

December Devotions:

Week 1: Philippians 2:3-11: Let this mind be in you!

There was a quarrel in the church of Philippi and Paul swiftly dealt with it by quoting a hymn. He introduces the hymn by saying that the quarrelers were to have the mind of Christ who (then the hymn begins) “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant...” The hymn goes on to say that Christ was obedient to death for our salvation and that God exalted him to be Lord of all (he became what we are so that we could partake of what he is). Paul faced these quarrelers with a clear decision: Exalt yourself by fighting for your own way (no matter what damage you cause) or give of yourself for the sake of others and let God bless you in Christ. There is nothing wrong with pointing out what may be a genuine injustice being done to you, but the spirit and goal is always to be one of desiring to bless others, even if this means stopping short of fully getting your way. There is no place for fighting in the body of Christ.

Week 2: Colossians 3:1-10: Set your minds on things above!

Setting one’s mind on things above rather than earthly things does not mean ignoring earthly things. The earthly or mundane things that we encounter each day have importance. They are tasks given to us by God to attend to in a wise and godly way. “Setting one’s mind” (or heart) on things above rather than earthly things means making things above one’s priority. It means making Christ and things related to Christ the most important goal and intent behind all that we do. If we go about our daily tasks in obedience to Christ and in submission to his character and mission, our lives will take on a clearer sense of direction and greater depth of purpose.

Week 3: 1 Corinthians 13: Above all else, love!

Love is the greatest and highest expression of Christian faith. This love is not the same as lust, romantic love, or friendship love. It is agape or divine love. Divine love was shown to us in Jesus’ self-giving on the cross for us: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9) (see John 3:16-17; Romans 5:1-8). Paul does not say that without this love our faith lacks fulfillment. He is more radical. Without this love, Paul states, our faith and deeds are without any value! All that we do and say fall to the ground as nothing. Only desiring and expressing divine love for God and others gives meaning, purpose, and value to what we say and do.

Week 4: 1 John 4:7-12: Love one another!

No one has ever seen God. The closest we come to it is looking into the face of Jesus, especially as he hangs on the cross out of love for others. Jesus came from the Father to reveal him (John 1:14-18). We also see God through Christ in one another's face as we love one another by the power of the Spirit: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12). This is the closest we get to seeing God: Loving as Jesus loved. It is that simple.

Week 5: Revelation 21:1-5: No more death, no more sorrow!

This is the closing section of the Bible. The great conclusion of salvation as portrayed in the Bible does not come when we all get to heaven. In fact, the saints that get to heaven in ch. 6 of Revelation are still asking when the end will come, as though there is still more to the story (6:10). The book of Revelation ends with heaven coming to earth! John wrote as he saw the heavenly city descending upon the new heavens (cosmos) and new earth: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (21:2). Jesus prayed in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). This is the conclusion of it all! God comes to dwell on a new earth while his presence fills all things. Sin, death, and suffering are finally gone and he comforts every soul with his eternal love. We bathe in that love and share it with him and one another. This is the ultimate conclusion of all things; this is what creation was made for! Faith does not seek an escape from this world; faith seeks and works in hope for a new world in which God dwells!