



Daily Devotionals – October 23 to October 29, 2021

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

October 23 - Titus 2:7-8; 11-15

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Teach a Sound Doctrine

⁷ Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.

Devotion:

This small letter has been attributed to Paul and was written to instruct Titus. Most likely a Greek who had been converted to Christianity by Paul, Titus had been given authority over several churches. So this letter was to serve Titus and assist him in the supervision of the island of Crete. As such, this letter contains practical advice for Titus in his discipleship process. Essentially, the writer is teaching Titus how to organize and lead churches.

Paul encouraged Titus to be a good example to those around him. If you want to encourage someone, then be the best you possible. If you desire others to imitate you, then make certain that the life you live is what you desire to be imitated. In the vernacular -- may your talk agree with your walk. To be an effective role model, one must have integrity. Integrity comes from careful study and listening before speaking. This is especially true when dealing with spiritual or moral issues. If you come across as someone that is impulsive or irrational, then an argument would be the more likely outcome rather than the desired outcome of teaching people the truth.

The Christian finds the power to live from the Holy Spirit. Because we have been rescued from sin by the death and resurrection of Christ, we are free from sin's control.

This power to live free from sin allows us to live actively, according to God's will for us. To live actively for God, requires us to renounce and turn away from sin. A person who lives such a life will live a life that brings honor to God.

It is important, in my opinion, to notice that in verse 13 we have an appearance of Christ with God. "while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Redeeming makes it possible for Christ to purify us. It is true that redeem means to purchase our release from the captivity of sin. So, we are not only free from the penalty of sin, but we are also purified from the influence of sin as we grow in Christ.

Finally, in verse 15 we have, “Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.” Sisters and brothers, may we ascribe to these attributes.

Prayer:

Thank you, God for our release from the penalty of sin. Thank you also for your continued teaching which promotes our growth. Amen.

October 24 - John 5:39-47

by Dr. Charles Qualls

How Will You Believe Me?

39 “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. 40 Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. 41 I do not accept glory from human beings. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 47 But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

Devotion:

They were wrong when they told me, *Okay, here’s how it works. The Old Testament is basically the set-up. Then, the real stuff is in the New Testament. The Old Testament is just history.* “They were someone during my upbringing. Maybe at my home church. I don’t remember. I heard it more than once.

Which tells me this misconception is out there. So let me dispel that one now: it all connects!

That’s right. All of the Bible connects up. It’s one long, unfolding story. Though divided up into Old and New Testaments, the Bible chronicles the beginning of God’s drama with humanity in Creation. So, for instance here are some things we can’t do --

- Act as though we get to choose one testament and disregard the other. We don’t get to say, “I’m an Old Testament believer. I like it when God gave people what they had comin’!” Nor can we say, “I just pay attention to the Gospels. Nothing else matters.”
- Just read the lines that are in red letters. These days, there are “Red-letter Christians.” They swear that the only parts of the Bible we have to worry about are the quotations from Jesus. Sorry...you don’t get to do that. Jesus is Lord, and all scripture is understood through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. But you don’t get to just read His words and throw away all the rest.
- Decide that the Apostle Paul’s important letters of theology work is somehow “lesser” scripture, and that anything he says is “optional.” I’ve heard this one, too.
- Act as though any one book of the Bible, or either Testament, stands on its own. There is an “arc” to the larger story. It begins in Genesis and slowly unfolds across the history, the Wisdom literature and the Prophets. Then, it moves on with the Gospels and then right on through Acts, the Epistles (or “letters”) and into the apocalyptic Revelation of John. One continuous story all the way through.

Why does all of that matter, and how does it relate to today’s scripture? Because Jesus used this larger story arc in today’s scripture text. Read it again. You’ll see. It’s why today’s Bible-thumpin’ Pharisees, who like to tout Salvation but who clearly see God in the angry Old Testament stereotypes, are just as off-base. A fervency about Salvation, absent any hint of the love of Christ, is just mean-spirited judgmentalism.

It's all connected. We must be, too!

Prayer:

God, lead our hearts to understand the story more like you do. Give us the patience to want to learn it all, that we might understand a little more. Amen.

October 25 - Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Taking God Seriously

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

15 You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor.

16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

17 You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.

18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Devotion:

Taking God Seriously. That's our central notion today as we hear these words from Leviticus 19. Nowhere might this theme of "taking God seriously" be embodied better in our scripture texts than right here. Which is why you'll need to push past the audible groan you might have had when you saw we were in.... Leviticus. Exactly no one seems to get excited about studying in that poor book.

Yet here we are. So many weights, measures, standards and instructions. Right?! One thing I don't want any of us to miss is that behind all those delineations is the very heart of God. Yes, I think in among the commands and expectations, the Bible reveals what is important to God. Similar to the 10 Commandments, which so many believers want to wield like a bat...when actually what is obvious behind them is a loving God who cares about how we get along with each other.

If you are slogging through what feels like 15 Levitical chapters on how the Tabernacle is to be constructed, therein is how seriously God takes our worship. If you are hearing instructions to the farmers about leaving the corners unharvested for the gleaners, there is God's priority on helping the poor and the vulnerable. The heart of God becomes evident, if we are paying attention rather than just reading rules.

That means my challenge today is going to be to study this text with an eye toward where we see God in all this. We must listen and tune our ears to hear God proclaiming the most essential elements of our existence. Not taking advantage of the vulnerable? Check. Service and worship? Check and check. Viewing others as equally important as yourself? Check. Living with integrity, speaking the truth and not rendering false witness? Check. Check. And, check. Remembering that God is God...and that I'm not? You betcha!

In among all that could seem so vanilla or boring, we are reminded to take God seriously. Our ethical behavior will be evidence that we see God, and that we take seriously what God cares about.

Prayer:

Lord, may we indeed take what you say seriously. We realize today that wrapped inside all that may appear boring or mundane is actually your own sacred heart. Your intent for our living. Amen.

October 26 - James 2:8-13

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself

8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Devotion:

Today, we see another central passage of scripture that we love to agree with...sort of. *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

If we are honest, most of us hear this and then we immediately add a "But..." to it. That is, we like to choose or define just who our neighbors are. Our enculturation steps in ahead of our Jesus sometimes. Just like Christ in the gospels, James repeats Jesus' teaching here today in ch2.

All of us are guilty of this. Some perhaps more so than others. But we all fight this tendency, I am sure. Obviously, I am referring to our biases, prejudices and built-in encultured blindspots. So while we may agree with Jesus, we find actually living by this to be difficult.

The following came through my social media again today--



What do we do with today's scripture? Know this. Then, do better. As Maya Angelou said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then, do better." So it seems that Jesus and James were both trying to suggest the same.

Prayer:

Lord of our days, make us one day better and one day healthier in order that we might love our neighbors as ourselves. Including the ones different from us. And yes, even the ones we don't like. Amen.

October 27 - James 2:14-26

by Dr. Charles Qualls

What Good Is It?

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder.

20 Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. 23 Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

Devotion:

I suppose the jokes within a culture at a given time are cyclical and faddish. When I was a little kid, one fad in the joke-telling world were the "useless" jokes. You'd use them when you were poking fun at something or somebody. They went like this:

- *That's as useless as a screen-door on a submarine...*
- *That makes as much difference as a BB rolling down a four-lane highway...*
- *That's about as phony as a \$3 bill...*
- *That's about as useless as a soup fork...*

James says that faith that's all talk is useless. James says that faith without evidence just may not be faith at all. James says that faith without works does no good. I tend to agree.

What he is countering here, and we all should consider his point, is that following Jesus Christ as our Lord-and-Savior is just that. It's not about marking the "Saved from the ravages of Hell's fire" off our list of concerns because in one moment we walked down a church aisle and presented ourselves for Baptism. James contends that this simply is not how faith will work.

Faith that's real...James says...will leave a trail. A legacy. Some evidence. There will be something there that causes people to say, "I see the *Jesus* in them now."

You've heard me say it before. No doubt I'll say it again: Some of the meanest people I've ever been around were in the churches I've served. But they could talk some Salvation! Just hateful, mean and cantankerous. When we started selling church t-shirts or handing out church bumper stickers, I found myself thinking quietly, "I sure wish you wouldn't take one. In fact, I'd love it if you didn't really tell people you are a member here." Sound judgmental? It is. James says that we all can do better, and that we must!

Scary thing is, at my worst moment I am the one who's lacking the evidence. At my worst, I am the one who wouldn't look like I'm the real deal. I can be downright useless to God at times. You might say the same thing about yourself, in an honest moment. So, James is not saying that we can be saved by our "works" or by our goodness. But he is saying that without works or goodness, maybe we were not really saved after all.

Prayer:

Lord, shape our hearts. Convict us that you are not just a matter to check off our life list, a once-upon-a-time matter to be taken care of. Help us to want to be people of real faith. Amen.

October 28 - Matthew 19:16-22

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Rich Young Man

¹⁶ Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" ¹⁷ And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ²⁰ The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" ²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Devotion:

This familiar passage has much to offer today's disciple. In today's terms, this rich young ruler would certainly qualify as the upper crust of society, i.e. the one percent, the wealthiest of the wealthy. But this young man does have qualities that can be redemptive -- especially his keeping of the commandments from an early age. Apparently, he was able to amass wealth and keep the commandments, which is not easy. Also, he recognized that Jesus was a teacher and someone that knew God's heart. So, what could possibly go wrong?

This young man wanted to capitalize on his success as one of the one percent and transfer that to his spirituality. But, he has not learned the basics that spirituality does not work like an equation. "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Here he states that innately he understands that he lacks something in order to have eternal life. He, like us, realizes that there is nothing that we can do to inherit eternal life.

There is a complexity that can often go unnoticed -- the rich, young man is seeking eternal life and yet Jesus answers his question with life. Jesus is speaking about the here and now while the rich young man is interested in eternity.

How does Jesus answer this question? He names Commandments 5-9, often deemed as the social commandments. These are the commandments that teach us how we should treat each other, and to these Jesus adds one other -- "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Not detained, the young man inquires further by saying that he has kept all these commandments since he was a young child. Then Jesus adds the kicker -- "Go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

The text states that he went away grieving because he had many possessions. Why was he grieving? The text gives a couple of clues: Maybe he was sad because he was wealthy, maybe he was sad because he would not be able to provide for his family, maybe he left to pray about his encounter with Jesus. We do not have any record that he went and sold his possessions and gave the money to the poor.

What can we learn from this passage?

Following Jesus is not a part-time job. Following Jesus in the words of Isaac Watts, “demands my soul, my life, my all.” If we truly desire to follow Jesus, then all of our allegiances will change. If we truly desire to follow Jesus, then our priorities will change. If we truly desire to follow Jesus, we must lose our life for Jesus’ sake.

Prayer:

Holy Jesus, give us the desire to truly follow you. Amen.

October 29 - Romans 2:17-29

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Jews and the Law

¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God ¹⁸ and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, ²¹ you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

²⁵ Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. ²⁹ Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart -- it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.

Devotion:

Paul is laying out the framework for Jewish Christians, because in his mind, this combination made a lot of sense. The friction arises when the Christians and the Jewish Christians have different opinions on what to include and what not to include in this “new” religion. Paul, being a Jew’s Jew, is the one who is up to the task.

We read a litany of Jewish Law and Paul makes a mockery of those who cling only to the Law. One by one, Paul calls out the hypocrites who proudly obey the Law, when in fact, they do not obey the Law. Those who claimed to be super religious are in fact imposters. There is no one who has kept the entire Law and no one who has not sinned.

But, to not keep one section of the Law, is an indication that the entire Law has not been kept. This is where religion becomes personal, because all of us have sinned and have fallen short of God’s glory. So Paul takes what are some of the hallmarks of the Jewish faith and then proceeds to show the Jews their fallacy at attempting to keep the Law. It was highly controversial for those belonging to the New Covenant to be called a Jew. Paul’s work is rooted in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and believes that one faith could contain the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and the Jewish Christians. Paul taught the Gospel was first for the Jews and then for the Gentiles. The unity of the faith is an important issue for Paul and his life bore witness to that fact.

Paul is teaching that real spirituality is a matter of the heart and not an outward appearance. What does it profit us if we keep all the rituals perfectly, but our hearts do not know God? As with most scripture, this passage invades and convicts our hearts. It is up to us to follow the teachings of Paul, and not of ourselves.

Prayer:

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me. Mold me and use me for your glory, now and forever. Amen.