

Opening prayer and insights from last week.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, and the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Luke 23:42, 43 (criminal on cross) Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

The death on the cross made the way for those who believe to be with him in 'paradise'. The power of the resurrection makes the way for a new life for us now and in the age to come. 'Fallen asleep' used here is at death, in Christ, the spirit passes on to be with the Lord for the time of the next age. Discuss what this means for the believers that know him down through the centuries. (Those who never had opportunity are dealt with differently) Jesus is the one who controls revelation of himself to a person, you are simply a messenger through whom the Spirit can work. Doesn't that make it easier?

1 Peter 3:13-16 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

If you set your heart on being an effective witness for Christ, will he not gift you accordingly so that you can be effective for him? Jesus wants to reach out through us. Comment on this concept and passage above. What are the desires of your heart in regard to serving at this time?

Acts 10:44-48 While Peter was speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Some people have experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit in a water baptism. True water baptism is full immersion by one with Spiritual authority in the body. There is nothing explaining why water baptism is needed, yet it is a command. My belief is that being baptized into the body of Christ this way gives you an anointing of his Spirit to strengthen you as a disciple. Comment on this concept and above passage. You don't need water baptism to be 'saved'.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge, by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and he gives them to each just as he determines.

Note: 'miraculous powers', I believe is a bad interpretation for 'power over evil spirits'.

Matthew 10:1 (Jesus) He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing ...

The above passages show that Christ has given spiritual abilities to different people in the body to carry out works of service. Remember, it is by his Spirit his work is done, not your natural ability. His kingdom is built by his Spirit, not your natural abilities. There are only 9 'manifestation' of the Spirit to allow working of the many gifts of service given to the body. Each believer has one or more to enable them to serve in the body. For example, an empowerment to preach would require 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' to allow the work of the Spirit under that authority given by the Lord. Discuss the implications for each in the group and consider what should be prayed later regarding this.

Romans 2:28, 29 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly; nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Romans 7:6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

The first Christians were called, 'followers of the way'. The covenant changed with Jesus' blood sacrifice. What does the 'way' mean and what are the implications for each of you in the group? Do you believe this is an easier way to serve God than by the codes of conduct that most religions have for themselves?

Consider praying and asking the Lord to show each of you how you might serve and to show each of you the gifts of the Spirit he has given you in order to do this.