

THE SALTSHAKER

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Bearing with One Another in Love

By Rev. Sean McCann

Last month the *Center for Disease Control and Prevention* published their weekly report on Morbidity and Mortality, and the results – though not all that surprising – were sobering nonetheless: “Symptoms of anxiety disorder and depressive disorder increased considerably in the United States during April-June of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.” The report goes on to outline how “40.9% of respondents reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral health condition, including symptoms of anxiety disorder or depressive disorder, symptoms of a trauma- and stressor-related disorder related to the pandemic, and having started or increased substance use to cope with stress or emotions related to COVID-19.” And most alarming of all was the statistic that the percentage of respondents who reported having seriously considered suicide in the 30 days before completing the survey was significantly higher in a number of demographics, including those in between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.

Are Christians immune to these hardships? Certainly not! The Bible tells us that life outside of the Garden of Eden in a fallen world is full of “toil and trouble” (Ps 90:10), “thorns” (2 Cor 12:7), “trials and testing” (James 1:2, 3). Paul lovingly urges his readers to “not lose heart” as they are so tempted to do (Eph 3:13) and prays for their renewed spiritual strength (Eph 3:18).

Not only are we not immune to general hardships, but the body of Christ also faces a unique challenge at this time. If it is true that what we primarily have in common is Christ, then we should expect a diversity of views and approaches to this virus, even in a small fellowship like ours. At the best of times, a gathering of diverse views requires patience, humility, and grace toward one another. How much more vital are these attitudes in a season of stress and anxiety? Think with me for a moment about all the differences that even Christians are experiencing right now that add to our stress:

Some of us are scared that we might be infected with a

virus that may cause serious suffering and even death; **others** of us are unconcerned about the virus and resent most of the public health measures.

Some of us are cautious to limit our exposure and carefully practice all the recommended health guidelines; **others** of us are impatient for things to get back to “normal” as soon as possible and only follow the guidelines when forced to.

Some of us are lonely without regular contact with loved ones and church members; **others** of us are enjoying the slow down in life and the extended time to spend at home.

Some of us have been thrown off-kilter by this drastic change in the normal patterns of life; **others** of us welcome the interruption as an opportunity to simplify our hectic life.

Some of us are terrified to have our children start back at school this fall; **others** of us are relieved to finally have somewhere for them to go.

Some of us are discouraged to see the church so limited in its worship and ministry; **others** of us are encouraged that the ministry of the church can endure in Word and Sacrament even in such a strange time.

Some of us are overwhelmed with all of the added work this pandemic has brought, and long for a day when work will finally slow down; **others** of us are under financial strain and long for a day when work will finally pick up.

Some of us have a clear idea of why all this is happening and who is to blame; **others** of us are more confused than ever and have no idea who to trust.

Some of us think relief may be coming with the November elections; **others** of us dread what the political future may hold.

The challenging prospect of loving and living with

Outdoor Worship Service, Sundays at 8:30 am - We continue to take advantage of our side yard and the nice weather to hold these outdoor services. The early time has kept the heat relatively mild and the grass allows us to spread out. We have been averaging 60-80 people during the service and plan to keep it going as the weather allows. The sound system and keyboard has worked well, and we have even had the joy of celebrating two baptisms at this service.

Indoor Worship Service, Sundays at 10:45 am - Our indoor service has continued to maintain protocols of masking and distancing, and we have just recently begun to sing one of the hymns instead of reciting it. This service has been averaging 20-40 in attendance, and we have also had the joy of celebrating a baptism and welcoming new members.

Livestream Worship Service, Sundays at 10:45 am - The indoor service is live streamed every week on our website and continues to be a source of encouragement for those who are not able to attend in person. We usually have 20-30 viewers of the livestream, and our experience setting this up has enabled us to help other sister churches do the same.

Lord's Supper, Sunday, TBD, at both morning services - This is one of the aspects of worship we have missed the most. The Session and the Return to Worship Task Force have been discussing and researching different options, which we hope to implement soon. We will give more detailed instructions as the time draws nearer, so for now we simply ask that you pray and prepare your hearts.

Outdoor Evening Prayer Service, Sundays at 6:00 pm, starting on September 6 - This new service will modify and combine our normal Sunday and Wednesday evening services. More informal in nature, we will sing, study the word, and spend time praying together. Pastor Sean is tentatively planning to teach through the book of Lamentations during these services. In the event of bad weather, this service will be cancelled.

Officer Nominations, ongoing until September 30 - The Session is seeking nominations for the church offices of elder and deacon, and is asking the members of our congregation to prayerfully consider nominating qualified candidates for these positions. The nature of church life right now makes it a challenging prospect to consider how to train, evaluate, and elect nominees, but we will proceed in faith that God will continue to guide and lead our church. Gordon Meiners and Tom Voigt will both conclude their second term as ruling elders at the end of this year, and in light of the circumstances they have volunteered to stand for election if nominated. Nomination forms can be found as bulletin inserts or by contacting the church office, and completed forms can be placed in the offering box or tray, or mailed to the church office. Please speak with the candidate you'd like to nominate to obtain his permission before submitting the form.

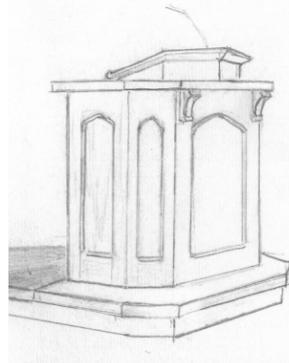
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those who disagree with us is laid on top of the base layer of our individual, family, and work stress. Who is sufficient for these things? However, in a time of national disunity, it is the church alone – empowered by God’s Spirit – that is able to stand united and resist the schemes of the evil one who would love to tear us apart. Our study in Ephesians has been timely as it addresses how we can walk together in unity. So think with me, as we close, about the difference the Lord makes in our life together:

All of us have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God (Ephesians 1:4).

All of us have been made alive together with Christ and raised up with him and seated with him in the heavenly places (2:5-6).

All of us have been reconciled to God in one body through the cross, and through Christ have access in one Spirit to the Father (2:16, 18).



The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann

It is very difficult to speak of [Ephesians] in a controlled manner because of its greatness and because of its sublimity. Many have tried to describe it. One writer has described it as ‘the crown and climax of Pauline theology’. Another has said that it is ‘the distilled essence of the Christian religion, the most authoritative and most consummate compendium of our holy Christian faith’. What language! And it is by no means exaggerated.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (God’s Ultimate Purpose—An Exposition of Ephesians 1)

In our morning sermon series this summer we have seen the truth of these glowing words from Dr. Lloyd-Jones. Ephesians starts with a bang as we are swung heavenward and carried along the heights to behold the glory and blessing of God’s eternal plans for us in Christ. Most of Paul’s

letters address some sort of issue or conflict among the people to whom he is writing, but Ephesians seems free from any controversy and thus Paul is at liberty to address deeper and broader matters of the faith. With breath-taking speed he covers many of the great mountain peaks of theology and practice without losing sight of the grand victory of Christ over the spiritual powers of darkness. In telling of the exaltation of Christ over all things, Paul’s main purpose appears to be what Peter O’Brien calls *identity formation* in the church: “...informing, strengthening, and encouraging them by assuring them of their place within the gracious, saving purpose of God, and urging them to bring their lives in conformity with this divine plan of summing up all things in Christ.”

The cosmic scope of Ephesians places the church – in her union with Christ her head – at the epicenter of God’s eternal plan to unite all things in Christ (1:10). In fact, Dr. Guy Waters goes so far as to claim that “the very existence of the church...is standing testimony to the ‘powers’ defeat and subjugation to the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul is not shy about exposing the spiritual battle at hand (1:20-22; 2:2; 3:10; 4:8-10; 6:12), though he does so not to scare the church, but rather to steel her with love and hope in Christ so that she might faithfully endure and walk in a manner worthy of her calling. The church is not a sidelined minority that must live in constant fear of the cosmic powers of this present darkness; rather she is the crown jewel of redemption, for “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rules and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10).

So far I have moved slowly and deliberately through this majestic book. Paul has packed so much into such a relatively short letter that by the end of the year we will have covered such topics as divine sovereignty and human free will, spiritual warfare, the work of the Holy Spirit, worship in the church, gender roles in marriage, racial reconciliation, unity in the body of Christ, spiritual gifts, sexual immorality, and much more. As we continue to soak up the grace of God that drips from the pages of Ephesians, it is my hope and prayer that God will forge a new identity in us so that we might be strengthened in our ongoing struggle with the spiritual powers, united as one body in Christ, and transformed by the renewal of our minds to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (4:16).

All of us have been urged to bear with one another in love and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:3).

All of us have been empowered to let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from us, along with all malice (4:31).

All of us have been empowered to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave us (4:32).

All of us have been empowered to put on the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (6:11).

What a difference the gospel of grace makes! May God the Father grant us to be strengthened with power through the Spirit in our inner being so that we might grasp the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning
Sept. 6	Ephesians 4:7-16
Sept. 13	Ephesians 4:17-24
Sept. 20	Ephesians 4:25-32
Sept. 27	Ephesians 5:1-2
Oct. 4	Ephesians 5:3-14
Oct. 11	Ephesians 5:15-21
Oct. 18	Ephesians 5:22-33
Oct. 25	Ephesians 6:1-4

Back to School?

By Rev. Chris Brown

Our parents and families are in a time of trial and testing. In some cases, it may feel as if we’re Israel of old, wandering around in the wilderness, hoping to teach our little ones about God’s gracious covenant promises, but also hoping to scrounge up enough food and energy for the day. In discussing our place as parents in a time of trial, I want to sympathetically cover two areas: first, the trials, and second, the hope. First: the trials. If you are like most parents, you’ve had to face the difficulties of back to school plans with COVID-19. I’ve heard many people detail the different ways that they have tried to navigate school in the midst of caring for the health of their children, and the children of others. I have heard of plans from continuing homeschooling with modified co-ops (social distancing required), to homeschool only, to meeting daily in class with masks, to meeting only a few times to get to know a teacher; and then there is online school! How hard it is for us to see our children suffering under Zoom burn-out, and how difficult for ourselves as we need to manage multiple children with multiple classrooms, assignments to print and scan and email, and on and on. On top of all of this, we have the difficulty of managing and promoting our children’s spiritual life. Before COVID we may have had a regular schedule of family worship, but perhaps now this has been thrown out of whack, or made more trying due to daily stresses and anxieties. Ordinarily, we have regular assistance with training our children in the Lord with Sunday school; for now, we are equipped to teach our own children with the material provided to us. But for some, this may only add to the list of difficult tasks to accomplish!

But secondly, we can and should have hope. When Israel wandered in the wilderness, God gave them manna from on high. He didn’t take away their challenges; He supplied the simple, but miraculous, gift of sustenance to His children. In the same way today, Jesus is our manna which comes down out of heaven for us. When we daily place our faith in this exalted Messiah, we feed upon and digest His life. Because faith is the means of feasting on Jesus, we must guard it and savor it in troubled times. As the hymn writer says, “Let no other trust intrude”. We may be tempted to think that another substance, or another career, or another something else will provide us the deep-seated relief we long to have within us. But we are told a better way, and the only way to find true inward relief in trouble is the secret and real strength of Jesus Christ. When Jesus invites the weary and heavy laden to come to Him, while He removes the guilt and bondage of our sin, He does not normally remove our circumstances. We may yet feel pain, sorrow, grief, and trouble. But, to give us strength, Jesus places His own yoke upon us. He says, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light”. His righteousness covers us as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We *can* fear no evil, for He is with us—His shepherd’s rod and staff protect us from His enemies, and from our own stumbling. Faith rests in the Shepherd’s benevolence and power to help us, even when inwardly we are in turmoil. So, weary parents, look up in your difficult time, and see the Savior ever-ready to grant you His grace. He is full of pity, joined with power, and so we can and should have hope.

Triumphing Over Sinful Fear

by Rev. Chris Brown



How many of us have been afraid during the last six months? In John Flavel’s short treatise on Triumphing over Sinful Fear, the Christian is given a holistic survey of the nature of fear, as well as the means by which we can overcome sinful fear. He bases some of his little book on Isaiah 8:12-14, a passage worth examining during this time. It says, “*Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*”

To begin with, Flavel makes an important distinction between three types of fear: natural fear, sinful fear, and religious fear. There are times when God has endowed us with natural fear of *evils* so that we are protected from harm. We see a boulder hurling down a cliff towards us, feel fear, and so leap out of the way to protect ourselves. Likewise, we may take health precautions around one another during this time because we have a natural and good fear to not kill our neighbors and friends. This is a good kind of fear that is unfortunately necessary in a world under the curse. Jesus experienced this kind of fear as He came to the final moments before His trial and execution upon the cross. He was not merely afraid of the evil of death, but feared the evil of being considered accursed and forsaken, which is infinitely worse than death itself. He endured this fear without succumbing to the next kind of fear.

But *we* easily succumb to an inappropriate and sinful type of fear: either too much fear, or fear at the wrong time, or fear in the wrong thing, or fear for the wrong reasons. It is primarily sinful because it “arises out of unbelief”, but it can also come out of ignorance of God’s promises and power, or a guilty conscience, or confusion about God’s providence, or immoderate love of this life, or even from Satan’s temptations. Flavel spends a great deal of time detailing the effects that sinful fear has, and why we should so seek to flee from it, and mortify it.

Meanwhile, there is a final kind of fear that is actually the remedy to sinful fear: religious fear. This is what is meant in the passage above where it says, “Let him (God) be your fear, and let him be your dread.” This kind of fear is first founded in seeing and trembling at God’s outpouring of wrath upon Jesus Christ in the place of sinners, and then embraces God’s covenant promises to save to the uttermost all those who trust Jesus, and finally reverences God as our Father. This reverence and awe for God must and may be increased by studying the various ways in which God has become yours and you have become His. It is this respect for your Heavenly Father that will drive out sinful fear.