

05/01/2017
I Pledge Allegiance

"Why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" (Lk.6:46).

"On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; To help others at all times; To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

Allegiance is an interesting thing, wouldn't you agree? I remember raising my right arm as a nine year old, with two fingers in the air, and reciting The Scout Oath... All the traits in the oath were to lead one to The Scout Law... A scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. The scout pledged allegiance to that as an American pledges allegiance to the flag. In today's verse, Jesus in His own inimitable way, is asking us to pledge allegiance to him. It is a very straight forward, to the point, statement/question...

"Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" I believe that Jesus' question is posed to those who might have divided allegiances. These folks are not out and out enemies of Christ. Neither is the Lord speaking to those who ignore Him, who attempt to be neutral, which of necessity makes them enemies of Christ... "He who is not with Me is against me..." (Matt.12:30). Neither is Jesus talking to those who are wholeheartedly for Him. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind" (Matt.22:37). Here's the kicker... Jesus is speaking to those who say, Lord, Lord. The "them", and lets be careful that the "them" is not us, are those who refuse to render wholehearted service to Him. It seems to be a problem of divided allegiance. This week's devotionals will be devoted to this very rule that Jesus puts out there for us. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other..." (Matt.6:24). Jesus' rule about doing what He says has far-reaching aspects to it. The sin implied here is not one of overt hate or love of Jesus. It is more about knowing what is right, and not pledging one's allegiance to it. To be a good Christian, is to be a good scout...

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/02/2017
He Could Go All The Way

"Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" (Lk.4:46) "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold or hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm ---- neither hot or cold ---- I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Rev.3:15-16).

In the Lord's eyes, the sin of being "wishy-washy" (lukewarm) about Him is worse than out in out opposition to Him.

Perhaps the best definition of being lukewarm is found in Jesus' question in Lk.6:46... "Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" It would make a great billboard, wouldn't it.... NO LUKEWARM CHRISTIANS FOR CHRIST! He just will not have them! NFL announcer Chris Berman has a signature call when a player is obviously going to score a touchdown, which he is famous for. I made it my title today.... "He could go all the way..." In so many instances, people who say Lord, Lord, will not go all the way with the Master. Some will follow Jesus for miles, but when it comes to following His plan for salvation, they balk. Such behavior is the height of inconsistency and a rejection of the counsel of God. The Lord, through the writings of Paul, has commanded us to give. (I Cor.16:2; Rom.12:1). But this is where many simply throw off His rulership. They cannot pass this test of loyalty because they really have not given themselves to the Master.(II Cor.8:5). God just didn't profess His love for us, but He exhibited it by sending Jesus to save us. Christianity can certainly be defined in terms of giving... God's gift; Christ's gift; our giving of self, time, money, etc... There are so many ways that folks will not go all the way with the Lord.. Many who pray in public, so as not to offend others, will not pray in Jesus' name as they have been instructed to do. God wants us to have complete loyalty to our Master. There are many who show inconsistencies in their fellowship, personal

behavior around non-Christians, soul winning or the showing of brotherly love. Jesus doesn't want halfway followers. He expects us to go all the way...

Have a great day... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/03/2017

On The Outside Only

"Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" (Lk.6:46). "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matt.15:8).

When Jesus posed the question of why people call Him, Lord, Lord and do not do what he says, He found many folks on the list. Another group on that list are the lip service people... The question condemns lip service that has no heart.

He blistered the scribes and Pharisees for their "all-lip" and "no heart" religion in today's 2nd verse. One of the important lessons Jesus teaches us is that one of the conditions of acceptable worship comes from the spirit of a person's nature... John 4:24 is a signature verse that explains this fully... "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth." There are two more verses that serve as an indictment against lip service. In speaking about the religious leaders of the day, He said; "So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matt.23:3). "They claim to know God, but their actions deny Him" (Titus 1:16). A religion that is worn on the outside, busies itself as long as it is cheered on by the public parade... "Everything is done for men to see..." (Matt.23:5). This religion fails miserably in the small, unobserved acts of discipleship, because it springs from an impure and ulterior motive. Under these circumstances, not matter what one professes, there is no Lord in it... I want to wrap this up with just one more of Jesus' teachings... "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matt.6:1). Calling Jesus, Lord, Lord, should be reflected by our daily actions... Lets be sure to look within ourselves so that our service to God is not on the outside only...

Have a wonderful day.... Make your little part of the world better... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/04/2017

Taking Sides

"Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" (Lk.6:46). "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise from men more than the praise from God" (Jn.12:42-43).

A fan of a certain team is passionate about their team. They stick with them at all times because of a fierce loyalty. If someone were to say something negative about their team, their defense will get even stronger. They are willing to take a stand for the team, because in essence, they have taken sides... A person with this type of faith, belief and loyalty translates into one not being addressed by Jesus' question about saying, Lord, Lord and not doing what I say. Jesus is putting the foundation of our belief out there with obedience in Him. If we do not take sides, we render all that He and the Father have done moot. The writer of the book of Proverbs has his finger on the pulse of this teaching; "Anyone who turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable" (28:9). The 2nd scripture this morning from Jn.12:42-43, debunks any thought that simple faith is sufficient for the Lord. Faith is certainly a part of the foundation, but will not justify anyone unless it is powerful enough to produce works. "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" (Jas.2:24). It is true also that Christianity demands a changed

intellect, but it is equally true that it demands a changed life... The one who would take obedience out of the equation robs the Lord's system of its practicality and leaves only an empty theoretical shell. All theory and no action has never won a battle in any realm. I am reminded of a story about a little old southern granny during the Civil War. When told that the Yankees were coming, she got out on the front porch with her broom in hand. One yelled, "Granny, what do you think you can do with that broom?" The reply was, "Well, at least I can show them whose side I'm on!" When folks view our lives, can they tell which side we're on? Only if the question from Lk.6:46 is not directed toward us....

Have a great day... Let His light shine through you... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/05/2017

The Era Of The Judges

"So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs" (Judges 3:7). "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (I Cor.10:11).

The group that meets in our home on Tuesday evenings has just embarked on a study of the Book of Judges. The era of the judges marked a time between the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan and the crowning of their 1st king. God raised these judges periodically to help with their civil matters, disputes and military conflicts. The accounts in this book present some of the individuals as noteworthy and others as somewhat disappointing. The reason for raising up judges is summed up by the statement found in today's 1st verse. So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord....The people were supposed to live with God as their king and the Mosaic Law to guide their ways. If they would have done this, God would have aided them in conquering all the surrounding people and allowing them to live the way God had designed them to. Unfortunately, they looked around at the pagan people intermingled with them, and even worshiped their gods.... There are some timeless lessons for God's people (us) to learn from the Israelites' failure to keep their covenant with God. We come to understand this by today's second verse... When we take on Jesus as our Savior, we enter into a similar covenant... Here are a few of the lessons; (1) God does turn away from His people and His steadfast love endures forever. (2) Persistent rebellion (sin) by people within this covenant invites disaster. (3) Those who turn their backs on God may suffer consequences for their actions. (4) Character is built by being faithful. Those who put their trust in Him today should never trifle with sin. We should use all our energies to serve Him faithfully. When we fall short, we must turn back to our faithful Lord and repent. We should never excuse our sins lightly or take God's forgiveness for granted. We must love Him with all our hearts and souls....

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/06/2017

Blowin' In the Wind

Today's questions, like last week's, are related to wind occurrences in the Bible. I hope the answers come easy so you won't have to huff and puff about them...

_____ 1. According to a Psalm, what sort of folks are like the chaff that the wind blows away. (a) ugly, (b) disobedient, (c) wicked, (d) hungry.

_____ 2. God addressed _____ out of a whirlwind. (a) Moses, (b) Job, (c) Joshua, (d) Clydeous.

- _____ 3. According to Jesus, the _____ man sees his house fall down when the winds beat against it. (a) foolish, (b) silly, (c) evil, (d) busy.
- _____ 4. The _____ were blown out of Egypt by a strong west wind. (a) locusts, (b) gnats, (c) flies, (d) killer bees.
- _____ 5. In his dream, a statue that crumbled into dust was swept away by a wind. (a) Elijah, (b) Elisha, (c) Cyrus, (d) Nebuchadnezzar.
- _____ 6. This prophet spoke of people who sow a wind and reap a whirlwind. (a) Hosea, (b) Obadiah, (c) Zechariah, (d) Malachi.
- _____ 7. God brought this food to the Israelites in the wilderness by using a wind. (a) manna, (b) quail, (c) coriander, (d) I made this up.
- _____ 8. According to Revelation, these creatures held back the winds from blowing on the earth. (a) horses, (b) dragons, (c) angels, (d) unknown beasts.
- _____ 9. In what book does a woman call on the north and south winds to blow on her garden? (a) Psalms, (b) Proverbs, (c) Ecclesiastes, (d) Song of Solomon.
- _____ 10. According to Proverbs, this kind of woman is as hard to restrain as the wind itself. (a) contentious, (b) nagging, (c) quarrelsome, (d) all three.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/08/2017
An Undivided Christ

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another, so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought..... Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" (I Cor.1:10 & 14).

Today's verses mark the beginning of the apostle Paul's 1st letter to the church in Corinth. From having read and studied the letter a few times, we come to find that as in all churches, the Corinthian one had a few problems. Since these verses are found in the very beginning of the letter, it would seem like the church was having issues with division... Paul wants to make sure that they get the thrust of his message, so in verse ten, he pleads that all of you agree with one another, so that there may be no divisions among you.... Why? That you may be perfectly united in mind and thought... He wasn't being the "mind police" in every aspect of their lives here, as it had nothing to do with what they wore, what they ate or where they worked. It was all about religious unity under Christ, so Paul really wades into the fray as he condemns their party spirit with biting irony and taunting ridicule. We must remember here that Paul had taught them the truth about salvation and Christian living, but it would seem as though they had quickly forgotten the message. I can almost read the dialogue...He asked this; "Is Christ divided?" Of course not! Then why are you divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Certainly not! Then why would you look at him as you liberator? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? Definitely not! Then why would you call yourself a "Paulite?" Paul was appealing to their nature of togetherness in the Lord, just as he does to us... "You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you acting like mere men? For when one says " follow Paul," and

another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?" (I Cor.3:3-4). Since I am a Christian, I certainly don't want the Lord to view me as a mere man.... How about you? This week we we examine the undivided Christ...

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two..... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/09/2017

One Church

"Is Christ divided?" (I Cor.1:13) "Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt.16:17-18).

When the apostle Paul was asking whether or not Christ was divided in today's 1st verse, he was alluding to Jesus' statement about the church in the 2nd verse...When Jesus was talking to Peter and his confession in the gospel of Matthew, He spoke of the church that was to come. I find the phrasing to be precise... "and on this rock I will build My church." Jesus is speaking of a singularity of purpose here. It certainly appears to me that he did not want the church to be divided up into many, many little factions. "For God id not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (I Cor.14:33). Jesus' prayers were about unity... He prayed that all who believe on Him may be one. "My prayer is not for them alone. I also pray for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (Jn.17:20-21). This prayer was not an act of showmanship... It was certainly not a hypocritical appeal to the grandstands, but a sincere desire that came from Jesus' heart...The person who says that Jesus is the author of many churches, sects, doctrines and divisions accuses the Savior of hypocrisy. Why? For if our Lord prayed for oneness, and then created a multiplicity of churches, he was guilty of the darkest and most gross sort of hypocrisy... Why one? Jesus said it... That the world may believe that You have sent me.... If unity promotes faith and peace, then it seems logical to me that division creates doubts leading to infidelity. Jesus said it.... My Church.... Paul reinforced it.... Is Christ Divided? We can all answer this ourselves...

Have a wonderful day... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/10/2017

Just One Body

"Is Christ Divided?" (I Cor.1:13). "And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God by the cross...." (Eph.1:16).

As we continue to answer the question posed in today's 1st verse, we saw last time that there was to be one church. The Bible uses different words when referring to the church, and one of them is the body... In today's 2nd verse, the term one body is referencing the church. Lest we think that this is just an isolated scripture, we can look at the following scriptures that say the same thing.... Eph.4:4, I Cor.12:20, Rom.12:4-5. These verses along with Col.1:18 and Eph.1:22-23 teach that the body is the church.... "And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him, who fills everything in every way" (Eph.1:22-23). Jesus really meant it when he said upon this rock I will build my church. The church, or the body of Christ was and is not to be divided. The Bible teaches oneness and unity in several figures of speech. The gospel writer John uses Jesus' words in the 15th chapter in speaking of the one vineyard. (Jn.15:1) There is one vine and its branches rather than many vines and their branches... If those branches (us) don't abide in the vine, we see what

happens to them in Vs. 6. Other figures of speech are the household or family of God in I Tim.3:15, and the one fold and one shepherd in Jn.10:16. Lastly, Paul presents the church to us in a special way in I Cor.12:12-27. Here it is likened to the human body. We see the figure of the human body with Christ as the head and all of the redeemed as the members of the body. One head and one body, rather than a monstrosity with one head and many bodies! Why are all these examples leading us to the same logical conclusion? You guessed it... Christ is not divided....

Have a great day.... Make your little part of the world better... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/11/2017

You Say Yes... I Say No

"Is Christ divided?" (I Cor.1:13). "There is one body and one Spirit ---- just as you were called to one hope when you were called ---- one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph.4:4-5).

Hypocrite: A person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings; a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion. Nobody likes to be called a hypocrite because it says that we believe one thing yet do another. If a preacher got up in the pulpit and preached one doctrine one time, and the very opposite the next time, you would say that he is a hypocrite. According to the above definition, you would be correct. If this is true, what does it make God if he is the origin of all these contradictory doctrines? The answer is obvious, so are you ready to call God a hypocrite? God simply cannot take the rap for this, for it is of man's doing... Today's 2nd verse makes a clear and true statement. There's one (1) body and one (1) Spirit... Along with this there's one (1) Lord, one (1) faith, one (1) baptism, and one (1) God and Father of all. Paul goes on to say this; "However, let us keep living by that same standard (rule) to which we have attained" (Phil.3:16). Here is the last point I would like to make... Some folks would promote that none of us view the Bible exactly alike, so lets revisit the scripture that spurred the question of Christ's division; "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgement" (I Cor.1:10). In matters of opinion, we may all seem alike. If we are talking politics, you may say yes and I may say no, but in matters of faith, we must all be alike. The Bible is our final authority. All of our religious practices must coincide with those things that are found there. If we think one of our practices may be wrong, we must seek it out in God's Word to find the answer. Why? Because outside of the Bible we are divided, and Christ is not divided....

Have a great day... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/12/2017

Old Recipes

"May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces" (Psa.122:7).

Are there any old food recipes floating around in your family that have been passed down to you? When your kids were at home, was there a special meal they liked that may have become your signature creation. Who knows, maybe some of your recipes that you've tweaked a bit here and there will become those old recipes for future generations. In life, the meal that folks really want served to them is one of peace, happiness and prosperity. If you are wondering where this is leading, here goes... Is there a recipe for peace, happiness and prosperity, because this yearning is a universal one that has been sought after forever... As this striving for peace, happiness and prosperity continues, perhaps I should clarify some common misconceptions. First of all, its not wrong for Christians to desire prosperity. The apostle John wrote this to Gaius; "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good

health, just as your soul prospers" (Vs 2). I underlined a key point in the verse, as one cannot think that his prosperity means he does not need God anymore. Secondly, happiness and prosperity are not always properly evaluated by the world. The world would have us think that the "good life" is only possible with us at the absolute center of it. The commercials tell us that winners drive the right cars, wash with the right detergents, brush with the proper toothpaste and use the right lotions. Thirdly, faithful service to God does not automatically withhold prosperity. There are those that feel its impossible to be happy and prosperous and be a Christian too, almost as if God holds us back. So.... Just where do we find this recipe you ask? For the next few Fridays, I will take us into the 122nd Psalm. Its only nine verses long, so it is perfect to read and meditate upon... I hope you look forward to next Friday...

Have a great day... T G I F Thank God I'm Forgiven.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/13/2017

Blowin' In the Wind

With the rain set in for the day, it is only fitting that today's quiz will be about clouds... Use a accumulation of your knowledge because I am curious about this quiz....

TRUE OR FALSE

- _____ 1. Elijah and Moses were with Jesus when a bright cloud enveloped them.
- _____ 2. God set a rainbow in the clouds to indicate that He would not flood the world again.
- _____ 3. The pillar of cloud guided the Israelites in the wilderness by night.
- _____ 4. Elisha saw a little cloud over the sea about the size of a man's hand.
- _____ 5. The epistle of Hebrews references a "cloud of witnesses."
- _____ 6. At a critical time, a pillar of cloud separated the Israelites from the Egyptian army

CHOOSE THE BEST ANSWER

- _____ 7. This epistle mentions that those who are alive will be "caught up together in the clouds." (a) Philippians, (b) Ephesians, (c) 1 Thessalonians, (d) 2 Thessalonians.
- _____ 8. God appeared in a cloud this mountain. (a) Horeb, (b) Sinai, (c) Olives, (d) Everest.
- _____ 9. This king, seeing the cloud in the temple, said; "The Lord will dwell in the thick cloud." (a) Saul, (b) David, (c) Solomon, (d) Hezekiah.
- _____ 10. At this event, a cloud hid Jesus from the apostles. (a) crucifixion, (b) ascension, (c) resurrection, (d) storm.

EXTRA CREDIT

_____ Xtra. This epistle compares false teachers to "clouds without rain." (a) Jude, (b) 1 Peter, (c) 1 Peter, (d) Romans.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day..... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/15/2017

Staying In God's Love

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom.8:35).

I have a very early memory of going into a store with my mom. Somehow, we got separated and I went into panic mode. I ran around looking up and down the aisles for her and when I saw her I sprinted in her direction. What a surprise I got when the woman I thought was my mom turned out to be another lady in the same colored coat. My cries were loud enough for my mom to hear them and we were reunited. Separation can be a terrible thing. It is separation that the apostle Paul is speaking about in today's verse. "Who shall separate us from the love of God" is asked here. This question is of vital importance to the Christian because it has to do with the possibility or impossibility of one being lost under any circumstances. I feel that the destiny of man's soul, is wrapped around the way the question is answered, and will determine how he or she lives... Keeping this in mind, as we look at the phrase love of God, we see that it can possibly carry two meanings. The first is Christ's love for man... If one is to accept this meaning, it still does not prove the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy. God loved the whole world enough that He sent Jesus. Jesus loved man so much that he died for all. Though all of this, Jesus made it clear that all will not be saved. ... The phrase love of God, evidently means man's love for God. No one would think after reading the rigorous things mentioned in the context surrounding this question, that there is anything that would hinder Christ's love for us. That being said, some might think that the hardships we endure for Christ might cause our love for Him to diminish. This week, we will examine Paul's question, so that we may answer it correctly...

Have a great start to your week... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/16/2017

Nothing From The Outside

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom.8:35). "Not death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord..." (Vs 37-39).

I would challenge you to read Rom.8:35-39 and meditate on it. The question is asked bluntly about who shall separate us from the love of Christ. If we look at the context, (35-39) there are evils that can strike man from the outside. Nothing is said here as to how an inward corrupting influence might affect man's love. Not persecution, hardship, trouble, famine, nakedness, danger or sword can force one to cease loving God. It would certainly seem that only the condition of one's heart can cause him to quit loving the Lord, so if it happens, its not because of any outside force or power. The bottom line says that its an inside job. Jesus said this; "Because lawlessness is

increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matt.26:12). Lawlessness (wickedness - iniquity) caused it, and that's an inside job... Since the question is asked, the fact remains that we are commanded to continue in God's love. That is proof that we can quit loving Him. Jesus constantly reinforced that we should love Him... "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (Jn.15:9-10). In the book of Revelation, which was written to seven churches in Asia, Jesus had an ax to grind with the church at Ephesus... "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love..." (2:4). Jesus admonished them to remember where they had fallen from and to repent and return to their first works... The thing that kills love is sin. Since love is a living thing, and any living thing can die, love and sin cannot coexist in the same heart. Sooner or later, one must crowd out the other. Lets be sure that our love for the Lord crowds out the sin...

Have a great day... Do good and give God the credit... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/17/2017

Love's Goal

"Who shall separate us from the love of God?" (Rom.8:35) "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God" (1 Jn.3:9).

The believer enjoys the promise of eternal life. This is indeed our life's goal. The question we have been dealing with, who shall separate us from the love of God, is a linchpin in all of this. The question powerfully implies that believers can be separated from God's love, so a prime ambition for us is to see that this does not happen. The Bible teaches in many places that a believer on this earth does not carry eternal life around in his pocket. It is something that folks must strive for each and every day of their lives... When the apostle Paul penned his letter to Titus, he began it this way; "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of truth that leads to godliness ----- a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (1:1-2). This being said, eternal life will be received at the end of time, because we do not hope for what we already have. As you read my 2nd verse this morning, were you intrigued just a bit? What's this thing about no one who is born of God will continue to sin all about. Reading the rest of the verse puts it into better perspective... Because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God. The seed is the Word of God, which serves as a restraining influence, but we must bear in mind that Satan can steal the word out of a person's heart. If one is robbed of that power, there is nothing left to guard him from sin. Its like a thief coming up to you and saying this; "Lets go rob a bank." Our reply would hopefully be; "I cannot." As a Christian, our moral compass tells us that this is wrong, therefore, we cannot do it. We physically could do it but won't (can't) because we answer to a higher calling. John does not teach sinless perfection in 1 Jn.3:9, because in many other verses he plainly teaches that man can sin. Our job is to stay in the love of God so that we can reach love's goal...

Have a great day.... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/18/2017

Don't Be The Castaway

"Who shall separate us from the love of God?" (Rom.8:35). "But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that,

after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Cor.9:27).

Have you seen the 2000 movie Castaway starring Tom Hanks? Hanks plays a FedEx man whose plane crashes over the Pacific. He manages to wash up on a deserted island where he survives for four years before escaping on a homemade raft. As we see in today's 2nd verse, the apostle Paul does not want to be a castaway, and to prevent it, he kept his body in subjection... Just what does all of this prove? "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God" (Heb.3:12). It proves that a child of God can quit believing and fall away. Paul told the Galatians that they could fall from grace... (5:4) Peter (2 Pet.2:20-22) taught that a Christian could sin as to be in worse condition than he was before he became a Christian. The Parable of the Sower (Matt.13:3-8) teaches about the seed on the stony or thorny ground that didn't produce any fruit. In the Parable of the Vine and Branches, (Jn.15:2-6) teaches that even a branch that is connected to the vine can be eternally lost if it does not bear any fruit. The Parable of the Talents (Matt.25:14-30) teaches that even one of the Lord's own servants can be lost... Finally, Christ stated (Matt.13:41-42) that He will gather out of His own kingdom those who do iniquity and make them castaways. This proves that a child of God can conduct himself as to be eternally lost. Hanks was able to build a raft and escape his castaway status. "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt.26:41).. "Therefore let him who think he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Cor.10:12). Once we have become a castaway, there's no raft to bring us back...

Have a wonderful day.... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/19/2017

Peace, Happiness And Prosperity... An Old Recipe

"I was glad when they said to me, Let us to to the house of the Lord" (Psa.122:1).

Do you think its a proper statement for me to make that the more that things change, the more they stay the same? We have all heard a sermon or two or ten about the importance of attending worship services on the Lord's Day. Hebrews 10:25 probably worked its way into the lesson if my memory serves me correctly, but its obvious that things were the same way in the days of the Psalmist. There's an unbridled joy found in today's verse... I WAS GLAD when they said to me.... What was it that brought this great happiness on his part? LET US GO to the house of the Lord... God's house today is his church. "I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." (1 Tim.3:15). I don't believe that anyone can prosper honorably if they leave the worship of God out of their lives. Lets all keep that spirit of eager anticipation for worship in our hearts... Verse two (2) of the 122nd Psalm gives a bit more insight into a happier and more peaceful life. "Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem." True peace and prosperity also come from taking a stand for God. With God, there is a big difference between an insider and an outsider... Its just not good enough to "lean that way..." One is expected to make a full committment to serve God in His designated place and way. Jesus said this even more succinctly. "He who is not with me is against Me" (Matt.12:30). Will God give true peace, happiness and prosperity to someone who is against Him? Since Jerusalem is often a term used figuratively to refer to the church, are we standing within its gates? More about the recipe for peace, happiness and prosperity next Friday....

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/22/2017
What's The Kingdom Like

"So He was saying, 'What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it?'" (Lk.13:18).

A wonderful way to get a point across in teaching is by using the comparison method. If you are able to compare something that your students do not understand to something they do, learning almost always takes place. This week, we are to look at the question posed in today's verse, what is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it... Lets 1st be clear that "kingdom of God," or "kingdom of heaven" means the church. Consider Jesus' words to Peter; "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt.16:17-19). The very nature and wording of today's question necessitates that it be answered by comparison. In Jesus' case, He had a very special comparison method he used called parables in which he explained the nature of what the kingdom is like by using things people knew about. I am going to choose several of those parables this week and use them as a basis for my devotionals. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened" (Matt.13:33). This parable teaches the glorious increase of the kingdom. It relates to the quiet and penetrative influence of the kingdom on the world it touches. In this parable we see more than growth, because the leaven has actively worked from the 1st moment it was hidden in the meal. This power lends a savor to that which it contacts. A lesson for us to day as members of the kingdom (church)? The nature of the kingdom demands that every citizen of it exert an influence for good.... (1 Pet.3:1-2 & Phil.1:20) Lets all be good citizens....

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:1

05/23/2017
The Good, The Bad, And The Christians

"What is the kingdom of God like, and what shall I compare it to?" (Lk.13:18). "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field" (Matt.13:31). "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away" (Matt.13:24-25).

As we continue Jesus' explanation of what the church would be like, we encounter two parables from the gospel of Matthew. Most of you get the gist of them, but refresher courses are always good to reinforce and enhance our belief... The seed that produces the mustard tree, which grows to a height of about 20 feet with low branches close to the ground, is very small. The tree produces a great herb, and the birds come and lodge in it according to the scriptures. This shows the very small beginning, the gradual progress, and the tremendous increase of the church... At first it was made up of some unlearned and unknown men;(Acts 4:13) yet it soon became a power that spread throughout the world. Soon (Col.1:23) the gospel was preached to every creature. Lets remember this; God intends for the church to grow and spread from small beginnings to great proportions. Here's our part; To do so, we who constitute its membership must be strong and influential Christians... Lets look at the Tares Among The Wheat parable. In it, we see the opposing works of Christ and the devil. In Jesus' explanation, He said that the seed are the children of God and the field is the world. The tares are the evil ones sown by the enemy, the devil. The teaching is that there will be a mixture of good and bad in the world, and that the righteous should not attempt to destroy sin by exterminating evil men. "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age" (Matt.13:40) We must allow them both to grow together until the harvest... As Christians, we are to strive at all times

to be the good seed, by being strong and influential members of His church... If we do so, we'll be welcomed into the next kingdom at the harvest....

Have a wonderful day.... Do good and give God the credit... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/24/2017

Treasure In The Kingdom

"What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?" (Lk.13:18) "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field" (Matt.13:44). "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls" (V 45).

Mulberry Sellers (based on Dr. M.F. Stephenson), a Mark Twain character from Georgia, claimed that there was a lot of gold in the hills of Georgia. In the 1840's he supposedly coined the phrase, "There's gold in them thar hills..." "Millions of it." We can make that a rallying cry for ourselves when contemplating what the kingdom of heaven is like according to today's two parables. In the 1st parable about a treasure hidden in a field, we find this nugget... "When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." In this parable, we don't see the kingdom of heaven as a mere generality, but as an individual and personal thing, Its not just a true blessing of the earth or leaven seasoning the earth, but something a man can make his own by a personal and willful act. Though we may dwell in a Christian society blessed by the shadow of a tree or affected by that leaven, that may not be enough... There must be a personal application of the blessing that we find in this wonderful, short teaching of our Lord. Notice that the man gave up all he had to acquire it. The 2nd parable about the costly pearl takes a slightly different spin. The operative term in the 1st parable is "hidden." The man stumbled upon the treasure and then did the right thing. In the parable of the costly pearl, the merchant was actively seeking fine pearls... "When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." I imagine that it was a determined and unrelenting search the man made for the treasure. "Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you... for everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matt.7:7-8). I am reminded of the the proverb that says this; "Buy the truth and do not sell it..." (Prov. 23:23). Lets all make sure that we see the bottom line of both these parables. Being in the kingdom opens untold treasure to us. Its all about seeking, finding and keeping... There is gold in them thar hills....

Have a great day.... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/25/2017

Diversity And Forgiveness

"What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?" (Lk.13:18). "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish" (Matt.13:47). "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants" (Matt.18:23).

As we continue with Jesus' vivid descriptions of what the church would be like, we get to look at two more of His parables. Lets remember that He is comparing things that are not very well known to those that are known to make the teaching more understandable... The 1st parable teaches that the net collects all the good and the bad, just as the gospel draws every diversity of character. Jesus proved this in His life when he went into the homes of folks that religious leaders of the day would have nothing to do with. Though the parable is a short one, the lesson is concise. All those that the gospel reaches must respond to it in the way they are humbly supposed to, because in the end, the separation of the good and bad will take place. "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of

His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Matt.13:41). The 2nd parable about the king who wanted to settle matters with his servants is a lengthier one and is all about forgiveness... As the parable unfolds, verse thirty five (35) suggests the following particulars; First that our sins against God are tremendous in comparison to those committed against us. Secondly, that God freely forgave our sins, and that we should freely forgive others... "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col.3:13). Thirdly, if we do not forgive others, God will withhold forgiveness from us and will punish us. He had previously said this; "But if you not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt.6:15). Aren't we glad that the Lord provides the gospel to all, and teaches that forgiveness is a sweet and beautiful thing....

Have a wonderful day... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/26/2017
Quality And Preparation

"What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?" (Lk.13:18). "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard" (Matt.20:1). "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom" (Matt.25:1).

As we complete this series of parables about what Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to, we will draw on the wisdom of two more teachings. In the 1st parable, a landowner goes to town early in the morning to find workers for his vineyards, agreeing on a wage of one denarius for the job. Not having enough workers, he goes out again on the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 11th hours for more workers. When pay time arrived, he gave them all the same wage as he promised to those who worked all day. This teaching was addressed to the disciples, but has its application in the lives of many others. Peter erroneously thought his reward would be more because they were the 1st both in "time" and toil," the earliest workers in Jesus' vineyard. His thoughts were wrong because eternal life is granted by grace rather than merit. It is the quality of works rather than quantity that counts, and it is how we end the race rather than how we begin it that determines our reward. In the 2nd parable, 10 virgins (us) with their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom (Jesus). Five wise virgins had brought along extra oil in case the bridegroom didn't get there for a while, but five foolish ones didn't. When the bridegroom was about to arrive, the foolish ones ran out of oil and tried to borrow from the wise ones but were refused. The bridegroom came when the foolish ones were out buying more oil. Explanation? The foolish could not borrow from the wise because Christianity is an individual matter. We can't borrow "righteousness" from one another. The foolish let the time of preparation slip by and after the bridegroom came, it was too late. The two parables link together for us very well. We are to live a quality life! Our lives should be in a constant state of watchfulness and preparation... If we say, "not now," tomorrow may be too late. Aren't Jesus' teachings fantastic....

Have a great day... T G I F Thank God I'm Forgiven.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/27/2017
Cave People

As you might have guessed from the title, this week's quiz is about caves found in the Bible. I hope you are able to dig right in to find the correct answers...

- _____ 1. Who lived in a cave with his daughters after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah?
- _____ 2. Who trapped 5 Canaanite kings in a cave where they were hiding? (a) Joshua, (b) Caleb, (c) Gideon, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 3. What friend of Jesus was buried in a cave?
- _____ 4. What prophet, hiding from Jezebel, hid in a cave? (a) Elisha, (b) Elijah, (c) Ahijah, (d) Micaiah.
- _____ 5. In the time of the judges, what tribe did the Israelites hid from in caves? (a) Philistines, (b) Amorites, (c) Midianites, (d) Amalakites.
- _____ 6. What hero hid in caves to avoid the wrath of King Saul?
- _____ 7. Who hid 100 prophets in two caves when Jezebel was trying to kill them? (a) Elijah, (b) Elisha, (c) Obadiah, (d) none of those 3.
- _____ 8. In King Saul's time, what foreign people drove the Israelites into caves? (a) Midianites, (b) Amorites, (c) Amalakites, (d) Philistines.
- _____ 9. Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were all buried in the cave of Machpelah. (a) True, (b) False.
- _____ 10. This prophet said; "Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and splendor of His majesty." (a) Isaiah, (b) Jeremiah, (c) Hosea, (d) Micah.

Have a wonderful weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/29/2017

What About The Law Of Moses

"What then was the purpose of the law?" (Gal.3:19.. NIV) "Wherefore then serveth the law?" (Gal.3:19...KJV).

"The law" spoken of in the question that is today's verse is the Jewish or Mosaic law... The phrase "the law" without some descriptive addition, however, was never used during the life of Moses. When Christ's teachings began to be preached and contrasted with the Mosaic system, the phrase "the law" become very common and invariably denoted the whole Mosaic law. In this usage, it appears about 150 times in the New Testament. Anything that is spoken of that many times deserves to be studied, so this week's devotionals will focus on the law, and we will examine it on several fronts. It at least deserves a week's worth of attention since it was in force from the time of Moses until the

resurrection of Jesus. To be more understandable, let's just mention that when the term "the law" has such a distinguishing epithet as "the law of faith," "the royal law," "the law of liberty," or "the law of Christ," it is very evident that the Mosaic law is not intended... But when "the law" is used without any restrictive definition as "but if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal.3:18), or "Ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom.6:14), it is obvious that such a reference is to the law of Moses. To make this week's study viable, we've got to look at why this question was asked in the 1st place. When Jesus walked the earth as a Jew, and He practiced the Mosaic law fully, even though he knew it was faulty. "For if there had been nothing wrong with the 1st covenant, no place would have been sought for another" (Heb.8:7). "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful man, to be a sin offering" (Rom.8:3). So, are all of you ready to tear the Old Testament out of your Bible and start all over again? This week, we will take a look at the good, bad, and ugly of the Mosaic law, and see why it's an essential part of the fiber of our faith...

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:11
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05/30/2017
The Faulty Law

"What, then, was the purpose of the law?" (Gal.3:19) "But those sacrifices were an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb.10:3)

When the apostle Paul asks the question in Gal.3:19, he did so with the full understanding, that though he was a Jew, the Mosaic law was faulty. It would be good for us to read Heb.10:1-18 and meditate upon it... Previously in the book of Hebrews, it was declared that the law was weak... "For if there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, no place would have been sought for another." (8:7). The law, with all of its sacrifices, was incomplete for the most

important of all reasons. The big evident reason was that it could not forgive sins. The sacrifices offered continually upon the altar of God, resulted only in the moving forward of sins year by year and a constant consciousness of sin. The two other deficiencies of the law was that it could not give righteousness and eternal life... "For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would have certainly come by the law" (Gal.3:21). Lets see why the law was given if we know that it was faulty, because it was given for great and important purposes. The law, pure and simple, was given because of sins and their recognition, but here's the real kicker... For Christ to accomplish His purpose as our Redeemer, it was necessary for Him to be born into a nation that believed in and worshiped God, not into one over-run by idolatry. The law was given to curb the threatening influx of that idolatry and preserve a nation of people of faith. So lets not throw out or Old Testaments, because there's a lot of valuable stuff there. The greatest of all things is the New Covenant under which we live. We serve a risen Savior that can forgive our sins, and can lead us to eternal life. Lets give thanks each day that we believe in a loving, wise and compassionate God that wants us to one day come home with Him....

Have a great day... Do good and give God the credit... Love mark Phil.4:11

05/31/2017

The Law Was About The Big Promise

"What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come..." (Gal.3:19-20).

From the time of Abraham, well before the law, the promise covenanted to him had stood at the center of God's relationship with his people. Thus, the law served the needed purpose of keeping Abraham's posterity a separate and distinct race until the promised Seed (Christ) should come. This was essential, for God had promised Abraham that of his descendents, one would come to bless the whole world. If we follow through with this, the law was also a means to fulfilling an earthly promise God made to Abraham... "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those that bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you" (Gen.12:2-3). The law was an outgrowth of this promise and was given 430 years after it was made. So that the promise would be kept, God gave them a government, the law of Moses, which guided and protected them religiously and politically. Because the law was perfect in its construction as a code of morality, it quickly pointed out the sinfulness of man in contrast with the holiness of God. All of this (my title today) led to the Big Promise... We today are the beneficiaries of that great and wonderful promise. The law showed in a crystal clear manner that a divine remedy was needed. God sent His Son Jesus to us as that divine remedy. Everything that started as a promise to Abraham and led to the formation of the Mosaic law, pointed directly to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. We are so blessed that God's Big promise was fulfilled in Jesus. Tomorrow we'll try to tie all this together to see how understanding the glorious promise is so great...

Have a wonderful day.... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11