

December Answers

- 1) [December 1] Paul's **fourth** letter to the church at Corinth (called 2 Corinthians). Paul began by praising God for His **comfort** in all his afflictions, and he told the Corinthians that they shared with him in both the **suffering** and the comfort of Christ. This teaches us to patiently **endure** the sufferings that come our way, for God's comfort will enable us to be a blessing to **others** in their afflictions. Paul told the church what happened to him in Ephesus, and he encouraged them to pray for him. He did this to strengthen the ties between the Corinthians and himself, for he knew that we grow to **love** those for whom we pray. He then explained the **changes** he had made to his original travel plans (cf. 1 Cor 16:5–9). The effort he put into his explanation teaches us how important it is to maintain a reputation for **truthfulness** and dependability. Fickleness on our part can bring **reproach** on the name of Christ. He went on to urge the church to **forgive** the one who had "caused pain" (the individual who had rejected Paul's authority) and **comfort** him lest he be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. This teaches us the importance of **restoring** those who have sinned, for Satan will always try to take advantage of such situations.
- 2) [December 2] Paul continued by denouncing those who peddled God's word for **profit** (2 Cor 2:17). They relied on "letters of recommendation" to win over their followers, but Paul let the transformed **lives** of the Corinthians speak for him. They were a **living** testament to the glory of the **new** covenant through the ministry of the Spirit. This teaches us that we share in the ministry of **glory** which the old covenant foreshadowed, for the gospel we preach has the power to **free** those held captive by the ministry of death. Paul went on to say that his physical **afflictions** showed that "the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:4, 7). This teaches us not to lose heart when we suffer for the gospel, for our "light **momentary** affliction" is preparing for us "an **eternal** weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4:17). Paul continued by reminding the Corinthians that the things which are seen are **transient**, while the things that are unseen are eternal. This teaches us to be of good courage, for to be absent from the body is to be **present** with God. Paul concluded this part of the letter by reminding the Corinthians that their bodies were the **temple** of the living God and this meant they should never yoke themselves unequally with unbelievers. Rather, they were to **cleanse** themselves "from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). This teaches us the importance of purity and **holiness** in our daily lives.
- 3) [December 3] Paul now addressed the issue of raising **funds** for the impoverished churches in Judea. Paul's comments here contain many principles on giving and good works. *First, the way Paul spoke to the Corinthians about completing their collection teaches us:* (1) Good works are acts of **grace**, and the desire to do them comes from the working of the **Spirit** in our lives. (2) God's will is for us to **complete** the good works which the Spirit has put in our hearts to do. Initial enthusiasm is not a substitute for **persistence** and determination. (3) An unfinished good work can call our love and sincerity into question, and it can also be an **embarrassment** to the cause of Christ. We must never allow **laziness** or **busyness** to keep us from completing these acts of grace. *Second, the reasons Paul gave for having a generous spirit teach us:* (1) The basis for giving is the **example** of Jesus Christ. (2) Being able to contribute to the needs of the saints is a **privilege**, for when we give to them, we're really giving to Jesus. (3) Our willingness to give **cheerfully** and enthusiastically is more important than the **amount** we're able to give. (4) We're free to give whatever we decide in our heart, but we should remember that "whoever sows bountifully will also **reap** bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6). *Finally, the comments Paul made on material blessings teach us:* (1) God gives financial resources to us, not so we can focus on pleasing ourselves, but so that we're able to give to **others**. (2) There will be times when we have an abundance and times when we're in **need**. When we have an abundance, we

should rejoice in the opportunity to **give** to those in need, and when we're in need, we should **welcome** the gifts of others who are blessed by giving to us. (3) The more we're generous toward others, the more God's **grace** will abound in our lives!

- 4) [December 4] Paul now addressed the issue of the "**super**-apostles" that had infiltrated the congregation. Paul's reaction has much to teach us about spiritual maturity. First, Paul recognized that although he walked in the flesh, he waged war by the **Spirit** (2 Cor 10:3–4). Second, Paul did not evaluate himself or his ministry by **comparing** himself with others. Instead, he based his sense of self-worth and success on whether or not he had **obeyed** God. Third, Paul was more concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians than he was about his own **image**. He had deliberately shared the gospel with them free of charge so he could avoid being a **burden** to the church. Fourth, Paul did not hesitate to **expose** the so-called apostles as a threat to the Corinthians. Paul was **bold** in his confrontation of such men, and we must be quick to do the same. Fifth, Paul played the "**fool**" by telling the Corinthians of his religious heritage, his toils and hardships, and his many visions and revelations. He did this, not to exalt himself, but to show the Corinthians that he was indeed a true **apostle** of Jesus Christ. Sixth, Paul recognized his own tendency to become **conceited**, and he accepted God's "thorn in the flesh" as necessary for his soul (2 Cor 12:9). This teaches us to see our weaknesses as opportunities for God to display His power, "for when I am weak, then I am **strong**" (2 Cor 12:10).
- 5) [December 5] Paul's letter to Rome expressed his desire to visit the church and share in their ministry, and it sought their **support** for his future missionary work in **Spain**. Paul also wanted the Romans to understand the **gospel** which he preached, and he carefully explained God's plan to save both Jews and Gentiles alike through **faith** in Jesus Christ (Rom 1:16). He began by affirming that the Gentiles were justly condemned as sinners, for "although they knew God, they did not **honor** him as God or give **thanks** to him" (Rom 1:21). This teaches us that there are no "innocent" people in the world, for **everyone** becomes aware of God's existence. This means that man-made religions (which are forms of **idolatry**) are not the result of man's search for truth, but rather the result of man's **rejection** of God! Paul continued by saying that the Jews were also accountable for their sin, for there is no **partiality** with God. There were advantages and privileges to being a Jew, yes, but with those privileges came the **responsibility** to uphold and obey God's commands. This teaches us that we cannot rely on our church **attendance** or religious upbringing to make us right with God. Paul concluded this section with the statement: "Both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: '**None** is righteous, no, not one'" (Rom 3:9–10). If "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," how can we be justified and righteous before God? "Through faith in Jesus Christ...for...all...are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3:22–25). Paul supported his claim by appealing to **Abraham**, that timeless example of salvation by grace through faith. Abraham was justified by **faith**, not works; by **grace**, not Law; by **divine** power, not human effort.
- 6) [December 6] Paul now explained the results of justification: **peace** and reconciliation with God. Our responsibility is to **nurture** the love God has given us by obeying His commands and **yielding** to the desires of the Spirit. Paul continued by addressing the question of whether **one** man could bring life to so many. Indeed, Jesus could, for just as Adam's **sin** brought condemnation and death to all men, so Jesus' **obedience** brought justification and life to all men (Rom 5:18). Paul next addressed the accusation that by emphasizing grace, he was encouraging a lifestyle of **sin**. "By no means! How can we who **died** to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1–2). This means we have both the **obligation** and the **ability** to live above sin. Paul went on to say, "My brothers, you also have died to the **law** through the body of Christ" (Rom 7:4). Paul explained that the law, which was "holy and righteous and good," could not, in itself, **justify** the sinner; it could only expose their sinful heart and **provoke**

them to more sin. In Christ there is no **condemnation**, for what the law could not do, the **Spirit** could. This means that we are free to walk, not after the **flesh**, but after the Holy Spirit. We know that God is working all things together for our good, that we might be **conformed** to the image of Jesus Christ.

- 7) [December 7] Paul lamented the fact that the majority of his own people, the **Jews**, were not saved. However, Israel's lack of faith did not mean that God's Word had failed, because the promise was to the Israel of **faith**, not **ethnic** Israel (Rom 9:6–7). This meant that **physical** descent did not equal participation in the promised blessing of salvation. Was this unjust? By no means! God is free to grant mercy as He chooses, and by granting mercy to **all** (Rom 11:32), God showed that participation in the promised blessing has nothing to do with **human** effort (Rom 9:16). That being said, we are accountable for our sin, for God created us as **free** agents, and we're responsible for our decisions (Rom 9:19–23). God provided access to the promised blessing by **faith** in Jesus Christ, not by **works** of the law (Rom 9:32). This is precisely where the Jews went wrong, for they sought to establish their own righteousness through **law-keeping** rather than seeking God's righteousness by faith. The law had a righteousness that led to life in the sense that those who kept the law avoided the **death** that was threatened to law-breakers, but it never offered **spiritual** life. Did Israel's unbelief mean that God had rejected His people? By no means! There is even now a **remnant** of believing Jews who participate in the promised blessing by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Jews' rejection of Christ meant the **reconciliation** of the world to God (Rom 11:15). This implied that the Gentiles should not be **arrogant** of their inclusion in the olive tree of believing Israel, for even though unbelieving branches were **broken** off and they were grafted in, they too would be cut off if they did not **continue** by faith in God's kindness.
- 8) [December 8] Paul called the Romans to live out in **practice** what was true of them in spirit, and his commands are the **calling** of our lives. First, and perhaps most important, we are called to **consecrate** ourselves to God (Rom 12:1). Before we were saved, we had nothing to offer God except our sin, but now that we have been washed in the cleansing blood of Christ, we can offer **ourselves** to God as **living, holy** sacrifices (cf. Lev 1:1–4; Num 3:9–13). This is an act of submission and **consecration**, and it means that we give up the right to have our own way and **surrender** unconditionally to God's will for our lives. Second, we are called to be **transformed** by "the renewal of our mind" (Rom 12:2). This means we must **soak** our minds in God's Word and allow the Spirit to conform our thinking to God's. We are called to use our spiritual gifts in humble **service** to the church, not thinking more highly of ourselves than we should, but working to **build** up our fellow believers. We are called to **submit** to the governing authorities, for all power and authority finds its source in **God**, and those that exist have been put there by Him. As long as man's authority does not contradict God's will (Acts 5:28–29), we must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of **conscience**. We are called to fulfill the law by **loving** others, for "love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:10). We are called to **cast** off the works of darkness and **put** on the armor of light, not making **provision** for the flesh to gratify its desires, but putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 9) [December 9] The last part of Romans reveals Paul's perspective on evangelism and discipleship, and it has significant insights for a biblical theology of **missions**. First, this passage teaches us that all missionary efforts are dependent on **God**, and the results must be recognized as the work of His **grace** (Rom 15:17–18). This means that while planning, preparation and resources are needed to accomplish the work of missions, the most important factor is the powerful, supernatural **work** of the Spirit. Second, the task of missions is the **priestly** privilege of ministering Christ to the nations (Rom 15:16). Third, missions must maintain a balance between the ultimate goal of establishing mature **churches** and the urgent need to **evangelize** those who have never heard the gospel (Rom

15:19–20). Paul’s approach to missions was to proclaim the gospel, establish a congregation of new converts, and then **disciple** those believers until they were **mature** enough to continue the cycle themselves. The ultimate goal of missions is to see maturing fellowships of believers who are themselves **reaching** out to make disciples. Finally, our churches must engage in **partnerships** of mutual benefit in order to advance the cause of Christ around the world. Paul stressed the need for partnership in missions, and as he looked to **Spain**, he knew he needed help from the church in Rome to accomplish his goal.

10) [December 10] Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders has much to teach us about spiritual **leadership**. When the elders came, Paul could have said, ‘Now be sure to remember all the things I taught you.’ Instead, he reminded them of how he had **lived** among them (Acts 20:18). This teaches us that the essence of leadership is setting the right **example** for others.

- Paul served God with **humility**.
- Paul faithfully **endured** persecution.
- Paul boldly **declared** “anything that was profitable” (Acts 20:20).
- Paul shared the gospel with both **Jews** and **Gentiles**.
- Paul followed the leadership of the **Spirit**.
- Paul refused to be **swayed** by the prevailing doctrinal winds of his day.
- Paul warned his congregation of the danger of **false** teachers.
- Paul did not **covet** material possessions.
- Paul **worked** hard to supply his own needs.

11) [December 11] When God sent Ananias to restore Paul’s sight, he told him that Paul was “a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and **kings** and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). The time had come for this to be fulfilled, and in the space of about two years, Paul shared the gospel with **Felix**, **Festus**, and **Herod** Agrippa II. Paul took full advantage of his situation, and he reasoned with Felix and Drusilla “about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25). This teaches us several lessons. First, it reminds us that God desires “**all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Second, it challenges us to be **bold** in our interaction with others. Paul was not hostile or offensive, but neither was he timid in preaching the gospel. Third, it teaches us the importance of **integrity**, for Paul refused to give Felix a **bribe**.

12) [December 12] There are several lessons we can learn from Paul’s long and dangerous voyage to **Rome**. First, Luke and Aristarchus showed their love and support for Paul by **going** with him on his journey. This teaches us that true friendship demonstrates itself by a willingness to **suffer** with those we love. Second, Paul took the initiative and **warned** the centurion, the captain and the owner of the ship not to leave Fair Havens. This teaches us that we have an obligation to look out for the **safety** of others and the **security** of their possessions. Third, God didn’t send an angel to Paul until all **hope** of being saved was abandoned (Acts 27:20). This teaches us that God often **waits** until all human effort has failed and nothing remains except complete dependence on Him. Fourth, Paul boldly **told** the entire ship about God’s promise, and he staked his life and reputation on the truth of God’s word. This shows us that true faith **believes** what God says and **trusts** His word no matter how difficult the situation. Fifth, Paul’s **calm** behavior in the face of imminent death testified to God’s faithfulness and gave his words a measure of authority. This teaches us that the best witness we have is how we **act** in desperate situations. Sixth, Paul patiently **endured** the hardship caused by others’ poor decisions, and he refused to feel **sorry** for himself, even when he was bitten by a viper! This teaches us to “share in suffering as a good **soldier** of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:3). Finally, Paul continued to seek **ministry** opportunities in spite of all he had been through. This teaches us that

opportunities to share the gospel abound for those who have the **eyes** to see them.

- 13) [December 13] Philippians is the first of what are known as the “**Prison** Epistles” (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon), so named because they were written during Paul’s imprisonment in **Rome**. This letter has many insights on how to be a disciple of Jesus. First, Paul emphasized the need to **rejoice**. This teaches us that joy is both a **decision** and an **emotion**. As we **focus** our minds on what God is doing and choose to **praise** God in every situation, the Spirit produces within us a feeling of joy. Second, Paul highlighted the fact that his imprisonment had served to **advance** the gospel. This teaches us to **notice** and **rejoice** in how God is using the circumstances in our lives to spread the good news and make us more like Jesus. Third, Paul encouraged the church to let their **conduct** be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27). Rather than acting from selfish ambition and conceit, they were to **humble** themselves, considering **others** as more important. This teaches us to imitate the mindset and attitude of **Jesus**. Fourth, Paul warned against false **teachers**. The Jews who demanded circumcision and works of the law were quick to tout their **fleshly** credentials. Paul dismissed such claims and reminded the Philippians that he could boast of the same things, yet he counted them as **rubbish** “in order that I may know Christ” (Phil 3:8). This teaches us that the righteousness which really matters is the righteousness that depends on **faith**, for the ultimate credential is to **know** Christ and the power of His resurrection. Finally, Paul admonished the Philippians to be **content** in every situation. He revealed that the secret to obeying this command is found in the glorious truth: “I can do **all** things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). This teaches us to regard what God has given us to be **enough** and rest in the knowledge that He will supply our needs as He sees fit.
- 14) [December 14] In the first half of Ephesians, Paul shared what God is doing through the **Son** in the **Church** by the **Spirit**. Before the creation of the world, God sovereignly and graciously **chose** (elected) Jesus to be the one through whom the world would be saved (Eph 1:4). This teaches us that election is **Christocentric**, that is, election is realized and centered “**in** Christ.” God also **determined** (predestined) that all who repent of their sins and believe in Christ would be spiritually **united** with Him and **adopted** as sons (Eph 1:5). This teaches us that our election is both **corporate** and **conditional**. It is corporate in the sense that our status as elect comes only from being united by faith **with** Christ. We are elect because we are “**in Him**,” the elect One. It is conditional in the sense that our election is based on our **obedience** to God’s requirements of faith and repentance. This means that no one is predestined to be saved or lost. Rather, **all** men are called to believe in Christ (Matt 22:14) and those who “**continue** in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel” shall be saved (Col 1:22–23). Paul went on to say that everyone, whether **Jew** or **Gentile**, must place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. When they do, they are **raised** from death to spiritual life and are made “**alive** together with Christ” (Eph 2:5). This teaches us that Christ’s body, the **church**, is made up of all those who are “**in** Christ.” This wonderful truth is the **mystery** of Christ, that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, **members** of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6).
- 15) [December 15] Having reminded the Ephesians of their new identity in Christ, Paul now exhorted them to **walk** worthy of their high and holy calling. Once again, this reminds us that theology matters, for right **thinking** must come before right living. Paul began with a plea for love and **unity**. This teaches us that we must treat our brothers and sisters with **patience** and gentleness, **bearing** with them in love and humility. Paul went on to say that within the unity of the church, there is a diversity of **gifts**, and when they are exercised properly, the Spirit will lead the church to **maturity**. Notice that Paul said that the apostles and shepherds and teachers were given “to **equip** the saints for the **work** of the ministry” (Eph 4:12). This means that the work of the ministry is **my** responsibility. Paul then pointed out the impact that individual **holiness** has on the health and

growth of the church. The church **depends** on our consistent obedience to God's Word in order to succeed. Above all, we must **yield** each day to the desires of the Holy Spirit. Rather than being "drunk with wine," we are to be under the Spirit's **influence**, allowing Him to guide and control all we do and say (Eph 5:18). As we walk in the light, the Spirit will lead us to **submit** "to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21). Paul concluded by saying, "Finally, be **strong** in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (Eph 6:10). This teaches us that the battles we face are ultimately **spiritual** battles.

- 16) [December 16] In his letter to the Colossians, Paul declared the truth which would guard them from heresy and motivate them to persevere in the faith: the **supremacy** and **sufficiency** of Jesus Christ (Col 1:15–20). First, Paul emphasized Christ's supremacy over creation, saying that Jesus is "the **firstborn** of all creation" (Col 1:15). We usually associate the term firstborn with birth, as in the first child born (cf. Luke 2:7), but it can also denote priority in **time** or supremacy in **rank**. Jesus was **before** "all creation" in time, and He is **over** "all creation" in authority. Paul was **not** saying that Jesus is the first created being, but rather that Jesus is supreme over all things as Creator, for "all things were created **through** him and for him" (Col 1:16). Second, Paul declared Christ's sufficiency in **redemption**, saying that "through him," God was pleased to **reconcile** "all things" to Himself, "making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). *The truth of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ refutes false teaching.* In Christ, the "whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). This refutes any system of thought which denies either the **humanity** or the **deity** of Christ. In Christ, we received a spiritual circumcision by participating in His death and resurrection (Col 2:11–12). This refutes those who insist on **adding** law-keeping to faith in Jesus. In Christ, we died to the world and its fallen ideas and values (Col 2:20–22). This refutes those who demand **asceticism** (false humility, severe self-discipline) and the **worship** of angels. *The truth of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ also motivates us to live a holy life.* In Christ, we have been raised to heavenly places. This motivates us to **set** our minds on things above, not on things on earth. In Christ, we died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. This motivates us to put to **death** the deeds of the flesh. In Christ, we have been raised to newness of life. This motivates us to put on a "compassionate heart, **kindness**, humility, meekness and patience" (Col 3:12). Our **union** with Christ is the basis of everything we are spiritually, and if we **abide** in Him, He will empower us to live a holy and righteous life.
- 17) [December 17] Paul's letter to Philemon is a good example of how to **resolve** conflict between Christians. First, Paul brought the disputing parties together by addressing them as **family**. Second, Paul was courteous and **tactful**, and his wording allowed both parties to save **face** in an awkward and difficult situation. Third, rather than giving a command, Paul **appealed** to Philemon to do the right thing. Fourth, Paul treated Philemon as an equal **partner** in ministry, even though as an apostle, he was Philemon's spiritual superior. In all, this letter shows us how to exercise spiritual authority and leadership in a **kind** and loving way. Jude's letter shows how concerned he was about the reports of false **teachers**, and he wanted to encourage his fellow believers to "**contend** for the faith" (Jude 1:3). Our responsibility is threefold: (1) to **build** ourselves up in the faith, **pray** in the Spirit, and keep ourselves in God's love (Jude 1:20–21); (2) to identify and **expose** those who have "crept in unnoticed" (Jude 1:4); (3) to **save** those who have been seduced by false doctrine, acting in a spirit of mercy, but also with **fear**, knowing the danger of such teachings (Jude 1:22–23).
- 18) [December 18] Paul's first personal letter to Timothy. Although there is a wealth of instruction and guidance in 1 Timothy for those who are in leadership positions in the church, Paul also exhorted Timothy to personal **holiness**. Paul said, "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good **conscience**" (1 Tim 1:18–19). This teaches us that as we fight against false teaching, we must be careful to stand **firm** in the faith and keep our conscience **clear**.

Paul said, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all** people” (1 Tim 2:1). This teaches us to be **diligent** in prayer, making intercession for all men, not just for those who are close to us. Paul said, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather **train** yourself for godliness” (1 Tim 4:7). This teaches us to **soak** ourselves in God’s Word, striving to understand the truth and **engrafting** it into our hearts and minds. Paul said, “Let no one despise you for your **youth**, but set the believers an **example** in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). This teaches us that no matter how young or old we are, our responsibility is to set an example of what it means to be a dedicated **disciple** of Jesus. Paul said, “But as for you, O man of God, **flee** these things [the desire to be rich and the love of money]. **Pursue** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. **Fight** the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim 6:11–12). This teaches us to avoid the pursuit of material wealth and possessions, and instead, to make **godliness** and holiness our goal.

- 19) [December 19] Peter’s first letter to the believers in Asia Minor (modern day **Turkey**). Peter was aware of the **persecution** these Christians had experienced, and he knew that more suffering was on the way (cf. 1 Pet 4:12–19). This prompted him to write a letter of encouragement and exhortation. Peter’s comments have much to teach us about suffering. First, suffering is part of God’s **plan** for our lives. It isn’t pleasant, but it is **purposeful**. Second, suffering **tests** the genuineness of our faith. This means that suffering is intended to **refine** and perfect our faith. As we endure by God’s grace, the fire of suffering gives our faith a **quality** that will result in the praise and approval of Christ. Third, suffering is evidence of our **union** with Christ. This means that suffering **demonstrates** that we are in Christ, for the Spirit rests on those who **share** in Christ’s sufferings. Fourth, suffering is a reason to **rejoice**. Suffering is a **sign** to us that we will be saved when Christ’s glory is revealed. This is grounds for joy and gladness, for those who suffer with the Son, will also **rule** and reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12).
- 20) [December 20] In his letter to Titus, Paul charged him to **rebuke** sinful practices, **teach** godly living, and **model** Christlike character. Paul was especially forceful in his command to rebuke sin: “rebuke them sharply,” “they must be silenced,” “let no one disregard you,” and “insist on these things.” This teaches us that **sin** must not be tolerated in the church. Those in leadership are charged to **confront** believers for their sin, and believers are expected to **submit** to the rebuke of their leaders. Paul also repeatedly called for believers to be “**self-controlled**.” This teaches us that self-control is a fundamental characteristic of godly living. We are called to renounce all worldly passions and to **resist** the desires of the flesh. Paul also exhorted believers to good works, saying over and over again: “be a model of good works,” “be zealous for good works,” “be ready for every good work,” and “devote yourselves to good works.” This teaches us that we must be **busy** in the service of God’s Kingdom. We’re all prone to **laziness**, and we must fight this tendency by actively looking for ways to be fruitful in the work of the ministry.
- 21) [December 21] Hebrews was an **anonymous** letter to the Christian community in **Rome**, who had recently gone through a time of **persecution**. Many of them were discouraged and in danger of **falling away** from faith in Christ. Knowing this, the author of Hebrews warned his readers of the peril of **unbelief** and urged them to endure to the end by **faith**. He did this by proving the **superiority** of Jesus and his covenant, and then calling the disciples to remain firm in their **commitment** to Christ. The author began by showing that the OT proclaims the Messiah to be the **Son** of God (Ps 2; 45; 110). This means that Jesus is **better** than the angels, for they are ministering spirits sent out to **serve** for the sake of the saints (Heb 1:14). This teaches us that we should pay *very close* **attention** to what Jesus has said, lest we **drift** away from it. The author continued by showing that the OT also proclaims the Messiah to be the son of **man** (Ps 8:4–6; Heb 2:9). As man, Jesus was made **lower** than the angels for a little while, but **now** he is crowned with glory and honor, and all

things will be put in **subjection** under his feet. His incarnation means that he is **flesh** and blood just like us, and his obedient suffering **qualified** him to be our High Priest. He made **propitiation** for our sins, and because he himself **suffered** when tempted, he is able to help us when we are tempted. The author then showed that Jesus is superior to **Moses** (Heb 3:1). Moses was a faithful **servant** in God's house, but Jesus was faithful *over* God's house as **Builder** and **Son**. If we remain **faithful**, like Moses, then we will be a part of Jesus' house. But if we **fall away**, like those Moses led from Egypt, then we will not enter God's **rest**. This teaches us to fear the danger of **unbelief**.

- 22) [December 22] Having introduced the theme of Jesus as High Priest, the author continued by saying that Jesus was a priest after the order of **Melchizedek** (Heb 5:10). He was about to explain the significance of this truth, when he paused and rebuked his readers for their **sluggish** hearing (Heb 5:11). They knew the truth, but they were no longer responding in **obedience** to God's voice. This teaches us the importance of consistent obedience to God's Word, for if we become negligent and indifferent to the Spirit's guidance, we will regress into **immaturity**, **unfruitfulness**, and finally, **apostasy**. We must **submit** to God's will and **allow** the Spirit to carry us forward to maturity. We should be able to **teach** others the basics of the Christian faith, and we should be **training** our powers of discernment to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:12–6:2). The author continued by showing the Jesus' priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the priesthood of **Levi** as given by the Law. Jesus took his office by God's **oath**—the Levitical priests did not. Jesus continues in his priestly role **forever**—the Levitical priests all died. Jesus lived a **sinless** life—the Levitical priests all sinned. Jesus offered himself **once** for **all**—the Levitical priests offered animals over and over. Not only that, but Jesus' **ministry** is better, his **covenant** is better, his **blood** is better, and his **sacrifice** is better.
- 23) [December 23] Having shown that Christ and his covenant are superior to the Mosaic covenant and its priesthood, the author urged his readers to **draw** near to God and **hold** fast to their faith. This teaches us the importance of **endurance**, for it is only when we have done God's will to the very **end** that we will receive what has been promised (Heb 10:36). The author's quote of Habakkuk 2:4 teaches us that God is only pleased with those who **live by** faith. Saving faith is the **attitude** of a **lifetime**, not merely the act of a moment. Our lives must be characterized by a **present, living** faith. Living by faith means living as though things which haven't happened yet will surely come to **pass**. It means living as though things which cannot be seen are really **there**. Faith is not imagining what we want to happen and then believing that it will. Instead, faith is **believing** what God has said, **obeying** what God has commanded, and **trusting** in what God has promised. Our task is to **lay** aside anything that would slow us down, **reject** any sin which would entangle us, and **run** with endurance the race set before us. We must keep our eyes **fixed** on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. We must "strive for **peace** with everyone, and for the **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). We must not be like **Esau**, who squandered a precious birthright for a single bowl of **soup**! We should be **grateful** that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and we should offer well-pleasing **service** to God, in reverence and awe, for God is a consuming fire!
- 24) [December 24] Peter wrote previously about the persecution the believers were suffering from those outside the church, and he encouraged the congregation to stand fast in the faith. Peter now wrote concerning the theological and moral **heresy** the believers were facing from those **within** the church. The threat came from false teachers who had once been **disciples** themselves! This teaches us that it's possible for a believer to **fall away** from the faith. We must be on guard against the temptations of **pride**, **greed** and **sensuality**, for they are just as real today as they were in Peter's day (2 Pet 2:10, 15, 18). The false teachers dismissed the apostles' eyewitness accounts of Jesus' ministry as **myths**, **questioned** the truth of Scripture, denied the **second** coming of Christ, and twisted **Paul's** teachings into error (cf. 2 Pet 1:16, 21; 3:4, 16). This teaches us that we can recognize

false teachers by what they **say**. They deny God's Word and teach their **own** ideas instead of the Spirit's inspired truth. The false teachers also **exploited** the church, **enticed** those who were weak, **despised** authority, and encouraged others to **indulge** in the passions of the flesh. This teaches us that we can recognize false teachers by what they **do**. They refuse to be **holy** and insist that God's grace is a license to **sin**. Peter knew how dangerous these false teachers were to the church, and he urged his readers to be diligent to **grow** in **grace**. If they would be **diligent** to increase in the spiritual character qualities he mentioned, they would be **safe** from apostasy and their calling and election would be **secure** (2 Pet 1:5–11).

- 25) [December 25] Paul's last recorded letter was written to **Timothy** from the prisons of **Rome**. His second imprisonment was very different than his first. Before, he had his own rented house with only one guard (cf. Acts 28:16, 30); now he was kept in close **confinement**. Before, he was surrounded by friends; now only **Luke** was with him (2 Tim 4:10–12). Before, he had hoped for freedom; now he expected to **die** (2 Tim 4:6). Notice, however, that although Paul spoke candidly about his difficulties, he was not depressed or discouraged. Instead, he was **trusting** in God and **relying** on His strength (2 Tim 4:16–18). Timothy was most likely at **Ephesus**, providing leadership and guidance to the church. Around two years earlier, much of Rome had **burned** to the ground, and **Nero** blamed the **Christians**. It was during this time of fear and doubt that Paul urged Timothy to "fan into **flame** the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of **power** and **love** and **self-control**" (2 Tim 1:6–7). This teaches us that we should never be **ashamed** of the gospel or of those who preach the good news. Instead, we should share in **suffering** as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Paul went on to call Timothy to a life of dedicated **service** to God, and his words are meant for us as well. We, too, should **endure** to the end for the sake of the gospel (2 Tim 2:8–13). We, too, should **teach** sound doctrine and **avoid** useless quarrels (2 Tim 2:14–16). We should understand that **difficult** times will come, and with them will come **false** teachers (2 Tim 3:1–7). We should make it our goal to **follow** Paul's example and live a life of **love** and service to God.
- 26) [December 26] 1 John is filled with helpful and straightforward teaching on what it means to be a **genuine disciple** of Christ. John knew there were false **teachers** and **antichrists** in the church (1 John 2:18, 26), and he wrote this letter to reaffirm the **truth** which his readers already knew (1 John 2:21). John taught that false teachers and antichrists can be recognized by what they **say** and how they **live**. They will deny that Jesus is the **Messiah**, and they will say Jesus is not fully **human**. (1 John 2:22; 4:2). They will say they have fellowship with God, but they will walk in **darkness** (1 John 1:6). They will say, "I know God," but they will not keep God's **commands** (1 John 2:4). They will say, "I love God," but they will hate their **brother** (1 John 4:20). This means that we must **examine** the lives of those who claim to be disciples of Christ. If they profess faith but practice **sin**, they are false. If they love in word but hate in **deed**, they are false. If they claim to love God but love the **world**, they are false. John also told his readers how to **recognize** a genuine disciple of Christ. A true disciple will walk in the **light** and accept the cleansing blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). They will **confess** and **repent** of their sins, and seek God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Above all, their life will be characterized by **love** (1 John 4:7), which is the defining mark of a true disciple, and true love for God always expresses itself in **obedience**. Obedience then gives us the **assurance** of salvation (1 John 2:3).
- 27) [December 27] Jesus appeared to John and gave him the **revelation** (*apokalypsis*) which the Father had given Him. John wrote what he saw and sent it to the **seven** churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Jesus' choice of these congregations was no accident. There were other churches, such as Corinth, Philippi and Berea, but Jesus chose these because what He said to them needed to be heard by **everyone**. The message to Ephesus teaches us that it's possible to **abandon** the love we had when we first believed (Rev 2:4). When Jesus said, "Repent, and do the **works** you did at first"

(Rev 2:5), He showed us that **obedience** is the heart and soul of love. The message to Smyrna teaches us that the believer who is poor in this world's wealth is **rich** in the glorious treasures of the next. There is a crown of life waiting for the one who will trust Jesus and be **faithful** unto death. The message to Pergamum teaches us that each church will be held responsible for allowing false **teaching** in their midst. Believers have a duty to call false teachers to repentance, and if they refuse, to **expel** them from the congregation. The message to Thyatira teaches us that each church will be held responsible for tolerating moral **compromise**. Those who promote immorality and sexual indulgence must be **confronted**, and if they will not repent, they must be **cut** off from the church. The message to Sardis teaches us that it's possible to have a godly reputation and yet be spiritually **dead** (Rev 3:1). The Spirit said, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jam 2:17), and Jesus commands us to show our faith by our **works**. The message to Philadelphia teaches us that it's possible to live in such a way that Jesus has **nothing** against us. Our responsibility is to believe God's Word and patiently **endure** the persecution of the world. If we do, Jesus will **keep** us from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole earth (Rev 3:10). The message to Laodicea teaches us about the self-deception of "**lukewarm**" works (Rev 3:15–18). Such works have the appearance of faith but lack the **obedience** of love.

- 28) [December 28] After giving John His messages to the seven churches, Jesus brought John into **heaven** in the Spirit. The voice speaking to John told him that he was about to see **future** events (Rev 4:1). These events will take place during the seven years known as the **Tribulation** (Dan 9:24–27). The first thing John saw in heaven was God the Father seated on a **throne**. The fact that God manifests Himself this way teaches us that **kingship** and **authority** are foundational to our understanding of who God is. He is the great King and Creator of all things, and this truth compels us to honor and **worship** Him. John saw a **scroll** in the Father's right hand, sealed with seven **seals**. This scroll contains the wrath and judgment God is preparing for a world which has rejected the precious blood of His Son, the **Lamb** slain from the foundation of the world. **Jesus** is the only one who can open the scroll and its seven seals, and He is able because He has "**conquered**" (Rev 5:5). God wants us to **overcome** just as Jesus did. John watched as the scroll was opened and God's **judgments** were carried out on earth and in heaven. Between the sixth and seventh seal, John saw a great **multitude** that no one could number from every nation, standing before God's throne with palm branches in their hands. John was told, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have **washed** their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14). How amazing to think that even when God is pouring out His wrath on the wicked, He is still **welcoming** those who turn to Him in sorrow and repentance!
- 29) [December 29] When Jesus broke the seventh seal, all activity in heaven stopped and there was **silence** for about half an hour. This was fitting, for the seven **trumpet** judgments were about to sound, and they were more terrible than the seals. Before the angels blew their trumpets, another angel came and offered incense to God mingled with the **prayers** of the saints. This teaches us that our prayers are like a sweet smelling **incense** which God **savors** in satisfaction and delight. God also takes what we say **seriously**, for after the angel offered the incense and prayers, he filled a censer with fire and threw it on the earth. The world shook and shuddered under the impact of God's **judgment** in response to His people's prayers! The seven angels sounded their trumpets, but men would not **repent** of their idolatry or their murders or their immorality or their thefts. Yet God is **patient** and longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, and He sent two **witnesses** to preach a message of repentance. Instead of listening to them, the people did everything they could to **kill** them. God knew that when He **raised** the witnesses from the dead, some of the people would "give **glory** to God" (Rev 11:13). This teaches us that God gives the wicked every **chance** to repent before the end.

- 30) [December 30] After the vision of the two beasts, John witnessed God's last call for repentance. Three angels flew over the earth with a final **warning**. This teaches us that God desires **everyone** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). After the reaping of the earth, John watched as the seven angels poured out the seven **bowl** judgments. In the middle of these judgments, the angel in charge of the waters cried out: "**Just** are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they **deserve!**" (Rev 16:5–6). This teaches us that even God's wrath is worthy of **praise**. As the bowls continued to be poured out, the wicked refused to **repent**. Indeed, John said three different times that they **cursed** God's name (Rev 16:9, 11, 21). This shows us that people can become so hardened that even the worst judgment only **fuels** their hatred of God. After the last bowl was poured, one of the seven angels took John aside to see the destruction of "**Babylon** the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations" (Rev 17:5). Babylon was the name given to "the great **city**," a place of commercial and political power which will dominate the world during the Tribulation. As John watched, the kings of the earth **wept** and wailed as they saw the smoke of her destruction, and the heavens **rejoiced** to see the downfall of the city which had killed both prophets and saints (Rev 18:24). This reminds us not to put our **trust** in any earthly institution or government, for the kingdom of God's Son is the only kingdom that will last forever.
- 31) [December 31] After the seven bowl judgments and the destruction of Babylon, John heard the **praise** of heaven ring out in celebration of God's wrath on the wicked. It was time for the Lamb's **marriage** ceremony and celebration feast, and all who are invited are blessed (Rev 19:9). We're privileged to be part of the **bride** of Christ, and one day we'll be with Him forever! John watched as Jesus came out of heaven on a white **horse**. Jesus is coming again! He is coming to defeat the **beast** and the false **prophet** and cast them into the lake of fire. He is coming to seize that ancient serpent **Satan** and bind him for a thousand years. He is coming to **resurrect** those martyred for His testimony during the Great Tribulation and reign with them on earth. As John looked on, the thousand years flew past and Satan was **released** from his prison. He was allowed to go out and **deceive** the nations and gather them together for battle against Jerusalem. This teaches us that a perfect environment cannot produce a perfect **heart**. We must work to transform people's **lives** with the gospel, for only then will a transformed environment really matter. John watched as Jesus defeated Satan for the last time and cast him into the lake of fire. Then he saw a new **heaven** and a new **earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Our eternal heritage is a new heaven and a new earth and a heavenly **city** of radiant splendor! Most of all, our heritage is that God will **live** with us forever. Now that's a future worth fighting for!