

Week 48

November 26 - December 2

Acts 20:7-21:36; Romans 8:18-16:27; 2 Corinthians 1-13

This was an interesting week to find a theme in, but I continued to come across one word that stood out in several passages. The word “all” appears in this section nearly 100 times. “All” can be used a variety of ways; as an adjective referring to “the whole number or amount of or every one of a class; or, “completely given to or absorbed by; the greatest possible, every, any, nothing but, only.” Or, as an adverb referring to a “complete degree or to the full or entire extent.” Watch for the variety of ways this word will be used.

November 26th

Romans 8:18-10:21. "Salvation for All"

"Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Can we really say "anyone?" Well, God says race doesn't matter. "Jew and non-Jew are the same in this respect." Money apparently doesn't help. Economic status doesn't matter. But how about the intellectually astute individual? Or the trained priest? Education and vocation don't matter. What about tradition? No. In fact, sometimes it just seems to get in the way. What about the right denomination? Ooh, that's a tough one. No. Not even mentioned. In fact, those who were concerned about following Paul or Apollos just seemed to be missing the point. So, what matters?

If we try to add anything to the simplicity of what is mentioned here we miss the point. The most powerful thing about this passage is that salvation has been made available to every one of us. Each of us stand just as guilty, just as lost, just as filthy, sinful and destitute before the Holy God, but He intervened. Confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead... that's what matters.

November 27th

Romans 11-14. "Mercy for All"

"God was merciful to you instead" (11:30b). This is a powerful passage. Mercy became available to those of us who are not Jews only because the Jews refused it (11:30). God then decided to offer it to us—although Israel still remains the chosen—and once that decision was made, He would not go back on it (11:29). If you don't fully appreciate this then you may not fully understand mercy. Mercy is defined as "leniency shown to a guilty person."

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death. "But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy."

"But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied. "Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for." "Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.

"Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge!" (11:33a)

November 28th

Romans 15-16; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:4. "All Comfort for All"

A little girl came home from a neighbor's house where her little friend had died. "Why did you go?" questioned her father. "To comfort her mother," said the child. "What could you do to comfort her?" "I climbed into her lap and cried with her."

It's not just that God comforts all, but He comforts us in all our troubles (2 Cor. 1), and then beyond that there is purpose to what we endure. On the other side of trouble and being comforted by God we are better equipped to comfort and encourage others.

How can we offer comfort to others? Use the Word of God. Ps. 119:52, "I meditate on your age-old regulations. O LORD, they comfort me." Just our presence can be very powerful. Job 2:11, "When three of Job's friends heard of the tragedy he had suffered, they got together and traveled from their homes to comfort and console him." Unfortunately, seven days later they felt the need to explain why. We can't always offer that. Be sincere and thoughtful, Job 21:34, "How can your empty clichés comfort me? All your explanations are lies!"

November 29th

2 Corinthians 2:5-6:13. "All for God"

Remember little Shirley Temple? Following her childhood movie career, she went on to hold several diplomatic posts, serving as the U.S. delegate to many international conferences and summits. She was appointed a delegate to the United Nations by President Richard Nixon in 1969. She was appointed United States Ambassador to Ghana (1974–76). In 1976, she became the first female Chief of Protocol of the United States. She also served as United States Ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1989–92).

An ambassador is a diplomatic official accredited to a foreign sovereign or government, or to an international organization, to serve as the official representative of his or her own country. Ambassadors from the United States currently serve 196 host countries, over one dozen international organizations, two ambassadors for crimes and over one dozen senior diplomatic representatives.

Do you know that you are an ambassador? You are Christ's ambassador (5:20) to this foreign soil that is not your true home. Take this position as seriously as God meant for you to. "We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us." (6:8)

November 30th

2 Corinthians 6:14-10:18. "All or Nothing"

Today's passage contains several "all or nothing" kind of statements concerning a variety of topics. Were you looking for them as you read? For instance, what about relationships in chapter six? Partnerships are limited to just Christians or just non-Christians, never mixing the two. A believing spouse will find he/she has very little in common with a non-believing spouse. What about repentance in chapter seven? Repentance can't be half-hearted. Paul illustrates it with someone who feels sorrow in getting caught but not repenting and it still leads to death (vv. 8-10). What about generous stewardship in chapters eight and nine? Perhaps a lack of generous stewardship reflects a lack of fully understanding "how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich" (8:9). "You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts" (9:13). And what about consistency in chapter ten? Paul defends his apostolic authority on God's calling and, without bragging, also on his personal track record (v. 8).

December 1st

Acts 20:7-12; 2 Corinthians 11-13. "All the Time"

There are a couple of statements in Second Corinthians 13 that I latched onto. One statement appears in verse eight, "stand for the truth at all times." That is a terrific word of exhortation for every believer. It provides clarity and purpose for what we are involved in. The other statement is in verse five, "Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test." If you pause long enough to examine what you are involved in, and then beyond that to examine your faith, you will learn much about your relationship with Christ.

I believe there are many who could stand to take this test more often and more honestly. Jesus says there will be many on the day their eternal destiny is determined who will say, "But Lord, I did this and that..." and Jesus will say "I never knew you." Are you due for a spiritual checkup? Are you increasingly aware of Christ's presence and power in your life? Are you actively seeking to grow closer to Him?

December 2nd

Acts 20:13-21:36. "Worth Nothing at All"

What makes life valuable: Good health, good self-esteem, having children, being married, being financially secure, being attractive or having lots of friends?

We have been reading about the Apostle Paul's life, his conversion, his missionary journeys, his hardships, etc. Paul had a resume' that would impress most everyone, but did it impress him? Not a bit. In fact, he considered it rubbish and loss compared to knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord (see Philippians 3). Paul emphasizes the same point here in Acts 20:24, "But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love."

How do you measure the worth of your life? Does life's value increase as you add things to it? Does it increase as you get more from it? Paul stressed its worth as he put into it, not took from it. What is "the work assigned you by the Lord Jesus?" Do you find worth in accomplishing it?

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

What is the difference (perhaps theologically) between teaching that Jesus died for "all" as compared to saying He died for "some?"

Prior to salvation do we really all stand before God the same?

What is the danger in believing we deserve grace and mercy?

Provide an example of a time you went through something difficult where God came to you with comfort, and then later how you were able to use that experience to comfort someone else.

Now, as honestly as possible, list the things you struggle with as you provide comfort to someone? (i.e. empty clichés, talk too much, deduce why they're going through it, etc.)

List as many similarities as you can between being an ambassador for the United States and being an ambassador for God. List the contrasts as well.

Personal application: Paul said he pressed on. Life takes work and constant commitment and evaluation. "All for God" is a powerful statement. List several areas of your life you could improve in and how.