

Order of Worship for June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013, title, “Sound Reasoning”, text, Philippians 1:19-26

Opening Song:

Welcome and Invocation: Isaiah 45:15-25

Ministry Moment:

Message Theme: If the believer puts the glory of Jesus first then there will be peace and joy in all things

Worship Theme: Thanks to God for His sustaining love

Sunday Evening in the Word  
The Christian and Worldly Authorities: 1 Peter 3:1-7  
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Church Library

**Opening Song:**

“Glorious Day”

overhead

**Welcome**

**Invocation:**

Isaiah 45:15-25

**Ministry Moment:**

Vacation Bible School

**Special Music:**

“Who Will Pray?” by EFC Choir

**Preparing the Heart in Song:**

“You are Holy (Prince of Peace)”

overhead

“Behold Our God”

overhead

“Jesus Shall Reign”

overhead

**Offering and Offertory**

“Sing Allelu (Ode 40)” by EFC Choir

**Message:**

“Sound Reasoning”

Philippians 1:19-26 Pastor John Bronson

**Response to the Word:**

“Be Still, My Soul”

Song # 712

**Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer**

**Sunday Evening in the Word:**

5:30-7 pm, in the EFC Library  
The Christian and Worldly Authorities:  
1 Peter 3:1-7

“The Prayer Closet”

June 23, 2013

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

**Carlisle: ARM to Butte County Jail:** Praise God for volunteers to mentor inmates in the jail, for a discount from Navigators on discipleship curriculum, and for donors who are stepping up to pay for it. Pray that God would use this program to mature faith, change lives, and build His kingdom in our community. Pray for Ian Carlisle, as he speaks in Butte County churches about the spiritual opportunity in our jail. Please pray for Roxanne Carlisle also, who was diagnosed with pneumonia this last Wednesday.

**President Obama and Governor Brown:** the Spirit will instruct them in the wisdom of freedom over comfort; the Lord will school them in the humility needed for the righteous use of great power; the Father will impress on them the grace of His loving care

**Vacation Bible School:** the Lord will bring those children and families He has prepared for hearing the gospel; the Spirit will stir up joy and love in the hearts of all the staff; the Lord will protect all from danger and open the hearts of children and their families to His truth

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:** David Alpern, US Army (Jennifer Alpern): that he experience a closer walk with God; that he will make good financial decisions now that he has an income of his own; that he is mentally prepared to be deployed

**Young Adult of the Week:** Lottie Conley, CSU Chico (daughter of Dave and Barbara): that she retain the information presented to her in summer class; praise for good grades this last semester!

**Please pray for our homebound family members:** Joe Avery, Hilda Chapman, Carol Koehler, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Fred & Jean Pauly

(please call the office to request updates)

I.

The title for today’s message is “Sound Reasoning”. The text is Philippians 1:19-26. Someone recently made this comment: What if God’s purpose for marriage is not to make us happy, but to make us holy? When I listened to that, when I heard that, I thought, “That resonates very well with me.” Those of you who are acquainted with this church and my wife and me know that we have an extremely satisfying marriage, but it has not been trouble free. I derive immense happiness from our marriage, but I must say that our marriage has been a powerful workshop for holiness. There are a lot of things about me which in the course of time have had to be amended, shifted, reshaped in order that I would in fact be the kind of man, husband and father needed for that situation, and as my wife and children can attest, I was not always graceful in the adjustments.

Holiness is not an easily gained quality in one’s life. But to have said that about marriage is certainly equal and the same about a church. What if becoming a Christian and joining a body of believers is not about finding happiness, but rather it is about the journey of holiness? That makes more sense to us, but it is not necessarily therefore any easier. Sometimes becoming the kind of people we need to be if we are going to be the servants of God in the contexts of others requires some painful adjustments: to deal with honesty and directness with others that doesn’t always come naturally. If you look to the “Questions” (at the end of the text), you will see that I have a question right at the beginning which is designed to prime the mind as we think about this portion of the word of God: “Do you see a connection between happiness and holiness?” Are they positively reinforcing, or are they always going in opposite directions? “How would you describe that connection?” Be in thought about that. Read with me now Philippians 1:19-26. Recall that Paul writes from prison in Rome, and that was a very dangerous place to be. The rule of law was “thin”, the passions of men were thick and powerful and at any moment he could lose his life, and Paul knew that. But he says to the Philippians, Paul is saying, even so, I am on a positive note.

*(v. 19) “Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.*

I would encourage you to take a moment and look at that last verse; perhaps underscore it or put a mark beside it, for it is an interesting motivation and expectation in the Christian life.

If you think about these verses, you have to put yourselves inside those verses. If you do, then you might move to a sympathetic view of the medieval Catholic notion of two kinds of Christians. They had established this kind of distinction. There were the laypeople, like you, and then there were the “hyper-spiritual ones” like me! What they actually meant was that there were people who were willing to devote their lives to Christ entirely and then there were people who knew they needed to attend the normal business of life. When you read someone like Paul who says, “You know to live or die is the same to me; my entire being, all that I am is devoted to Jesus Christ. If He asks me to lay down my life, I’m doing it,” most of us would say, let me think about that. In the normal way of things, don’t we wrestle with this? Let’s say God came to me and said, “John, I need you to go where somebody in this congregation went, behind the communist “veil”.” What would I say? “Look, Lord, I have a wife, I have children. I have bunch of responsibilities in this situation. I cannot just go!” And that would not be a trivial conversation, because the obligations that are mine I believe are mine by God’s direction. So it is not a light matter, and I think most of us understand that. Can you entertain as equal alternatives living or dying for the glory of Christ? That is what Paul sets before his readers. They knew he was in prison. They knew it was exceedingly dangerous to be in those prisons. They knew he could be gone in a moment.

As my comments so far have indicated, [we are asking] how are we to think about Paul’s statements, his commitments as they apply to us common people? I think that all of us can appreciate the relevance of personal reliance on the Holy Spirit. That is what he says, “I am sure that by your prayers and by the Spirit of Jesus...” We can identify with that; that is not a problem with us. I received a call today from a couple from this congregation who have experienced a minor accident while traveling. She faces surgery and they are disheartened. They want our prayers. I spoke today with the wife of a man who recently had heart surgery. When he was in the hospital he has a lovely testimony: “I can feel the people’s prayers.” We value that; we ought to value that. We should cry out for that; we should look for that. We want that to be true. [It is] the ministry of God’s people through the Holy Spirit as we pray for one another. That is what we want to do for this week’s VBS. If we don’t pray for the VBS Director she is going to be a deflated balloon by Thursday!

There are ways, anticipations as to how God is going to respond to our prayers. We anticipate the clarifying of our thoughts. We anticipate that God will actually give us the words we need to say at certain occasions. I imagine that this week there will be opportunities that will come up suddenly and you are going to say, “I need help!” If the people of God are praying and this place is covered with a veil of prayer, you will get those words and you will say what needs to be said, and great things will be done by the Lord. We know that is true.

There is the gift of inner peace. How many have been through times of great inner turmoil and then suddenly there is this inner quietness, and then later we find out that a group of God’s people, maybe just one prayer warrior, was there before the throne of grace praying. That has happened for me lots of times. Finally we also receive direction and strength. These are all ways that common folk like us anticipate the work of the Holy Spirit through the prayers of God’s people. These are great things.

Here is the second question: “In what ways has the Holy Spirit actively and directly intervened in your life to help you?” It is a good thing to know that, to write that down and remember that. It is an essential part of our walk of faith.

Notice what Paul does next. He speaks of deliverance. He says “I know, I am confident, this will turn out for my deliverance.” Reading through the paragraph it might appear he is thinking of deliverance from death, “I am going to get out of prison; I am going to escape from this horrible place.” I imagine that was a significant part of his hope and even of his anticipation. But notice where he goes with that statement. He says “. . .it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed.” Beloved, that is a radically different perspective on the issue of deliverance. Paul is anticipating, his prayer is that he will be delivered from shame. In our culture shame is almost forbidden as a topic. There is a reason for that. Shame is devastating to experience. Shame is an experience that says there is something deficient about me as a human being, not just that I make a mistake. We all mistakes! But mistakes do not bring shame. But some things do. When shame comes, we feel that a shadow has fallen over us so that now we are unacceptable. That is serious. So Paul is saying “I am confident that I will be delivered from shame.”

That is highly significant. Rarely are you and I confronted with life and death choices, the threat that somebody would [take our life]. But the danger of personal shame is real for us. There is a list of some areas where we run the risk of that danger: actions done or not done. How many of us have done something and then afterwards you don’t just say, “I am so sorry,” but you say, “I can’t believe I did something like that: I just can’t believe it!” That’s right. Or what of words said or not said? We come away from the situation and we realize, “Oh, that child was primed; that kid was ready to talk about the Lord, and I just walked away!” That moment an arrow just goes thump, and you feel like, “Oh, I don’t belong here. I should get in my car. I should go home. I am a curse and not a blessing for this ministry.” That is shame. Most of us are acquainted with it.

Even thoughts entertained though left unspoken. If you are like me you think things and though you may never have said them the echo of your thoughts continues to wander around in your subconscious and surface and you feel like, am I not done with that yet? Can't I get rid of that? Where is the SOS pad for the mind or soul?

So Paul speaks of deliverance from shame. But this goes one step further: We are in danger of seeking peace at any price. The avoidance of confrontation; the avoidance of trouble, the avoidance of the unpleasant: in order to buy temporary peace, we will sacrifice almost anything, and that includes our self-respect.

The reason I take us [down this set of reflections] is so we can understand. If we say, “Well, God is never going to ask me to die,” no, that is right; probably not. Very, very few of us are ever going to be in a situation where physical death might actually be an immanent reality. But there is nobody in this room who isn't going to face these kinds of issue. That is why the example is given to us, so that we understand God already knows what we wrestle with, and He is offering us a marvelous help. That help is the ministry of the body praying for one another and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit in order that we would be delivered from shame. This is wonderful! That is worth the disciplines of the faith – reading the Word of God and praying – [in order that we would be delivered from shame]. Think about that as a part of your own life. Hoping to be safe rather than sorry, we become burdened with regrets and run the danger of being ashamed to stand before our Lord on the last day. The reason I make those kind of comments is because all of us in this room should, as we are believers in Jesus Christ, we should be thinking not just in terms of how well we are getting along with our brothers [and sisters] – that is a very important issue – but we should also constantly be in thought of how we are standing before God. Where are we going on this journey of life? [Are we] raising our eyes so that we are not trapped in the horizontal? This is a humanistic age, an age that pays no respect or honor to the transcendent truths about God. It laughs at and mocks God. You and I should not do that; and you and I should not let the imprint of a godless culture direct our thoughts. The direction of our thoughts should be just what Paul says in Colossians 3. He says, fix your mind on the heavenlies where Christ is. We should be doing that on a regular basis. We have an opportunity to reflect on that in light of what Paul says here to the Philippians.

All of us desire to glorify God, at least in some sense. We want to honor Him at least in a general sense even if not with the passion that characterized Paul. But it is hard to see how God can be glorified or honored with our physical death. Most of us, if confronted with that sort of thing, would think, hey, isn't God going to be more glorified if I am healed from illness? Who of us hasn't prayed for someone to be healed from illness? We always tag on, “for the glory of God.” [It is] my good and the glory of God! Of course! That is the sort of thing we like: victory over our enemies; success in our ventures. Who brings the most glory to God? Is it people who live in poverty and misery, or the people who live in wealth and happiness? It is people who live in wealth and happiness of course. That is our culture, it is our mindset. And there is some truth in that, isn't there? Does God desire that people would live in misery and poverty? No, He doesn't desire that at all. Paul faced persecution. I am sure he would have preferred peace and acceptance and quick conversions by all to whom he spoke the world of God. That is what he would have wanted. Wouldn't it have been nice if Paul had come into the cities of Thessalonica or Philippi and he spoke the gospel and everybody said, “We believe”? Of course that would have been great. Of course Paul wanted success in that sense, and so do you and I. We want success. We want every kid who comes through the door this week to VBS to come to personal faith in Jesus Christ, and we want every one of them to go home and tell their family about what it means to know Jesus Christ and every family comes back and says, “Tell us what it means to know Jesus Christ.” That would be great. You wouldn't have to pray for the VBS director in that case; she would be so excited she would probably have to be tied to the ground.

Persecution alone is too limited an application of Paul's teaching. This applies right across the board. I want to take us in a very sober direction. The Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even more the Puritans

of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, spoke of something they called a “good death.” What is a good death? Here is a list, what they generally would have said. We face the prospect of death with resolute faith in the goodness of God. A number of people in this congregation have already done this. I have had the privilege of praying with you and walking with you as you faced significant diseases, great questions regarding your physical future, saying God is good all the time. That is an affirmation of faith. That is one. The second is that though we face the reality of death, nevertheless we are assured regarding the promise of heaven and the resurrection. The grave is not the end. It just is not. We realize that. In attendance with those we come with the personal application: I am personally submitted to the will of God. Those are the qualities that come together for a good death.

We have started talking about this sort of thing again, and we need to. Why do we need to? Beloved, I have a question here: for what or for whom do you think it is worth dying? We need to think about that. When medical science was severely limited, especially in its ability to control pain, death had to be faced with fortitude. Today medicine has forced us however to weigh end of life issues with a new calculus. How do we honor the Lord as we confront the ambiguous blessings of medical technology? I do not have an answer to this. But if we are praying for one another, we need to praying about this and asking, Lord, given us wisdom. At what point do we make decisions in which we say, “The machines may continue, but the life will not”? In reading and praying about this, it seemed this was the right place to set this in front of us as a congregation and recognize that this is a new challenge that the body of Christ needs to meet in the context of what we are accomplishing with our medicines and technology. How many know someone who is dying? This is part of life, and we know that. Figuring out how to best meet these challenge is part of what you and I are asked to do at this time in history.

We turn now to Philippians 1:22. One of the commentators made this reference when looking at verse 22, that when Paul uses the word flesh – in the Greek it is the word “sarx”, and some of you will recognize that right off – he used it in a way that was strictly physical and had none of the moral and spiritual connotations that are normally associated with the word “sarx”. Normally what is associated with that word is the whole body of the sinful bent of our physical selves. If you look at Romans 7 and 8 you can see there that Paul is acutely aware of immense difficulty there is coming out of our physical selves for remaining true to the Word of God and following through on the ministry commitments that we make. It is a whole bag of goods, and most of us are acquainted with that bag of goods and the difficulty that we confront arising from our own flesh. [It does not seem likely, therefore, that Paul didn’t think] this was a significant factor as Paul faced the trials associated with his life as a witness and apostle for Jesus Christ whether in the Roman prison or with the Philippians. You don’t think his own flesh was a stumbling block for him? That does not make any sense. Surely when I read what Paul has to say here to the Philippians about it being far better to be with Christ, how many of us have said, “I will be so glad to be done with this area of temptation and struggle in my life”? I am well acquainted with that longing. There are aspects of my life which I passionately wish weren’t; but there they are!

I spoke recently with someone who had a close contact with “celebrity Christians”, people with strong faith and wide influence for Christ. They said they were so surprised to realize that [those people] suffered all the same temptations that they did, normal stumbling Christians like us: of course! I am sure that Paul did too. Do you think Paul ever said, “I am going to just sleep in today.” Do you think he ever said, “You know in Antioch I get ‘Yeah, Paul’, but if go over here to the towns in Galatia what I get is stones! I think I’m just going to stay in Antioch for a while, where I am praised rather than going where I am stoned”? Of course Paul thought such things. Our bodily selves work a constant drag self-ward. Here is the question I ask at the end of the message: “Would you say that you experience a self-ward drag from your body? How might this interfere with being faithful to the Lord as well as to your friends?” I have talked before about this. This is major for me because I have a pain in the neck body to live with: headaches and all kinds of stuff. I have learned that if I am not careful with my diet I am a mess! A lot of self-discipline in order to make myself a person that can respond well and decently and coherently to other people.

That is my commitment and that is what I have to do in order to remain in any degree useful either for my family or for the people of God. Well, what about you?

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 5:29, “...no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church...” It is important for us to have the right perspective and attitude regarding our fleshly selves. How many are familiar with Medieval or other forms of asceticism where you beat the body and starve the body and you subject the body to pain: you are doing everything you can to make the body as little as possible. This is an unwise approach [to holiness]. We have to be careful. Our bodies are a part of the gift of God to us. How many know what it is like when the body really malfunctions? You feel like, whoa, now I am really knocked out. It is not good. We want healthy bodies. We should enjoy our bodies! We need the right perspective on our bodies. Our bodies are given to us by God and they are magnificent instruments as long as they do not become our masters.

Here is one of the ways in which that danger comes: I Corinthians 6:13. “*The body is not meant for sexual immorality...*” Ouch! But this is right. Now notice what Paul says. He does not stop with the negative, and that is what we need to be aware of. “*The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body...Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ...Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against* – and do we know what we sin against? We sin against our own body! [It is] not that you are sinning against the holy Lord, but when we engage in immoral behavior we sin against our own body! We are walking real close to shame, aren’t we? Of course we are. Is there a cure for this? Of course there is: the forgiveness of God, the renewing grace of God, the prayers of God’s people: of course there is a cure. “*Glorify God in your body*” is how the passage ends. There is a lot of teaching there but I don’t want to pursue that this morning.

Look now to Philippians 1:22. Paul says, “*If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me...*” When he talks about that I can scarcely imagine that Paul has suddenly forgotten what it means to resist the sinful tendencies of the flesh. Why then would he say that to remain in the flesh is fruitful labor? There is an obvious and a not so obvious reason that Paul would make that statement. If Paul is going to help the Philippians what has he got to do? He has got to stay alive. He has to be present. He has to walk in there. He had to be with them. That is a pretty obvious reason for preserving the body and making sure the body is functioning in a healthy manner. Notice that running the hazards of temptation and sin is therefore a part of the price for being able to serve others. Look, if I die right now, if I fall off the steps and break my neck and I am dead, what is the likelihood that I am going to sin thereafter? Zero. So why not [do it], other than that suicide is frowned on by God? Why not say, “You know pneumonia wouldn’t be bad. I’m out! If I stay, what is going to happen? I am going to walk into temptation. Of course I am, because I am in this body. There is no way out! I will speak of this same issue as we go down through the passage. It is an extremely serious issue because many of us do this: “It is too hard to deal with that person. When I deal with that person it makes me angry and then I say things I shouldn’t. I am not going to deal with that person.” Do we see what has happened?

There is a large issue here. We have got to be willing to run the hazards of temptation. It is not a sin to be tempted. It is sin to fall into that temptation and to own it as behavior.

The less obvious reason that this is a good thing for us [remaining on earth in our bodies] is that the disciplines of faith by which we resist and subdue the body are essential and fruitful aspects of our walk of faith. You can see this if we look in Romans chapter 8:12-18. See there the dynamic which Paul lays out for the conversation between a person and the temptation to sin and how that is supposed to feed and build into a person as a servant of God.

Questions 5 and 6 deal with this topic, especially 5: “What sacrifices have you made in order to serve others?” That is a hugely important. It goes on, “Have you found there are temptations which come with the determination or

effort to serve?” If there aren’t any come and talk to me, for it means you aren’t serving. The sixth question is this: “Have you struggled with fear as Paul mentions this in Romans 8:18? What do you understand to be the spirit of slavery?”

Paul writes as if he was poised between two things. He says he is hard pressed. At this stage in his life Paul has known enough of the sorrows and troubles of life to be ready to let it go. How many have said, “I am ready to be done!” I have been saying that since I was 16! At one point I actually thought about making it real.

We should not think that Paul makes this statement lightly; it is not just a rhetorical flourish. Paul was not a sentimentalist; he did not envision, by the way, climbing into Jesus’ lap for a happy cuddle time. This is one of the most amazing developments in the church of Jesus Christ that I can imagine. “I am just going to cuddle up and cozy up with Jesus and get in His lap and sit there and have a nice time together.” Really? What do you know about Jesus, the God Who died for your sins? On the contrary, Paul knew he would face an impartial evaluation of his performance as the Lord’s servant. On this see 1 Peter 1:17, “...if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear...” I do not know where we are with this business. [Do we think we can approach the Lord and say], “Hi Jesus! I’m just going to climb up into Your lap and we are going to snuggle”? Really; with the Holy One Who laid down His life. What He is going to do is He is going to sit and say, “Before we proceed, let’s have an examination of every word and every deed that you have done.” If you think I am making that up go and read 2 Corinthians 5:10.

There will be lots of cuddle time with Jesus, I suspect, a little later. But [it will not be] right at the outset, for there is this time of evaluation. Paul teaches regarding the future judgment of our works as I mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” What Paul is actually saying here is, I am willing to risk that impartial review because that, I believe, will be better, [even with] enduring the realities of sin on the face of the earth. He says to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. “*Convinced of this I know that I will remain.*”

I will conclude with question #7: Is the anticipation of the eventual judgment, assessment by God of the works of your life important to you day by day? How might that future event encourage you today? Turn now to the last question. This is where Paul goes as he continues to unfold his instructions in servant hood in this little paragraph. I will cover these points next week. Here is question 10, “As far as you are aware, who are the people for whom you and your life are ample cause to glory in Christ?” That, beloved, is what Paul and the Spirit of God hands out to us as God’s people. That in that last day when that assessment occurs – this is just speculation for we have no clarification of this in scripture – won’t it be something if as in our courts today the Lord calls forth witnesses, and when you are there suddenly someone steps out and says, “Lord, let me tell you what that person did for me on Your behalf.” Won’t that be something. Yes! That will be something, to the glory of God.

Pray with me: Father I heaven, we have touched a little on this remarkable passage. Oh my goodness what riches Your Spirit pours into a few words through Your faithful servant Paul! We will not all of us, Father, do as Paul did: of course not. We are diverse and You have placed each of us in separate situations and each of us has a calling to serve you by serving those around us. May we be faithful. May in the last day there will be those who say, “That person blessed me with the love of God.” May it be so, for all of this is to the praise and glory of Your great and gracious name. We pray, Father, in the name of Jesus. Amen.



Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you see a connection between happiness and holiness? How would you describe that connection?
2. In what ways has the Spirit most actively or directly intervened in your life to help you?
3. For what, or for whom, would you think it is worth dying?
4. Would you say that you experience a “self-ward drag” from your body? How might this interfere with being faithful to the Lord and as well to your friends?
5. What sacrifices have you made in order to serve others? Have you found there are temptations which come with the determination or effort to serve others?
6. Have you struggled with fear as Paul mentions this in Romans 8:12-18? What do you understand to be the “spirit of slavery”?
7. Is the anticipation of the eventual judgment (assessment) by God of the works of your life important to you day by day? How might that future event encourage you today?
8. Realizing that there is such a thing as “heroic service”, what is the difference between the cultural dream of becoming a hero and the New Testament’s call to become a servant?
9. Which of these is most important to you, to speak the truth about Jesus, rightly representing Him in your words, or to act like Jesus, being like He was in the world?
10. As far as you are aware, who are the people for whom you and your life are “ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus”?