

Money – a gift from God or worldly corruption?

There is no doubt that nowadays that people, especially within the American culture, have an enthrallment with wealth. In so many places, people are striving for everlasting riches brought by a multitude of ways. The pursuit of wealth has also managed to creep into some Christian churches. Christ's message has seemingly been flipped from the rich hardly entering the kingdom of God to God making those who worship him physically rich. However, even with all the fanaticism to wealth, money is still needed for the basics in life today. One has to consider if money in itself is a source of evil or not. It is possible to live without money or is there a Godly way regarding the handling and accumulation of it?

Lately there has been a message going around in certain Christian churches aptly called the "prosperity gospel". The one of perpetuators of this type of gospel is Preacher Creflo Dollar. What is notable about this particular gospel message is not only that we can receive wealth from God, but also that Jesus himself was a man of wealth and that God wants us to be wealthy. While many question where the preachers of this gospel accumulated their wealth, one has to speculate if this particular has any validity to it and if scripture backs it up. If there is any truth to it, then why is it that Christ seems to allude to wealth being a hindrance toward salvation? Does this mean that money in itself is corruptive or that it is simply one of many types of blessings from God?

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."
– Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." – 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NIV)

"Then Jesus said to the man who had invited him: 'When you give a dinner or a banquet, don't invite your friends and family and relatives and rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return, and you will be paid back. When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. They cannot pay you back. But God will bless you and reward you when his people rise from death.'" – Luke 14:12-14 (CEV)

"Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;" – Proverbs 3:9 (ESV)

"Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear honor to whom honor." – Romans 13:5-7 (NKJV)

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.” -1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV)

While some of the members of Creflo Dollar’s church claim that they have experienced physical prosperity, it is likely that our ultimate gift from God is one of spiritual wealth. It does not seem sound that we are entitled to riches for our devotion to God when we did not deserve Christ dying on the Christ for us. We should not look to Christ for riches, even if God may give them to us, but for spiritual prosperity over our sin and death brought from it. With this in mind we have to think of money for what it is: a physical commodity used for our well being and as an opportunity give glory to God. Of course, we need money to obtain the essentials and to pay what we owe, but it is so easy to give into greed and self-indulgence when it is used for our own devices. Considering that, it is good to invest in the spreading of the word, the serving of others or any other righteous thing. God doesn’t give wealth out of our devotion; God gives so that we have an opportunity to keep our relationship with him intact. In the end, money isn’t a danger but greed is what makes money a problem. And it is one problem that could be fueled dependant on what you do with your riches. In conclusion, the best thing we receive and should give back to God is our riches. Let’s not forget who enabled us to have it in the first place.

Questions to Consider

- If you are physically wealthy, do you give back to God in any way? If not, do you think you can give anything back to God?
- Do you credit your wealth, or lack of it, to God? If so, why do you think he gave them to you?
- Do you think we need to be wealthy to have a fruitful discipleship?

Prophecy – What does it mean for us?

Prophecy has been apparent since the time of the Bible. Yet with so many people, both in the past and presently, are claiming to be prophets or see prophecies in so many things. So then the question is how do we tell who or what a real prophecy or prophet of God is and what or who isn't? God most likely has a distinction on what is true and what isn't; otherwise we would just go with anything that could indefinitely mislead us. The predicament becomes this: Why did God give prophecy? What makes a prophet or prophecy true? And what should be our standpoint on it today?

Is the gift of prophecy active today?

As far as the gift of prophecy nowadays, it is likely that there are no actual current prophets in existence. In fact, the gift of prophecy has ceased sometime after the completion of the New Testament. Daniel 9:24-25 mentions the sealing up of prophecy around the time of Jesus coming to Jerusalem, atoning for sin and bringing everlasting righteousness. Zechariah 13:1-6 mentions a time where the house of David and the people of Jerusalem will be cleansed from sin and God will remove the prophets and spirit of sin. The biblical position clearly states that the gift of prophecy passes around the time of Christ. This is also confirmed within the New Testament as well. As 1 Corinthians 13:8 mentions the ceasing of prophecies and when seen in view with Daniel 9 and Zechariah 13, the fact is that prophecy ceased after New Testament times. Hebrew 1:1-2 tells how God spoke through prophets in the former times and how in the last days he speaks through Jesus. It is a fact the early church had prophets, but these prophets were a result of God giving inspired teaching to the church by the laying of hands on an apostle (1 Timothy 4:14). However, there is no biblical indication or fact in church history that evidences prophets not given the ability by laying hands on an apostle. It is very likely that when the New Testament was in the hands of the church, prophecy passed away. Overall, the gift of prophecy is no longer active because of the crucifixion of Christ and the church's development of the New Testament.

How does one know if a particular person is a true prophet of God?

While it is unlikely that a true prophet existed after the sealing up of prophecy, there is still an issue of how to determine if one is a true prophet. There certainly were ones who claimed to be prophets in the times of the Bible as well as afterward. However, the test of a true prophecy was quite simple. In Deuteronomy 18:21-22, the test of the prophet is one of accuracy. Whatever the prophet predicts has to come true in order for a true prophecy of God. However, there is one principle that nullifies a prophecy. In Jeremiah 18:6-10, it is mentioned that God changes his prophecy based on hearts of repentance or disobedience. For example, Jonah predicted the destruction of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. The people of Assyria repented and God forwent his destruction of them. Nowhere does the Bible indicate that true prophecy is nullified for any other reason. On the whole, if the prophet is in fact a true prophet of God, he has to be completely accurate in every prediction he makes. And if any prophet misses a prediction, it has to be because of a change of heart toward repentance or disobedience by the people involved. Even if the

prophet misses one prediction without that aspect, they may prove to be a false prophet on the whole.

Do we even need prophecy today?

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” – 2 Peter 1:21

Basically, the gift of prophecy is not likely to be active today and has some specific guidelines to determine true prophecy. But even if the gift were still active, it doesn't seem that it is a gift that is completely necessary in today's world. Considering the circumstances of the early church and before then, there was a much bigger need for prophecy. The people of the biblical times had little access to scriptures and were in the face of persecution at times. With the previously mentioned scriptures, it is clear that prophecy was to challenge people to change for God. Because people had little access, along with incompleteness of the scripture, they need prophecy to help them along spiritually. Prophecy was essential because it helped bring access of the scriptures to all as well as the prosperity of the Bible. Now since we have access to the word of God along with Christianity being a world leading religion, there is no threat that would derail the prosperity of Christianity. This is probably why the gift passed away after the New Testament times. The Bible within itself exemplifies God will for us and guidelines regarding sin. The false prophecies today only represent the will or fabrications of man.

Is knowing a prophecy supposed to save us?

While it foretells God's will, prophecy in itself does not save us. Does the knowledge of an upcoming storm tell you how to survive it? Again, the point of prophecy was to instill repentance or action toward what God promised. In the end, the appropriate response toward God's will is what saved the people in the times of prophecy. However, the question becomes what do we respond to now that there is no more prophecy? The thing that saves us now is the salvation brought by Christ and our acknowledgement of what he has done. In Mark 16:16, Jesus states the standard that insures our safety and what is done to lose it. It is not that anything we have done saves us because crucifixion of Christ has given us salvation through the grace of God. However, doing works out of faith insures that we do not walk away from the grace given through Christ by God (James 2:14-26). In addition, our access of the Bible insures that we can have a foundation in living for Christ (2 Timothy 3:14-16). The knowledge of prophecy does not do what indulgence in Christ does. Even if an upcoming prophecy were true, we would have to insure that we are with Christ. What good is it to even know of a prophecy if we are likely to be condemned anyway? We have salvation because of Christ and we will always have it as long as we live with him as our center.

How should we respond to the current prophecies being made?

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)

“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly

puffed up by his fleshy mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is from God.*" Colossians 2:18-19 (NKJV)

Regarding the probable false prophecies of today, we have to respond to it in the same way we respond to other issues. We state the biblical standpoint and test the issue to see if it holds true or not. Deuteronomy 18 gives us the standard for prophecy, so only time and consistent accuracy will tell if it is true. However, one must take caution when dealing with prophecy because the Bible clearly warns of false prophets. While the gift of prophecy is likely to be gone, many people hold to false prophets. Along with this, many people are making claims of prophecy found within things, even parts of the Bible that are considered to be non-prophetic. While the conditions of these types of prophecies are debatable, one has to question where they come from and how they are found. 1 Timothy 4:1-4 warns of spirits of deception regarding teachings. With this in mind is best to be cautious apparent prophecies and question the validity of them. In dealing with people preoccupied with prophecy, one has to focus on two things: righteousness and repentance. As mentioned before, prophecy within itself does not save us. So it is best to question the point of a prophecy being made; especially if a person believes it can't be changed. Why would God show us a prophetic vision if we can do nothing about it? What did this apparent prophecy mean at the time of its origin to the people who wrote it? Why is it that no one found it up until this point? Moreover, it is best to question the state the person is in regarding their relationship with God. More often than not, it seems that a preoccupation with prophecy is a distraction and involves a non-spiritual person. Why worry about a prophecy if you're liable to be without salvation anyway? One has to come to a point where they have to accept Christ and repent from their sin, regardless if an upcoming prophecy is true or not. On the whole, we have to approach people who hold to prophecy respect gentleness but we should be questionable about how the prophecy came about or whom this prophecy is from.

Overall, the gift of prophecy is no longer active and has specific details to determine what type of prophecy comes from God. But with the entire obsession regarding it, it seems the idea of trying to find prophecy today is futile. Because we have the Bible, we have everything we need to live righteously, eliminating the need for prophecy. Even if a false prophet were to have a lucky guess or if God for some reason sent us a true prophet, we should not be focused on that aspect. We as people of Christ have to consider where we are spiritually and set our mind on righteous things (Col 3:2). It doesn't matter if we meet our end through a prophecy or through other causes. What matters is our standpoint with Jesus and maintaining that so we don't lose our salvation. It is best to be confident of the safety in Jesus regardless of whatever else we're facing.

Pursuit of Excellence or Pursuit of Perfection

It seems that when people devote themselves toward doing certain things, they go about it in different ways. Two of these ways include excellence and perfection. While most think that these two ways would go hand in hand, the applying of these factors would differ slightly. One usually has determining factors in choosing to go with and the decision involves the process of going about their commitment. While these two factors may vary regarding certain activities, in the Christian life one is actually less honorable than the other. God calls us toward one of these two pursuits while in our walk with him and we need to realize why he wants us do one over the other.

The application of excellence is one that most people may go for because they feel it is the most realistic. For example with me getting back into exercise, I recently uncovered this rule, called the 90% rule, in a fitness magazine. The rule stated that while in a workout program, you would have to do at least 90% of the work to get notable results. Meaning one could miss a day of working out or go slightly off the nutrition plan and still get formidable results in the end. When you think about it, most people could possibly be using this rule in other outlets. Other examples include one doing only enough work to receive an above average grade or performance. Pursuing excellence rather than perfection opens some leniency toward achieving the ultimate goal. The problem is that in a spiritual sense, it may lead to some compromise. One could do only enough to seem righteous and disciplined when they are discreetly being lenient regarding their actions. One could be active in their spiritual life to seem put together because we can only see so much. On another hand, one could pursue excellence because they feel that they don't have the tools or justification into going to something higher. While going for excellence may be seem reasonable, it is really more a compromise and an action of reluctance.

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." – 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)

"But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does." – James 1:25 (NIV)

"If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth." – Deuteronomy 28:1 (NIV)

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." – Philippians 3:12 (NIV)

"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." – Hebrews 10:36 (NIV)

Believe it or not, Christ wants us to make a pursuit in him towards perfection. Not because we are capable of perfection, but because those who strive for it persevere in their walk with God. However, striving for perfection with God involves complete obedience. For example in 2 Chronicles 34: 27-33, King Josiah was obedient to God

and was able to persevere in God's eyes. While everyone has a weakness that prohibits them from achieving perfection, through Christ we are perfect through obedience to God. Because of Christ blood, our weaknesses do not overshadow our connection with God (2 Corinthians 12:9). However, we can stay perfect in God's eyes only if we are fully obedient. Notice in the above verses that it does not say to be half way or 90% obedient. In conclusion, we have to pursue a relationship with God that is perfect. While we in no way can achieve perfection without Christ, our drive towards it is very much more appreciative than going at half-way.

Questions

1. Do you find yourself going for excellence in God? If so, what are your reasons?
2. Do your reasons make you go about your conviction half-heartedly?
3. Despite how you're going about your relationship with God, can you sincerely say you're doing all you can?

-Alex Junious

Satan's subtle voice is the blatant assault

Sometimes when we resist an obvious temptation, the residual seed of danger can still be lodged in our mind and heart...

"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time."

Luke 4 :13

Over the past year, my quiet times have often focused on the topic of "Worship".

Recently, this study brought me to Christ's temptations in the desert as he began his public ministry. Reflect on Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13.

The lessons are many. But here are some thoughts that were new to me – and challenging to my preparedness to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Key Insight: Even though the brazen, blatant, ruthless attacks of Satan are obvious at first glance, the subtle, insidious intentions can linger and erode away your relationship with God.

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8

3 Areas Satan tempted Christ in these passages...

1) Self-Doubt... "If you are the Son of God"

Often we focus on the fasting and Christ's hunger here. People will teach "Satan was attacking his humanity, and trying to get him to make bread!"

The real temptation was directed at Christ's identity and his worth. "If you are the Son of God, prove it. Are you really?"

Many of us, myself included would do well, to grasp the idea that we have absolutely nothing to prove to anyone as we entrust ourselves to God. Oh but how often have we been trapped by people pleasing, church serving and anesthetizing busy-ness to show everyone, in and out of the fellowship, that we are "good disciples."



2) Defend God's Faithfulness... "He will command his angels concerning you"

Here again, not only does Satan attack Christ's identity as the Son of God, he challenges Jesus' trust of God's faithfulness. It wasn't a request for Jesus to do some sort of sensationalistic miracle; it was a subtle temptation to "conclusively prove" one facet of God's eternal character. It was a temptation for Christ to prove that God was truly with him.

"Is God really faithful? The scriptures say it. Prove it. I don't believe you are his man – and neither will others. Jump Jesus. Jump if it's true!"

OK. Have you ever made a foolish decision and stepped off the ledge "by faith" to prove the point that "God is with you"? It could be a rash attempt to show a person or a whole group of people that you and your God are right. "So watch this! I'll show you God is with me!"



The temptation must have been strong for Jesus. If anyone ever had the opportunity to prove that God was with him in that way, it was Christ. Yet, he knew God's will enough to not destroy the whole, overall plan. He looked at

scripture humbly in light of all scripture, void of wrong motives and any theomaniacal selfishness. He was a true servant leader as Paul described;

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped..." Philippians 2:5-6

3) Christ's Personal Worship... "If you bow down and worship me"

Wow. This is brazen. This is what struck me in my study of worship. If Jesus could be tempted to get off track with his worship, what about little old, unspiritual me and you?

It wasn't all the kingdoms of the world Christ thought about. It was, "Should I really worship God?" That was the temptation. God already had given Christ everything and Satan knew it. The brazen attack was not the temptation. Jesus was tempted to be disloyal to God and worship ANYTHING else instead of God! And of course, that would be worshipping Satan.

Isn't that what we should think about? What is at the center of our worship? Our church, our doctrine, our abilities, our charitable deeds, our families? Is it truly God and God alone?

Worship, the fear of God, is the beginning of wisdom. It is our overall reason to be alive. It is why we were created.

Worship is the many expressions of our ultimate love and loyalty to God.

In heaven, worship will be our continual eternal past-time.

Is the real temptation materialism?

Or is the temptation to take our heart

off of adoring, praising, extolling, exalting, magnifying, fearing and

worshipping our Holy, Holy, Holy Creator? Reflect on John 12:41 and

Isaiah 6:1-10

As Peter commanded us, in light of Satan being a prowling lion...

"Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." 1 Peter 5:9



In Him,
Jerry Maday

Should we condemn others?

I've decided to focus this devotional on a subject that perplexes some people who may be weak in their knowledge and faith. And that is the issue of whether or not we should condemn others who are in opposition with us. Based on some of the statistics you may read, especially those found in some atheistic writings, you may find that some people who call themselves Christians are condemning and at times persecuting those outside the faith that are perceived as a threat. With this in mind, one would have to question if God calls us to do this or if people are misconstruing God's word and taking it out of context. Despite what some say we would have to do regarding those outside our faith, we have to look at scriptures thoroughly in order to gain an understanding and address from there.

Misunderstanding

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." – 1 John 2:15 (NIV)

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" – 2 Corinthians 6:14 (NIV)

There is always a perception that one could easily misconstrue scripture. If you look at the two scriptures above, someone could easily use that as leverage to condemn or persecute others. These type as well as others are used in the justification of condemnation. Personally, I found that some atheistic writings even use some scriptures insinuating that Christianity promotes condemnation. In addition, one other factor that comes along is pride. In order to get into a sense of condemnation, one has to have an excessive amount of pride in their faith to push it on others. And while the person claims to be with God, their godly habits are overwhelmed with pride and eventually turn into a form of assault. With this in mind, we have to examine the word and get an understanding of what God wants us to do regarding others.

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." – Romans 12:17-18 (NIV)

"Dear friends, I urge you, as alien and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." – 1 Peter 2:11-12 (NIV)

"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." – Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NIV)

"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king." – 1 Peter 2:16-17 (NIV)

What does God want?

If you look at Matthew 15:1-9, there is a great level of truth in the scripture. Many people who condemn others often are ones who do not have a heart or mindset with Christ. With this type of attitude, there is a definite flawed relationship Christ through one's actions. As people of Christ, we have to have respect for everyone.

Keep in mind that respect for someone does not mean acceptance of sinful things. While there are certain attributes people may have that we can't support, we can't condemn them for it. In the end we have to live at peace with each other and just agree to disagree with nothing more. In addition, if one is faced with a confrontation with someone doing something sinful, the best thing is to express your obligation regarding it. Its one thing for someone to talk you into doing something sinful or to do something that affects you and declaring a standpoint, but it's another to condemn someone for doing sinful things, especially when you're not directly affected. We have to be considerate of our actions and how we come across to people outside the faith. Because in the end if we have an attitude of condemnation, we distance ourselves from others seeking God as well as from our relationship with God.

Questions

1. Do you find yourself condemning others? If so what are your reasons?
2. Do you think that these reasons are in accordance with the word?
3. What do you think you will have to do if your actions are not in accordance?

-Alex Junious

Strong Weakness

When you think of the worldly perception of weakness, it is generally an unfavorable thing. Weaknesses are always prohibiting and are approached with disassociation. As a result, weaknesses are despised by other people as well as the ones who own them. Anything or anyone weak is considered to be inadequate while there's a need to focus on one's own strengths or seemingly strong individuals. However, there seems to be a different approach to spiritual weaknesses. Of course, everyone has a spiritual weakness and usually there's no pride in that weakness. However, it seems that at times some people are forced into a conflict of faith regarding that weakness. Despite how we may perceive our weakness, there is something to take pride in for most spiritual weakness regardless of the extent of them.

While it seems that the world despises weaknesses, there comes a sense of leniency and disconcertment when it comes to spiritual weaknesses. In the world, any spiritual weakness, whether it's one's purity or addiction to something, is seen as something that can't be overcome and in some instances is worth abolishing the faith over. The perception assumes that since God doesn't take away the weakness, it means that it will not be changed and that it is safe to leave God. As a result, people turn away from God and address their weaknesses in ways that leave them entrapped in sin. People have the viewpoint that as long as they have a weakness they can never be faithful to God and doing his will. While it is true that one could meet their spiritual, and in some cases physical, demise through weaknesses, there comes a point of realization of the meaning of a weakness, other than being something you should not succumb to. Any weakness owned by someone has more of a connection to God as one thinks.

"Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the Lord. "I will protect them from those who malign them." – Psalms 12:5 (NIV)

"Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight." – Psalms 72:1, 12-14 (NIV)

"I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice." – Ezekiel 34:15-16 (NIV)

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV)

"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” – 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (NIV)

Despite the worldly perception of weaknesses, especially spiritual ones, our weaknesses actually bring us closer to God. Despite hindrances from them, our weaknesses enable us to keep coming to God and continue in a relationship with him. As mentioned in Romans 8:26, the Spirit intercedes our weaknesses and provides a drive toward God. While there are people whom are overcome by their weaknesses, being overcome only results in failure when one chooses to succumb to it. God assures us that we will never be tempted beyond what we can bear and that he can exalt us through our weaknesses. In addition, weaknesses can exemplify God’s work. While spiritual strength can bring prosperity in one’s spiritual life, God’s exaltation through weakness brings forth greater appreciation for God and provides an example of how God works through our spiritual life to others. Despite one’s faults, God still shows his glory through us. In conclusion, any spiritual weakness keeps our relationship with God secure as long as we continue to address it with accordance with him. With that in mind, I will leave with this scripture from 2 Corinthians 4:7-10.

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 (NIV)

-Alex Junious

The Call to Persevere

Dust Yourself Off and Try Again!!!

What does the word persevere mean to you??

Oxford dictionary defines it as: to continue in a course of action in spite of difficulty or lack of success.

Mark 6:10-11

“Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them. They went out and preached that people should repent.”

1. Where did Jesus find the courage to say this to the apostles?
2. Did Jesus actually DO what he was suggesting to his disciples?

Mark 1:35-38

“Very Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else- to the nearby villages- so I can preach there ALSO. That is why I have come.”

Jesus convened with the Father to start off his day, and was AWARE of his purpose; Spreading the Good News.

*On a side note A brother once explained it like this: God is a big pitcher of water, and you are a tiny glass, and those brothers and sisters around you are tinier glasses than you. When you spend time with God he fills up your cup. And when you meet with your brothers and sisters you are to pour out your cup, and fill up each of theirs. At the end of the day you will be empty, hence needing another meeting with God to refill your cup and renew the cycle. If we can do this, we will be able to impact those around us in the same way Jesus did.

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life- not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.

2 Timothy 1:7-9

“We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition...We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.”

1 Thessalonians 2:2-4

It is of the utmost importance that we understand why we feel confident in what we are doing. We do it to please God, NOT our peers. As Paul says we should enjoy the opportunity to suffer for Christ:

We know that suffering creates endurance, endurance creates character, and character creates confidence. We're not ashamed to have this confidence, because God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

Father,

Help us continue to be confident that you are good.

Help us be content that you are in charge.

Help us continue to have faith that your path is a good one.

Help us keep on keeping on!

For it is written,

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” –

James 1:12

Also look at

1. 1 Timothy 4:16
2. Hebrews 10:36
3. James 5:11

-Maurice Charles

The Gift of Passion

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Romans 12:11 NIV

God is amazing, sometimes he places gifts in us that we never even knew where there! Or we knew they were there, we just didn't realize they were from God – and for a purpose!

I don't suppose there are any sports fans reading this bulletin.. 😊 I don't know if it happened to you in the last 3 months, as it did to me. I went to the Ukraine – France Soccer Game in the Ukraine National Stadium. When Ukraine scored the first Goal – I found myself flying in the air, yelling at the top of my lungs, Screaming names that I never can pronounce correctly, this is all at 10:00 p.m. – when the game started in negative temperatures. Now – who can explain this behavior? Who can explain the burst of Passion from thousands of People. Or the display of indignation when something did not go our way?

God has placed in each one of us a gift! A gift of Passion, a gift of zeal, that he placed there knowing we would need it. God knew we were going to enter into a War – that would require, great passion to Survive, and great passion to see victory. This passion is in us, and can only be completely understood and managed when walking close to God!

It is sad to realize that many use their gift of passion only for their jobs, careers, sports, or hobbies, and never truly understand why God put it in their lives. They notice the gift at sporting events, when stuck in traffic or when they fall in love with someone! But it is never used to its full potential – if not used in a relationship with God, for building up the Kingdom.

The last 3 minutes of a game are different from the first 3? Why? Its the same amount of time passing? Its different because – its the last 3! All will be decided in the last 3 minutes! Satan understands – Time is short! The clock is ticking! Are we in the Battle? To take away from Satan one more soul! To strengthen Each other! Lets use this Gift for God! May his Kingdom – see our greatest moments of Passion and Zeal, where the Battle for Eternity is Won!

-Shawn Wooten (Kyiv, Ukraine)



The King and I

What is the Kingdom of God? Is it here now, or is it yet to come? If yet to come, where is it going to be? There are many debates about these questions today, just as there were in the times of Jesus.

There were various groups with differing opinions about the Kingdom of God in the first century, just like today. For example, the Pharisees thought about the kingdom of God as a physical kingdom that would come if the people of Israel would follow God's law. If they could get enough people to meticulously observe the laws of God, He would then intervene by sending a king who would rid them of the Roman occupation, and lead Israel as a sovereign nation. God would rule the world through Israel. The problem, as they saw it, was that there were not enough law-abiding Jews.

The Zealots believed the way the Kingdom would come through the rallying of Jews who were bold and decisive enough to organize an armed resistance. They would take their country back from the Romans, and then God would rule the world through Israel.

A third group of people thought that the Kingdom of God would come with visible signs. These were the "signs of the times" people, of which there are plenty today as well. They observed comets, astronomical phenomena, dissected Biblical prophecy and, I suspect, provided free entertainment for many, just like they do today.

All of these groups assumed that the Kingdom had to have a particular location. The location was "here," and the "here," of course, was Israel.

Jesus, responding to this controversy, goes for the jugular. In Luke 17:20 He says: "The coming of the Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of God is in your midst." The reason why it was "in their midst" was because Jesus was in their midst. The Kingdom is not fully observable with the natural eye; nor defined by a location. It is here, and now; His name is Jesus.

The Kingdom of God is everything, everywhere, everyone, every time where and when Jesus is king. The boundaries of this kingdom do not lie in any geographic place but in the hearts of true believers.

When I was 26 years old, in Moscow, Russia, the kingdom came to me through people who were different from anyone I had ever met before. These strange people, exuded joy, refused to repay evil with evil, and loved for no good reason (or so I thought). They were genuinely interested in my life, my past, my struggles and my fears. They crossed the boundaries of normal, social behavior, where people politely stay on the surface but don't really care. The kingdom was at my doorstep, knocking, loving, and advancing into my heart.

I resisted at first, being very skeptical of all organized religion. I doubted, having grown up all over the world and seen so much human madness. I hesitated, knowing the changes I would have to make in my lifestyle. I was ashamed, being acutely aware of my sin, being the selfish, arrogant and wicked man I was. Then I found out that these people used to be all of that too, but Jesus died on the cross in their place and for their sins to give them not only forgiveness but his very Spirit and eternal life as a new creation.

I will never forget the moment I made my decision to follow Jesus. Andy Fleming, a friend who was helping me study the Bible, saw it without me telling him. "It seems to me you have already made your decision", he said. Was it written all over my face? Apparently yes. "I can't believe I am becoming a Christian. This is silly!" I thought to myself, but instead of voicing that, I said "Do I have a choice?". Andy paused, and then shook his head. He was right. How could I not follow, love and serve this Jesus? I couldn't hide my excitement. I desperately wanted to be part of this Kingdom, this invisible world where Jesus reigns supreme.

As Christians, our purpose is to manifest the Kingdom of God to the world around us. Being Jesus to whoever we are with effectively brings the kingdom to them "right here, right now." We need to be Jesus to someone who is lost, or addicted, to a person who betrays and slanders. We have to be the Kingdom to our gay neighbor, the elderly lady down the block who needs someone to talk to and the African orphan across the world who might not make it without our help. We really can be the Kingdom to our boring co-worker, the obviously promiscuous person in the gym, the homeless guy who stinks, the intimidating boss and the Muslim guy who doesn't seem like he would be into Jesus. Bring the Kingdom to the doorstep of their heart, and watch Jesus knock, love and advance.

What's amazing is that the Kingdom of God in many ways is small, inconspicuous and humble. Jesus compares it to a mustard seed. However, the Kingdom does not stay small; it grows and spreads like wildfire. A small woman, known as Mother Teresa, who became famous for her humble service to the poor in Calcutta, used to say, "In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love." Her message of love did spread like wildfire, impacting generations of Christians and non-Christians alike.

The Kingdom is always right here and right now, and unlike the Pharisees, the Zealots and "sign of the times" people, we need to always be aware that its source is from "another place." In John 18:36 -37, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, *"You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*

God is the source of this Kingdom we carry in our hearts. May we, who are "on the side of truth," while we go about our business, knowing that The Kingdom is "in our midst", listen attentively in the noise of this world for the loving voice of our King.

Things for you to discuss with a friend:

- I. In what ways does knowing that the kingdom of God is "in our midst" help you?
- II. Can you think of any preconceived ideas, stereotypes, fears that stand in the way of your "kingdom living"?
- III. What "little things with great love" are out there for you to manifest the kingdom of God through?

Things for you to do:

1. Create an environment where you can experience Jesus “in your midst”. Re-assess your relationship with God and people, your prayer life and Bible study on a regular basis to experience Jesus’ presence fully.

2. When there is a person, situation or environment where you don’t naturally engage, pray to overcome your preconceived ideas and stereotypes that keep you from manifesting the Kingdom of God to the world

-Christian Ray Flores

Worldly repentance vs. Godly repentance

What is it that comes to people's mind when they think of repentance? Does it mean apologizing and never doing it again or something more? I'm beginning to realize that not many people have an idea of what true repentance is and more often than not it's because of the worldview of when repentance should be enforced. Often the world tells us that repentance only should be done when it involves certain actions with certain consequences. However in the life of a person devoted to Christ, there is a situation that calls for repentance and is usually done with every sin.

When you look at it, worldly repentance seems to only come out of two situations: guilt and circumstantial consequences. People who feel guilty often would have take responsibility for their actions. Unless they have some method of smothering their guilt, the feeling never disappears until that responsibility is taken. With circumstantial consequences, responsibilities to own up to actions are more force. For example, if someone is caught doing something illegal, they don't have much of a choice but own up to it. Or if someone is doing something that eventually hurt someone or leads them to rock bottom. The only other choice in the outcome is to get better. These two situations are often representative of worldly repentance. However the two situations are really not the best to follow when being truly repenting. While guilt can make people come clean, it only does so because of that guilt. Without guilt, there is no likely incentive to repent. In addition, there is always a perception that one is repenting out an attempt to relieve the guilt and not recognizing their actions as problematic. With circumstantial consequences, there is also the same perception. There always the possibility of simply being remorseful because of being caught or because of the consequences reaped from the actions. Either way repenting due to either of the two situations is not the way God wants us to take it.

Along with this is the world perception of repentance. Often the world's way of repentance only involves apologizing and turning away or stopping the problematic action. Problem with this form of repentance is that there is still a potential stronghold. Sure there is an apology and one is turning away from something problematic but there is no distance enforced between those problematic things. For example, one could quit drinking excessively but still have alcohol around the house or be around others who drink excessively. The world tells us we just need to stop or in some cases do things in moderation to overcome being entrapped by them. However, God calls us to repent in a greater way by doing more than apologizing and turning away from transgressions.

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter." – 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 (NIV)
"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces then finds mercy." – Proverbs 28:13 (NIV)

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” – 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” – Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

True repentance comes out various things according to 2 Corinthians. There is a sense of earnestness and eagerness to clear out sin. There is a sense of indignation of your sin and shock from it. There is also a desire to do better and to concern actions with a readiness to justify one’s self. It’s clear that God wants us to approach repentance with an eagerness to get better with recognizing the spiritual damage of our wrongdoings. That type of approach can never come from the worldly motivations for repentance. The main motivation in true repentance is the desire to do better spiritually and to overcome sin.

Along with this is the meaning of true repentance. Repentance involves recognizing sin, turning from sin and seeking God. There is no way to repent without the acknowledgement of sin and its spiritual damages. Sin is always damaging regardless if it is brought to point where it’s physically destructive or done discreetly without no one but the person and God knowing. This in turn should lead to turning away from sin. Not only does this involve stopping sinful actions but renouncing the things lead to or influence sin. Then there is the need to seek God. Of course, you can’t recognize all sin without seeking God. However, in distancing yourself from sin, there is a bigger incentive to seek God. Without seeking God, there is not much of an incentive to stray away from sin besides not wanting to fall into it. Even if one could stop indulging in their sin, there is always a chance to be pulled back into it without repentance.

Overall, true godly repentance is essential in overcoming problematic actions. While there are rare cases of worldly forms of repentance succeeding, it most likely results in a less honorable achievement. Godly repentance can not only give an honorable achievement, but also strengthen spirituality. With Godly repentance, we can keep going forward towards education.

-Alex Junious