not a dead Christ," I've heard some say when responding to other Christians' "obsession" with the cross.
 - ? How does Paul feel about the crucifixion?
 - ? How is his determination to preaching nothing but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" consistent with the entire gospel message?
 - ? How will you think and act upon the reality of Jesus' crucifixion during this Easter Season?

1corinthians 12.²⁶— just scripture

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Questionary

1. In today's passage, Paul speaks of the interconnectedness or intersectionality of church members.
 - ? How do you feel about being connected so intimately to others, both the "weak" and the "strong"?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that this interconnectedness is not limited to members of the Church but to every citizen of your nation and even every inhabitant of the planet?
 - ? How is this principle applied to society at large?
 - ? Is society any more healthy than its most vulnerable members?
 - ? How are you impacted by the successes of others?
 - ? Does their success diminish you in any way?
 - ? Can you rejoice in the advancement of others?

2corinthians 5.¹⁷⁻²¹— Atonement

¹⁷Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. ¹⁸And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. ²¹For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Qquestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement.” *

1. Paul speaks of God “not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

? What does it mean to “impute”?

Read Psalm 130.³⁻⁴ and Romans 4.⁶⁻⁸ found below.

“If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,

O Lord, who shall stand?

But there is forgiveness with thee...”

“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying,

‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven,

and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”

? How do these two passages relate and enhance Paul’s statement in today’s reading?

2. Paul says “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.”

? How is this different than if Paul had said “that God was in Christ, reconciling himself unto the world”?

? What does it say about Heavenly Father’s character that he does not need to reconcile himself unto us?

? What does it suggest about Heavenly Father’s feelings toward us that he had no need to be reconciled to us?

3. Paul says that those who are “in Christ,” are “new creatures;” that “old things are passed away;” and that “all things are become new.”

? How have these truths been reflected in your life?

? What “old things” have passed from your life because of Christ?

? What new things have entered your life because of Christ?

4. We speak often of Jesus having “taken upon himself our sins.”

? What imagery comes to mind when you consider this language?

Paul uses different language here. He says that God “made him [Christ] to be sin for us.”

? How do you feel about this language?

? How does it alter how you think of Jesus and the impact of his atonement upon himself?

In saying that Jesus “took upon himself our sins,” it can almost seem as if “sin” remains “external” to him, as if he bore a weight on his back.” Paul’s language that Jesus was “made sin” seems to reflect the fact that “sin” became, somehow “internal” to him.

? How do you feel about “sin” being, somehow, an “internal” rather than merely an “external”

phenomenon in Jesus” Being?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Galatians 1.¹⁻⁵

¹Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) ²and all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: ³grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: ⁵to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Questionary

Today's reading is the first in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians' apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

1. Paul speaks of "God the Father, who raised [Jesus] from the dead." He is not unique in ascribing the power of Jesus' resurrection to the Father. See, for example, Acts 2.^{24, 32}; 3.^{15, 26}; 5.³⁰; 10.³⁹⁻⁴⁰; 13.^{29-30, 37}.
 - ? What, in your mind, is the significance of this teaching?
 - ? What is the impact of this truth in your real day-to-day-life?
 - ? What role did Heavenly Father play in "raising Jesus from the dead"?
2. Paul wishes "grace" and "peace" upon the saints in Galatia. "Grace" is one of the things about which Paul most often speaks and wishes most to have us experience.
 - ? Of what do these two bestowals—grace and peace—consist?
 - ? Concerning "grace," go beyond the traditional "enabling power." Think of grace as something that God Himself and His Son possess in themselves—for example, we speak of a dancer as showing "grace" What do we mean by this?
 - ? What is it about God that would make us think of him as possessing "grace" and beauty?
 - ? In what moments of his earthly ministry do you witness Jesus being "graceful"—showing a "gracefulness" that belongs to him?
 - ? Consider how the dancer's "gracefulness" impacts your life. How and why does the Father and Son's "gracefulness" impact our lives so powerfully?
3. Paul says that Jesus "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What are the evils of this present evil world from which we need delivered?
 - ? How does Jesus deliver from the evils that are present in this world?

Galatians 1.⁶⁻¹⁰

⁶I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ⁷which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

⁹As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

Questionary

Today's reading is the second in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians' apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

1. Paul complains that the Galatians are "removed from him that called [them] into the grace of Christ."
 - ? What kind of errors have the power to "remove" us from Heavenly Father and cause us to lose site of the gracefulness that Christ possesses?
2. Paul's language concerning those who propagate the errors among the Galatians is uncompromising and strident. They "trouble" the Galatians themselves, and "pervert" the gospel. They are to be "accursed."
 - ? How do you feel about the strong language Paul uses? (We will ask this question again when the nature of the errors have become clearer.)
 - ? What does it mean to be "accursed"?
 - ? Does thinking of "accursed" as "something delivered up to divine wrath," or "dedicated to destruction" alter the way you think of being "accursed"? If so, how?
 - ? Are there errors in belief or behavior that today you would label as "accursed"? If so, what are they? Why do you feel this way about them?

Galatians 1.¹¹⁻¹⁷

¹¹But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. ¹²For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: ¹⁴and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

¹⁵But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, ¹⁶to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: ¹⁷neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

Questionary

Today's reading is the third in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostacy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians' apostacy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

In our previous reading (Galatians 1.⁶⁻¹⁰), we found that Paul feels that the Galatians have abandoned the "gospel" that he preached to them for a counterfeit gospel.

1. Before, restating the gospel that he preaches, Paul reminds the Galatians of his "credentials"—how he learned the gospel and who taught it to him.
 - ? As you read today's passage, how would you answer the question, "how did Paul learn the gospel and who taught it to him?"
2. Paul affirmatively says that he learned the gospel from direct communication with Jesus himself. He also spends some time establishing how he did *not* learn it and who did *not* teach him the gospel.
 - ? How and from whom did he not learn the gospel, as he tells it?
 - ? Why, do you think, was it important to Paul that he establish the fact that he was not taught the gospel by Jesus' disciples or by any other man (flesh or blood), for that matter?
3. Paul says that after communicating personally with Jesus, he went into the desert rather than going to Jerusalem, the center of Christianity and the location of Jesus' apostles.
 - ? What do you think is the significance of this?
 - ? How does it bolster his argument about the source of his message?
4. Paul seems to have spent up to 3 years in some type of seclusion, away from the center of Christianity.
 - ? Have you ever taken the opportunity to find some type of "seclusion" where you could be taught of God more personally and directly, without "mediators"?
 - ? Can you find any advantage in doing so? If so, what advantages do you find?
 - ? What could you do to find more time to effectively be alone with God and receive instruction directly from him?

Galatians 1.¹⁸⁻²⁴

¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. ²⁰Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. ²¹Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; ²²And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judæa which were in Christ: ²³But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. ²⁴And they glorified God in me.

Questionary

Today's reading is the fourth in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians' apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

In our previous reading (1.¹¹⁻¹⁷), Paul sought to impress upon the Galatians the seriousness of their apostasy from the gospel that he had preached to them by reminding them that the gospel that he taught came to him through direct contact with the Lord, Jesus Christ. He reminded them that no other human being had instructed him in the ways of God and his plan to save his children.

1. In today's reading, Paul continues to stress the fact that no man had taught him the gospel that he had preached to the Galatians.
 - ? How does he do this?
 - ? How does the fact that he had not met Peter until several years after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and then for a mere 15 days, affirm and enhance his contention that the gospel he taught came from his encounter with Jesus rather than that with any other man?
 - ? How does the fact that members of the Church in the heart of Christianity, Jerusalem, did not know Paul, could not have picked him out of a crowd, affirm and enhance his contention that the gospel he taught came from his encounter with Jesus rather than any other man?
2. Even though members of the church in Jerusalem had never met Paul, they had heard rumors of his conversation and of his budding success as a Christian missionary. Because of these impressive rumors Paul says that "they glorified God in me."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? Is it clearer if we were to translate, "They gloried God because of me"?
 - ? How does the affect that Paul's impressive ministry had on the early saints—causing them to glorify God—compare with the affect that the ministry of those around you, including leaders of the Church today, have on you?
 - ? How does your ministry in the life of others compare?
 - ? What is the importance of the fact that they felt to "glorify God" rather than "glorify Paul"?
 - ? As you ponder this final question, consider the following passages and how they relate to the early saints' attitude toward Paul and our attitudes toward our modern-day leaders?

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world [Paul is speaking of himself, among others] to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world [again, Paul] to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world [again, Paul], and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.... that, according as it is written, 'He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord'" (1 Cor. 1.²⁷⁻³¹).

“Thus saith the LORD,
Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
neither let the mighty man glory in his might,
let not the rich man glory in his riches:
But let him that glorieth glory in this,
that he understandeth and knoweth me,
that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness,
judgment, and righteousness, in the earth:
for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9.²³⁻²⁴).

Galatians 2.¹⁻⁵

¹Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.
²And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. ³But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: ⁴and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: ⁵to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Questionary

Today's reading is the fifth in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians' apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

In order to stress the seriousness of the Galatians' as-yet-unspecified apostasy from the gospel as he had delivered it to them, Paul continues to focus on his total dependence upon God rather than other men for revelation concerning the nature of the gospel. In our previous reading, Paul was careful to point out that he had not even learned from Peter, whom he met only once, several years after his conversion and the beginning of his ministry, and then only for a mere 14 days.

1. In today's reading, we learn that, all total, it was some 14 to 17 years after his encounter with Jesus, and after several missions in which he had established churches all over the eastern Mediterranean, before he spent any time in council with Peter, or any other apostle.
? How does this narration of some of his past experiences in the Church, support and enhance Paul's assertions about where his understanding of the gospel comes from, where his understanding of what he was to preach comes from, and, therefore, how serious the Galatians' apostasy is?
2. Paul has not and still does not describe the specific nature of the Galatians' apostasy. However, verse 3 begins to hint at it.
? Based on verse 3, what would you consider the Galatians' apostasy to be?
3. In speaking of those who oppose his understanding of the gospel as he has preached it throughout his ministry, and among the churches he has organized in the eastern Mediterranean, Paul uses some very strong and uncompromising language.
He calls them "false brethren"
He accuses them of being "spies" who are attempting to undermine his converts' "liberty."
He accuses them of wanting to bring his converts into "bondage" and "subjugation."
? How do you feel about Paul's use of such strong language and imagery?
Without knowing the exact nature of the Galatian apostasy or the "false" brethren's objections to what Paul has been teaching, do you feel that his strong language is justified?
4. Paul mentions meeting with the brethren after many years of evangelizing work throughout the Mediterranean Sea. To better understand the meeting that Paul had with "the brethren" and the nature of the controversy to which he refers, read Acts 15.
? What light does Acts 15 shed on Paul's mention of his meeting in conference with other church leaders?

Galatians 2.⁶⁻¹⁰

⁶But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: ⁷but contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; ⁸(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) ⁹and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. ¹⁰Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

Questionary

Today's reading is the sixth in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians' apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

1. In today's reading, Paul, as he has for several verses now, continues his assertion that Christ, and Christ alone, taught him the gospel that he had preached to the Galatians, and from which they were departing,
 - ? How does today's reading affirm and strengthen Paul's assertion?
2. Paul says that "they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me."
 - ? How do you feel and what do you make of the extraordinary "independence" that Paul was granted and expected?
 - ? From your own observations about the "nature of men," especially "power males," and from your reading in Acts 15, how do you think Paul's demand for independence was initially received?
 - ? Do you suppose that those to whom Paul had referred as "false brethren" and "spies" were reconciled to Paul?
 - ? What issues in today's Church cause anxiety, uncertainty, and even disagreement among members of the Church?
 - ? How do you negotiate such anxieties, uncertainties, and disagreements, either as one who shares them, or as one who does not?

Galatians 2.^{11-14a}

¹¹But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

¹²For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. ¹³And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. ¹⁴But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all...

Questionary

Today's reading is the seventh in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians' apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

1. Paul has maintained since 1.¹¹ that he was not dependent upon any mortal being, but upon Christ alone, for his understanding of and authority to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - ? How does Paul's narration concerning his encounter with Peter at Antioch play into this narrative to confirm and enhance his assertion that he has been under the necessity of relying upon Jesus rather than any man for his understanding of the Gospel and how it was to be preached?
2. Paul complains that as long as Peter was by himself, he conducted table fellowship and ate with gentiles, but that as soon as Jewish converts to Christianity, who were influenced by James, arrived he withdrew and refused to sit at table with gentiles.
 - ? How do you feel about Peter's behavior?
 - ? Why, do you think, he acted as he did?
 - ? What was his uncertainty, in the face of the Jewish converts to Christianity?
 - ? How do you feel about Paul's certainty in contrast to Peter's uncertainty?
3. Paul accuses the "other Jews," Peter, and Barnabas of "dissimulation" and of not walking "uprightly according to the truth of the gospel."
 - ? What is "dissimulation"?

The Greek word is *hupokrisis*, "hypocrisy."

- ? How do you feel about Paul so openly calling his fellow Jewish Christians, Peter, and Barnabas "hypocrites" and of not acting consistent with the "truth of the gospel"?
- ? How do you feel about Paul so openly challenging Peter?
- ? Through all of Paul's defense found in 1.¹¹-2.¹⁴, what have you felt and learned about Paul the man?

Galatians 2.^{14b-16}

^{14b}“If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?”

¹⁵“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Questionary

Today’s reading is the eighth in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians’ apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

1. In today’s reading, a continuation of Paul’s assertions concerning his “credentials” and the sureness of his doctrine, Paul challenges Peter’s hypocrisy with a question and then a doctrinal statement. Paul asks Jewish Christians, including Peter, why, when they no longer follow Jewish customs, but live in many ways as do gentiles, they would ask gentiles to follow Jewish customs.
 - ? What type of Jewish customs do you suppose Peter and other Jewish Christians no longer observed because of their conversion to Christ?
 - ? What types of Jewish customs do you think Paul has in mind?
2. Paul says that he, Peter, and other Jewish Christians are “not sinners of the Gentiles.” Paul certainly knows himself to be a sinner. He will say so in verse 17. Consider, too, the following passages.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1.¹⁵).

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3.²³)

 - ? What, then, do you think Paul means by saying that he and other Jewish Christians are “not sinners of the Gentiles”?
3. In verse 16, Paul comes to what may be the central concept of his entire message and ministry: justification.
 - ? What does Paul mean by this word?

Reread verse 16 replacing “justified” with “approved of” or “accepted by” (God).

 - ? Does this change the way you understand verse 16? If so, how?
 - ? Why is it that Jewish Christians could not find acceptance with God by observing the law of Moses?
 - ? How would you feel if we suggested that modern day Christians cannot find acceptance with God through observing the commandments they have been given today?
 - ? Why is this true?
 - ? What is it about our attempts to obey that are insufficient to earn complete acceptance with God?
4. Paul says that we can find acceptance with God “by the faith of Jesus Christ.”
 - ? How does our trust in Jesus and his message—his revelation about God’s feelings of

“connectedness” (at-one-ment) with us—make it possible for us to find and accept the reality of God’s acceptance, or to believe in and act upon God’s accepting nature?

In addition to addressing what Paul views as Peter’s and other Jewish Christians’ errors, verse 16 begins to get to the nature of the Galatian apostasy. Therefore, the reader should find in verse sixteen an opening response on Paul’s part to the Galatians’ error.

Galatians 2.¹⁷⁻²⁰

¹⁷“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. ¹⁸For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. ²⁰I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Questionary

Today’s reading is the ninth in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians’ apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

Like so much in Paul’s writings, these verses are subject to multiple interpretations. Paul is, here, at his densest. Without trying to nail down every word, we will simply explore a few questions.

We must remember that these verses represent Paul’s continued argument to the Galatians that 1) the Gospel he preached among them came directly and personally to him from Jesus, and was without any other human’s additional contribution, amendment, or correction—including Peter’s; and, 2) that this made the Galatians’ turning away from the Gospel that he had preached among them particularly serious.

I understand today’s passage to be a continuation of his response to Peter’s “hypocrisy.” Paul uses Peter’s fickleness at Antioch, and Paul’s response to it as further evidence that no one, including even Peter, saw things as clearly as did he, Paul. While today’s passage is to be read in light of this encounter between Paul and Peter, we can also explore it for any applications that we might be able to make of it in our own lives. We will not try to unpack the entire passage, but ask a question or two from both perspectives: historical and didactic.

1. Let’s consider Paul’s question: “If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin?”
 - ? How likely is it, do you think, that Jews and even some Jews converted to Christianity accused Peter, Paul, and other Jewish Christians who did not live by the law of Moses as they had before their conversion of being sinners?
 - ? Does it make sense to you that those who accused Jewish Christians of being sinners might also, then, accuse Jesus of condoning sin?
 - ? How can Jesus approve and accept us while we still sin?
 - ? How should we feel about Jesus when we inevitably sin even as we seek and obtain Jesus’ approval?
2. Paul says that “if I [he, Peter, other Jewish Christians] build again the things which I destroyed [return to keeping the Law of Moses as a Jew would], I make myself a transgressor.”
 - ? Why would he be a transgressor in these circumstances?
 - ? How do you feel about Paul, in this subtle way, accusing Peter and those who have influenced him to withdraw from table fellowship with gentiles of being “transgressors”?
3. Paul says, “I through the law am dead to the law.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?

In the next chapter, Paul will describe “the law’s” attitude toward those who do not keep it in its entirety.

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3.¹⁰).

- ? How do you feel about the law’s “all or nothing” approach to determining whether or not an individual is acceptable to (justified before) God?
 - ? Do you ever feel that the law you have been given makes the same “all or mothering” demand of you?
4. Paul feels no heartache over being pronounced dead by the law because he is “alive unto God.”
- ? How does Paul’s understanding that the law’s pronouncement of “death” upon the “sinner” only makes it possible for the “sinner” to find acceptance with God?
 - ? How does Paul’s teachings in today’s reading help you understand the error of thinking that keeping the commandments is an “all or nothing” proposition when it comes to finding acceptance with God?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you read Paul’s hopeful testimony, “Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”?

Galatians 2.²¹

²¹“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the last in a series of ten from Galatians 1 and 2. In these readings, Paul addresses Galatian apostasy.

After his initial greeting, Paul established his credentials as one whom Jesus personally visited, taught, and authorized to preach the Gospel. Paul learned the Gospel, and was authorized to preach the Gospel with little or no other human involvement. Because of the direct and personal manner in which Paul was instructed, the Galatians’ apostasy from the Gospel as he had preached it to them was particularly egregious. The specific nature of those errors become evident as the reader progresses through the letter.

In this final verse of chapter 2, Paul makes a profound and challenging statement that challenges Peter, Jewish Christians, and Galatian converts all of whom maintain by doctrine or behavior that one must keep the law in order to find acceptance with God. This belief is directly contradictory to the gospel as Paul received it directly from Jesus and had preached it in Galatia.

1. Paul says that he does not “frustrate” God’s grace.
 - ? What does it mean to “frustrate” God’s grace?
 - ? If you think of it as “placing no value in,” or as “annulling,” how do you feel about Paul asserting that looking to the law for approval with God is to place little value in the person of God and his graciousness?
 - ? Does this apply to your own attitude toward observing the law that you have today? If so, how?
2. Paul asserts that if one can find acceptance with God through obedience, then Christ’s suffering and death are irrelevant.
 - ? How, do you suppose, did Peter feel about Paul’s implied accusation that Peter was denigrating Christ’s death by his continued desire to hold to keeping the law to find acceptance with God?
 - ? How do you feel about this assertion?
 - ? How do you feel about the strength of Paul’s feelings about this that is reflected in his speaking of Jesus dying in vain?
 - ? Why is a “self-righteous” attitude—an attitude that I can be right with God through my own efforts—so denigrating to Christ and his sufferings and death?
 - ? How is this true today?

Galatians 3.¹⁻⁵

¹O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? ²This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

³Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? ⁴Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain. ⁵He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Questionary

After a brief greeting (1.¹⁻⁵) and a charge that the Galatians were guilty of apostacy (1.⁶⁻¹⁰), Paul devoted the remainder of chapter 1 and most of chapter 2 to reviewing the “credentials” of his ministry. His credentials were, essentially, that he had learned all that he had taught the Galatians directly from Jesus, himself, rather than from any mortal being. In reviewing his credentials, Paul did not seek to boast but to illustrate how grievous the Galatians’ apostacy from his teaching was. In 2.¹⁷⁻²¹, Paul addresses the nature of Galatian apostacy: rather than seeking acceptance and right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Galatians were seeking to be right with God (justified) through keeping the observances and commandments of law, in their case the “Law of Moses.”

We suggested that right standing with God was not only impossible through the Law of Moses but through any law, including the religious laws we have today.

In today’s reading, Paul comes back to addressing the Galatians directly

1. In returning directly to the Galatians’ apostacy, Paul asks 6 questions.
 - ? Take a moment to consider and answer each question as if you were a Galatian and had yielded to the temptation to rely on law rather than Jesus to find complete acceptance with God.
2. Paul asks “who hath bewitched you”?
 - ? What feels and thoughts come to your mind when you read of “bewitching”?
 - ? What were the traditional deleterious effects that “witches” could have on others?
 - ? What harm has come upon the Galatians because of their apostatized through “bewitching”?
3. Paul speaks of “Jesus Christ” having been “evidently set forth, crucified among you.”
 - ? What, do you think, does Paul mean by this?
 - ? How, today and in your life has “Jesus Christ” been “evidently set forth, crucified among you”?
4. Paul suggests that there are right ways and wrong ways to obtain and then maintain the presence and companionship of the Holy Spirit.
 - ? What are those wright and wrong ways to receive and keep the companionship of the Spirit?
 - ? Why is it so difficult, maybe impossible, to maintain the companionship of the Holy Spirit while, at the same time, believing that one must be obedient? —later in this same epistle Paul will remind the Galatians that law will accept nothing short of complete obedience to every one of its stipulations before it will pronounce one “innocent,” “not guilty,” or, in religious terms, “righteous.”
 - ? What role does faith in Jesus Christ, his mercy and grace, play in our obtaining and maintaining the companionship of the Holy Spirit?
 - ? To what degree do you feel you enjoy the companionship of the Holy Spirit?
 - ? What might you need to think and do to enjoy the Holy Spirit’s companionship more consistently and powerfully—especially if it isn’t by means of some “work ethic”?

Galatians 3.⁶⁻⁹

⁶Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ⁷Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. ⁸And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying,

“In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

⁹So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Questionary

After a brief greeting (1.¹⁻⁵) and a charge that the Galatians were guilty of apostasy (1.⁶⁻¹⁰), Paul devoted the remainder of chapter 1 and most of chapter 2 to reviewing the “credentials” of his ministry. His credentials were, essentially, that he had learned all that he had taught the Galatians directly from Jesus, himself, rather than from any mortal being. In reviewing his credentials, Paul did not seek to boast but to illustrate how grievous the Galatians’ apostasy from his teaching was. In 2.¹⁷⁻²¹, Paul addresses the nature of Galatian apostasy: rather than seeking acceptance and right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Galatians were seeking to be right with God (justified) through keeping the observances and commandments of law, in their case the “Law of Moses.”

We suggested that right standing with God was not only impossible through the Law of Moses but through any law, including the religious laws we have today.

In 3.¹, Paul began once more to address the Galatian’s directly. In today’s reading, Paul continues to address the Galatian apostasy.

1. Paul writes, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” This is a quotation from Genesis 15.⁶.
 - ? What is the context of the statement in Genesis 15? What had God said that Abraham believed?
 - ? What was so remarkable and commendable about Abraham believing God’s promise that Abraham would sire a son?

Consider the following observation that Paul made concerning Abraham.

“¹⁸[Abraham] 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.’ ¹⁹And 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 Sara’s womb*: ²⁰he 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. ²²And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4.¹⁸⁻²²).

- ? How old were Abraham and Sara at this time?
 - ? What is meant by Abraham’s body being “dead,” and the “deadness of Sara’s womb”?
 - ? How believing would you be if you were told that an impotent husband and a wife in menopause would have a baby?
 - ? What is it about Abraham’s trust that he and Sara would have their own child that caused God to pronounce Abraham “righteous”?
2. Today’s reading begins with “Even as...”
 - ? What does this beginning to verse 6 tell you?
 - ? How do these two words connect this verse with the previous: “He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith [faithful hearing]? Even as...”

Abraham is an example of the truths Paul teaches in verses 1-5. Just as God worked a miracle in

Abraham's life (producing a child) because he, Abraham, believed the promise God made of a child, so too we can see miracles performed in our lives through believing in God's capacity to do the seemingly impossible.

- ? What difficult, seemingly impossible things would you have God do in your life?
 - ? How is possessing and maintaining the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, in our lives "miraculous"?
 - ? Is being thought righteous and acceptable in God's sight and thus maintaining the presence of the Holy Spirit a thing that you find difficult to believe in your life?
 - ? How does a belief that one must "keep the commandments" add to the difficulty?
 - ? How does "believing God" really is willing to overlook our mistakes and find us acceptable give us the ability to feel "righteous" and "acceptable" in the eyes of God?
 - ? How does "believing God" really is willing to overlook our mistakes and find us acceptable give us the ability to maintain the presence of the Holy Spirit?
3. Paul concludes with, "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."
- ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What was Abraham's ultimate blessing, something even larger than having a single child?

Abraham is promised, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

- ? How does he do this?
- ? How is one of his children, Jesus, a fulfillment of this promise? How is he a blessing to the world?
- ? How are you a fulfillment of this promise? What do you do to be a blessing to those around you?

Galatians 3.¹⁰⁻¹⁴

- ¹⁰For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written,
“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”
- ¹¹But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for,
“The just shall live by faith.”
- ¹²And the law is not of faith: but,
“The man that doeth them shall live in them.”
- ¹³Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written,
“Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:”
- ¹⁴That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

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We suggested that right standing with God was not only impossible through the Law of Moses but through any law, including the religious laws we have today.

In 3.¹, Paul began once more to address the Galatian’s directly. In today’s reading, Paul continues to address the Galatian apostasy.

1. Paul quotes four passages from the Old Testament: Deut. 27.²⁶, Hab. 2.⁴, Lev. 18.⁵, and Deut. 21.²³. Previously in chapter 3, Paul has quoted from Gen. 15.⁶ and 12.².
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider how thoroughly Paul’s thoughts, attitudes, and actions are influenced and directed by scripture?
 - ? How central are the scriptures to your own thoughts, your own attitudes, and your own actions?
 - ? Are their other influences—for example, those that come through social media and other web based platforms—that compete with the influence that scripture has in your life?
 - ? How much time a day do you spend in the scriptures as opposed to these other, inferior, and often deceptive influences?
2. Consider these two quotations, with which Paul agrees completely.

“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

“The man that doeth them shall live in them.”

- ? What does it mean to be “cursed”—think: “what is the opposite of cursed”?

In order to not be “cursed,” or “unblessed,” law demands the one obeys every law all the time. In other language, the law pronounces “lawful,” “righteous,” “innocent,” “justified” only those who observe every law all the time. For example, if you kept every law, but robbed one bank on just one occasion, the law would declare you “guilty,” “a lawbreaker,” “unrighteous,” “unjustified.”

- ? How do you feel about this?

- ? Do you understand why it is so? Why is it so?
- ? Is this consistent with the expectations of the law you live today—either secular or religious?
- ? Do you see that no one keeps every law all the time?
- ? Do you understand why it is impossible to be “justified,” “righteous,” “innocent,” “not guilty” only through the observation of laws and commandments?
- ? Answer what is really Paul’s question, then: “Why do you look for “righteousness,” “innocence,” a verdict of “not guilty,” or “justification” by means of obedience to commandments or “works righteousness”?”

Paul’s quote, “The man that doeth them shall live in [by] them,” makes essentially the same point. If one wishes to live one must keep the law’s demands. The law provides no other means to life.

- ? How do you feel about this, the unyielding, unbending demands of law—every law?
 - ? Based on these insights about law’s demands, what kind of “relationship” can and do you have with “Law”?
 - ? What do you think and feel when we say that none of this means we do not attempt to be as good as we can be, but that it is not through law or obedience that we find acceptance or a healthy relationship with God—being aware, as we are, that we fail in keeping every law all the time?
3. Paul’s final quote, “Cursed is ever one that hangeth on a tree,” is accompanied with his assertion that “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.”
 - ? How do you feel about Jesus as you read this?
 - ? What is the impact of our “unlawfulness” upon him?
 - ? How does Jesus’ “cursedness” change our relationship with law?
 4. Today’s reading ends with Paul’s conclusion that “we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” rather than through law.
 - ? After studying and pondering these last two readings from Galatians 3 (6-9 and 10-14), explain in your own words what this means and how and why we receive the Holy Spirit as we do?

Galatians 3.¹⁵⁻²⁰

¹⁵Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. ¹⁶Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, "And to seeds," as of many; but as of one, "And to thy seed," which is Christ.

¹⁷And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

¹⁸For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

¹⁹Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. ²⁰Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

Questionary

After a brief greeting (1.¹⁻⁵) and a charge that the Galatians were guilty of apostasy (1.⁶⁻¹⁰), Paul devoted the remainder of chapter 1 and most of chapter 2 to reviewing the "credentials" of his ministry. His credentials were, essentially, that he had learned all that he had taught the Galatians directly from Jesus, himself, rather than from any mortal being. In reviewing his credentials, Paul did not seek to boast but to illustrate how grievous the Galatians' apostasy from his teaching was. In 2.¹⁷⁻²¹, Paul addresses the nature of Galatian apostasy: rather than seeking acceptance and right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Galatians were seeking to be right with God (justified) through keeping the observances and commandments of law, in their case the "Law of Moses."

We suggested that right standing with God was not only impossible through the Law of Moses but through any law, including the religious laws we have today.

In 3.¹, Paul began once more to address the Galatian's directly. In today's reading, Paul continues to address the Galatian apostasy. Paul's argument is a little dense. The reader might be helped by the following translation, taken from the NIV.

¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"^[a] meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

1. Paul suggests that the promises were made to the man Abraham and "his seed." He suggests that the singular "seed" rather than the plural "seeds" is significant.
 - ? What significance does Paul attribute to the singular "seed"?
 - ? How is Jesus an ultimate and perfect fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that Abraham was promised many descendants, but that only through Jesus Christ can those descendants experience an everlasting life?
 - ? Abraham's descendants are but a small portion of the human population. How does Jesus give entrance to the billions of others who are not literal descendants of Abraham?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate Jesus' capacity to save compared with Abraham's ability to produce descendants?

2. Paul speaks of the relationship between the Law of Moses, given some 400 years after Abraham, and the promises made to Abraham.
 - ? How did the Law of Moses serve to undermine or limit the promises God made to Abraham?
 - ? How did the Law of Moses exclude those who were not descendants of Abraham?
 - ? How does Jesus' gospel, or good news, open the door to all people, regardless of race, blood lines, nationalities, etc.?

3. Paul says that the Law of Moses "was added because of transgressions."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How do you feel about the Law of Moses being something less than a "first choice" on God's part when it comes to a plan of salvation?
 - ? How are all systems of religious laws, prohibitions, statutes, etc. inadequate when it comes to accomplishing God's goal of saving His children? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Why does humankind's hope in achieving a higher consciousness and eternal life always finally come down to God's promise of being able to accomplish in individuals' lives what is otherwise impossible if they are left to themselves and their own devices?

Galatians 3.²¹⁻²⁵

²¹Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. ²²But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

²³But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. ²⁴Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Questionary

After a brief greeting (1.¹⁻⁵) and a charge that the Galatians were guilty of apostasy (1.⁶⁻¹⁰), Paul devoted the remainder of chapter 1 and most of chapter 2 to reviewing the “credentials” of his ministry. His credentials were, essentially, that he had learned all that he had taught the Galatians directly from Jesus, himself, rather than from any mortal being. In reviewing his credentials, Paul did not seek to boast but to illustrate how grievous the Galatians’ apostasy from his teaching was. In 2.¹⁷⁻²¹, Paul addresses the nature of Galatian apostasy: rather than seeking acceptance and right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Galatians were seeking to be right with God (justified) through keeping the observances and commandments of law, in their case the “Law of Moses.”

We suggested that right standing with God was not only impossible through the Law of Moses but through any law, including the religious laws we have today.

In 3.¹, Paul began once more to address the Galatian’s directly. In today’s reading, Paul continues to address the Galatian apostasy.

For today’s reading, we must be aware what Paul has in mind when he speaks of the promise of God. The promises that God made to Abraham were many. But Paul is particularly interested in the promise that because Abraham trusted God to act in his life Abraham would be looked upon favorably by God. That is, Abraham would be considered “righteous,” “innocent,” “blameless,” “not guilty,” “acceptable,” “justified,” or “forgiven.”

1. Paul asks if law—any religious law—can get in the way of God’s promise to look favorably or with acceptance upon an individual. He then answers in the negative.
? Why does Paul answer as he does? What makes it possible for God to approve of individuals in the face of an impossibly demanding law?
2. Paul’s “if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” reminds us that there is no religious law through which individuals can find acceptance with God.
? Why is they so?
3. Paul reminds us, as he does elsewhere and repeatedly, that “scripture hath concluded all under sin;” i.e. everyone commits breaches of the religious law to which they have committed themselves.
? How does this address the previous question?
? How does this reality of imperfection complicate our desire to be “righteous,” or to experience God’s acceptance of us?
? What is Paul’s solution to this deadlock: we feel that to be thought righteous before God we must keep whatever religious law we have adopted but it is impossible to keep the law as it demands or as we demand of ourselves?
? How does our trust in God’s promise of righteousness through faith and the forgiveness of sins break the deadlock?
4. Paul teaches that “the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

? How does the law serve as a “schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ”?

Often we think of this in terms of the symbols found in the sacrificial aspects of the Law of Moses that seem to point to Christ and his atonement. But, all systems of religious laws, ours included, serve to point our minds to Christ with or without ritual symbolism.

? How?

Consider our law’s demand that we obey—always and in everything, as Paul reminded us.

Consider too, the impossibility of the demand.

? How does this deadlock drive us to Christ and to trust and rely on him for forgiveness and help—thus making the law a sort of instructor?

5. Finally, Paul says that “after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” Again, we tend to think of this only in terms of the Law of Moses. This, to be sure, was Paul’s focus. But this could be said of every system of religious law.

? How?

? How does actual experience of Christ’s generosity in forgiveness and acceptance serve as its own kind of “schoolmaster” that is, in fact, even more powerful and convincing than the law’s impossible demands?

Galatians 3.²⁶⁻²⁹

²⁶For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Questionary

After a brief greeting (1.¹⁻⁵) and a charge that the Galatians were guilty of apostasy (1.⁶⁻¹⁰), Paul devoted the remainder of chapter 1 and most of chapter 2 to reviewing the “credentials” of his ministry. His credentials were, essentially, that he had learned all that he had taught the Galatians directly from Jesus, himself, rather than from any mortal being. In reviewing his credentials, Paul did not seek to boast but to illustrate how grievous the Galatians’ apostasy from his teaching was. In 2.¹⁷⁻²¹, Paul addresses the nature of Galatian apostasy: rather than seeking acceptance and right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Galatians were seeking to be right with God (justified) through keeping the observances and commandments of law, in their case the “Law of Moses.”

We suggested that right standing with God was not only impossible through the Law of Moses but through any law, including the religious laws we have today.

In 3.¹, Paul began once more to address the Galatian’s directly. In today’s reading, Paul continues to address the Galatian apostasy.

1. Paul offers these comforting words: “ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”
 - ? What is the difference between saying, as we so often do, “we are the children of God,” and saying, as Paul always does, “we are the children of God *by faith in Christ Jesus*”?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Paul’s statement makes being a “child of God” a matter of personal choice that we either make or don’t make?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you consider that those who do not trust Christ are not “children of God” as Paul thinks of it?

Elsewhere, Paul speaks of our having been “predestinated,”—“foreordained” if that makes you more comfortable—“unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself [the Father]” (Ephesians 1.⁵).

- ? What do you think of when you read that word “adoption”—that we are adopted as “children of God”?
 - ? How does the idea of our having been “adopted” as “children of God” through our choice (our faith in Christ) emphasize the unnaturalness of our relationship with God?
 - ? How do you feel about Paul’s idea of our becoming a “child of God” as though we came from outside the family (as adopted children are) rather than through some kind of natural birth or heritage?
 - ? What does this say about us in our “natural” state?
2. Paul teaches that in Christ, there “is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female” because “in Christ Jesus” we are “all one.”
 - ? What kind of community do you envision when you contemplate this oneness, unity, or sense of connectedness?
 - ? To what degree do the various social circles of which you are a member—family, church, neighborhood, city, state, nation—approximate Paul’s vision of oneness as found here?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What role and responsibility do you have for the state of your social circles and the connectedness or disconnectedness, unity or division that you find in them?
 - ? What can you do to improve the unity in the social circles in which you live?

3. Paul announces that “if *ye be Christ’s*, then are ye Abraham’s seed.”
 - ? Which means more to you, or with which do you resonate most strongly: being a child of Christ or being a child of Abraham? Why do you answer as you do?
4. Finally, Paul promises that in Christ we are “heirs according to the promise.”
 - ? Of what are we “heirs”?

While one might name any number of blessings we might inherit with Abraham, the one Paul has focused on has been the promise that by trusting in God and his generous character, we can find acceptance with him even though we do not measure up to the demands that religious law and ourselves place upon us.

- ? How do you feel about being heir to this sort of peace and security with God?
 - ? To what degree do you partake of this inheritance of peace and security with God? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What needs to change if you do not feel this peace and security with God in your life?
- ? After reading chapter 3, how do you feel about and how would you describe the Galatians’ decision to stop trusting on Christ and his willingness to forgive and replacing with an attempt at strict legalistic observance of commandments in order to find acceptance and peace and security with God?

Galatians 5.²²⁻²³

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is

love,
joy,
peace,
longsuffering,
gentleness,
goodness,
faith,
²³meekness,
temperance:

against such there is no law.

Questionary

1. Normally, “fruit” springs from a carefully nurtured plant.
 - ? Do you carefully nourish the Holy Spirit so that it springs forth with the fruits mentioned in this passage?
 - ? Or does the Holy Spirit carefully nourish you so that you spring forth with the fruits?
 - ? Perhaps some combination of the two, or something else entirely?
2. Choose one of the fruits that you would like to cultivate in your life, and make it a matter of study, meditation, and prayer.

Ephesians 1

Questionary 1 — ephesians 1. ³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, ¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

This is a longer passage than we usually examine in a single reading. The 12 verses represent a single long sentence, so we felt the need to present them together. However, we will highlight and examine portions of this reading over multiple readings. This, then, is our first reading in this single sentence.

1. Traditionally, every sentence has a subject and verb. After reading the entire sentence, identify the subject and verb.
 - ? What is the subject?
 - ? What is the verb?

2. We might rewrite the main idea of the sentence (subject/verb) as “God and Father is blessed.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?

The Greek word that the KJV translated as “blessed” could be translated as “worthy of praise,” allowing us to read, “God and Father is worthy of praise.”

- ? What reasons would you personally offer for why God is worthy of praise?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that the key idea that Paul wishes to make is that God is worthy of praise? Why is it important to make this point?
3. In the remaining 11 and ½ verses of this long sentence, Paul provides his list of reasons that God is worthy of praise.
 - ? We will examine these reasons in our follow-up readings, but take a few minutes to re-read these 12 verses and identify Paul’s reasons that God is worthy of praise.

Questionary 2— ephesians 1.³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:** ⁴according as he hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, ¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

This is a longer passage than we usually examine in a single reading. The 12 verses represent a single long sentence, so we felt the need to present them together. However, we will highlight and examine portions of this reading over multiple readings. This is our second.

1. In our first reading, we discovered that the subject/verb of this entire sentence, and thus the main point Paul wished to make with it was, “God and Father is worthy of praise.” The rest of the sentence lists reasons that Paul finds to praise God.
 - ? Each reader might identify the reasons differently, but what reasons do you identify as found in this single sentence?
2. As a reason for God being worthy of our praise, Paul offers that God “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”
 - ? What blessings might come under the rubric of “spiritual”?
 - ? What, do you think, is meant by “spiritual blessings” that are “*in heavenly places*”?
 - ? What is the significance of these “spiritual blessings in heavenly places” coming to us “*in Christ*”?
 - ? Though God bestows the “spiritual blessings in heavenly places,” they come “in, by, or with” Christ. Why, do you think, is this?

This is our first encounter with the prepositional phrase beginning with “in, by, through” with Christ (or some allusion to him) as the object of that preposition. Scan through the entire sentence found in vss. 3-14 and identify the others.

- ? What is the doctrinal and emotional impact of this repetitive use of the prepositional phrase that has Christ as the object?

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places **in Christ:** ⁴according as he hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children **by Jesus Christ** to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted **in the beloved,** ⁷**in whom** we have redemption **through his blood,** the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation

of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things **in Christ**, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even **in him**: ¹¹**in whom** also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted **in Christ**, ¹³**in whom** ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: **in whom** also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

3. God's bestowing "spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" is "consistent with" or "in line with" the fact that He, God the Father, "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the significance of God, the Father, having "chosen us before the foundation of the world *in Christ*" as opposed to simply having "chosen us before the foundation of the world"?
 - ? What did God choose us to do or be (hint: stay in this reading for the answer)?

Paul says that we were chosen to be "holy and without blame before him [God, the Father] in love.

- ? What does it mean to you to be "holy."
- ? What do you think when you consider that at the heart of the meaning of holiness is the idea of "apartness, uniqueness, peculiarity, uncommonness, difference"?
- ? Is being "blameless" in God's eyes a common or uncommon state? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What does it mean in this context to be "uncommon"?
- ? What is "common" in this world?
- ? What is required to be "blameless"?
- ? How and why is uncommonness and blamelessness found only "in Christ"?
- ? Paul also teaches that uncommonness and blamelessness is found "in love." Whose love is it that makes uncommonness and blamelessness a reality?
- ? What role does our love for Christ and Christ's love for us play in making us uncommon and blameless?

Questionary 3— ephesians 1.³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵**having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, ¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.**

This is a longer passage than we usually examine in a single reading. The 12 verses represent a single long sentence, so we felt the need to present them together. However, we are highlighting and examining portions of this reading over multiple readings.

In our first reading, we discovered that the subject/verb of this entire sentence, and thus the main point Paul wished to make with it was, “God and Father is worthy of praise.” The rest of the sentence lists reasons that Paul finds to praise God. In each case, while it is the Father who bestows the blessings, He does so in, through, and by Christ. In our second reading (vss. 3-4), we found that one of the blessings was that God bestowed upon us divine spiritual blessings that made it possible for us to be unlike normal worldly individuals so that no reason could be found to blame us for anything.

1. In verses 5-6, Paul offers another, perhaps more than one reason why God, the Father is worthy of our praise.
? What reason/reasons do you find?
2. We often speak of all humanity being children of God through some sort of eternal birthing by birth parents.
? How does Paul see us becoming children of God?

Think about the idea of our being “adopted” as children of God. If a couple “adopts” a child, the couple is not their birth parents. In the case of adoption, being a child and parent of another is a conscious choice.

? What thoughts do you have about this as you consider Paul’s teaching that we are children of God by adoption, not “natural childbirth”? Why do you answer as you do?

Paul says that we are adopted as children of God “*by Jesus Christ.*”

- ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? How does Jesus serve as the agent in our adoption?
 - ? Our being children of God is based upon our faith in Jesus Christ and is thus a matter of choice. How do you feel about this?
3. God free choice to adopt us as His children “made us accepted,” or is indicative of the fact that He accepts us.
? What do you think and feel when you contemplate this?
? Once more, Christ, or “the beloved,” is the agent that brings this acceptance. How does he do so?

4. God's willingness to adopt us as His children was "consistent with the benevolence of his desire."
 - ? What does this tell you about the nature, character, and disposition of God?
 - ? What does it tell you about the impetus behind his decision to accept us as children?

5. Paul says that the Father's conscious choice to adopt us as His children when we trust Christ causes us to "praise the immensity of His inner kindness."
 - ? How do you feel about the inner kindness that God possesses in Himself, a kindness that led Him to feel well disposed toward us even though our actions might not naturally show us to be compatible with Him?
 - ? Does it instill within you the feelings that Paul says it was intended to instill? Why do you answer as you do?

6. The decision to do all of this and adopt us through Jesus Christ was "predestined" or "made beforehand" based on God's dispositional generosity of soul.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate this?

Questionary 4— ephesians 1.³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷**in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;** ⁸**wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;** ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, ¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

This is a longer passage than we usually examine in a single reading. The 12 verses represent a single long sentence, so we felt the need to present them together. However, we are highlighting and examining portions of this reading over multiple readings.

In our first reading, we discovered that the subject/verb of this entire sentence, and thus the main point Paul wished to make with it was, “God and Father is worthy of praise.” The rest of the sentence lists reasons that Paul finds to praise God. In each case, while it is the Father who bestows the blessings, He does so in, through, and by Christ. In our second reading (vss. 3-4), we found that one of the blessings was that God bestowed upon us divine spiritual blessings that made it possible for us to be unlike normal worldly individuals so that no reason could be found to blame us for anything. In our third reading (vss. 5-6), Paul lists the blessing of being accepted as children of God through adoption. This blessing comes as a result of God’s characteristic generosity.

1. In verses 7-8, Paul describes another blessing that the Father grants us through Christ—a blessing that makes God worthy of our praise.
 - ? What is that blessing?
 - ? To what degree do you live a life in which you feel forgiven for the sins and errors you commit? Why do you answer as you do? What does your answer suggest about you and the relationship you have with God?
2. Verse 7 begins with the prepositional phrase, “in whom.”
 - ? To whom does the “whom” refer?
 - ? According to Paul, Jesus is the agent to carry out all of God inner desires, including the willingness and desire to forgive sin. Why is Jesus able to fulfil this role? How does he do it?
3. Paul informs us concerning the basis of our forgiveness with the subordinating phrase, “because of the bounty of Father’s generosity.”
 - ? What do you think and feel about Heavenly Father when you read this?
4. Paul’s 8th verse is made up of a single subordinating clause, “wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence...”
 - ? To what does “wherein” refer?
 - ? How does it clarify Paul’s reading to read, “in His generosity to forgive (KJV, “wherein”) Father hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence?”
 - ? How does God demonstrate His “wisdom and understanding” by generously forgiving us our

sins?

? How does forgiveness demonstrate God's understanding of our mortal state?

5. Paul's sentences can be long and complex with much use of pronouns (which refer to an antecedent proper noun), prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses. To understand Paul's writings, it is often necessary to slow down and analyze these grammatical phrases.

? In the following reading of these verses, we specify some of the pronouns. Does doing so clarify any points Paul makes? If so, how?

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [Father] hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as [Father] hath chosen us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before [Father] in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to [Father], according to the good pleasure of [Father's] will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of [Father's] grace, [in his grace] [Father] hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in [Christ] we have redemption through [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of [Father's] grace; ⁸[in the richness of Father's grace] [Father] hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of [Father's] will, according to [Father's] good pleasure which [Father] hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times [Father] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in [Christ]: ¹¹in [Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of [Father] who worketh all things after the counsel of [Father's] will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of [Father's] glory, who first trusted in Christ, ¹³in [Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in [Christ] also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴[the holy Spirit of promise] is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of [Father's] glory.

Questionary 5— ephesians 1.³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; **⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:** ¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, ¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

This is a longer passage than we usually examine in a single reading. The 12 verses represent a single long sentence, so we felt the need to present them together. However, we are highlighting and examining portions of this reading over multiple readings.

In our first reading, we discovered that the subject/verb of this entire sentence, and thus the main point Paul wished to make with it was, “God and Father is worthy of praise.” The rest of the sentence lists reasons that Paul finds to praise God. In each case, while it is the Father who bestows the blessings, He does so in, through, and by Christ. In our second reading (vss. 3-4), we found that one of the blessings was that God bestowed upon us divine spiritual blessings that made it possible for us to be unlike normal worldly individuals so that no reason could be found to blame us for anything. In our third reading (vss. 5-6), Paul lists the blessing of being accepted as children of God through adoption. This blessing comes as a result of God’s characteristic generosity. In our fourth reading (vss. 7-8), Paul lists the blessing of the forgiveness of sins which flows to us out of the Father’s generosity, wisdom, and understanding.

1. In verses 9-10, Paul gives another reason why God, the Father, is worthy of our praise.
 - ? What is that reason?
 - ? What does it mean to you that through Christ everything in heaven and everything in earth is brought together or unified?
 - ? What does this mean for you in your daily life?
2. Paul speaks of this unification of heaven and earth through Christ as part of the “mystery of his will” or of “God’s secreted desire.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to have heaven and earth and everything in them united?
 - ? What divides them to begin with?
 - ? How does Christ reveal God’s hidden desire to unite heaven and earth and everything in them?
3. Earlier (vs. 5), Paul credited God’s willingly choice to adopt us as His children to “the goodwill” He possess for others. Then, in verse 7, Paul credits God’s willingness to forgive to the “bounty of God’s kindness.” In 9-10, Paul credits God’s revelation of his desire to unite heaven and earth to His “goodwill.”
 - ? What impact does this repetition of God’s feelings of goodwill toward us have on you and your faith and trust in Him?
 - ? What does God’s goodwill—a goodwill so central to His Being that it’s existence is repeated over and over again in this very short passage—tell you about the character of God?

Questionary 6— ephesians 1. ³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: **¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ,** ¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

This is a longer passage than we usually examine in a single reading. The 12 verses represent a single long sentence, so we felt the need to present them together. However, we are highlighting and examining portions of this reading over multiple readings.

In our first reading, we discovered that the subject/verb of this entire sentence, and thus the main point Paul wished to make with it was, “God and Father is worthy of praise.” The rest of the sentence lists reasons that Paul finds to praise God. In each case, while it is the Father who bestows the blessings, He does so in, through, and by Christ. In our second reading (vss. 3-4), we found that one of the blessings was that God bestowed upon us divine spiritual blessings that made it possible for us to be unlike normal worldly individuals so that no reason could be found to blame us for anything. In our third reading (vss. 5-6), Paul lists the blessing of being accepted as children of God through adoption. This blessing comes as a result of God’s characteristic generosity. In our fourth reading (vss. 7-8), Paul lists the blessing of the forgiveness of sins which flows to us out of the Father’s generosity, wisdom, and understanding. In our fifth reading, we learn that gathers and unifies everything and everyone through Christ.

1. In verses 11-12, Paul gives another reason why God, the Father, is worthy of our praise.
 - ? What is that reason?
 - ? What is it that you inherit in Christ in this life?
 - ? What is it that you inherit in Christ in the next life?
2. As Paul describes the blessings that God bestows upon those who have faith in Christ, he says that in receiving those blessings so that we serve as “praise of the glory of his grace (vs. 6),” and “unto the praise of his glory (vs. 14),” and that “we should be to the praise of his glory” (vs. 12).
 - ? How do you feel about God’s intentions of exhibiting His grace and glory through the blessings He gives to you?
 - ? How do you feel about being used to send the message of God’s grace and glory?
 - ? What role do you play in sending this message?
3. Paul says that God does all that He does and blesses as He does “after the counsel of his own will,” or “consistent with plan reflective of his desire.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that all that God does in our live is the result of the fact that it is what he wants to do and what brings Him pleasure?

Questionary 7— ephesians 1.³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, **¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.**

This is a longer passage than we usually examine in a single reading. The 12 verses represent a single long sentence, so we felt the need to present them together. However, we are highlighting and examining portions of this reading over multiple readings.

In our first reading, we discovered that the subject/verb of this entire sentence, and thus the main point Paul wished to make with it was, “God and Father is worthy of praise.” The rest of the sentence lists reasons that Paul finds to praise God. In each case, while it is the Father who bestows the blessings, He does so in, through, and by Christ. In our second reading (vss. 3-4), we found that one of the blessings was that God bestowed upon us divine spiritual blessings that made it possible for us to be unlike normal worldly individuals so that no reason could be found to blame us for anything. In our third reading (vss. 5-6), Paul lists the blessing of being accepted as children of God through adoption. This blessing comes as a result of God’s characteristic generosity. In our fourth reading (vss. 7-8), Paul lists the blessing of the forgiveness of sins which flows to us out of the Father’s generosity, wisdom, and understanding. In our fifth reading, we learn that gathers and unifies everything and everyone through Christ. In our sixth reading, Paul reminds us that through Christ Father has given us a lasting inheritance.

1. In verses 13-14, Paul gives another reason why God, the Father, is worthy of our praise.
 - ? What is the blessing found in these verse for which God is worthy of our praise?
2. Paul speaks of being “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the “holy Spirit of promise?”
 - ? What would it mean to read this phrase as “the promised Holy Spirit” or “the Holy Spirit that was promised”?

As you consider this question, consider the follow passages.

“And, behold, I send the a promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be be endued with power from on high” (Lk. 24.⁴⁹).

“And, [Jesus] being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be a baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1.⁴⁻⁶).

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance...

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2.^{1-4, 33}).

Jesus kept the promise he made before his death to bestow the Holy Spirit upon his disciples.

- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the reality that you receive the Holy Spirit through Christ and that your receiving it is the coequence of a promise and the fulfillment of that promise?
- ? On the other hand, what would it mean to read the phrase, “the Holy Spirit of promise” as “the Holy Spirit that brings promise,” or “the promising Holy Spirit”?
- ? What “promise” does the Holy Spirit bring into our lives?

We sometimes speak someone—for example an athlete—as having or showing promise.

- ? What do we mean by this?

In this example, we could replace the word “promise” with “potential.”

- ? How does the Holy Spirit bring added potential into our lives?
- ? What added potential and capabilities has the Holy Spirit brought into your life?

3. Paul speaks of our being “*sealed* with the holy Spirit.”

- ? What does this “sealing” mean to you?

The “sealing” of something is often done to indicate possession.

- ? As whose “possession” does the Holy Spirit make the one who is sealed?
- ? What does it mean to have been taken possession of by God?

Earlier in this sentence, Paul taught that through Christ and faith in him, we are “adopted” as children of God.

- ? How does this apply to our being possessed of God?

“Sealing” is also done to secure an item’s security, safety, and continuance.

- ? How does the Holy Spirit bring safety and continuance/ endurance into our lives?

4. Paul says that the Holy Spirit is “the earnest of our inheritance.”

- ? What does this mean to you?
- ? How does God’s keeping of his promise to give us the Holy Spirit demonstrate the earnestness or assurance of his commitment to give us an eternal inheritance?
- ? How has and does your possession of the Holy Spirit demonstrate the very real potential or assurance of an eternal inheritance awaiting you?

Questionary 8— ephesians 1. ³⁻¹⁴

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, ⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹²that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ, ¹³in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Questionary

We have now examined this long, single sentence in a series of seven readings. We found that the subject and verb of this single sentence is, “Blessed be the God and Father.” In the remainder of the sentence, Paul enumerated many reasons why God is worthy of our praise.

- ? Take some time to review this sentence and...
 - The many reasons Paul offers for praising God,
 - How you understand the blessings that Paul mentions
 - How you feel about those blessings
 - How those blessings impact your daily life
 - What role Jesus plays as the agent of those blessings
- ? Finally, consider the impact that such an expansive list has on you and the feelings you have for God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.
- ? How will you express your gratitude and how will you serve to “praise to his glory” so that others can witness your respect and appreciation for God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ?

Ephesians 1.¹⁵⁻²³— atonement

¹⁵Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, ¹⁶cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: ¹⁸the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: ²²and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Glorification: The Savior’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement”*

Today’s reading of nine verses is one long sentence. The single sentence represents Paul’s hopes for the saints at Ephesus as expressed to God in prayer. We have included the entire sentence in today’s reading for the sake of context, but we will only explore verses 19-21.

1. Paul teaches that God, the Father “raised [Jesus] from the dead.”
 - ? Is this consistent with your understanding of Jesus’ resurrection and the power by which it was achieved?
 - ? What do you envision in your mind when you imagine God acting as agent of Jesus’ resurrection?
2. Paul teaches that God, the Father, exercises the same “mighty power” in our lives to achieve the ends of our salvation as he exercised in raising Jesus.
 - ? What do you think about when you consider the power that is necessary to raise the dead?
 - ? What things require greater power than raising the dead, do you think?
 - ? How do you feel knowing that you have access to the sort of strength that can raise the dead?
 - ? When have you experienced such power in your life?
3. God also exerted his power to “set [Jesus] at his own right hand in the heavenly places.”
 - ? What is the significance of Jesus being at the “right hand” of God?
 - ? What does Jesus do from his privileged and intimate place at God’s right hand?
4. Sitting at God’s right hand, Jesus is “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”
 - ? What is the significance of this in your daily life?
 - ? What kinds of “powers” and “dominating influences” are in your life against which you protected and over which you hope to see victory?
 - ? How does today’s reading help you understand and appreciate the fact that Jesus’ resurrection, his ascension into heaven, and his enthronement at the right hand of God are as essential a part of his atonement as his suffering in Gethsemane or at Golgotha?
 - ? How does Jesus continue to reveal is at-one-ment, or his connectedness to you from his place at the right hand of God?
 - ? What is the significance of his advocacy for you at the right hand of God?
 - ? When have you sensed his advocacy in your behalf? How did it make you feel?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Ephesians 2.⁴⁻⁷

⁴God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: ⁷that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Questionary

- ? What do you think and feel when you read that God “hath quickened us together with Christ” “even when we were dead in sins”?
- ? What does it suggest to you concerning your behavior toward others that Jesus suffered and died for us before we could respond, and without knowing how we might respond?
- ? How does this serve as evidence of “the exceeding riches of his grace”?
- ? What does it mean to sit “in heavenly places in Christ? How does it relate not only to the next, but this life?

Ephesians 3.¹⁴⁻¹⁹— Atonement

¹⁴For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement.” *

1. Today’s reading is a portion of a prayer that the apostle Paul offers in behalf of the saints.
 - ? What requests does Paul make of God for the saints?
2. Paul asks, first, that the saints “be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What does it look like in one’s daily life?
 - ? What is the significance of this strengthening being “in the inner man”?
 - ? On what is this strengthening with power” based?
 - ? This strengthening is brought about through the Spirit, but is a consequence of “the riches of [God’s] glory.” What do you think of when you think about the “riches of [God’s] glory”?
3. Paul also asks that “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.”
 - ? What does it look like in one’s daily life to have “Christ... dwell in your heart”?
 - ? What role does “faith” play in this in-dwelling?
4. Paul asks that “ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”
 - ? What does it mean to be “rooted and grounded in love”?
 - ? What role does it play in helping one “comprehend... and to know the love of Christ”?
 - ? What does it mean to “comprehend” and “know” the “love of Christ”?
 - ? How would you feel about understanding “comprehend” and “know” as “experiencing the love of Christ”? What does it mean to experience Christ’s love?
 - ? What impact does Paul’s speaking of “the breadth and length, and depth and height” of “the love of Christ” have on the way you think of Jesus’ love?
5. Paul speaks of “the love of Christ” as that “which passeth knowledge.”
 - ? Do you feel about the Savior’s love as Paul does? If not, why not?
 - ? If you do feel as Paul does, what have you experienced in your own personal relations with the Savior that confirm that the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of Christ’s love is, indeed beyond understanding?
6. Through comprehending and knowing Christ’s love, Paul hopes that the saints will be “filled with all the fulness of God.”
 - ? What is “the fulness of God”?
 - ? What does it look like in one’s life to be “filled with all the fulness of God”?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
“Justification: How We Repent and Change”
“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Philippians 1.²⁹

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake...

Questionary

1. Some translate the King James' "given in the behalf of Christ..." as "bestowed in the behalf of Christ..." as if suffering were a gift.
 - ? How do you feel about suffering for Christ being thought of as a blessing bestowed rather than a trial to be endured?

Philippians 2.³⁻⁸— Atonement

³Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sanctification: Imitating and living Atonement.” *

1. Paul issues several admonitions in today’s readings?
 - ? What admonitions do you find?
 - ? Which one stands out to you as most pertinent for your life today?
2. Paul admonishes that “nothing be done through strife or vainglory?”
 - ? What is vainglory?
 - ? How does personal ambition for glory/ prestige as a motivator create strife between individuals?
 - ? What would you point to in Jesus’ earthly ministry as evidence that he was not motivated by personal ambition for glory/ prestige?
 - ? What evidence would others find in your life that you do not operate at the level of personal ambition for glory/ prestige as a motivator?
3. Paul admonishes us, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.”
 - ? What does this look like in every day life?
 - ? What is the significance of Paul’s “in lowliness of mind”?
 - ? What is the difference between what Paul is encouraging and what we traditionally label, “low self-esteem”?

Consider the following description Jesus gave of himself.

“I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11.²⁹)

- ? How does it relate to Paul’s admonition?
- If one assumes that God’s follows the counsel that he gives to mortals, and that the advice that Paul gives here is appropriate and inspired of God, then one must ask, “Does God possess “lowliness of mind,” and even more radically, “Does God esteem others better than himself”?
- ? How would you answer these questions? Why do you answer as you do?
4. Paul admonishes the Philippians to “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”
 - ? What does Paul mean by this?
 - ? To what evidences would you point that Jesus followed this principle in his own mortal ministry?
 - ? What evidence is there that he continues to follow this principle today?
 - ? What evidences would others find in your life that you follow this admonition?
 5. After describing Jesus as “being in the form of God,” high praise indeed, he says that Jesus “made himself of no reputation,” “took upon him the form of a servant,” “was made in the likeness of men,” was “found in fashion as a [mere] man,” and “humbled himself.”
 - ? What comes to your mind when you contemplate Jesus’ willingness to leave his divine glory behind to not only become human but to become the lowliest of humans?

- ? How does your awareness of Jesus humbling himself to such a degree impact how you feel about him?
- ? How does Jesus' example of self-humiliation impact the way you act in your own life and in your relationship with others?
- ? Think about 'reputation.' What is the "reputation" of a slave? What does it say about Jesus that he was satisfied with, indeed sought the reputation of a slave?
- ? What do you want your "reputation" to be?
- ? How would you feel about having the "reputation" of a slave?
- ? What does today's reading and questions to ponder contribute to your understanding of the nature of at-one-ment, or connectedness, linkage, unity, etc?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - "Fall: Our Need of Atonement"
 - "Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"
 - "At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"
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 - "Justification: How We Repent and Change"
 - "Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"
 - "Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement"
 - "Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"
 - "The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Philippians 2.⁴— just scripture

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Questionary

- ? What do you do to be true to this Pauline admonition?
- ? What does our society do to encourage this type of thinking and behavior?
- ? What are the consequences of not giving heed to this counsel?

Philippians 2.⁵⁻¹¹

⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ⁹Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is the 20th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

1. Paul speaks of Jesus as "being in the form of God."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? When you think of Jesus, how often do you think of him as "God"?
 - ? How does this shape the way you feel about him and the way you relate to him?
2. After describing Jesus as "being in the form of God," high praise indeed, he says that Jesus "made himself of no reputation," "took upon him the form of a servant," "was made in the likeness of men," was "found in fashion as a [mere] man," and "humbled himself."
 - ? What comes to your mind and how do you feel when you contemplate Jesus' willingness to leave his divine glory behind to not only become human but to become the lowliest of humans?
 - ? How does Jesus' example of self-humiliation impact the way you act in your own life and in your relationship with others?
3. Paul says that because Jesus so willingly humiliated himself, God has "given [Jesus] a name which is above every name and has "highly exalted" Jesus so that "every knee should bow" and "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."
 - ? How do you fulfil God's intent that you bow the knee and confess with your tongue that Jesus is the master of your life?
 - ? How much joy does it bring you to do so?

Philippians 3.⁸⁻¹⁰

⁸Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ¹⁰that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death...

Questionary

- ? What is the difference between a “righteousness which is of the law” and a “righteousness which is through the faith of Christ”?
- ? What does it mean to be “made conformable unto his death”?
- ? As you consider the priority that Paul gave to Christ, how do your priorities compare?
- ? What might another find in your life that would confirm that your priorities conform to those of Paul?

Philippians 4.⁸

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

Questionary

- ? How does the American Caligula stack up when placed along side the virtues on which one is to think and for which one should seek?
- ? What does it say about America that so many seek after and support Caligula?

Colossians 1.¹⁻⁸

¹Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, ²to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, ⁵for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; ⁶which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth: ⁷as ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; ⁸who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Q

uestionary

Today's is the first of five readings taken from Colossians 1.

1. After a brief greeting, Paul shares with members of the church, as he often does, the nature and content of the prayers he offers because of them and for them.
 - ? For what does Paul express thanks to God in relation to the Colosse saints?
2. Paul speaks of "the hope which is laid up... in heaven" for the Colosse saints.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the nature of the hope?
 - ? Why does Paul speak of the hope being "laid up... in heaven"?
3. Paul speaks of "the word of the truth of the gospel" and the fact that it "bringeth forth fruit."
 - ? What sort of "fruit" does the word of God and the good news of Christ produce?
 - ? What "fruit" has the gospel produced in your life?

Colossians 1.⁹⁻¹¹

⁹For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness...

Questionary

Today's is the 2nd of five readings taken from Colossians 1.

After a brief greeting (vs. 1-2), Paul shared with members of the church, as he often does, the nature and content of the prayers he offers because of them and for them. He began by telling them what he is grateful for (vs. 3-8).

1. In today's reading, Paul shares with the members of the Colossian church the nature of the requests that he makes to God in their behalf.
? For what does Paul ask God in behalf of the Colosse saints?
2. Paul asks that the Colossian saints be given knowledge of two kinds.
? What are those two kinds of knowledge?
3. Paul prays that the saints "might be filled with the knowledge of his [God's] will" so that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."
? What role does God play in making it possible for us to "walk worthy"?
? What role does God's revelation of his will play in our being able to "walk worthy"?
4. Paul prays that the saints might "increase in the knowledge of God."
? What truths are part of possessing a "knowledge of God"?
? What do you do on a regular basis to increase your knowledge of God?
? What portion of your prayers are devoted to increasing your knowledge of God—not his will, but of Him personally?
5. Paul prays that the saints be "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power."
? How do you tap into God's "glorious power" in order to be "strengthened with all might"?

We require God's power to be strengthened in "patience," "longsuffering," and "joyfulness."

- ? What role do these three attributes play in your life?
- ? What do they accomplish in our lives?

Colossians 1.¹²⁻²⁰—Atonement

¹²Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: ¹⁴in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

¹⁵who is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of every creature:

¹⁶for by him were all things created,
that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible,
whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers:
all things were created by him, and for him:

¹⁷and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church:
who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead;
that in all things he might have the preeminence.

¹⁹For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

²⁰and, having made peace through the blood of his cross,
by him to reconcile all things unto himself;
by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Questionary

This reading is the 5th in a series of Advent readings and post-Advent readings that will continue through the end of December. In addition, this reading is one of five from the 1st chapter of Colossians and is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.”*

In verse 3, Paul informed the Colossians saints of the prayers he offered to God in their behalf—the things that he thanked God for (verses 3-8), and the things he requested of God in their behalf (verses 9-14). In today’s reading, we hear a continuation of his prayerful requests (verses 13-14) followed by what many believe to be the lyrics of an early Christian hymn (verses 15-20).

I have reformatted verses 15-20 to represent the hymnic nature of the passage.

1. In verses 12-14, Paul lists a number of blessings for which he hopes the Colossians are grateful and for which he hopes they express their gratitude to God.
 - ? What are those things?
 - ? What do each of these blessings mean to you?
 - God has “made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”
 - God has delivered us from the power of darkness”
 - God has “translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”
 - In Christ “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”
 - ? How, and to what degree do you feel that you have experienced these divine blessings?
 - ? If you are unsure, or feel that you are missing something, what could you do to increase your awareness and experience of these in your life?
 - ? How can you include the gratitude you feel for these blessings in your daily prayers?
2. In the possible hymn found in verses 15-20, Jesus is said to have “preeminence” “in all things.”
 - ? What specific aspects of Christ’s character and mission do you identify as evidence of his preeminence?
 - ? What specific aspects of Christ’s character and mission does Paul mention as evidence of his preeminence?
 - ? What evidences can be found in the way you live your daily life —the things you think, say,

and do—that reflect Christ’s preeminence in your life?

3. In declaring Christ preeminent, the hymn uses several “superlatives” as it describes Jesus.

? What superlative words do you find that refer to Jesus?

- “*Firstborn*” (And not just “firstborn”—that would have said it all—but “firstborn of every creature—another superlative, “every.” Does it get more superlative or comprehensive than “every”?)
- “*Before all things*” (Is there anything in front of “before”?)
- “*Head*” (any body parts above the head?)
- “*Beginning*” (Is there anything before “the beginning”?)
- “*Preeminence*”
- “*Fulness*” (And not just “fulness,” but “*all* fulness.”) Why the unnecessary redundancy?

? Did you find other indicators of Christ’s preeminence?

? Taken altogether, what impact does all this “superlative” language have on your thoughts and feelings about and for the Son of God?

4. There is another “superlative” word, used in combination with another word, that is used six times in the hymn.

? What is that word and what are the two words that, together, are repeated six times?

“All” is a superlative. Does it get any more comprehensive than “all”? Is there anything greater than “all”?

? Take another look, if you missed it, at all the things to which “all things” refers when speaking of the Son.

? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider all the ways that Christ is preeminent as identified by the hymn?

5. Paul speaks of Jesus as “having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself...”

? Who is the subject of the verb “made peace”? Who is “himself”?

? Our LDS culture can sometimes almost belittle “the cross.” But Paul has no lack of appreciation when it comes to the cross. Elsewhere, he writes,

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1. ¹⁸).

? How do you feel about Paul’s assertion that peace is brought about through the “life given on the cross”?

? What are your thoughts, feelings, and estimations of the cross? Would Paul be able to relate?

6. It is significant that Paul teaches “by the Son, the Father reconciles all things unto himself” rather than “by the Son, Father is reconciled unto all things.”

? What, do you think, is the significance of this observation?

? How do you feel when you consider that it is our feelings toward God—especially the feeling we sometimes have that Father is not, somehow, on our side—that need reconciled, rather than God’s feelings toward us?

? How does Jesus accomplish our reconciliation toward God?

? You might want to make your own list of 1) your gospel hopes and expectations; 2) the things that Father has done for you, and about which you feel great awe and gratitude; and 3) the things that you have learned and felt about the Savior that suggest why he should take priority in your life.

? If you would like a different kind of experience, take what you have thought and felt, along with what you have added to your own list, and write lyrics to a hymn of praise for Christ.

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Colossians 1.²¹⁻²⁵

²¹And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled ²²in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: ²³if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; ²⁴who 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: ²⁵whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God...

Questionary

Today's is the 4th of five readings taken from Colossians 1.

After a brief greeting (vs. 1-2), Paul shared with members of the church, as he often does, the nature and content of the prayers he offers because of them and for them. He began by telling them what he is grateful for (vs. 3-8) and then informed them of the requests he makes of God in their behalf (9-11). In verses 12-20, Paul utilized what appears to be an early Christian hymn to celebrate the supremacy of Christ in our lives, in the church, and in world, and in the universe at large.

1. In today's reading, Paul speaks of the Colossian saints' past, before they knew of Christ. He speaks of them as being "sometime alienated and enemies in your mind" in relation to God.
 - ? What is the nature of the alienation and enmity with God?
 - ? Does this alienation and enmity exist in the mind of God toward people, or in the mind of people toward God? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What do you think and feel when we suggest that
 - God does not view sinners as enemies?
 - It is in the nature for sinners (the natural man) to falsely imagine God viewing them as enemies and harboring ill will toward them?
 - Individuals feel alienation and enmity toward God "in their minds," thus feeling enmity toward God?
 - Christ "reconciles" us to God by his living example of love and acceptance and his self-sacrifice for the benefit of sinners?

2. Paul teachings that Jesus presents us "holy and unblameable and unproveable" in the sight of God.
 - ? What comes to your mind when you think of being "unblameable" or "without blame"?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that in Christ God finds no reason to "reprove" us of any wrongdoing?
 - ? Is this "presentation" something for which we must wait until later in life or even in the next world, or is it something that can be experienced in the present?
 - ? What is the relationship between your own life-management and God's mercy as expressed in Jesus in your presentation as "holy and unblameable and unproveable"?
 - ? To what degree have you experience this state in which there is no reason to blame or reprove you because of your relationship with Christ?
 - ? What does your answer the previous question say about you, your relationship with Jesus, and the effectiveness of your use of his atonement?

Colossians 1.²⁶⁻²⁹

²⁶even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: ²⁷to 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: ²⁸whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: ²⁹whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Q

uestionary

Today's is the of last of five readings taken from Colossians 1.

After a brief greeting (vs. 1-2), Paul shared with members of the church, as he often does, the nature and content of the prayers he offers because of them and for them. He began by telling them what he is grateful for (vs. 3-8) and then informed them of the requests he makes of God in their behalf (9-11). In verses 12-20, Paul utilized what appears to be an early Christian hymn to celebrate the supremacy of Christ in our lives, in the church, and in world, and in the universe at large. In verses 21-25, Paul spoke of the Colossian saints' past, before they knew of Christ.

1. Paul speaks of "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations."
 - ? What is that "mystery"?
 - ? What does it say about the provincialism and prejudices of past ages and generations that they could not fathom God's willingness and intention of reaching out to "gentiles"?
 - ? How might our provincialism and prejudices toward certain populations and classes of people keep us today from seeing God's willingness and intention of reaching out to yet more and different populations?
2. In contemplating the revelation that God would reach out to Gentiles and give them entrance into the church, he speaks of "the riches of the glory of this mystery."
 - ? What is so "rich" and "glorious" about this divine willingness to reach out to unexpected peoples?
 - ? To what degree do you share Paul's gratitude for God's expansive outreach?
 - ? Some Jews were uncertain how they felt about this expansive outreach. Why were they hesitant?
 - ? What is so intimidating about diversity in society and especially in the church?
3. Paul speaks of being "perfect in Christ Jesus."
 - ? What is meant by being "perfect"?
 - ? What is the difference between speaking of being "perfect" and being "perfect in *Christ*"?

Colossians 2.¹⁻⁵

¹For 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; ²that 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; ³in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. ⁵For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

Questionary

1. Sometimes as we move from verse to verse and chapter to chapter, we mentally stop and start, stop and start as if we are leaving one idea and entering into a whole new world of ideas. However, a single thought can extend itself from one verse to another and even from one chapter to another. This reading begins with the word, “for.”
 - ? What does that “for” tell you?
 - ? With its grammatically connecting “for,” how does the thought expressed in this first verse of chapter two relate and connect to the final verses of chapter one?
2. Though he has not been able to visit the Laodicean saints in person, Paul assures them that he wants them to enjoy the same benefits as those whom he has visited in person.
 - ? What are those benefits?

Among the benefits he hopes for the Laodiceans is that “their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love.”

 - ? How does love and unity among the saints serve to comfort us?

Paul also hopes and believes that the Laodicean saints can find comfort through a full understanding of the “mystery of God.”

 - ? What is the nature of that “mystery”?
 - ? How do these two verses from the first chapter explain what Paul means by the “mystery of God”?

even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 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...” (vs. 26-27).

 - ? What is it about Christ and about what he does in our lives that leads Paul to think of Christ as a “mystery”?
 - ? In what ways has Christ acted in your life that were beyond your expectation and nearly beyond your comprehension?
 - ? How have you felt about him in such moments and experiences?
 - ? How have such moments and experiences influenced and shaped the way you interact with others?
3. Paul says that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are “hid” in the Father and Son.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What “wisdom and knowledge” has come to you... as a consequence of the activities of the Father and the Son in your life?

Colossians 2.⁶⁻⁸

⁶As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: ⁷rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. ⁸Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Q

1. Paul admonishes us to “walk” and be “rooted and built up” in Christ.
 - ? What does it mean to you to be “rooted” in him?
 - ? What does being “rooted” in him look like day to day?
 - ? In your mind, what does it mean to be “built up”?
 - ? Into what would Christ build you up?
 - ? What does it mean to you to “walk... in Christ”?
 - ? As you contemplate “walking in Christ, which, if either, idea dominates your thoughts: “walking *as* Christ” or “walking *with* Christ”? Why?
 - ? What is the difference in emphasis between the two?
2. Opposed to Christlike principles are empty and deceitful ideologies and traditions and “the rudiments of the world.”
 - ? What is a “rudiment”?
 - ? If we understand “rudiment to be a basic principle, what are “the basic principles of the world”?
 - ? What are the world’s priorities?
 - ? By what means does the world suggest that its priorities are best achieved?
 - ? What are the “rudiments” or “basic principles” of Christ?
 - ? How do they differ from those of the world? How are they achieved differently than those of the world?
3. Paul admonishes us to find strength in our faith in Christ and to “abound therein with thanksgiving.”
 - ? What is the antecedent of “therein”?
 - ? In your mind, what does it look and feel like to “abound...with thanksgiving”?
 - ? How characteristic is this in your life? Why do you answer as you do?

Colossians 2.⁹⁻¹²

⁹For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. ¹⁰And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: ¹¹in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: ¹²buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Questionary

1. Paul teaches that “all the fulness of the Godhead” dwells in Jesus’ mortal being.
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider the claim that “all *the fulness* of the Godhead” dwells in Jesus?
 - ? What is the practical impact of this truth in your every-day life?
2. Paul also teaches that Jesus “is the head of all principality and power.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the practical impact of this truth in your every-day life?
3. Paul teaches that we find the “the body of the sins of the flesh” put off; i.e., we become born again, “through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised [Jesus] from the dead.”
 - ? What “operation of God” is Paul speaking of?
 - ? How much power do you imagine it takes to raise the dead?
 - ? How does knowing that God possesses such knowledge—as evidenced by his raising Jesus— increase your belief and trust that God can help you put off your sins?

Colossians 2.¹³⁻¹⁹

¹³And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; ¹⁴blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; ¹⁵and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. ¹⁶Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: ¹⁷which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. ¹⁸Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

Questionary

1. In this reading, Paul warns the Colossians of something that he considers apostasy.
 - ? What is that form of apostasy?
2. Paul speaks of “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us” and “contrary to us.”
 - ? To what is Paul referring?
 - ? Would you change your answer if we highlighted the fact that “ordinances” refers to more than rituals and sacrifices, but to all stipulations of the Law of Moses? How and why?
 - ? How was the law of Moses with all its “ordinances,” stipulations, and demands “against” and contrary to Christian believers?

The Law of Moses was not only “against” and “contrary to” Christian believers. It was and always had been “against” and “contrary to” everyone.

- ? How do the following passages relate to and confirm Paul’s feelings about the law of Moses, not only after Christ’s coming but from its very inception?

“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke [demand that they keep the law of Moses] upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (Acts 15.¹⁰).

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.’ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ And the law is not of faith: but, ‘The man that doeth them shall live in them.’” (Gal. 3.¹⁰⁻¹²)

“The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9.⁸⁻¹⁰).

- ? How does Paul’s admonition, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days,” relate to Paul’s point?
 - ? Is there any way that what Paul thinks and feels about the Law of Moses is similar to whatever religious law or laws you are currently committed to and seeking to obey? Why do you answer as you do?
3. Paul says that Jesus has “quickened” the Colossians “together with him, has “forgiven [them] all trespasses, and has “blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

- ? How does all of this relate to the Law of Moses and its insatiable demands?
- ? How does it relate to you, today?

Colossians 2.²⁰⁻²³

²⁰Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances * ²¹(Touch not; taste not; handle not, ²²which all are to perish with the using), after the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Questionary

1. Paul speaks of the Colossian saints as being “dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world.”
? What does Paul mean by “*the rudiments* of the world”?

The Greek word, , translated here as “rudiments” means “first principle/s,” or “foundational principle/s.” There is in the idea of the word, the idea of “something by which one walks,” or “that which one stays in line with.”

- ? What are the “first principles” of this world, or, in other words, what principles does this world expect you to “stay in line with”?

2. Here, Paul associates encouragements toward the kind of “self-control” or “mortification” in which one abstains from certain pleasures as an example of this world’s “basic principles.”
? How do you feel about Paul’s rather negative view of such self-mortification?

In verses 22 and 23, Paul outlines some of the reasons for his reluctance to indulge in such “basics.”

- ? What are those reasons?
- ? How do you feel about them?
- ? How does/can such “will worship” lead to self-righteousness and a false sense of piety?
- ? How does/can such “will worship” lead us to ignore the weightier matters of “justice, mercy, and true humility” (See Micah 6.⁸)?

3. Paul’s final objection to the sort of self-mortification the world often presents as virtuous, good and healthy is that it serves “not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”

- ? This phrase is difficult. What do you make of it?

How does the following translation, found in the NIV, help?

“but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

Apparently, one of the world’s “first principles” is that if one denies oneself simple pleasures one learns to overcome greater and more harmful pleasures.

- ? How do you feel about this worldly “first principle”?
 - ? Do you observe it to be generally successful?
 - ? Have you find success through it in your life? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? For Paul, it isn’t so much that such “will worship” is evil as it is that it does not produce what it promises. In the end, how do you feel about Paul’s rather cool feelings toward the idea of overcoming serious and harmful passions by denying oneself the most simple of pleasures?

Colossians 3.¹⁻⁴

¹... Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ... (NIV)

Questionary

Today's reading is our 21st reading for Lent 2024.

1. Paul admonishes, “set your *hearts* on things above” and “set your *minds* on things above.”
 - ? What are some of the “things” that constitute “things” that are “above”?
 - ? What is the difference between setting the “heart” on “things above,” and setting the “mind” on “things above”?
 - ? How avidly are your *affections* set on “things above”? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? How avidly are your *thoughts* set on “things above”? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What are the evidences—in the way you spend your time, considerations, talents, money, etc.—that “things above” take priority in your daily life?
2. Paul bases our setting the heart and mind on “things above” upon our having “been raised with Christ.”
 - ? What does he mean by being “raised with Christ”?
 - ? How, for Paul, is setting our hearts and minds on “things above” more than a kind of enlightened self-control regimen and more a reflection of our encounter with a transforming Jesus?
 - ? How did Jesus evidence that he had set his heart and mind on “things above”?
 - ? How does he assist us to follow him in his priorities?
3. As a corollary to setting our “hearts on things above,” Paul also indicates that since we have been raised with Christ, we are *not* to set our hearts and minds “on earthly things.”
 - ? What sorts of things constitute “earthly things”?
 - ? How many of these earthly things surround you at home, work, etc.?
 - ? What does their abundance or scarcity say about your priorities?
 - ? How did Jesus show his lack of interest in “earthly things”?
 - ? What changes can you make in your life to follow Jesus’ example of proper priorities?
4. Paul offers as another reason for our establishing priorities for “things above” over “earthly things” the fact that we “died, and [our] life is hidden with Christ in God.”
 - ? What, do you think, does it mean to have one’s life “hidden with Christ in God”?
 - ? What role would having your life “hidden with Christ in God” play in helping you be released from the servitude of “earthly things” and the desires and lusts that earthly things encourage and nourish?

1 Thessalonians 4.¹⁶⁻¹⁷— advent 2020

¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,
with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:
and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

¹⁷then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds,
to meet the Lord in the air:

and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

¹⁸Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is the 14th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December. It celebrates, not Christ's mortal ministry, but his anticipated ministry as a resurrected and glorified being.

1. Paul foretells several related events associated with the Savior's return.
 - ? How real do these predictions seem to you?
 - ? How do they impact your daily life?
 - ? How often do you contemplate such things?
2. Among Paul's promises is: "so shall we ever be with the Lord."
 - ? What do you imagine when you think of "*ever be[ing]* with the Lord"?
3. Paul also leaves us with an admonition: "Comfort one another with these words"?
 - ? Who is likely to be comforted by such promises as Paul makes in today's reading?
 - ? How do they comfort you?
 - ? How do you or would you go about utilizing the promises Paul makes in today's reading in order to "comfort" another?

2thessalonians 2.³⁻⁴— just scripture

³Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; ⁴who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Questionary

- ? Just one simple question... “How is the current American Emperor, Caligula as I call him, not the latest manifestation of Christian apostasy as its American adherents give him entrance to and allegiance of their heart?”

1timothy 1.⁸⁻⁹

⁸But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; ⁹knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane...

Questionary

- ? What do you think and how do you feel concerning Paul's assessment concerning "the law"?
- ? Is this true only of the "Law of Moses," or of all law?
- ? For example, how pertinent, really, is the prohibition against murder in your life?

1timothy 1.¹⁵

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Questionary

- ? Why should we believe that Paul was being serious when he refers to himself as “chief” among sinner, and not just showing rhetorical flair and a false humility?
- ? Why is Paul’s confession “worthy of full acceptance”?
- ? How do you feel about Paul’s language: “Christ Jesus came into the world *to save sinners*”?

1 Timothy 6.⁵⁻⁸— just scripture

⁵Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. ⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

Q

uestionary

1. Any number of evils might be imagined when considering “men of corrupt minds” and men “destitute of the truth. However, Paul has one evil and one untruth in particular in mind.
 - ? What is that untruth?
 - ? What is the problem in supposing that “godliness” is a means to financial success?
 - ? How does religion and the broader society teach the untruth that one’s relationship to God is evidenced by one’s economic status?
 - ? How would one “withdraw” themselves from those who teach, by word or action, that “gain is godliness”?
 2. In verse six, Paul comes back to the idea of “gain.”
 - ? What is the nature of that gain?
 - ? what does it mean to be content?
 - ? What is the relationship between “godliness” and “contentment,” especially as that contentment relates to economic circumstances?
 - ? What does economic “discontentment” look like?
 - ? How “content” are you?
 - ? How “content” is our society? Is “contentment” in economic circumstances encouraged?
 - ? What does Paul’s warning here suggest about the relationship between discontent and one’s relationship with God?
- ? How realistic do you find Paul to be in his admonition that we be content with “food and raiment”?
 - ? What do “food and raiment” represent in today’s life?
 - ? How consistent with this admonition are you?

1 Timothy 6.⁹⁻¹¹— just scripture

⁹But they that will be rich fall into temptation and snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. ¹¹But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

Q

uestionary

1. In verses 5-8, Paul encourages the saints to be content in their economic lives if they can do no more than provide themselves with the most basic of life's necessities. In today's reading, Paul explores the evils that enter one's life when they discontent with life's necessities and seek to be "rich."
 - ? What are those evils?
 - ? What, do you think, is the nature of the "temptations and snares" that riches bring?
 - ? What "foolish and hurtful lusts" inflict the wealthy?
 - ? When you think of "destruction and perdition" what comes to your mind?
 - ? How does material wealth "pierce [the riche] with many sorrows?"
 - ? How and why do the "un-wealthy avoid these evils?"
 - ? To what degree have you fallen prey to such evils? Consider, for example, "foolish and hurtful lusts"?
2. Paul says that "the love of money is the root of all evil."
 - ? What is the difference between saying that "the love of money is the root of all evil" or "money is the root of all evil?"
 - ? Who doesn't love money?
 - ? In light of everything that has proceeded in 5-9, how would you feel about understanding "the love of money" as the desire for wealth above that needed for the necessities of life?
 - ? Think about the metaphor of a tree's root system. A root system passes all water and nutrients to the trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit of the tree. Take a few minutes to consider how the "love of money" feeds every other evil?
 - ? What societal evils get their strength from rampant materialism?
3. Paul encourages the saints to pursue "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" with the same energy and enthusiasm as the world pursues money.
 - ? When you consider the time, energy, and zealousness you spend in the pursuit of "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" how does it compare to the time, energy, and zealousness you spend seeking "money"?
 - ? How about society? To what degree does it seek "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness"? To what degree money?
 - ? What evidence to you see in your society that confirms the prophetic warning that the wealth brings temptations, and acts as a snare?
 - ? According to today's reading, what is the "man [or woman] of God to "flee"?
 - ? What are examples of "foolish and hurtful lusts"?

1timothy 6.¹⁷⁻¹⁹— just scripture

¹⁷Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; ¹⁸that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; ¹⁹laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Questionary

- ? What does a “readiness to distribute” one’s economic benefits to others look like?
- ? We may ask this question of the private individual, but we can also ask it of public citizen. How “readily” do you as a citizen seek public policy that distributes assistance to the less advantaged?
- ? How “readily” does American culture and legislative priorities distribute to the less advantaged?

2 Timothy 4.²⁻⁴

²Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Q

uestionary

- ? How does “unsound doctrine” apply not only to matters of “religion” and “theology,” but to such things as justice, economics, social issues, politics, etc.?
- ? How and why do our “own lusts” dictate and control the “doctrine” and “teachers” to which we are willing to hear and follow?
- ? What “fables” are currently in vogue in our society?
- ? How would you feel about calling the many “conspiracy theories” that are prevalent in today’s society “fables”?

Hebrews 2.⁹⁻¹⁸— atonement

⁹But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. ¹⁰For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²saying, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.”

¹³And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me.”

¹⁴Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

¹⁷Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.” *

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

With this in mind, today’s passage contains one of the best descriptions of Jesus’ atonement anywhere in scripture, even though the word, atonement, does not appear.

- ? The writer of Hebrews lists several ways in which Jesus demonstrates his unity or oneness with human kind. What are these ways?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that Jesus, God, choose to unite himself with humankind so far as to experience the challenges and suffering that accompany mortality and to die, or “taste death” as every man dies?
- ? What does one mean to communicate when they call another “brother” or “sister”?
- ? How do you feel about Jesus, God Himself, the greatest of all, when you contemplate his willingness to enter into such intimate relations with you?
- ? How has Jesus demonstrated his feelings of unity, connection, and attachment with you?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Hebrews 4.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. ¹⁵For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Q

uestionary

- ? What does it mean to you to have Jesus sitting on the right hand of God in order to advocate for you?
- ? Have you ever sensed Jesus advocating for you? Under what circumstances did you feel this?
- ? What might you do to sense the Savior's advocacy at the right hand of God for you?

hebrews 8.^{1-2, 6}

¹Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; ²a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

⁶But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

Q

uestionary

- ? When and how have you sensed Jesus representing you and your interests from the right hand of God?
- ? Better, better, better. How have you found Jesus' ministry and promises "better" in your own life?

Hebrews 13.¹⁻²— just scripture

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Questionary

1. The author of Hebrews admonishes, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers.”
 - ? What is meant by strangers?
2. The reference to entertaining angels unawares almost certainly refers to Abraham’s entertaining of the “three men” who visited him to inform him that Sarah would bear a child. However, “strangers” in the scripture often means immigrants, migrants, refugees, etc.
 - ? How do we “entertain” immigrants, migrants, refugees, etc.?
 - ? How do immigrants, migrants, refugees, etc., serve as “angels” who might bring a message of or from God?
 - ? How does the way we “entertain” or not entertain “strangers” serve to as revelation concerning our individual and societal character?
 - ? What does our willingness to accept or our insistence on denying “strangers” reveal about us individually and societally?
3. Before his admonition about “strangers,” Hebrew’s author admonishes, “Let brotherly love continue.”
 - ? How does this relate to the immigrant, migrant, or refugee?

In lamenting the wickedness of those who lived at the time of the flood, God said, “And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; *but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood...*” (Moses 7.³³).

- ? Are immigrants, migrants, and refugees our “own blood”? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? What does the following passage contribute to our understanding of the “stranger” as our “own blood.”
 - “[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17.²⁶).
- ? Why is it so common throughout history and today for individuals to be suspicious of, fear, and poorly treat foreigners? What is it about the foreigner and/or the resident that creates this sort of fearful and spiteful environment?
- ? How is God likely to feel about the sort of nationalism in which individuals and societies show partiality for those of their own nation or society over those of others? Why do you answer as you do?

James 1.²⁷— just scripture

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and [thus] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Questionary

1. James speaks of religion that is “pure” and “undefiled” “*before* God and the Father.”
 - ? What is the significance of the “before God”?
2. James mentions “fatherless and widows” as vulnerable populations that “pure” and “undefiled” religion serves.
 - ? What other vulnerable populations might he have mentioned?
3. James speaks of being “unspotted from the world”?
 - ? How does taking care of vulnerable people keep one “unspotted from the world”?
 - ? How is the opposite true: that the world is “spotted” because it does not care for the vulnerable?
 - ? What can and do you do to care for the vulnerable around you?
 - ? What can and do you do to see that your society is true to James’ definition of “pure” and “undefiled” religion?
 - ? How do you feel about and what we to make of individuals who personally try to engage in “pure” and “undefiled” religion, but then do not support society doing so through legislation and government action—local, state, and federal?

James 2.¹⁻⁵— just scripture

¹My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.
²For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; ³and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: ⁴are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? ⁵Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

Questionary

1. The type of “respect of persons” that is discussed in today’s reading is often based upon the false doctrines of the “prosperity gospel.”
 - ? What is the “prosperity gospel” and what is it about the doctrine that is so tempting?
 - ? How is the “respect of persons...” which not only includes showing more private and personal respect toward the “successful” than to the “unsuccessful,” but also supporting public policy that benefits the rich over the poor... how is this a denial of “faith of our Lord Jesus Christ”?

James 4.²— just scripture

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not...

Questionary

- ? In addition to teaching that “fighting and warring” never achieve their unrighteous material ends, what does this passage suggest about the true cause of “fighting and warring”?
- ? How do you feel and what do you learn when you see “lust” spoken of in the same breath as “killing,” “fighting,” and “waring”?

James 5.¹⁻⁶— just scripture

¹Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. ²Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. ³Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

⁴Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

⁵Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not [cannot] resist you.

Questionary

1. James speaks of employers who fraudulently refuse to respect the labor and pay the deserved wage of their employees.
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think when you contemplate that the wealthy became wealthy and “lived in pleasure on the earth” through wickedness not righteousness?
 - ? What role, do you suppose, did their refusal to pay laborers a “living wage” play in their becoming rich?
 - ? How applicable to today are James’ observation?
2. James characterizes the employers’ refusal to respect the labor and pay the deserved wage of their employees as “condemning and killing the just.”
 - ? How do you feel about this? Why is such language appropriate and far from being hyperbolic?
3. In his attempt to capture the extreme nature of the wealthy’s sins, James uses some very intense language.
 - ? What intense language do you find?
 - ? How do you feel about the following intense language?
 - The wealthy’s “riches are *corrupt*.”
 - The wealthy’s “garments are *motheaten*.”
 - The wealthy’s “gold and silver is *cankered*.”
 - The wealthy have “been *wanton*.”
 - The wealthy’s attitudes and actions are like “a *day of slaughter*.”
 - The wealthy’s ill-gotten gains “shall *eat your flesh as it were fire*.”
 - The wealthy will “*weep and howl*” for their “*miseries*.”
 - ? Do you feel that this intensity is appropriate to the sin.
4. James promises that the pain and insecurity that the poor experience at the hands of the wealthy enters “into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”
 - ? How do you feel about this? Does it bring you a sense of satisfaction or leave you confused and uncertain?
 - ? Why do you think and feel about the fact that James speaks of no “exceptions” and offers no “caveats” to his indictment of the rich?

2 Peter 1.¹⁻⁴

¹Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: ²Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ... (NIV)

Q

Today's reading is the 32nd in a series of Advent readings (this one "post-Advent") that will continue throughout the month of December.

1. Peter says that we "have received a faith as precious as ours" "through the righteousness of our God and Savior..."
 - ? What does Peter mean by the "righteousness" of the Father and the Son?
 - ? How does the "righteousness" of the Father and Son create, grant, and make possible our "faith"?
 - ? What is the relationship and balance between your efforts to have faith and the efforts of Father and Son to make the effort even possible?
2. Peter speaks of "a godly life" that we can live.
 - ? According to Peter in today's reading, how is that "godly life" made possible?
 - ? How likely is it that you will live "a godly life" without "his divine power"?
 - ? What do you need to do to personally tap into "his divine power" that makes "a godly life" possible?
 - ? How does "our knowledge of him" make it possible for us to live "a godly life"?
3. Peter holds out the promise of our "participat[ing] in the divine nature."
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the relationship between "the divine nature," "a godly life," and "the righteousness" of Father and Son?
4. While Peter holds out the hope to us that we can "participate in the divine nature," he also holds out the hope of "escap[ing] the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."
 - ? What "evil desires" do you need to overcome to be released from "the corruption in the world"?
 - ? What role will your own efforts play in this effort?
 - ? What role will the Father and Son's "righteousness" play?
 - ? What is the balance between the two?
 - ? Which is likely the greater power, your efforts, or Gods?
 - ? How do you tap into the greater power that God possesses in your desires and efforts to "escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires"?

1 John 1:1-5—Atonement

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; ²(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) ³that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

⁴And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. ⁵This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us.” *

One of my central understandings of Jesus Christ and his ministry is that he and it represented a witness of God’s feelings of connectedness, attachment, linkage, participation, and unity with humankind. Rather than understanding the basic meaning of at-one-ment to be something like “expiation,” or “propitiation” or “sacrifice,” etc., I understand its basic meaning as “connectedness,” “attachment,” “unity,” “oneness,” etc.

- ? How does today’s reading contribute to your understanding and appreciation for the Savior, his feelings of connectedness to you, and the witness it is to the Father’s feelings of attachment to you?
- 1. John testifies that he and his fellow disciples had “heard,” “seen,” “looked upon,” and “handled” Jesus. This among other things was indicative of their “fellowship” with Jesus. After sharing this testimony, John then expresses his wish that his readers share in the disciple’s fellowship with the Father and Son.
 - ? What, do you think, is the nature of our “fellowship” with Father and Son?
 - ? What role, if any, would “hearing,” “seeing,” “looking upon,” and “handling” play in our fellowship with Jesus?
- 2. John assumes that the news of fellowship with Father and Son would bring about a fullness of joy.
 - ? How does this news of fellowship with Father and Son effect you?
- 3. John seeks to summarize the gospel message that he had heard from Jesus: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is the importance of the truth that there “is no darkness” in God?
 - ? How would you feel and what would you think if we understood John to mean that those who are “in God” do not experience “darkness” in their lives?
 - ? What would be the nature of a “darkness” that is kept from one’s life in God—it certainly is not disappointment, failure, etc.?
 - ? What would it mean to have the light of God in one’s life?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

1 John 1.⁸⁻¹⁰— Atonement

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Q

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Justification: How We Repent and Change.” *

1. According to John, those who refuse to acknowledge sin reveal several things concerning their perspectives about themselves and God.
 - ? What are those things revealed?
 - ? How is the refusal to acknowledge sin a form of self-deception?
 - ? How is the refusal to acknowledge sin a rejection of truth and the word of God?
 - ? How is the refusal to acknowledge sin a rejection of God’s faithfulness, or commitment to us?
 2. Immediately after warning about the evils of refusing to acknowledge our sins and sinfulness, John reminds us that God is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”
 - ? What is the significance of this follow up to the warning about refusing to acknowledge sin and sinfulness?
 - ? God has unambiguously taught that “all have sinned” and that He, Himself, can be counted on to be on our side, as well as being compassionate and friendly to those who trust Him. How does a refusal to acknowledge sin make a liar of God on both counts?
 - ? Why can it be so difficult to acknowledge, both to ourselves and to God, our sins?
 - ? What sins and weaknesses are in your life that you have been reluctant to acknowledge?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

1 John 2.¹⁵⁻¹⁷— just scripture

¹⁵Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Questionary

1. John admonishes the saints to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”
 - ? What is meant by “the world”?
 - ? What type of things “in the world” are to be avoided?
2. In Greek, “lust” is an “uncontrolled,” not uncontrollable desire.
 - ? What uncontrolled desires does the “flesh” find offered in the surrounding world?
 - ? What uncontrolled desires do the “eyes” see in the surrounding world?
3. One of the things that is “of the world” and opposed to “the Father” is “the pride of life.”
 - ? What is “the pride of life”?

1john 2.²⁷

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

Questionary

- ? What experiences have you had when you have received revelation for yourself without any need of relying upon another to teach you?

1 John 3.¹⁶⁻¹⁹— Atonement

¹⁶Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ¹⁸My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement.” *

1. We are justified— born again, forgiven, receive a remission of sins—solely through faith in Christ and his grace—his generosity or beauty of character and soul. There can be no thought of working our way to forgiveness or birthing ourselves. We are wholly dependent upon the merits of Christ. However, having been justified without money and without price, we do have a part to play in retaining our remission of sins. While still in need of help—and much of it—we do have a role to play in our sanctification. With help, we exercise our will and exert our energy in striving to imitate Jesus, the first of sanctified men. Like him, we seek to be of maximum benefit to the individuals that surround us and the societies of which we are a part by laying down our lives to raise others up.
? What principles of sanctification do you find in today’s reading?
 2. Most of us will not be called upon to literally “lay down our lives” in death “for the brethren. But there are other ways to “lay down our lives.”
? What are some of those ways?
 3. With his warning that “whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion,” we are reminded that an important aspect of our lives that heavily influences and determines our sanctification is economic—how we use our personal economic resources and what we do to influence society’s use of economic resources to benefit the less advantaged.
? What do you do in your private life to open up your bowels of compassion to those who “have need”?
? What do you do in your public life as a citizen to assure that the institutions to which you belong—religious, governmental, civic, etc.—open up their bowels of compassion to those who “have need”?
? How does your joining with others in the spirit of at-one-ment (unity, cooperation) increase the effectiveness with which those who “have need” are assisted?
 4. John speaks of “assur[ing] our hearts before him,” God.
? What does it mean to you to have a heart that is “assured”?
? What role does our use of economic resources and the distribution of our economic resources to assist those who “have need” play in having hearts that are “assured” before God?
? To what extent is your heart assured before God?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
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 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

1 John 3.¹⁷— just scripture

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

Questionary

1. John speaks of those who “shutteth up his bowels of compassion.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to “shutteth up... bowels of compassion”?
 - ? How do your actions and your sentiments stack up against this apostolic assertion?
 - ? How can this apostolic assertion be applied to society at large and to how one nation treats another?
 - ? How does this apostolic assertion relate to popular notions of “My nation before other nations” as is found in an “America First” slogan?

1 John 5.⁹⁻¹³

⁹If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath witnessed of his Son. ¹⁰He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the witness that God gave of his Son. ¹¹And this is the witness, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. ¹³These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

Q

uestionary

Today's reading is the 33rd in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

1. In today's reading, John speaks of God as being a witness who bears witness or testimony.
 - ? About what does God bear witness in today's reading?
 - ? How dependable is God's testimony?
2. God testifies that eternal life is found in Jesus and that those who "hath the Son" can feel assured of eternal life.
 - ? What does it mean to "have the Son"?
 - ? Do you "have the Son"?
 - ? How confident are you that the Father's witness about those who "hath the Son" having eternal life is not only "true" at the general level but is true in relation to you and your future?
3. John says he has shared God's hopeful witness of eternal life to believers so that those who "believe on the name of the Son of God" might "know that [they] have eternal life."
 - ? What do you feel and think when you consider the assurance that John says believers can have of eternal life?
 - ? Do you possess such assurance? If so, why?
 - ? If not, why not? What do you feel you lack that such assurance is denied you?

Revelation 4.^{8, 11}; 5.^{9-10, 12, 13} — Atonement

1st hymn

⁸“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
which was, and is, and is to come.”

2nd hymn

¹¹Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things,
and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

3rd hymn

⁹Thou art worthy to take the book,
and to open the seals thereof:
for thou wast slain,
and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred,
and tongue, and people, and nation;
¹⁰and hast made us unto our God kings and priests:
and we shall reign on the earth.

4th hymn

¹²“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

5th hymn

¹³“Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.” *

Appropriately enough, when we think of the Book of Revelation, we think of the apocalypse. But before John launches into his apocalyptic vision, he offers an introduction (1.¹⁻³), writes a universal letter to seven churches “in Asia”—modern day Turkey (1.⁴⁻²⁰), writes seven individual letters to the seven churches (2-3), and records his vision of the divine throne room in heaven (4-5). Only then does he begin his apocalyptic vision with the opening of the seven seals.

While in the heavenly throne room, John sees increasingly larger groups singing hymns of praise to God and the Lamb. In today’s reading, we examine the five hymns sang in John’s presence.

1. In the first hymn, we hear, “holy, holy, holy.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to speak of God as “holy”?
 - ? How does God’s holiness impact your daily life?
 - ? Does your respond to these two questions change if we understand God’s “holiness” to mean something like, “God is someone completely *separate and unique* from all other beings? If so, how does it change your perspective of holiness and the holiness of God?
2. In the second hymn, we hear, “thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”
 - ? What is it, do you think, about creating and being a creator that brings God such pleasure?
3. In the second hymn and again in this third hymn, God and the Lamb are praised as “worthy.”
 - ? What does it mean to speak of God and the Lamb as being “worthy”?

In the third hymn, we hear of three blessings that come to us through the Lamb’s death.

- ? What are those three things?

- ? What is the relationship between our being “redeemed” and our being given power to “reign on the earth”?
4. In the fourth and fifth hymns, we hear that the Lamb is to receive “power,” “riches,” “wisdom,” “strength,” “honour,” “glory,” and “blessing.”
- ? How does the Jesus’ possession of all these things impact your daily life and the way you live your daily life?
5. With each hymn, the choir becomes larger. Take a moment to review the text and answer the following questions.
- ? How large is each choir?
- ? How do you feel as you see the choirs get larger and larger?
- ? How would you describe the size of the final choir?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
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- “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
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Revelation 6.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

¹⁵And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: ¹⁷for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

Questionary

-
- ? Who comes to mind when you think of this world’s “kings,” “great men,” and “rich men”—both in history and in the contemporary world?
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think as you contemplate the intimidation they feel and the desire they have to disappear at the appearing of God?

Revelation 7.¹⁰

“Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne,
and unto the Lamb.”

Questionary

- ? What does it mean to you to understand “salvation” as “victory”?
- ? What “victory” or “victories” have you experienced through Father and Son?

Revelation 7.¹²

Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

Questionary

-
- ? God is to be granted seven things. What do each of them mean, and how are they manifest in your life?

Revelation 11.¹⁵

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Questionary

-
- ? How do you think this transfer of power will take place?
 - ? What role will individuals and the decisions they make play?

Revelation 11.¹⁷⁻¹⁸

¹⁷We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty,
which art, and wast, and art to come;
because thou hast taken to thee thy great power,
and hast reigned.

¹⁸And the nations were angry,
and thy wrath is come,
and the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets,
and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great;
and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

Questionary

- ? What new insights do you have from today's reading into God's anticipated reinstatement as the acknowledged world leader?

Revelation 12.¹⁰

Now is come salvation, and strength,
and the kingdom of our God,
and the power of his Christ:
for the accuser of our brethren is cast down,
which accused them before our God day and night.

Questionary

-
- ? How does Satan accuse you?
 - ? How do you resist his accusations?

Revelation 15.³⁻⁴

³Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty;
just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

⁴Who shall not fear thee, O Lord,
and glorify thy name?

For thou only art holy:

for all nations shall come and worship before thee;
for thy judgments are made manifest.

Questionary

- ? We continue with hymns found in Revelation—today, the eleventh. In what way is it essentially and utterly true to speak of God as the “only” one who can be thought of or proclaim “holy”?

Revelation 18.¹⁻³— just scripture

¹And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. ²And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying,

“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,
and is become the habitation of devils,
and the hold of every foul spirit,
and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

³For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication,
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,
and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading from the 18th chapter of Revelation is the first of five readings we will take from that chapter. Chapter 18 is a series, numbering seven, of what I call “laments” or “taunts” concerning the fall of Babylon—its cooperating individuals, institutions, and kingdoms of this world. Today’s reading from verses 1-3 would more accurately be thought of as a “taunt” than a “lament” as the angel who utters these words is surely not sorry to see the collapse of evil.

1. In the previous chapter, John sees a “great whore.” Her name is “Mystery, BABYLONG THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS, AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” In today’s reading, the revelator speaks twice of “fornication.” It is used, of course, metaphorically of all sorts of perversion and unfaithfulness.
 - ? How do you feel about the revelator’s resort to such extreme and explicit language?
 - ? Do you find it a bit offensive?
 - ? How is it an appropriate metaphor of evil?
2. Consider each of the following phrases.
 - “Nations have drunk of the wine...”
 - “Kings... have committed fornication...”
 - “Merchants... are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies...”
 - ? How does each metaphorical phrase act as an interpretive key to the others?
 - ? How, for example, is the “fornication of kings,” related to the “merchants’ wealth,” and visa versa?
 - ? How, if at all, does today’s reading apply to modern populations, institutions, and nations?
 - ? How do you feel about the Revelator’s contention that the “merchants of the earth” find financial success through associations that are compared with whorish practices?
3. In the following readings from Revelation 18, note any repetition of individuals, classes, or institutions.

Revelation 18.⁴⁻⁸— just scripture

- ⁴And I heard another voice from heaven, saying,
“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins,
and that ye receive not of her plagues.
⁵For her sins have reached unto heaven,
and God hath remembered her iniquities.
⁶Reward her even as she rewarded you,
and double unto her double according to her works:
in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.
⁷How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously,
so much torment and sorrow give her:
for she saith in her heart, ‘I sit a queen, and am no widow,
and shall see no sorrow.’
⁸Therefore shall her plagues come in one day,
death, and mourning, and famine;
and she shall be utterly burned with fire:
for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”

Q

uestionary

Today’s reading from Revelation 18 is our second in a series of five. It represents our second “taunt.”

1. I have often said that the Book of Revelation could not exist without the Old Testament. Old Testament language and imagery is everywhere, in nearly every single verse. Consider the following: the saints are warned to leave Babylon “that ye receive not of her plagues.”
 - ? When you read this, does an Old Testament narrative come easily to mind?
 - ? If Babylon is going to be struck by famines (the famines are mentioned earlier in the book and match very closely those inflicted upon Egypt) what is the Revelator telling you about the sins/crimes of Babylon—or latter-day societies?
 - ? What was ancient Egypt’s sin/crime?
 - ? How do modern day institutions and governments “enslave” populations for their own economic gain—which was, of course, what ancient Egypt was doing in enslaving the Israelites?
2. Babylon—modern-day populations, institutions, and governments—“glorified herself, and lived deliciously.”
 - ? How is this accomplished? How did ancient Egypt manage to “live deliciously”?
3. Babylon, like Egypt before her, boasts, “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.”
 - ? Of what does Babylon boast here?
 - ? What grounds, do you suppose, does Babylon see for possessing such false security?
 - ? What propagandistic language among modern day populations, institutions, and governments are akin to this false Babylonian boast?

Revelation 18.^{9-17a}— just scripture

⁹And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying,

Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city!
for in one hour is thy judgment come.”

¹¹And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: ¹²The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, ¹³and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. ¹⁴And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. ¹⁵The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, ¹⁶And saying,

“Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet,
and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!
¹⁷For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is our third in a series of five readings from the eighteenth chapter of Revelations. It contains two laments.

1. In our first reading from Revelation 18 (verses 1-3), we suggested that you be on the look out for individuals, classes, or institutions that are repeated.
 - ? Do you find mention of any individuals, classes, or institutions in today’s reading that were mentioned previously in Revelation 18?
 - ? Why, do you think, they are “targeted” by the Revelator?
2. The Revelator might have simply said of the merchants: “no man buyeth their merchandise any more.” But he didn’t. He added a long list of twenty-eight items. Go back and reread the itemized list in verses 12-13.
 - ? Why do you think he “used ink” to itemize such a list?
 - ? What is the effect or impact of the list? What do you think and feel as you read it?
 - ? Of what would such an itemized and materialist list be constituted if the Revelator were writing today?
3. The merchants of Babylon were “made rich by her.” We have already seen that Babylon “prospered,” as Egypt had, through economic oppression of vulnerable people.
 - ? How does Babylon—modern day individuals, classes, institutions, and governments—utilize economic policies today that oppress the vulnerable and “enrich its merchants”?
 - ? What does the attire of Babylon—“fine linen, and purple, and scarlet... gold, and precious stones, and pearls” suggest about her priorities and values?
4. In today’s reading, individuals involved in a “global” economy lament its collapse.
 - ? What do you think when you hear them lament, “for in one hour so great riches is come to nought”?
 - ? What does it tell you about the actual value of temporal “riches”?
 - ? What are your thoughts and feelings as you read this, especially in light of the current economic situation?
 - ? How repentant do those who lament the collapse of their comfortable and profitable lifestyle

- sound to you? How about today?
- ? Sumaria. Assyria. Babylon. Egypt. Persia. Greece. Rome.... These all fell and disappeared for the world stage. Do you believe that modern national and global economies could collapse as did those listed? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What role, if any, do you think "lust" for the material things of the world would play in any collapse?

Revelation 18.^{17b-20}— just scripture

^{17b}And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, ¹⁸and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying,

“What city is like unto this great city!”

¹⁹And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying,

“Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich
all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness!
For in one hour is she made desolate.

²⁰Rejoice over her, thou heaven,
and ye holy apostles and prophets;
for God hath avenged you on her.”

Questionary

Today’s reading is the fourth of five readings from Revelation 18. In it, we find our fifth and sixth laments of the chapter.

- ? What is the significance of “ships,” “shipmasters,” “ship companies,” “sailors” found in today’s reading?
- 1. Obviously, the “ships” etc., do not represent vessels, but financial/trading institutions.
 - ? Why, in addressing the fall of Babylon, is there such an emphasis on the economy of Babylon?
 - ? What does this suggest concerning latter-day financial institutions?
- 2. The Revelator observes “heaven,” “apostles,” and “prophets,” rejoicing over the demise of Babylon and its financial institutions.
 - ? Honestly, how will you feel about the collapse of Babylon’s financial institutions?
 - ? Will you be one who laments their collapse, or one who rejoices their demise with heaven, apostles, and prophets?

Revelation 18.²¹⁻²⁴— just scripture

²¹And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying,

“Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down,
and shall be found no more at all.

²²And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters,
shall be heard no more at all in thee;

and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be,
shall be found any more in thee;

and the sound of a millstone
shall be heard no more at all in thee;

²³And the light of a candle
shall shine no more at all in thee;

and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride
shall be heard no more at all in thee:

for thy merchants were the great men of the earth;
for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

²⁴And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints,
and of all that were slain upon the earth.”

Questionary

Today’s reading from Revelation 18 is the last of five readings.

1. The Revelator sees that

- *“the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee.”*

? What is the significance of their disappearance?

- *“no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be”?*

? What would be the consequence to society if it lost a huge portion of individuals who know how to do all the things that help society function... food distribution, energy access, computer programming, traffic movement, etc.?

- *“the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee”*

? Of what is this absence indicative?

- *“in [Babylon] was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”*

? What is the significance of blaming Babylon for all earthly violence?

? What are the motivations and desires that lead to such violence?

? This is very reminiscent of what we read in Rev. 6.¹⁻¹¹. How do those verses relate to the statement of violence found in today’s reading?

2. We have previously suggested that the reader look for a repetitious mention of a particular class found throughout the 18th chapter.

? What class of individuals mentioned in previous readings from the chapter is mentioned in this reading?

? What is the significance of the repetitious mention of “merchants”?

? What role do they play in the establishment and maintenance of Babylon?

? What is the relationship between the “merchants” and “sorceries”?

3. We broke up the reading into poetic lines. In each of the first 12 lines of 6 pairs, the second line of the pair repeats “no more... no more... no more.”

? What is the impact of this repetition as you read them?

- ? After completing the 18th chapter, what are your impressions?
- ? What principles have you learned from this chapter?

Revelation 21.³⁻⁷

³And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,
and he will dwell with them,
and they shall be his people,
and God himself shall be with them,
and be their God.

⁴And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
and there shall be no more death,
neither sorrow, nor crying,
neither shall there be any more pain:
for the former things are passed away.”

⁵And he that sat upon the throne said,

“Behold, I make all things new.”

And he said unto me,

“Write: for these words are true and faithful.”

⁶And he said unto me,

“It is done.

I am Alpha and Omega,
the beginning and the end.

I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

⁷He that overcometh shall inherit all things;
and I will be his God,
and he shall be my son.

Questionary

Today’s reading is the 8th in a series of Advent readings that will continue throughout the month of December.

Traditionally, Advent is a time to celebrate not only the Savior’s birth and his mortal life and ministry, but also the hope that he will come again to minister upon the earth. Today’s reading celebrates the second of these two points of focus.

1. In today’s reading, John imagines a world in which five common human afflictions are missing with God’s presence on earth.

? What are those five things?

In his sermon found in Alma 5, Alma asks his audience to “imagine” several different scenarios.

? Imagine a world without tears, death, sorrow, crying, and pain. How easy or difficult it is for you to imagine such a world?

? How do you feel and what do you think as you try?

2. God declares “he that overcometh shall inherit all things.

? What does it mean to “overcome”?

? What do you see, think, and feel when you imagine inheriting “all things”?

Revelation 22.¹⁷

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come."

And let him that heareth say, "Come."

And let him that is athirst come.

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Questionary

Today's thrice repeated invitation, "Come," is found at the end of the New Testament's final book.

- ? Have you heard and felt the Savior's invitation to "Come" extended to you?
- ? How did it come?
- ? What happened when you accepted?