

Devotional and Reading Plan for 2022, Week Forty-seven

Week 47 — November 19th-25th. Acts 19:21-20:3; Romans 1:1-8:17; 1 Corinthians 4-16

The theme for this week is submission. I know that this concept can be very challenging to many of you because it does not fit the American cultural value system. However, the need for submission is a Biblical expectation in the life of the Christian. This week will trace more of Paul's missionary journeys, specifically his third journey and a couple of the letters that he wrote while on that journey. May you be challenged and encouraged this week as you consider the need for submission in your life.

November 19th

1 Corinthians 4:1-7:40. "Authority"

"Obey your spiritual leaders and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they know they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this joyfully and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit." – Hebrews 13:17

Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 5 may seem rather harsh, but based on the above verse, we know that Paul is accountable to God for the sake of the church. So, Paul is submitting to God's authority and is then asking the church to submit to the authority given to him by God. The same is true today of the pastors and elders, whom God has placed in the church.

Sometimes I find a resistance in people to submit to the spiritual authority of pastors and elders in the church. I think that this stems from an unwillingness to accept their authority as actually God's authority being exercised through them.

Are you willing to submit to the authorities (spiritual, paternal, political) that God has placed over you?

November 20th

1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1. "Weaker Brother"

I have a pastor friend who told me about how he chose not to watch the horse races at the Oregon State Fair one year because they allowed gambling. His concern was that a Christian brother or sister who struggled with gambling might see him entering or exiting the horse arena and assume he gambled and then be encouraged to violate their own conscience and place bets on the races.

This friend of mine was willing to give up his freedom in Christ to watch the races, with his daughters who love horses no less, because he had a genuine concern for his fellow believer.

Unfortunately, 1 Corinthians 8 is often abused by legalistic Christians attempting to curtail the exercising of genuine Christian freedom. No one can force you to give up your freedom as a believer; however, when you know that your actions will seriously lead a fellow believer into temptation, it is your responsibility to submit to Scripture and give up your freedom in that area.

May you never be a stumbling block to the growth of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

November 21st

1 Corinthians 11:2-13:13. "Body Life"

“...you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” – Ephesians 5:21

The Church, like our bodies, is a complicated living organism made up of different parts. When all the parts are working together in harmony, it's a beautiful thing to watch. A church that works well together is like watching Tiger Woods hit a golf ball. Every part of his body works together for the singular purpose of hitting the ball towards the hole. A dysfunctional church is like when I hit a golf ball, hoping that some of the parts will work together towards the objective. It's not a pretty sight.

For the Church to work as intended, the various people involved must submit to one another. It takes a working-together of those involved for it to function. Agendas and petty differences must be laid aside to focus on the primary objective.

Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is that every member of the body is equally valuable, important and needed to make the body function. Are you willing to see yourself, including your preferences and unique personality, as one among equals?

November 22nd

1 Corinthians 14-15. “Orderly Worship”

If we all were to share every thought that occurred to us during our worship services, it would be rather chaotic. This problem was precisely what Paul was instructing the church toward in 1 Cor. 14:26-40. He wasn't passing judgments on particular gifts or groups of people. His goal was “that everything is done properly and in order” (14:40).

To ensure that worship was orderly, Paul called for submission regarding certain issues in the Church. The submission he called for took on different forms. You were to be silent if there were enough people to share already, you had to wait your turn, and you were to be silent if there was no one to interpret when needed (14:27). Distracting questions were to be asked at a later time (14:35). Messages were subject to evaluation (14:29). No one message was more important than any other (14:30).

The opposite of submission – arrogance – makes it impossible to follow Paul's instructions. Without submission, church services would be chaos. Are you willing to submit to Paul's instructions to avoid confusion in the worship of our Lord and Savior?

November 23rd

Acts 19:21-20:3; Romans 1:1-32; 1 Corinthians 16:1-24. “God's Plan”

“The epistle to the Romans is widely regarded as the most significant of Paul's letters...Romans stands alone in the massiveness of its thought and the power it has released in history through its testimony to the gospel...” – D.G. Miller (ISBE)

God's plans are truly amazing. Because of the money Paul had collected for the believers in Jerusalem, Paul's desire to go to Rome would have to wait until he returned to Jerusalem. When he realized this, he decided to write to the church in Rome while in Corinth. If it had not been for these circumstances, Paul may have never penned the epistle to the Romans. It is hard to imagine the New Testament without this wonderful book.

Paul is a wonderful example of submitting to God's plan and timing in his life. It is not that Paul sat around and waited for God to reveal every detail of his plan. No, Paul was a man of action, but he was always willing to lay aside his own plans and desires to accomplish God's plan.

November 24th

Romans 2-4. "Justified by Faith"

In explaining justification by faith, Charles Ryrie once said, "Imagine a man before a judge who has been given the choice of paying a \$100 fine or serving 90 days in jail. He doesn't have any money, but he does have a family that depends on him. He tells such a heart-rending story that those present, including the judge, collect \$99.95 to help pay the fine. Even though they are only five cents short, the judge orders the bailiff to take the man to jail. Dejected, he walks out of the courtroom, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets where he finds a nickel! Elated, he rushes back into the courtroom and slaps it on the bar before the judge, declaring "I'm free, I'm free!" In his mind, what saved him? The \$99.95, or the five cents.

If we did anything to merit our salvation, we would be forever boasting about it in Heaven. The fact is, we could do nothing so Jesus paid it all.

Because we are justified by faith, we must recognize that we've done nothing to secure our salvation. We must submit to God's plan rather than try to add to the finished work of Christ Jesus.

November 25th

Romans 5:1-8:17. "Submitting to Temptation"

"But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give into it." – 1 Corinthians 10:13

The Apostle Paul knew that the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith apart from the law would be difficult for Jewish believers to accept. They would accuse Paul of being soft on sin, and that grace actually encourages sinful living. Knowing this, Paul addressed their concerns in Romans 6, making it clear that the Christian has died to sin and has a new life in Christ. This is balanced by Romans 7:14-25, when Paul discusses the reality of the struggle against sin that every believer endures.

The issue is really one of daily submission. We must daily submit to God's will and consider ourselves dead to sin (6:11). Otherwise, we'll find ourselves submitting to temptation and doing the very thing we hate (7:15).