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Daily Devotional - Monday, January 6, 2025 - Defending the Truth

JANUARY 06TH 2025 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Monday, January 6, 2025 - Defending the Truth

Over the centuries, the gospel message has been distorted in many ways, from an over-emphasis on rules or performance to an excessive pursuit of emotion to supernatural wonders or prosperity. Still today, Christians must be vigilant about discerning and protecting the truth.

In Galatians 2, Paul jumps forward 14 years to his second Jerusalem visit as a follower of Christ (v. 1). For this important trip, he took with him Barnabas, his principal partner. Barnabas provided support and substantiation as Paul defended his ministry to the “esteemed leaders” who had been hearing defamatory reports from spies (v. 2).

Paul explained that he traveled to Jerusalem “in response to a revelation” (v. 2). He doesn’t tell the story of how he received this particular “revelation,” but he uses the same word that he did in 1:12 to speak of his conversion encounter on the Damascus Road. This repetition highlights the fact that God alone is leading Paul’s ministry, every step of the way.

In Jerusalem, Paul met privately with the most prominent apostles and gave them a report regarding his gospel ministry to the Gentiles (v. 2). He was seeking their blessing and partnership. He hoped they could present a united front as the gospel message of freedom in Christ—rather than slavery to the Law—spread to all people (v. 4).

One central issue of confusion and contention was circumcision. The “false believers” were insisting that the Gentile converts be circumcised. But Paul preached a gospel of grace, which did not require such slavish adherence to Jewish Law. Titus, a Greek, was also with Paul in Jerusalem (v. 3), and Paul offered Titus as a living example. Though he was a faithful believer and a devoted minister of the gospel, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised.

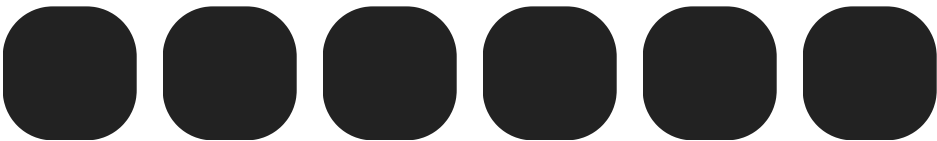
What false messages are added to the gospel today? How can we protect the truth of the gospel of Christ?

Father, Your Word is truth! May we always walk in Your truth. May we be blessed with rest and peace amid life’s storms, knowing that You are with us. Give us confidence that, like Paul, we are safe in Your arms.

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Daily Devotional - Friday, December 20, 2024. - Rejoicing in Disagreement

DECEMBER 20TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Friday, December 20, 2024. - Rejoicing in Disagreement

Church splits are nothing new. For centuries, they have happened because of differences of opinion within the body of Christ. Often church divisions grow from different perspectives on important doctrinal issues. But personal taste or even petty disagreements can also grow into rifts that divide, disrupt, and even destroy a church family.

Early Christians experienced similar struggles. Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ sometimes had trouble accepting one another because of their differences. When Paul urged the “strong” to accept “the failings of the weak” in verse 1, he was referring to differences about things he described as “disputable matters” (Rom. 14:1)—disagreements mainly about abstaining from certain foods and the observance of certain sacred days (Rom. 14:2, 5). Paul described those whose lives were governed by such rules as “the weak.” Their conscience obligated them to obey laws that Christ had fulfilled by His sacrifice (Mark 7:19; Rom. 14:14).

Paul did not demand that all Christians agree on disputable matters but commanded that all believers accept one another as those accepted by Christ (v. 7). When we bear with the opinions and practices of others, we choose to “please our neighbors for their good” rather than please ourselves (v. 2). There may be occasions when their weak

conscience calls us to limit our freedom when in their presence (Rom. 14:19–23). It is wrong to force other Christians to go against their conscience. We may think we are doing them a favor, but in reality, we are causing them to violate their conscience and act contrary to faith. Their views need not shape our practice. And we shouldn’t force them to follow ours.

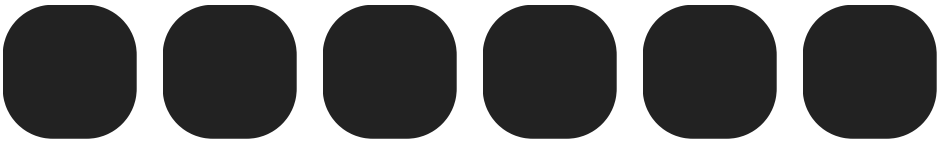
Can you think of a difference in church practice that is considered disputable or outside of core doctrine? Why does Paul urge believers toward unity despite these things?

Jesus, we pray for unity in our churches today! Give us discernment between differences in core doctrine and “disputable matters” that Paul mentions in today’s reading. Help us love and accept those accepted by You, Lord.

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Daily Devotional - Tuesday, December 17, 2024 - Mourning Turned to Joy

DECEMBER 17TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Tuesday, December 17, 2024 - Mourning Turned to Joy

When a newly elected official gives an inaugural speech, they usually outline the values and goals that will mark their administration. When Jesus preached His own inaugural sermon, He chose portions of Isaiah 61 as His text. Jesus began by saying: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

The fact that Jesus did not read all the verses in Isaiah’s text may have been a signal that some aspects of this prophecy would not be fulfilled during His earthly ministry. Jesus had come to proclaim the good news of salvation, not to judge (see also Luke 12:14). The inauguration of Jesus’ earthly ministry was the beginning of the age of grace. Jesus came to offer forgiveness of sin and freedom from its bondage. But He also warned of a coming day of judgment when it would be more tolerable for the people of Sodom than for those who rejected His offer of mercy (Matt. 11:24). This other side of the gospel is reflected in Isaiah 61:2, which indicates that “the year of the Lord’s favor” will ultimately culminate in “the day of vengeance of our God.”

On the surface, this might seem like a contradiction, especially given the promises in verses 3–7. Here we read of a joy that will replace mourning and rebuilding what has been destroyed. These promises of hope, however, belong to those who are God’s people. They are the people of the Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles, who are called

“the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16. The day of vengeance is when all God’s promises and warnings will be proven true. It will be the day when those who set themselves against God are punished. It is also the day when the faith of all who have trusted in Jesus as the Messiah will be vindicated. Which of these will be true of you?

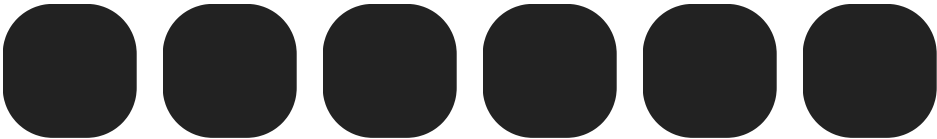
Why do many people get confused about God’s grace and judgment? How do those two things go together?

Lord, thank You for Your encouragement in today’s reading. Thank You for Your promises of hope and everlasting joy for those who belong to You. Thank You that in the “day of vengeance” we, as Your people, will receive grace.

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Daily Devotional - Thursday, December 5, 2024 - Leaning to Hope

DECEMBER 05TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Thursday, December 5, 2024 - Leaning to Hope

Emily Dickinson called hope “the thing with feathers.” Hope, said the poet, is like a tiny bird that sings despite the storm. In Romans 8, Paul described the groaning of creation. It is not a cry of despair but an expression of longing for transformation. This painful groaning is not just evidence that the world is broken, it is a promise of the liberation that is to come. Jesus told His disciples that while others faint with terror and grow apprehensive about “what is coming on the world,” their response should be different. In Christ, we have hope (Luke 21:26–28).

Troubles remind us to lean into the hope of Christ’s return. Like creation, we “groan,” eagerly awaiting the transformation He will bring (v. 23). The fact that the world seems to be falling apart does not erode our hope. Even when our circumstances appear dismal, we keep going because “hope that is seen is no hope at all” (v. 24). We should not expect life to be any different this side of the new creation. Likewise, we should not be surprised when we sometimes struggle with the collateral damage of sin in ourselves even after we have placed our faith in Christ. The final stage of our salvation experience will be “the redemption of our bodies” (v. 23).

Advent speaks of arrival, but until Christ comes again, we are in a season of waiting. This should not make us sad because waiting is a sign of hope. The apostle observes in verse 24: “Who hopes for what they already have?” Even though waiting is not comfortable, it is a manner of hope. Only those who hope to receive something are willing to wait. Hope warrants patience. The certainty of the Lord’s promise gives wings to our hope.

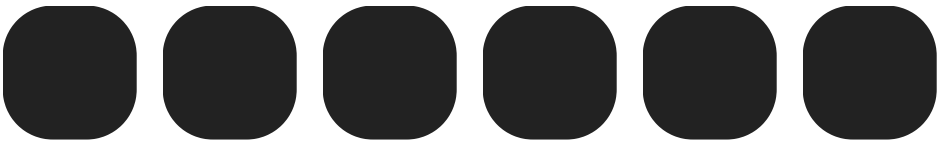
Is there something you can do to “lean into” hope today? Should you sing a song, talk to a friend, or read a verse of Scripture?

Father, give us better understanding of the connection between waiting and hope in today’s reading. Teach us to wait patiently for Christ’s return and to lean into this hope. May our hope truly have wings!

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Daily Devotional - Monday. November 25, 2024 - A Righteous Response

NOVEMBER 25TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

We've all seen adventure films where the main character searches for a lost and valuable relic. In his pursuit, our hero must overcome perilous obstacles. He recovers the priceless object but only after breathtaking twists and turns. Chapter 22 almost reads like a movie script when the 18-year-old King Josiah, orders the renovation of the Temple only to discover the Book of the Law.

While Manasseh was wicked, his grandson, Josiah, had pursued righteousness from a young age (v. 2). As he matured, he set out to cleanse the Temple. While repairing the Temple, his workmen uncovered this book that had been "lost" (an incredible testament to the depth of wickedness that ruled during the reign of Manasseh). The king's response to the news of discovery presented a model for the nation and all who want to live righteous lives: "When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes" (v. 11).

Why did he respond this way? He now understood that his nation had violated the terms of the covenant they made with God at Mt. Sinai. In humility, Josiah acknowledged the reality of his situation, saying that "great is the LORD'S anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us" (v. 13).

Recall that during the reign of Manasseh, God told Judah that exile was inevitable. Yet, the promise of great wrath provoked the king to greater acts of righteousness. He gathered the people, reaffirmed their commitment to the covenant, cleansed the land of idol worship, and celebrated Passover on a national scale! Josiah repented and led his nation to repentance just as God's judgment required.

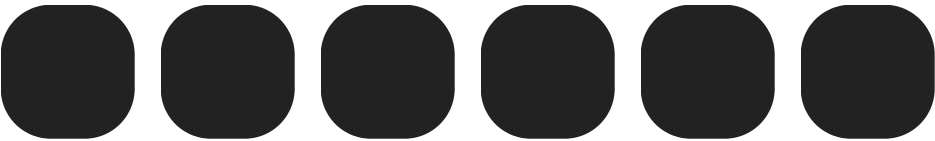
Are you sensing God's judgment in your life? Is there anything you need to repent of? Consider the example of Josiah and turn to the God who has committed Himself to you.

In response to today’s reminder about the importance of repentance, let’s confess to God the sins that we continue to struggle with. Thank You, Father, that in Christ Your grace is greater than our sin.

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