

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 40

The Bible Challenge 2018 Intro and the reflections and notes for each week may be found at biblechallenge.pendletonchurch.org

Read 4 chapters per day

October 1-7: 1 Corinthians 16; 2 Corinthians 1-13; Ephesians 1-6; Habakkuk 1-3; Galatians 1-5

As you complete 1 Corinthians, and continue into the familiar New Testament books 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Galatians, remember that Paul is writing to bring correction to churches that were in need of strengthening their faith at a time when they had allowed “worldly pleasures and comforts” to supersede their spiritual disciplines. As a result they had lost the sense of Godly love in their ministry; in their treatment of others. Note how many times the word “love” is used in these books. Each time the word appears notice who is being spoken about, and how Godly love, or a lack thereof, affects the life of the Christian disciple and those around him or her. How do spiritual disciplines like reading/ studying the Bible, prayer, regularly participating in worship and the Sacraments, and spending time talking with other Christian disciples impact on the way Godly love manifests in our lives?

In 2 Corinthians we find a challenge to Paul’s authority as a leader in the church. We read about his defense of his authority, his deep concern for the condition of God’s people, and his sincere desire to serve God well. In chapter 3 Paul points out that all the individuals who have God’s Spirit because of Paul’s ministry in their lives are in themselves the proof of the authenticity of his authority. He goes on to point out the requirements of Christian ministry in terms of where the ability to minister comes from, how ministers conduct themselves, why people minister, and what to expect. The UMC calls all Christians ministers, and we are all, in some capacity or another, expected to minister God’s grace to people as God has called us to do. So, how do Paul’s words encourage you in your ministry? In what ways do his words challenge you to examine your life and step up to new heights of faith, love, and service, wherever God has called you to serve?

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is a letter describing the essence of the Church. We see what our position as Christians is as the result of God’s grace in our lives, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Reflect on the love God has for you, which causes God to pour out God’s Spirit into you so that you may continue to grow in all God has called you to be and do. Notice the harmony of the interweaving work of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit so that you may be “Rooted and established in love.”

Paul is aware of the cultural conditions that press upon Christians and exhorts them to lead an exemplary life, do works of service, and overcome powers of darkness in this world so we will not be lead astray. There is much in this short book about our relationship to God, to each other as Christians, to others in this world, and to the powers of darkness. All Christians are to be actively involved in all these areas. How? What is your role as a member of the Church? How does this inform your responses in the midst of events in your personal life, your community, and the wider world? Chapter 4, verses 11-13 speak of God’s people being prepared for service, to be prepared to fulfill God’s call on their lives, and become mature and unified in our knowledge of God. Do you think this is an ongoing process for all Christians that must continue throughout our lives? How are you working with others to grow in your own faith and help others grow in theirs?

From the Hebrew Scriptures, we turn to the book of the prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk’s writing expresses his confusion at God’s patience with sinful people. The prophet realizes a sinful life leads to spiritual death and a life of faith leads to spiritual life. As the book begins we hear a conversation between the prophet and the Lord. In chapter 2, God speaks of the need for the chosen people to live by faith, not in sin. Observe the sinful behaviors God describes through the prophet and recall how

God's law addresses each. In chapter 3 we see the hope of the prophet expressed in recounting the deliverance of the people as he praises God for God's mighty works. We can see the results of sin manifesting all around us in the actions of other people as well as in ourselves. If no one in this world is yet completely free of sin, how is it that we should regard the sin of others when we see it exposed? If Christians are to be God's light in the world, God's example of the results of mercy and grace poured out because of the mercy we have been shown by God, how should we respond to the sin of others?

Back to the New Testament, in Galatians we find Paul has written to the church at Galatia to correct their inappropriate mixing of God's law with God's grace. Remember that there is nothing human beings can do to earn God's favor or salvation. Gentile Christians were exempted from following laws such as circumcision by the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. There is no such exemption in Scripture for Jewish disciples of Messiah Jesus. Nor is there any indication that the covenant between God and the Chosen People has been nullified. Under the law the people were expected to be of a right heart toward others. Loving the Lord and one's neighbor as oneself comes from God's Old Testament Law, and Jesus carried the Law over into the New Covenant. So, right practices of the Law for Jewish people come from a right heart toward God, not merely doing good works as an outward show of righteousness. Likewise, when people come into Christian faith, we are drawn into Christian discipleship and inspired out of love to do those things that please God. We avoid sin and do good works, not because of a set of rules, but because we love God and all God's creation. We seek to act toward God and others out of love by faith and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, that we may ultimately be perfected in love and be instruments through whom the Holy Spirit draws others toward salvation in Christ. Let us reflect on our responses to events in our personal lives as well as those in the wider world, and consider whether or not we are demonstrating God's saving grace.