

# St. Paul: On The Same page

for 02.01.15 Epiphany 4b

## Day One: Deut. 18:15-20

*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers... For this is what you asked of the Lord your God... when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."*

Did you notice that the people asked *not* to hear God speak? They had the truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – no, even more than that – they had a once-in-all-history opportunity to be taught by God himself. But they prayed that God would send someone to stand between himself and them.

They were so afraid of God, so intimidated by his presence, that they couldn't stand it. They literally could not stand in the presence of God.

Most of us were not raised with such a picture of God. Many Americans think of God as a kindly old-man-in-the-sky and don't take him seriously as a judge.

That changes when we see the reality of our sin. Imagine the feelings of the cruise ship captain whose actions caused a terrible tragedy. He does not want to see the faces of his passengers. He is afraid of the judgment that he will see in their eyes.

The same is true for us, when we realize that the suffering people in the world were our responsibility, but we failed to care for them. We are filled with dismay when we realize that our sins caused misery also. If we need someone to talk to us in God's place, who could that person be?

God did not send Moses to stand for us. He sent us his only Son. Knowing that Jesus gave his life for us, knowing that he intercedes to the Father for us, we can stand in God's presence with joy, and not fear.

**Prayer:** *O Almighty God, I have sometimes been ashamed of myself, but I have never had to be afraid of you. Thank you, Father, that because of Jesus I could know you in a new way. Amen.*

## Day Two: 1 Cor. 8:1-13

*Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak...*

*Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.*

“I have my rights.” That is a familiar phrase. Can you think of a recent time that you were concerned to get your rights, or to get what you deserved?

If everyone in our community is most concerned to get something for himself, what would our life be like? Paul says that we ought to be more concerned about others, that our rights not cause someone else to sin or to be driven away from Jesus.

We do many things that have an effect on others. In fact, we want them to. We choose our clothes with an eye to how others will see them. We put a bumper sticker on our car because we want others to read it and react. We post a picture to FaceBook because we want to suggest something for others to think about or to laugh about.

Do all those things build others up? Do some of them tear others down?

You have a perfect right to “free speech” that is provocative, or even inflammatory. But if it is fun to make people angry, is that building others up?

You have a right to enjoy humor, but if our laughter comes from cutting up another’s reputation, is that God’s will?

You are able to do and say things that display criticism, or indifference, or kindness. At any moment you can offer one of these three. It costs you nothing to offer a word of kindness to a slow waitress, to an impatient customer, to an offensive neighbor. You have the ability to build them up.

Who is there that you should be more concerned about than you are right now? Does your behavior sometimes risk leading someone else further from Jesus Christ?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I would be perfectly ‘right’ to condemn the sinners I see around me. Help me to speak the truth, and yet to reveal your love and your desire to forgive, not just my uprightness and anger. Teach me to place myself last, and you and your love first. Amen.*

### **Day Three: Mark 1:21-28**

*They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.*

When people tell us to do what they say “because I say so” are we more likely or less likely to follow them? Usually less likely, but this was how Jesus taught. The people were impressed because Jesus did not just quote other great authorities, but he told them what was truthful from his own word. And his words were authenticated by his actions, and by his miracles.

We don’t like people to tell us what to do. Our parents sometimes said “because I say so,” and they could do that because they gave us life. Still, it’s a hard message to accept.

Would you like it if Jesus stood in our pulpit and told you, authoritatively, how to live? If it were Jesus himself who preached to us this coming Sunday, would you be willing to do whatever he said, even if that meant changing your habits, your choice of leisure time, your clothes, your

politics? What if Jesus has an opinion about these things?

Of course, we know that Jesus is God, and that he has a “right” to command in our lives. That’s why we call him “Lord.” But sometimes it seems as if we give Jesus full control over those abstract theological things – things that we really don’t care much about. But we are unwilling to give Jesus authority over our money, our time, our friendship, or our thoughts.

Of course, Jesus does not want to micro-manage your life. He only wants this: for all of your life to be centered and built around him, and his all-consuming love for you.

Jesus taught with authority. He spoke words of healing, and people really were healed. He spoke God’s promises, and they were kept. He spoke words of forgiveness, and our sins really were taken away.

In what part of your life is Jesus’ authority hardest to accept?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, lead my by your Spirit to accept your Lordship. If I am the captain of my own ship, I will surely destroy my life. Take charge, and lead me. Amen.*

## **Day Four: Philippians 3:14**

*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

The Superbowl is coming! Already lots of people are sending out invitations, planning snacks, even buying new (larger) televisions just for the big game.

I don't want to rain on anybody's parade, but it's worth asking if we are too "engrossed" in this game— or if we are just enjoying a fun event.

Many congregations will see lower attendance that weekend. Some churches that have an evening service will even cancel worship because of the game. Our own congregation will not hold its New Member class because so many people want to enjoy the game.

That's not all bad. It is a wonderful thing when our community comes together to celebrate one of the gifts of God, like sport. But how can we tell when we have too much of a good thing?

It's not simply a question of how much time we spend. Some people are fans of football. Some people play

football. And some people actually make their living from football. Obviously, some of them will spend almost all their time, and even many of the thoughts of their waking hours, around a game. And yet, the one who makes his living from football may actually be the one whose life is still built around his Savior, Jesus Christ.

Tony Dungy, the winning coach of Superbowl XLI, wrote, "The point of this book is not the Superbowl. In fact, it's not football. Don't get me wrong – football is great. ...But football is just a game. It's not family. It's not a way of life. ...I hope that when it's all said and done, you'll see that it's really all about Him."

If your love for the game is about your love for Him – if your love for your family is about your love for the One who gave you a family – if your love for your house is about the One who said he is preparing a place for you – then you've got it right.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, thank you for the good things of this earth. Teach me to enjoy them while I build my life on the good things of your heaven. Amen.*