

02/01/2017

Making All "C's"

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,' and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matt.5:21-22). "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life with Him" (1 Jn.3:15).

When I was a kid, the grades we received on our report cards reflected this system: A... Excellent B... Good C... Fair (average) D... Poor F... Failure Having been out of the teaching profession for 15 years, I assume that these are still the standards... So.... What did mom and dad say when you brought home all C's? Lets look at the reality of this, after all a C is fair or average. Our parents wanted us to be better than just "average," didn't they... This "C," or average mentality is a drag on the world, but a bane for Christians. The Lord asks us to live to a higher calling and a more lofty standard, and actually demands it of us. Is it hard to rise up above the average? Try this one on for size... "You have heard that it was said, 'eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also..." (Matt.5:38-39). The general average believes that stealing is wrong, but how about a bit of defrauding, just as long as you stay "within the law." In Mk.10:19, Jesus says do not defraud. How many people are killed on the highways each year by drunk drivers? Interesting enough, both drinking and driving are legal, but together they can become lethal. Paul said to abstain from all appearance of evil... Maybe one of the greatest motives behind being satisfied with the general average, is selfishness. You know.... Let the other guy sweat the big stuff, I just want to get by. The Bible is clear on this too... "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain deceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil.2:4). Lets all give some serious thought about climbing up the grading scale of our lives. Through His words and actions, Jesus has demanded that we do better than C's....

Have a great day... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/02/2017

The Gold Standard

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Pet.1:21).

Lets play a little game of "fill in the blanks." Hopefully, because of your humility, you will be reluctant to do so, but please indulge me.... Fill in the blanks with the names of someone you know.... Here goes... "I'm better than _____, but _____ is better than me." None of you wanted to put a name in either blank, did you? But in the deepest recesses of your mind, are there a couple of names floating around? For you baseball fans out there, fill in this blank. _____ is the best 3rd baseman to ever play in the Major Leagues. This is an easier blank to fill in, but its not easy either. Why? Humility or statistics aside, the reason it is so hard to fill in the blanks is that there is no gold standard... No one out there lives a perfect life, and even though some come closer than others, we know this; "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Rom.3:23). Today's verse gives us the absolutely one and only person who has lived a completely sinless life. Ladies and gentlemen, there is only one gold standard really worthy, of imitation, and that is Jesus Christ. He is every Christian's example. If we hope to spend eternity with the Father in heaven, Jesus pointed the way. "I am the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn.14:6). Now don't get me completely wrong here... In

our striving to be like Jesus, we are to display traits that are worthy of imitation, but we could never be the gold standard... Paul even gave an admonition for those who might think too highly of themselves... "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves, they are not wise" (2 Cor.10:12). I am sure that I have not reinvented the wheel with today's message to use Jesus as our example, but gentle reminders are always needed to help us to keep our eyes on the goal. Comparisons are just that, but the gold standard is never open to conjecture..

Have a great day... Let His light shine through you... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/03/2017

The Mind Of A Servant

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...." (Mk.10:45).

A term that I have heard a lot in the 21st century is mind set... I am sure when I was younger there were some other terms like attitude, standpoint, approach, perspective, slant or opinion out there, but I really like mind set...That being said, just what do you suppose the mind set of a servant is? Does it require a change of attitude? I believe that the Lord really cares about what actually motivates us, thus, our attitude counts more than our achievement. Yesterday's devotional focused on Christ being our gold standard when it comes to behavior. Jesus Himself said that He came to serve rather than to be served in today's verse, so the bar has been set. Have you ever described people as "being full of themselves?" When was the last time you emptied yourself for someone else's benefit? The point is that we can't be servants if we are already full of ourselves. It is only when we forget ourselves that we really do things that are worthy of being remembered. Paul described Jesus in this way; "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phil.2:6-7). A servant thinks like a steward. not like an owner. Why? Because a servant remembers that God owns it all anyway. Thus, servanthood and stewardship walk through life hand in hand. With that in mind, we cannot let money get in the way... More folks out there get sidetracked by money and materialism than by any other things. If money becomes our master, we become its slave. When Jesus is our Master, money becomes our servant! "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (Lk.16:12). Having money is not a sin, failing to use it for God's glory is... More about being servants over the next few days...

Have a great day... T G I F Thank God I'm Forgiven.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/04/2017

I Don't Like Spiders And Snakes

This morning's quiz is about exactly what the title indicates. So... Don't get squirmy, and answer some questions about these pleasant creatures... As always, have fun....

- _____ 1. According to Prov.23:31-32, what substance affects man like a snake bite? (a) anger, (b) wine, (c) gossip, (d) laziness.
- _____ 2. According to Job, what kind of men suck the poison of snakes? (a) wicked, (b) righteous, (c) deserving, (d)

flattering.

- _____ 3. What tribe of Israel was supposed to be like a snake? (a) Reuben, (b) Dan, (c) Asher, (d) Benjamin.
- _____ 4. According to Prov.30:15, this blood-sucking creature is an example of something that can never be satisfied. (a) gnat, (b) mosquito, (c) python, (d) leech.
- _____ 5. Joel had a vision of what destructive creature? (a) viper, (b) frog, (c) locust, (d) wild goat.
- _____ 6. King Rehoboam said he would use these to discipline the people. (a) snakes, (b) scorpions, (c) spiders, (d) ants.
- _____ 7. Jesus said that these people were broods of vipers. (a) Pharisees, (b) Sadduces, (c) sinners, (d) publicans.
- _____ 8. This OT book says, whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. (a) Psalms, (b) Proverbs, (c) Ecclesiastes, (d) Leviticus.
- _____ 9. According to Isaiah, _____ will be the serpent's food. (a) the wicked, (b) dust, (c) liars, (d) it doesn't say.
- _____ 10. He had a vision that the locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. (a) Elijah, (b) Elisha, (c) Daniel, (d) John.

Extra Credit... True or False

- _____ 11. According to the Law, the people could eat locusts, but could not eat lizards.

Have a great weekend and a glorifying and uplifting day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/06/2017

The Ministry Of A Servant

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Gal.5:25-26).

As we attempt to get into the mind of a servant, we must inspect different aspects of it. Today we'll look a one really important thing. What is a servant's ministry all about? I believe that servants think about their ministry, not about what others may be doing. Though I do not particularly like food shopping, one thing about it is that comparison thing. When I buy fruit, one of my favorites, I don't just grab a container of blueberries and throw them into the cart. I want to take a close look at it, making sure the fruit is ripe, but not overripe... Since I'm going to eat this stuff, I want the best I can find... When a servant is ministering, he or she does not criticize, compare or compete with other servants or with their ministries. Why? They are too busy doing the work of the Lord, seeking and saving the lost. Today's verses follow those famous ones about the fruit of the Spirit... (Vs.22-23). With the Spirit as our guide, keeping in step with Him, we're not to become conceited, provoking and envying each other... Very often, a goal of team sport athlete is to make an All Star team. This means that his abilities are such that they are appreciated by teammates and opponents alike. A servant wants to make that All Star team too. He wants to know that his efforts have made a difference in

people's lives, but there is one more important thing. A servant wants to make God's All Star team, knowing that in his servitude, God is pleased. When Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John, it says that the heavens opened up and the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. God's words are the same ones that we are striving to hear... "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." A servant's ministry is about pleasing God...

Have a great start to your week... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/07/2017

The Security Of Being A Servant

"For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one who the Lord commends" (2 Cor.10:18).

When we decide that we must be a servant as Jesus was, we have to settle our identity in Christ. The central theme of today's devotional is that only really secure people can serve. Why? Because insecure folks are always worrying about how they appear to others. I think that the words in today's verse explains this important issue. Of course we must know that what we are doing in servitude is right, but it must be for the proper reason. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one who the Lord commends... The bottom line in all of this is that the Lord is proud of the humility involved in our service. If we serve, as Jesus did, we can expect to be criticized... After all, Jesus was criticized for the things he did, how He did them and even for the type of people He served... The world, and even many of our own brethren may not understand what God values. When we serve, the risk of having our motives questioned is always lurking. We've all heard the innuendos... "You're just being a goody, goody," or "you're just trying to impress someone," are often heard... Our service for Christ is never wasted regardless of what others might say, because true servants base their identity on the Lord. If you get a chance today (make one) read Jn.13:1-8. In this passage, much to Peter's chagrin, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples... "You shall never wash my feet" was Peter's statement... "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me," was Jesus' reply. This act of foot washing was one of the most profound examples of serving from a secure self-image that I have ever read. Washing of feet was the task of a slave and a job devoid of any status. In it, Jesus showed us the real security of being a servant....

Have a great day.... Do good and give God the credit... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/08/2017

Servitude - An Opportunity

"God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them" (Heb.6:10).

A servant is to look at his or her ministry as opportunity rather than an obligation. A true servant finds real joy in helping people, meeting needs and seeking the lost. I believe a part of fulfilling the opportunity to serve begins with the gratitude one has for the undeserved grace of God. With this attitude, service becomes the highest use of life. Today's verse about our service even lets us know that God will not forget your work.... There's even more; He will not forget the love you have shown as you have helped His people. The whipped cream on the top of this sundae is all about God's expectations for His true servants; and continue to help them. The real teaching here is that service is to be an ongoing part of a Christian's life. I found several scriptures that actually put a cherry on top of that whipped cream... "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up"

(Gal.6:9). "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Matt.25:21). Our wonderful God promises a reward for His faithful servants! As we finish this short series about being a servant, we must remember this... Don't get discouraged if it seems that your service goes unnoticed, because that wasn't the reason that you served anyway. Keep on serving, because even the smallest act of service (the widow's mite?) is noticed by God. Jesus specialized in menial tasks that lots of folks tried to avoid. Things like washing feet, helping little children, associating with tax collectors and serving lepers. Nothing was beneath Him because "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (Mk.10:45). It was not in spite of His greatness that He did these things, but because of it... The wonderful thing is this; We get to follow His example....

Have a great day... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:1

02/09/2017

Whose Fault Is It?

"Why do you pay attention to the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Matt.7:3).

From Jesus' Sermon On The Mount, we get one of His epic teachings about the judging of others. If I have seen a caricaturist's rendering of the scene portrayed in today's verse, and I always have to keep from laughing. There's nothing like a satire of a satire to set me off. I think I will do a short series on Matt.7:1-6 this week. At the center of Jesus' teaching is the faultfinder, who He calls a hypocrite. Of all the things one might be referred to be, a hypocrite could be the most distasteful... First of all, let's get a thing or two out of the way... Jesus is not teaching that one has to be perfect to see when someone is doing something wrong and try to correct it. If this was so, there would be absolutely no corrections ever done, because man at his best is still sinful. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn.1:8). Also, Jesus is not forbidding us to decide as to the personal merit of those we would help. If so, verses 6 & 7 would be moot... I believe the bottom line of Jesus' teaching here is the question He directs at the faultfinder in today's verse. To add to a bit of spice to the satire, some Bible versions refer to the plank as a beam and others a log... Any way we look at it, Jesus satirized the sin by using the figure of a man with a whole log in his eye, attempting to extract a tiny speck from his neighbor's eye.... Delicious... With a log protruding from his eye, a man approaches his neighbor as says; "Pardon me sir, But I detect a tiny speck of dust in your eye. May I help remove it?" How ridiculous! For a few days, we will all do a bit of introspection. When things are going along smoothly, we might get the tendency to act in a sanctimonious manner. I hope that Jesus' teaching here puts all of that to rest...

Have a great day.... Let His light shine through you... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/10/2017

A Look At Me

"You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to remove the speck in your brother's eye" (Matt.7:5).

The behavior of the faultfinder is hypocritical on several levels. First is that he is not nearly as good as he thinks he is because his self-righteous eye has blinded him to his own faults. With this "abnormal vision," he thinks he can see his brother's shortcomings at a distance better than he sees his own at close range. He is in need of spiritual bifocals...

The Pharisee of Lk 18:10-14 is a great example of this. "God, I thank you that I am not like other men -- robbers, evildoers, adulterers -- or even like this tax collector" (Vs.11). He was easily able to see the speck in the poor publican's eye, but was totally blind to the plank in his own. Perhaps the biggest of the faultfinder's own shortcomings is the inability to see his own... You've all heard the language... "I think I could see my own faults, if I had any..." "My next mistake will be my 1st." Here is the next mistaken level of a faultfinder... His action(s) is often motivated by the selfish and hypocritical desire to build himself up at the expense of tearing someone else down. It is the critics way of adding to his own merit by way of contrast. We all know the way it was when we were kids, and we didn't do as well as we should have. When our parents questioned our poor actions, we would try to bring up someone else who also didn't do very well either. We thought if we could draw the comparison that we would not look so bad. I can still hear my mom's words ringing in my ears today.... "I don't care about, _____, it is your behavior I am interested in..." The real motive of the Pharisee back in Lk.18 was in this mistaken thought... He thought the comparison would make his own light seem to be brighter... We cannot make our lights shine brighter by blowing out or diminishing the lights of others. There's a lot more good stuff in this story. I hope you will follow along....

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/11/2017

More Snakes And Creepy Things

This morning's quiz is about just what my title implies... Snakes and other creepy stuff in the Bible... Don't get "creeped out," and enjoy these questions about some less desirable creatures in the Bible. As always, have fun....

TRUE OR FALSE

- _____ 1. From Psalms, the just man will be able to tread upon the head of the cobra.
- _____ 2. In the Book of Amos, a man rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bit it.
- _____ 3. In Proverbs, the bee is held up as an example to the lazy man.
- _____ 4. Jeremiah said the infant would play near the hole of the cobra and put his hand in the viper's nest.
- _____ 5. Jesus said His followers would be able to pick up snakes and not be harmed.

- _____ 6. The Psalmist said a slug will melt away as it moves along.
- _____ 7. According to Revelation, the locusts had tails and stings like scorpions.
- _____ 8. In Genesis, it says that the snake will strike at the neck of man.
- _____ 9. According to Ecclesiastes, dead flies give perfume a bad odor.
- _____ 10. David compared himself to a tiny ant as Saul was chasing him.
- _____ 11. In Job, Bildad compared man to a maggot and worm.
- _____ 12. Herod was eaten by worms before he died.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/13/2017

Faultfinding Motivated By Envy

"Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls;
Who steals my purse steals trash ----
But he that filches my good name,
Robs me of that which enriches him not
, And makes me poor indeed."

Wm. Shakespeare's Othello Act 3 Scene 3

Very often, a faultfinder is motivated by envy. Of all the sins, perhaps there is none more vile or malicious than envy. Why? Because it seems that jealousy is always involved, as it may be defined as "discontent at the excellence or good fortune of another..." To put it in blunt terms, it is the feeling of a low character person who cannot stand for another to have what he or she does not possess. Just before the apostle Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in Gal.5:22-23, he runs off a list of unsavory traits. Among them are; "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like..." (Vs 19-20). That's pretty select company for a simple 4 letter word like envy, isn't it! In verse 21, Paul delivers a stark warning; "those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." After all of these negatives, its no small wonder that he lists the fruit of the Spirit in the next verse... The writer of the Book of Proverbs is just as biting when it come to envy... "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (14:30). It looks like the writer views envy as a malignant condition that literally eats into the bones and character of a person, destroying him rather than the object of his envy. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy.... (1 Cor.13:4). Instead of a scripture, I used a quote from Shakespeare's Othello this morning. The words, ironically, are by Iago, but the sentiments ring out true and clear. The envious faultfinder does just this. He destroys the reputation of another without in any way blessing himself. We cannot be enriched by either the fortunes or misfortunes of someone else. Their successes or failures are theirs and will not impact whether we will inherit the kingdom of God. Only our own behavior can do that....

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/14/2017

Who Faultfinding Always Hurts

"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"
(Matt.7:2).

We have seen thus far, that constantly finding fault in others is hurtful to them, but we are missing something very important... The faultfinder often inflicts the greatest injury on him or herself. The story of the speck and the plank illustrates that a persistent finder of faults binds himself to, and blinds himself from his own shortcomings. The real danger here is that his chances for improvement are miniscule because he sees no need of it. Those who tried to bring down Jesus are great examples of this. Instead of looking at the good that was being done, they went on a witch hunt for evil. "When the Pharisees saw this, they asked the disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?' " (Matt.9:11). Jesus' answer to this is clear, concise and easy to understand.... He explained that the sick needed the doctor and the sinners were the ones who needed His mercy... Instead of looking for good, they were looking for evil that did not exist. The faultfinder is rarely a factfinder. That plank has destroyed his ability to discern between good and evil. In talking about a maturing Christian, the writer of the Book of Hebrews says this; "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish between good and evil..."

(5:14). The constant faultfinder will have very few friends, and even those friendships will be short-lived. As he gradually picks them to pieces, they usually are glad to leave his company. Finally, the habit of speck-hunting is an obvious mark of egotism. With this egotism, repentance is not only difficult, but nearly impossible. The exalting of oneself on an invisible pedestal, allows no room for the humility it takes to repent. The conclusion of "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector" in Lk.18:9-14 is this; "I tell you that this man, (the tax collector) rather than the other, (the Pharisee) went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Vs 14). We ought to read this short parable today...

Have a great day.... Do good and give God the credit... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/15/2017

A Remedy For Speck Finding

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matt.26:41).

If we remember that faultfinding is a despicable trait that requires nothing great, physically or mentally, we're off to a good start in eliminating it. The noted theologian Robert West said this; "No great talent, no self-denial, no brains, no character are required to set up in the grumbling business..." Today's scripture is a reminder to all of us to become cognizant of the sinfulness of it, and watch and pray against it... Faultfinding needs to be "put in reverse." By this I mean that one must make up their mind to look for good instead of evil. Then the virtues of a brother would be magnified, while minimizing their shortcomings. Its kind of like showing a person a piece of clean white paper with a black spot in the middle and asking him what he sees. The chances are that the response will be, "a black spot." Often the large piece of white paper is ignored because of the presence of that small black spot... Unfortunately, this is often true of man. We are quick to see the black spots in the life of another, but are slower to see all the whiteness that is there too... In his short story of the man with the plank in his eye, Jesus is quick to tell the man to look at his own life first... "first take the plank out of your own eye." He says. The only way we can help a brother is if we can see clearly... A clear look at ourselves will take much of the joy out of criticism... Lest we think this is some isolated teaching of Jesus, other Bible authors have taken up the same mantle. James tells us to look into a mirror and not forget what we see. (1:23-25) Paul tell us to examine ourselves (1 Cor.11:28) and test our own actions. (Gal.6:4). There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us that it little behooves any of us to talk

about the rest of us.... I'll finish this subject tomorrow....

Have a wonderful day.... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/16/2017

What If You Are The Target

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners'?" (Matt.9:10-11).

The setting of today's verses is clearly explained, as Jesus is in the home of Matthew. To put your mind at ease, this is the Matthew who not only wrote this gospel, but was one of Jesus' disciples. As we read verses 9-13, we are able to get the entire context. We can take comfort that even Jesus, who was sinless, could not escape the censure of faultfinders... After Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, He reminded them of this; "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him..." (Jn.13:16). With the last devotional in a series about faultfinders, we come to an obvious possibility. What do we do if we become the victim or target of the unjust criticisms of a faultfinder? There is always the sage advice of a few respected men of American history to follow. Ben Franklin said this; "Be sure you are right and go ahead..." Here are the words of Abraham Lincoln; "I do the very best I know how, the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference." The best advice I can offer if you become a target is this... Profit from the criticism, even though it was intended to hurt rather than help. The words of the apostle Peter sum it up for us... "But do this with a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your behavior may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Pet.3:16-17).

Have a great day... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/17/2017

Being Taught To Praise

"Praise be to the name of God forever and ever; wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him. I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, You have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king" (Dan.2:20-23)..

When folks ask where the value of reading and studying the Old Testament lies, a passage like this from the Book of Daniel comes to mind. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him. He called in all of his wise men for an interpretation, but being wise himself, he threw them a curve ball. Instead of asking for a simple interpretation, he asked them what his dream was about and to then for them to interpret it. All the magicians, conjurers, sorcerers and astrologers were beside themselves.... Their response was this; "There is not a man on earth that can do what the king asks!" Enter Daniel... With execution of all those who failed looming, Daniel goes to his 3 friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah and urges them to plead with him for mercy from the God of heaven. "During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said;" (Vs19). With today's verses, we get a first class reason why Old Testament study is useful. Daniel could have gone to the king and looked totally impressive with what he knew and was able to reveal. Instead, he first praised the Lord! If

we parse today's verses, we find how Daniel viewed God...(1) Daniel praised God and said that all wisdom is from Him. (Vs.20), (2) He said that God is in control of the world ---- seasons and rulers, and gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. (Vs.21). (3) God reveals secret things, knows what is in the darkness or unknown and light dwells in Him. (Vs.22)... Last, and perhaps most important, Daniel gives credit where credit is due. (Vs.23). Daniel taught us that he was wise because he knew his limitations. He knew he was limited, but he knew not to limit God. We ought to all read these verses and praise our Lord....

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/18/2017

The Mane Event

Pardon me for being a bit "punny" with my title, but today's quiz is related to stuff about lions. So... Roar into action and see what you know about these animals today.... As always, have fun.

- _____ 1. This king claimed he grabbed a lion by the hair, struck it and killed it. (a) Hezekiah, (b) Saul, (c) David, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 2. He tore a lion apart with his bare hands. (a) Saul, (b) Samson, (b) Gideon, (d) Absalom.
- _____ 3. This OT prophet saw locusts with the teeth of lions.(a) Hosea, (b) Joel, (c) Obadiah, (d) Nahum.
- _____ 4. This Bible book speaks of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. (a) Daniel, (b) Jeremiah, (c) Isaiah, (d) Revelation.
- _____ 5. David said this father and son were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions. (a) himself and Solomon, (b) Saul and Jonathon, (c) Elkanah and Samuel.
- _____ 6. Peter said that _____ is like a ravenous lion.
- _____ 7. This soldier in David's army went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. (a) Joab, (b) Uriah, (c) Benaiah, (d) Jonathon.
- _____ 8. This king had a throne with 6 steps. There was a lion standing beside each of them. (a) Saul, (b) David, (c) Solomon, (d) Nebuchadnezzar.
- _____ 9. This famous prophet saw a lion eating straw like an ox. (a) Isaiah, (b) Jeremiah, (c) Zechariah, (d) Micah.
- _____ 10. A dying Jacob compared which of his sons to a vicious lion? (a) Simeon, (b) Dan, (c) Judah, (d) Benjamin.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/20/2017

Forgiveness - How Much

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? ' " (Matt.18:21). "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" (Lk.17:3).

This week I would like to delve into the divine subject of forgiveness. Perhaps this is one of the most difficult of all Christian behaviors to cling to, so it really needs to be addressed. If you google the word forgiveness, you'll find an endless amount of information, of both Christian and non-Christian nature. See if you like this definition, and comment on it if you wish... "Forgiveness is an attitude of heart which restores the offender to the former state and affections of the offended one..." To forgive is to bury the matter and treat it as if had not been committed. See if you like these human sketches about forgiveness;

"Forgiveness is man's deepest need and highest achievement" Horace Bushnell

"To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; but to return good for evil is God-like" Spanish proverb

"Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it foregoes revenge, and dares to forgive an injury" Edwin Hubbell Chapin

Jesus lets us know that forgiveness comes from the heart. In the parable about the king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants, (Matt.18:23-35) which might be good for all of us to read and meditate upon, Jesus ends it this way; "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart" (Vs. 35). From the Book of Hebrews, we get this wonderful nugget about the nature of God; "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more..." (10:17). In the 2nd of today's above verses, Jesus says that if our brother sins we are to rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. The teaching does not stop here though, as Jesus teaches on an even higher plane. If he does not repent, we must still manifest a kind and tender feeling toward him (Matt.5:44-46) and leave vengeance in the hands of the Lord. As Jesus' ambassadors on earth, we are to imitate him when it comes to forgiveness. More tomorrow....

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:1

02/21/2017

Bad Forgiveness

"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but up to seventy times seven' " (Matt.18:21-22).

The number seventy times seven in today's verse probably does not mean 490, but rather numberless times. Jesus is trying to explain that forgiveness ought to be like counting from 229 to 230. By the time we get to those high numbers, forgiveness should be a habit and come very naturally. Jesus followed this with a parable (Vs. 22-35) about forgiving debts. The indication from the parable is that God is very forgiving, but he judges those who refuse to forgive very harshly. The culmination of the parable finds these words from Jesus; "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (Vs 35). That's real serious stuff! In his prayer of example (The Lord's Prayer) and immediately following it, Christ taught that our forgiveness from God is contingent upon our

forgiveness of others. The parable also teaches that when man sees the enormity of his own sins and is grateful for God's forgiveness, the sin of his fellow man toward him will seem like a millionth part by comparison. This comparison will make it easier to forgive others. Let me finish with a story... A minister once saw a man severely berating a subordinate. One of the things he said was this; "Take care of what you say and do: I never forgive!" The minister looked at the man in charge and replied quietly; "Sir, my hope is that you never sin.." The man responded, "Never sin? Why of course I sin. What has that got to do with my statement?" The minister said, "If you never forgive, you will never be forgiven..." The one who does not forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass....

Have a great day... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/22/2017

The Bible Teaches Forgiveness

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk.23:34).

There are probably dozens of reasons why forgiving is a good practice, none of which are better than how it is attached to the scriptures. Today's verse tells me that Christ's words on the cross sets an example that demands us to be forgiving people. Jesus's words in what we have come to know as The Golden Rule also requires it. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," strongly infers that we would want those we sin against to be forgiving. We obviously ought to forgive those who sin against us because its not much of a golden rule if it doesn't cut both ways... The churches, like the one at Colosse, taught forgiveness... "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another, Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (3:13-14). That's a powerful message... Love requires that we forgive..."Love is patient, love is kind, it does not boast, it is not proud" (1 Cor.13:4). Does the person who loves like this sound like someone that won't forgive? "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet.4:8). Does a person who loves his brothers deeply sound like someone who won't forgive? Finally, the seeking of peace requires that we are forgiving people. "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Rom.14:19). I hope you agree with this... Unforgiveness promotes strife and even bitterness, but forgiveness makes for peace and pleasantness.... Jesus set the bar very high for us when it comes to having a forgiving spirit, and the apostles followed suit in their writings. The scriptures teach us to forgive....

Have a wonderful day.... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/23/2017

Forgiveness Is A Big Deal

"To err is human, to forgive is divine."

From "An Essay On Criticism" by Alexander Pope 1711

Forgiveness demands a bigness of heart that is akin to divinity, hence my Alexander Pope quote this morning... God and Christ forgive because they are big in heart. In the Old Testament, Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery because he was a big man. (Gen.50:15-21). There is a headstone in a cemetery not far from NYC that is engraved with a single word: FORGIVEN. The message is simple and unembellished. There is no date, no epitaph.

There is only a name and the solitary word FORGIVEN. I would contend that this is the greatest word that can be applied to any man or woman, or written on any gravestone... Forgiveness is too big for little people! Even today, congregations have folks in them who are "at odds" with one another. Until we can replace grudges, malice and ill-will with forgiveness, we cannot be the churches we were intended to be. As surly as people live, they will sin so they will stand in need of forgiveness. Forgiveness and forbearance go hand in hand. In case you forgot, forbearance means patience, self-control, endurance or fortitude. "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another" (Col.3:13) Why? Because the rest of the verse says this; "Forgive as the Lord forgave you..." As we conclude this short series on forgiveness, lets think about this... Forgiveness is an act of mercy and not justice, so I guess that forgiveness and mercy go hand in hand too... The forgiving and merciful spirit cuts through all lines... Temper, gender, nationality, ethnic group, education or training should never serve as barriers to a person with a forgiving spirit. Forgiveness attempts to view offenders as generously as possible. 17th century theologian Richard Baxter said this in his old age; "I see that good people are not so good as I once thought they were, and find that few people are as bad as their enemies imagine."

Have a great day.... Let His light shine through you... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/24/2017

What God Knew And When He Knew It

"But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal.4:4).

Our Sunday morning adult class at Northfield has recently started a study of the Book of Daniel, and we have just covered the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The fact that Daniel consulted with his three friends and then prayed to God to help him is obviously important. I am sure that King Nebuchadnezzar felt good about being the head of gold described in the dream, but I doubt that he understood what the rest of the great statue made of several metals really meant.... The really cool part of the story is that we do. History has born out that the Persians were the next great world power after the Babylonians, and the Greeks followed them. The legs of iron represented the Roman Empire, and that's where today's verse comes in... When the time had fully come, God sent His Son.... In one big swoop, with the interpretation of a king's dream, God lays out for us about 600 years of world history. How nifty is that? As we take a look at my title this morning, we get a slight glimpse into the wisdom and foreknowledge of God. "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Dan.2:44). We all serve a wonderful God who has known all along how things would unfold. Through history, we have watched kingdoms come and go, but God's kingdom established through His Son will itself endure forever... When we take another look at today's verse we get a mini-chunk of what God knew and when He knew it... It just reaffirms my faith that we can go back to the Old Testament Book of Daniel and see God's plan unfold. Isn't it great to know that we serve a loving and all knowing God....

Have a great day... T G I F Thank God I'm Forgiven.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/25/2017

Baaaaaaaaa

If you haven't guessed it, today's quiz is about sheep and shepherds...As you try to answer these questions, I hope I don't pull the wool over your eyes... As always, have fun.

- _____ 1. What wealthy OT man had 14,000 sheep? (a) Abraham, (b) Lot, (c) King David, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 2. Who married the shepherd girl Zipporah? (a) King David, (b) King Solomon, (c) Samson, (d) Hosea.
- _____ 3. Whom did Jesus command to shepherd His church? (take care of my sheep) (a) Peter, (b) Paul, (c) Mary, (d) John.
- _____ 4. Who was the Bible's 1st shepherd?
- _____ 5. What prophet said; "We are all like sheep who have gone astray?" (a) Ezekiel, (b) Isaiah, (c) Jeremiah, (d) Zechariah.
- _____ 6. In which Gospel does Jesus talk about separating the sheep from the goats? (a) Matthew, (b) Mark, (c) Luke, (d) John.
- _____ 7. Who had compassion on the people because they seemed like sheep without a shepherd? (a) King David, (b) King Solomon, (c) Paul, (d) Jesus.
- _____ 8. Who berated King Saul because he heard the bleating of sheep taken in his battle with the Amalekites? (a) Eli, (b) Samuel, (c) Nathan, (d) David.
- _____ 9. Which Psalm says this? "We are His people and the sheep of His pasture." (a) 1, (b) 23, (c) 44, (d) 100.
- _____ 10. Who became a shepherd in Midian for his uncle? (a) Jacob, (b) David, (c) Moses, (d) Caleb.

Have a great weekend, and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/27/2017

Who's The Authority

"Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and elders of the people came to Him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you this authority?' " (Matt.21:23).

Lets get a bit of context into today's verse, which is a question from the religious leaders of Jesus' day... Just previous to their question, "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves" (Vs. 12). He let them know that the temple should be called a house of prayer and they were turning it into a den of robbers... Along the way, blind and lame people came to Him and were healed. The chief priests and teachers of the law saw all this and they were indignant.

They were looking at someone who was making changes in the affairs of the temple, and also in religious instruction, not to mention the healing... This guy Jesus had no real ecclesiastical or civil authority as a Jew; hence, they claimed to know why he did all of this without their permission. Jesus struck up a deal with them... If they could answer His question about John's baptism (Vs.25), He would tell them by what authority He did the things He did. No matter what they answered, they would come up looking bad, so they chose ignorance. Jesus replied, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things" (Vs.27). Having 20/20 hindsight, we know about where Jesus' authority came from... What Christ said and did, sprang from an authority much higher than any man. It came from God Himself. At the Transfiguration, a voice from heaven said; "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" (Matt. 17:5). When Jesus met with His disciples after His resurrection, He said this; "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." (Matt.28:18). This week we will take a look at the authority in our lives and why and how it impacts us....

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

02/28/2017

The Need For Authority

"All of us who are mature (perfect) should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil.3:15-16).

There can be no harmony, unity or system in any realm of life without the recognition of authority. Sometimes, striving toward Christian maturity or perfection can be so difficult that it leaves us drained or discouraged. We may feel so far from perfect that we think we can never please God with our lives. I think this perfection or maturity that the apostle Paul calls it, is meant to mean not flawless in every detail. Those who are more mature must continue in pressing on in the Holy Spirit's power, knowing that Christ will fill reveal and fill in any discrepancy between what we are and what we should be.... Why? Because Christ and His Word are our authority. This authority ought to drive us toward the maturity we so desperately want to attain. Can you imagine the chaos in society if there were no standards. Business and trade would be paralyzed without a monetary standard. Think of the difficulty there would be in buying things if there was no agreement on weights and measures. Inches in a foot, feet in a yard, the dimensions of an acre all come to mind... In the field of religion on the earth, there is also division and confusion of all sorts. The reason for this is the failure to be guided by the true standard of authority found in God's Holy Spirit inspired Word. In today's verses, Paul admonishes the folks in the church at Philippi to adhere to this simple credo... Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing... He did not want them drifting on the winds of conjecture, but by that same rule that he had given all of them through Jesus Christ. Lets make no mistake here, there must be authority...

Have a great day.... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11