

Berean Baptist Church
Devotions for the Week of May 2nd

Berean Baptist Church
Devotions, Prayers, Sermon Notes
For May 2, 2010

Daily
Devotions



Thought: The prisoner who had become accustomed to prison life, who had shaped his life to its routines, now has to shift to a whole new way of life, and its requirements. Old patterns will no longer work. New patterns are demanded, and the danger is that the Christian, like the newly freed prisoner, is so accustomed to the old that he or she cannot change. ...that is the danger of the new freedom; so accustomed to old ways, Christians run the danger of ignoring their new freedom, as though the old lordship still ruled them.

Paul J. Achtemeier

Opening Prayer for the Week:

O heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of truth, present everywhere, filling everything, Treasury of blessings, Giver of life: come and dwell in us, cleanse us of all impurity and of your goodness save our souls.

Orthodox Prayer

Monday

Ac 16:18

"In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

I know this particular verse and those that surround it refer to the Holy Spirit. But they do illustrate the power of the Holy Spirit, through Peter, freeing the young woman from another 'spirit.' The entire story line, the young girl being freed followed by Paul and Silas being freed from prison and the guard being freed from fear, all illustrate the variety of ways that the Holy Spirit works through the church to bring people to freedom. The young woman is freed from the abuse and oppression of her 'employers' as well as the 'spirit' that controls her thoughts. Paul and Silas are freed from political incarceration and the guard is freed from fear of violent reprisals by his captains, so he too is freed from Roman Authority and its violence. The Holy Spirit is sent to free us, from personal enslavement, such as guilt, but also the abuse of others that echoes in our memories and causes us pain today. The Holy Spirit is sent to free us from the manipulation and abuse of others, and from fear. Read this entire story and ask the Holy Spirit to free you from that which still enslaves you; anger, guilt, sadness, or bitterness. Use the Orthodox prayer to center yourself and listen for the Holy Spirits freeing voice

Tuesday *Ro 8:1*

8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

Ro 6:22

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life .

The frightening thing about freedom is the challenge of the unknown. ‘Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t’ is a maxim that rules many of us from time to time. Yesterday we focused on just listening for what the Spirit wants to free us from. Today I want to encourage you to focus on what the Spirit frees you for! We spoke about this briefly two weeks ago in the sermon. We are freed for God’s love, ‘there is now no condemnation.’ We are freed from guilt and anger which keep us from being loved by God, so that we can participate in God’s love. This is important because sometimes the sinful things that enslave us, say anger, have been vital for our lives. If we have been hurt deeply, anger is an effective shield which guards us from ever being hurt again. It will not be enough to ask the Spirit help us let go of our anger... that will leave us feeling vulnerable. Instead we ask the spirit to lower the walls so that we might know God’s love... we can take a risk for God’s love. Find a verse about God’s love and make that your centering prayer for the day.

Wednesday *Gal 5:22-26*

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

We are freed so as to pursue the love of God, but sometimes we need some more concrete virtues to pray for and meditate on as a focus. Paul

offers Gal 5 as one example of concrete virtues for the disciples to ask for, develop and seek. While Paul does not call these ‘fruits’ as a plural, but all of them are the one ‘fruit’ of the Holy Spirit, I confess that I am stronger at some and weaker in others. So while we pursue all of these slices of the orange which is the fruit of the Spirit, each may personally want to petition the Holy Spirit for specific ones.

The fact that Paul calls them ‘fruit’ is intended, I believe, to teach us an important lesson. To pursue patience, for example, relying on our own strength of will, is not what Paul is describing. The fruit of the Spirit is not something that we attain with our own labor. The fruit of the Spirit is a gift. So while we must, through prayer, worship and the fellowship of the believers seek to practice these virtues, we do so relying not on our own wills, but on the support of others and the generosity of the Spirit. My point is, don’t view the exercise of these gifts as something you must do yourself. Instead, through prayer and the support of other disciples, receive these. Don’t try to muster them of your strength alone, but instead ask to receive them and imagine yourself and how you will look, act, and feel having received them.

Thursday *Col 3:7-11*

8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free , but Christ is all, and is in all.

Paul again gives us a list, actually two. First a list of the personal things of which we are freed by the Holy Spirit, such as anger, malice and slander. But then, Paul goes on to describe the ‘political’ freedom that the Holy Spirit brings. I don’t mean the political freedom to vote, or the political freedom to choose democrat or republican. I mean ‘political’ as in the way that we organize our community... how we live life together. Paul is describing the ‘political,’ implications of being freed from anger, malice and slander. We will be a community that is not divided among ethnic or economic or even gender lines. We are freed from the stereotypes

that others have forced upon us, but also from the stereotypes that we may buy into ourselves. The Holy Spirit frees us to live in a new identity; the follower of Christ. We are valued through that new identity and not according to how the world values... which is why Paul could say there is no longer slave or free. Slaves were no longer less valued because in the politics of the church they were now equal brothers and sisters in Christ, gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is because of this freedom that we support women in ministry, for instance. They are freed from gender stereotypes and valued for the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives. Consider what other aspects of our community life may be challenged by this new freedom. Would this influence the way we think about 'immigrants' or the GLBT community for instance?

Friday *1 Cor 12:13*

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

If Anna does not arrive and I am with you next week we will be discussing this verse. The topic will be; The Holy Spirit Unifies. I am increasingly convinced that this is a vital gift of the Holy Spirit, but one that is undervalued. There are some who suggest that Facebook and Myspace and Twitter are replacing the church as the vehicle for social connection among younger generations. But I'm not sure its just younger generations. Many boomers that I speak too think of church, WHEN, they think of church as one option among many for connecting to God. In my generation the church is often viewed as a suspect and disappointing vehicle for connecting to God. But Paul viewed the life of discipleship not lived in isolation, but in community. So we will think about these things... the importance of the community for our faith, the ways that we disappoint others in the way we do community, and hopefully we will find some ways to grow and change as a community so that others will appreciate the

direct connection of church as opposed to the safer and easier methods of facebook and twitter.

Closing Prayer of the Day:

Give me, Lord, a stout heart to bear my own burdens, a tender heart to bear the burdens of others, and a believing heart to lay all my burdens on you, for you care for us. Amen

Lesslie Newbigin

Verse for the Week:

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Rom 6:22