



## Daily Devotionals – September 18 to September 24, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

**September 18 - 2 Corinthians 13:5-10**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

**Self-Examination**

<sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! <sup>6</sup> I hope you will find out that we have not failed.

<sup>7</sup> But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong -- not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup> For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong.

This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. <sup>10</sup> So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

### **Devotion:**

Self-examination is one of life's necessary and important responsibilities. Our human nature, by definition, is the party that makes this necessary. All of us need a course correction from time to time, and Paul is reminding the church at Corinth of this very fact. In fact, Paul is writing this heartbreaking message to them before he travels to visit with them. It is as if Paul wanted to deliver this harsh message in a letter and not in person. Paul reminds the church of his love and affection for them, and his authority to teach and admonish them. In effect, Paul wanted the visit to be a joyful one and as such, he wrote to them words that appear to be harsh. No one likes to be disciplined, but the love and acceptance that follows discipline is well worth the effort that it takes.

Who is in a position to judge the Corinthians? Paul asserts that he is uniquely qualified because Christ lives in him. Then the question is turned against the Corinthians -- are you still in the faith? Is Christ really among you?

Paul's authority comes from the risen Christ, who called and equipped him for an important role in the development of the Christian faith. Because of Paul's love and concern for the Corinthians, he exemplifies self-sacrifice. This deep seated Christian thought involves the giving of oneself for another. Paul's love takes its pattern from Christ himself, that love which considers and seeks the best for the other person. This love treats our neighbor as we would treat ourselves. This love seeks good and not harm. This love considers the other person *before* it considers self.

The underlining issue is a difference of opinion between Paul and the church. As we all know, differences occur in churches, but the manner in which differences are handled is of primary importance. The rub for most of us comes in how we manage differences. If we approach the disagreement from the side of sacrificial love, the dispute may well be short-lived. If however, we approach the disagreement from the side of self-centeredness, then the outcome is less likely to be satisfactory for all.

All believers are charged with the self-testing of our faith. This self-testing is not to be confused with sitting in judgement, because judgement belongs to God alone. It is suggested that a thorough self-examination would come before our self-testing of others.

Again, if we approach this with the same selfless love that Jesus exhibited, then the process has the possibility of a win-win situation.

Today, there are divisions everywhere -- whether to wear a mask, or not; whether to wash your hands, or not; whether to resume in-person worship, or not. Divisions even extend to what news outlet is "approved" and what news outlet is "not approved." All of this certainly weighs on our minds and we filter our comments because we do not desire to add to the division.

What are we to do to keep the peace and to live in harmony with each other? Bryan Jeffrey Leach wrote this text in 1973 and it appears in our hymnal, # 675.

Make room within my heart, O God, that You may form in me  
the image You have shown in Christ, my very life to be.  
Inspire my thought, O lofty one, to reach the highest plane,  
that I may know the mind of Christ, and Him, as greatest gain.

Direct my will, O King of kings, subject it to Your own,  
that every impulse, action, word, may make Your kingdom known.  
Effect my prayer, great Trinity, eternal Three in One;  
combine each part of me to praise the Father, Spirit, Son.

**Prayer:**

O God, may we always see others through your lens of love. Amen.

**September 19 - Exodus 16:22-30**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***The Lord Has Given You The Sabbath***

22 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.'"

24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none."

27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. 28 The Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? 29 See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

**Devotion:**

Ever catch yourself "nesting," either at work or at the office? Maybe you don't know why you suddenly have a burst of energy and spend it straightening things up. Or, maybe what you notice is that you have suddenly prioritized cleaning or organizing when normally you don't care much for that. If you paid attention, something unusual is probably coming up. Maybe you are about to go on vacation. Or, a holiday is coming up.

We haven't looked in on Moses and the Children of Israel in a while. Now, they are early on their exodus in the wilderness. They are free of Egypt's threat, but will they starve? Will they die of thirst? Moses assures them that God will provide. Soon, quail begin to appear by day so that they have meat. Manna also appears. They are to gather only 1 measure each day. Except on the 6th day. On that day, they can gather double, or exactly "2 omers." This is to feather the nest. They were to store up and be ready.

An Omer was a biblical unit of measure that the Hebrews used. It could be a dry measure or a quantity of eggs. In dry measure terms, their 1 daily omer might be converted or understood as roughly 9 cups. Enough to feed a family from this mysterious bread or flour-like substance that God provided. Some cooked with it, others formed it and ate pretty much as it came.

Why 2 omers on the 6th day? Because the Sabbath was coming. Now free from generations of enslavement in Egypt, God wanted the Hebrews to emphasize a return to Sabbath keeping. The Creation story built in a day of rest on the 7th day. The people were now to take seriously their communal gatherings for worship and for rest. They were to give thanks to the One who had delivered, who had promised them and was providing for them.

You'll notice that "some" of them just couldn't listen. Or maybe they simply didn't trust. They tried to gather on the 7th day. There was no manna to be found. God had given them enough, and either they ate too much or they didn't gather double the day before. Either way, Moses reminded them of the instructions. Aren't humans and their behaviors timeless? Oh, and that part about "...don't leave your place on the 7th day?" He meant to go out and glean manna. Don't get any wise ideas. They could go to worship, and they should!

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to trust. Almost everything we do as people of faith comes down to whether we actually trust you or not. Kindle in us hearts that trust. Amen.

**September 20 - Exodus 16:2-15**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***The People Complain, and Yet God Provides***

16:2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

16:3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

16:5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

16:6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 16:7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?"

16:8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him -- what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

16:9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"

16:10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

16:11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 16:12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

16:13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

16:14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.

16:15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

**Devotion:**

*The people complain, and yet God provides.* If I were summing up today's lesson, that might be one attempt I would give. If we follow the Israelites' larger story of deliverance, exodus and settlement -- they did a lot of complaining. "Why did you bring us out here to die? We were better off in Egypt." That mindset is woven into today's story. "Well, now we're thirsty!" Or, "We can't possibly take Canaan. Those people are giants." These are all complaints that will happen along the way in the larger story.

I wonder how often God is miraculously providing me life, but I just don't see it? During seminary, Elizabeth and I used to sit at a yogurt shop and speculate on what our life would be like. Our love was young and our dreams were big. Almost nothing that has unfolded resembles what our dreams were like. I have felt at times like a victim of Baptist timing. I have felt at times as though I came along a generation late and missed out on a "Golden era" of church life. I have wondered why God has let things get like they are in the religious world. Once in a while, though, I look around and notice that life as God has provided...is actually pretty great!

I'll pull the curtain back for you again today: We live in an unprecedented era of ministerial shortages. Younger people have been choosing to enter the ministry at a lesser rate for at least the last couple of decades. Meanwhile, ministers have also left the profession at a higher rate over those same decades. Why? It's actually not the "big" things that burn most ministers out. The great Carlyle Marney once said, "To be a pastor is to be stoned to death with popcorn." It's the day-to-day complaints about what no one wants to hear is actually the little stuff. It's the petty politics of congregational life that kills one's spirit.

In next Sunday's lesson text, Moses and Aaron will tell God that they legitimately believe the people are about to stone them! They constantly stood between an impatient people and their God. It was a tenuous position to hold. This would not be the end of this serial rebelliousness. The prophets would be sent later to tell the people of Israel that they simply weren't letting God be God. For now, let's notice that bread and meat were not the only things God provided for an ungrateful Israel. God also gave them a patient listening ear for their complaints.

It took Moses and Aaron to point this out, but God actually heard their complaints. God provided, even if not always precisely in the ways they might have hoped. But there is more. God provided one other thing. Sabbath is woven into the rhythm in which they would harvest God's provision. If you look at Exodus 16 as a whole, and not just the few verses we are assigned here, Sabbath will be built into their lives again. They may not have understood at the moment, but a day of rest and worship may be exactly what they needed most!

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to be willing followers. If all we are is impatient consumers of your religious goods and services, we are not a faithful people. Kindle our spirits with your Sabbath, and shape us to be more like you created us to be. Amen.

**September 21 - Exodus 16:31-35**  
**by Dr. Charles Qualls**  
***So That They Will Be Appreciative***

Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. 32 Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they may see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" 33 And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations." 34 As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant, for safekeeping. 35 The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

**Devotion:**

When last we saw the Children of Israel, all they could do was complain. I try to understand. What they lacked was perspective. We hold a Bible in our hands and read the early history of their story. They had no such concise summary. They were living it! If they were hungry, and saw no provisions, they thought they would starve. If they were thirsty, and no stream were in sight, they thought they would die.

However, there was one thing that should have been traveling with them. The very recent memory of God's mighty, even supernatural provision should have been evidence of God's ability. God's presence and willingness to provide should have been something they could remind each other about. Instead, they complained and threatened their leaders.

God's noticeable deeds got them released from Egypt. Those should have been evidence enough. With the daily provision of Manna, as well as quail at one point and even a stream of water flowing from a rock, they could not deny that God was with them. But like the Israelites, no one of us has the end of our story to read. When life disappoints, or threatens, we can wonder where God is. We can get discouraged.

God is right where God always has been. God hears our hearts, knows our fears and attends our spirits. Will we notice the sometimes "still, small voice" of God that speaks into our lives in a variety of ways? If only we will work at growing our faith. If only we will look back enough to see God's mighty ways. If only we will tell each other the old, old story so that we don't forget. Moses was right -- we must not forget. For tomorrow we may need to see the omer of Manna in a jar just so that we can believe another day.

**Prayer:**

God, please grow our faith. May we meet you with grateful spirits that remember where you have been and what you have done. Amen.

**September 22- Psalm 119:97-104**  
**by Dr. Charles Qualls**  
***I Love Your Law!***

97 Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long. 98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. 101 I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. 102 I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me.

103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

**Devotion:**

*Oh, how I love your law!*

That's not something you'll hear most mainline ministers say very often. So, let me go on record right now. Actually, I do love God's law. I just don't love what "The Law" became. Then or now. It wasn't God's fault that the people added to the laws until the whole system became distorted and impossible to live by. It wasn't God's fault that adhering to the law became a substitute for an actual relationship with the God of the law.

Take any one law that you'll read in your Bible. Behind it is a portrait of a loving God who wants all of Creation to live in healthy relationships. Behind any law is a God who desires fellowship with each human. Within any law is a God who knows that we may need structure and expectations in order to live with each other at our best. Biggest of all, the laws were intended to help us find and share "life" with each other.

What Jesus, and the apostle Paul, especially tried to teach us is that the Law (as a whole) was never intended to be a stick with which to beat each other up. The Law against which the Hebrews strained was always intended to shape and guide collective life. It wasn't to spoil anyone's fun or to entrap anyone. Sadly, of course, then and now it was misused. Legalism replaced God in religious life and no one could keep it all straight. Some misused the Law to their political or economic advantage. Others were blind to their own shortcomings, but sure could point out with 20/20 sight the sins of others.

I love the way God's laws lead us to life! May we have --

- Vision to see that God's guidance releases us rather than holds us back.
- Spirits big enough to trust God.
- Hearts that want others to have as much of that life as we.
- And, faith that is mature enough to love God's laws for what they are.

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to see the big picture. Lead us with glimpses of heaven to see that your ways are the best ways. May we use your laws not to kill, but instead to find life! Amen.

**September 23- Matthew 18:1-5**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***True Greatness***

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup> He called a child, whom he put among them, <sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

**Devotion:**

People often misunderstand their own importance, and that is what we find in Matthew 18. The scene occurs when the disciples approach Jesus to ask their most burning question: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" The account does not include any greetings or pleasantries, just the burning question that they all needed answering. For an abrupt entrance, to an unconventional question, the disciples wanted their questions answered and they wanted the answers now!

Jesus answered the question with an unconventional response. He answered the question by choosing not to answer the question. Instead, he did the unexpected. This account describes his unexpected answer by telling a parable concerning a child. As you might expect, the disciples were not amused. They had asked Jesus a direct question and they anticipated a direct answer, but Jesus cannot be pigeonholed. Instead, Jesus' answer

confounded them with its sleight of hand. Jesus answered the disciples' question by placing a little child in the center of the parable. Kate Foster Commons puts it this way -- "Jesus demanded a fundamental change in his disciples and that change was that they become like little children. Unless they changed and became like little children, they could not expect to enter the kingdom." Earlier in this Gospel, in the Sermon on the Mount, we find similar words: "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

What does it mean to become like a child? Jesus was calling his disciples to become like a child, to become humble like a child. Contrast this to the disciple's question in verse 1 which sounds so presumptuous. Instead of hoping that they would enter the kingdom of heaven, they were assuming their entrance to be a fact. How do you spell arrogant?

Just like you and I, when we become too cocky, Jesus reorients our thought process. Just like you and I, the process of reorienting is both necessary and painful. Just when we thought that we had everything figured out, we learn a more profound concept. In other words, we need to be confronted in order to grow. This confrontation is often something or someone so concrete, that even we cannot overlook it. What this child teaches the disciples is that God's economy is not the same as our economy. This child reminds the disciples that even they can get it wrong. This child reminds the disciples that God is a God who continually thinks and acts beyond our comfort zone.

So what happens when we, who are certain that our opinion is correct, discover differently? Are we like the disciples, so sure of ourselves that we would shout down any other viewpoints? Can we even anticipate that our opinion *might* be wrong? What happens when all the voices do not agree? Today, the viewpoints shout differing viewpoints -- is it time to regather for in-person worship? Why would Franklin Baptist not allow a regathering for worship? What if the science is wrong?

I, for one, will err on the side of love and caution. It is with an abundance of love, that I will not knowingly do anything that could potentially cause harm to my neighbor. Loving my neighbor means that I will wear a mask so I might not spread any germs that I might have.

Love of God and love for God require me to follow Jesus. And how do I follow Jesus? Maybe Isaiah 11:6 contains the secret "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a *little child shall lead them.*"

#### **Prayer:**

Holy God, please forgive us when we think more of ourselves than we ought. Remind us that whoever would like to be great must become as a little child. Amen.

**September 24 - James 4:11-16**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Warning Against Judging Another***

<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

#### **Boasting about Tomorrow**

<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." <sup>14</sup> Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

**Devotion:**

James is a small book that packs a large punch. This short book of only five chapters is packed full of practical tips and best practices for Christians. This book is full of advice and warnings that “steps on our toes.” One does not need a theological degree to grasp the meaning of James. The first section deals with judging one another.

Our portion begins with a simple injunction -- do not speak evil against anyone. In our first church, Fort Trial, Bassett, VA, I cautiously told Jane that we should not talk about anyone in the church because everyone was related! (This was a wonderful ministry experience and we dearly love the people at Fort Trial.)

Thus the first lesson on James -- is related to the lesson that your mother probably taught you -- if you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything! As a young child this sounded stern and yes it is. James flatly tells us that we should not speak evil to another brother or sister. Why? When we speak evil against someone else we make ourselves above the law itself -- this is when we move from obeying the law to judging the law. In that case, we have supplanted the one true judge who is able to save and to destroy. Taking that into account, who are we to judge our neighbor?

The second section deals with boasting. Who are we to say what our schedule will look like? There is much wisdom in the old adage, we make detailed schedules and plans and then the Lord laughs out loud at our folly. Please do not misunderstand me, because I too am a planner. But one lesson that I have learned is that we make plans for today, for tomorrow and for the future. But all of our best plans are subject to our Lord's plans. We do not know what tomorrow will bring, but God does. We do not know the length of our life, but God does. So James suggests that we make our plans and let them be subject to God's plans. To do otherwise would be boasting and if we boast in our arrogance, our boasting is evil.

James gives us practical advice for living. Now, it is our decision whether to adopt James' advice, or to neglect James' advice. Now, we have to decide what we will do.

**Prayer:**

Faithful Judge, instruct us in your ways, and give us the ability to follow you. Amen.