



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

2 Corinthians 8:16 - 9:5

Summer 2025

"The Careful Life"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in 2 Corinthians, and we're in chapter 8. I have a lengthy passage; it's verses 16 down through chapter 9, verse 5.

Just by way of reminder, Paul is addressing the Corinthians, admonishing them, really, to fulfill their commitment to the project which he had put together among the Gentile churches in Macedonia and in Asia for a famine relief for the Jewish churches in Jerusalem and Judea. The Corinthians, who had started so well, had begun to flag a bit in their enthusiasm, and so he is encouraging them to follow through on the commitment they had made.

So we'll begin reading with verse 16, chapter 8, down through chapter 9, verse 5;

¹⁶ But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in *the things of the gospel has spread* through all the churches; ¹⁹ and not only *this*, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by

us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and *to show* our readiness, ²⁰ taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; ²¹ for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. ²² We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of *his* great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, *they are* messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. ²⁴ Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

9 For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, *namely*, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; ⁴ otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

2 Corinthians 8: 16 – 9: 5

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

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Father, we do thank You for the time we have together. What a privilege, to read the Scriptures, consider their meaning—and the exhortation and admonition that it should give to all of us. We pray for a generous heart, it's a gift from You. And we pray that as we consider this conflict that the Corinthians were having, and this necessity to reengage with their earlier enthusiasm, that You would convict us where we need to be convicted, and encourage us where we should be encouraged—and be a people that are ready to help those in need and be generous with them.

That's the general gist of this passage, but there's other things, LORD, that we will consider. We'll consider Your goodness and Your grace in giving us that kind of a disposition and heart; and so we look to You to bless us in many ways. Bless us with understanding this morning, give us an appreciation of what we've read and who You are, and build us up in the faith.

And LORD, we remember various needs. We remember our youth who are gone on this trip and retreat; they're on the road today and we pray that You give them safety. We pray that as they arrive, You would bless the week for them, and it would be a time of, 'great spiritual recharge', so to speak—that they'll be blessed by the things that they hear and that they do. May it be a refreshing, wonderful time for them. So we pray for them, and specifically that You'd give them safety on the road.

And, LORD, I pray with thanksgiving for the life and the ministry of Dr. John MacArthur, who we learned this week has entered glory—and that is a blessing for him, and a great reward for him, and for the great service he has given to the church universal. But it is a time of sorrow, and a time that his church in California is looking for someone to fill that pulpit. I pray that You'd raise up someone to do that—not only there, but LORD, raise up men of boldness, men of conviction who understand Your Word throughout this nation and throughout this world...that Your church would be fed and Your church would be defended—and Your Word would be defended and You'd be glorified. It's all of You, LORD.

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And we're reminded of that in our text, and I pray that You would bring us to that understanding and that conviction with the things that are required of us—our faithfulness to our word and our faithfulness to one another is ultimately Your work, Your sovereign work within us, (which would suggest, in fact very clearly, that we need to look to You continually).

We look to You now to bless us, and bless this service, and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Ray Donovan is a name from the past. He was the Secretary of Labor in the Reagan administration in the 1980s who had the unfortunate experience of being accused of larceny...theft. It was a highly publicized case. He was investigated; he was put on trial. In the end he was acquitted. Ronald Reagan supported him through it all, called him a man of integrity...but it took a toll. Mr. Donovan is famously quoted as asking after the verdict, "Which office do I go to get my reputation back?"

Accusations raise suspicions that are hard to remove, even for the innocent. Nothing is more important than a person's reputation; and it's really what our passage is about, integrity and the importance of one's name. Proverbs 22, verse 1, which was just read, states, "A *good* name is to be desired more than great wealth."

Paul believed that and wanted to protect his good name from being stained by scandal in Corinth—as well as protect the Corinthian saints from harming their own reputation and their witness.

The church there was in danger of falling short of its commitment to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul had boasted about their faithfulness, boasted about their concern for the poor, and had done that to the Macedonian churches, (and that motivated the Macedonians to give).

But if they learned of the Corinthians' failure, he wrote, "...we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence." (vs4b). In other words, 'Their failure

would put Paul in a bad light.' And that would compromise Paul's reputation and his ministry, which would blemish the name of Christ and the Gospel.

So, to help rekindle their enthusiasm for their commitment, he informed them that he was sending Titus back to them. Titus had arrived with his letter, so he then informed them that he sent him with, 'some other men of good reputation.' In verses 16 and 17 Paul wrote that Titus had "accepted" the request to go there, and in fact was eager to do it. He shared Paul's concern for the Corinthians and the poor saints in Judea. Proof of that is in verse 17 where Paul said Titus went "of his own accord." In other words, he didn't have to be persuaded to go to Corinth. Titus loved the Corinthians, and he wanted to help them to do a good work...his love was genuine.

But it was God given. That's what Paul said in verse 16, "Thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus." Now that reassured the Corinthians, not only of Titus' love for them, but more importantly of the LORD's great concern for them. He had raised up a man to care for them, to minister to them. That's what God does; He raises up shepherds for His sheep; He gives His church people who desire to give instruction and guidance and help.

Down through the centuries He has done this—provided the church with gifted saints who know the Bible and can instruct God's people from it...and care for them spiritually. He did that here for the Corinthian church...and we should expect Him to do that for us; and we should pray for that—for people who are earnest and helpful on our behalf.

That's the nature of the Christian life, and that's the nature of Christian service. But, (and this is important), it originates with the LORD. That's why we pray for it. Titus' concern and affection for the Corinthians was real. It was his genuine concern...but ultimately, the Holy Spirit produced it without interfering with his, with Titus', freedom or responsibility. It is the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5, verse 22, and the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit to change our character and produce virtue in us.

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It is His work of sanctification in us. That's clearly what Paul is saying here. "Thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness in the heart of Titus." (vs16).

It reminds us that we are completely dependent on the LORD for all Godly affection, for a right disposition, and the will to do what we ought to do...and then follow through. We are dependent on the Holy Spirit for the continuance in, and the exercise of, the Christian life. And He is faithful to do it.

The Holy Spirit doesn't bring us into our new life through regeneration, impart spiritual life in us, and then leave us on our own...leave us to struggle on our own in our own strength for our own spiritual existence and spiritual growth. Not at all! The new birth is the beginning of the constant indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul so that our continuance in faith and life are due to His presence. —And all the glory goes to Him.

Now that is something in verse 16, that you might read over, really without giving a lot of thought to it as you pass on to the other verses—but it's there. And Paul never missed an opportunity to give glory to God in everything. And that should be cause for us to praise and thank Him for what He is presently doing in our lives because all that we are and all that we have is due to His gracious work in our lives.

So we should pray, 'LORD, put in my heart an earnestness for You, an earnestness for Your people...Put in my heart generosity. Put in my heart a desire to know Your Word, and to be obedient. Make me, keep me, faithful to the end.'

Only He can do that, (we can't do that in our own strength), and He will do it. He gave to Titus an earnest concern for the Corinthians so that he gladly went to them to stir them up to faithfulness, and in so doing avoid shame.

He didn't go alone. Paul mentions two others who accompanied Titus. The first is in verse 18, and he describes him as, 'a brother who was well known throughout the churches.' Paul doesn't identify him. Many think it was Luke...and other names have been suggested, (however, the identity isn't important to us). Titus and 'the two

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brothers' brought this letter to Corinth...so he, (*the first brother*), was standing there in front of the Corinthians as they read the letter—and they knew who he was.

What is important to us is his reputation. He was a man of integrity, "...whose fame", Paul said, "...in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches." (vs18). Quoting verse 19, 'he had the confidence of the churches.' Whoever he was, he had 'a good name', a proven reputation; he could be trusted with the collection and the distribution of the money that would be given to those poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea.

Paul explains in verses 20 and 21 that it was a "precaution" taken for the integrity of the mission, "...so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift." So Paul sent these three men to Corinth to organize the collection of their gift, he did not do it personally...he kept himself separate from the money. Then, when the money was taken to Jerusalem, he went in the company of a group of men, who represented various churches, in a rather large entourage. That is a careful life. A person cannot be too cautious in guarding himself, or herself, against the appearance of evil.

The handling of money is an especially risky situation. Calvin commented that, "There is nothing which is more apt to lay one open to sinister imputations than the handling of public money." Calvin was writing against the background of the notorious Renaissance popes; it was Leo X who made the statement, "God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it." —And they did.

Now that wasn't limited to that group of Catholic Pontiffs, or only a problem for Rome. There have always been those who 'enjoy the ministry'...who 'take' and don't give. Paul's concern was not that money might become a temptation to him, but to avoid a situation that could raise suspicion in the minds of others. That was wisdom on his part, caution on his part. It's not enough to avoid evil; we must avoid every

appearance of evil and be completely above reproach in order to guard and keep a good name.

So Paul didn't undertake this mission alone. He surrounded himself with men of integrity who could account for every penny, every shekel, every drachma, every lepton, and verify that all was done with complete honesty. Paul wrote in verse 21, "...for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." Paul knew the importance of a good name, that, 'It is to be desired more than great wealth.' (Pro 22:1).

But it wasn't his own reputation he was zealous to protect, it was the Lord's reputation, the Lord's name, the Lord's work, the Lord's people. He knew that whatever he did reflected on the Lord and the Gospel, and he didn't want to do anything that could be misconstrued and bring shame on Christ. That was his concern; he said in verse 19 that he and the others were administering the generous gift, "...for the glory of the Lord Himself."

That is the ultimate reason for everything that we do, "the glory of God." 'The glory of God' would be seen in the fact that Gentiles were taking care of Jewish believers, (and many of them *poor* Gentiles). And that would bring glory to God and the grace of God...and the **widespread** grace of God; for it touches even the Gentiles—and the Jews will be blessed by that.

But that is our goal, "The glory of the LORD". And Paul was jealous for God's glory and he wanted to protect it. That's behind all of this that he's doing. He is very concerned for the Corinthians, but ultimately, he's concerned for God's glory.

For Paul, it wasn't enough to do what is right; rather he recognized the importance of appearing to be right, so he took precautions against suspicion and slander for Christ's sake. Charles Hodge wrote, "It is foolish pride which leads to a disregard of public opinion." Paul would have agreed with that.

George Müller; I think I referred to Mr. Müller not too long ago; I like referring to Mr. Müller. He has a great witness and he was a great servant of the Lord. He was a man like these men, (Titus and the other two with him), he handled a lot of money in his long ministry of caring for thousands of orphans in England.

Müller and those who worked with him, you'll remember, never appealed for funds publicly...they asked only the LORD. They prayed and God blessed. God always provided for Müller and his ministry without fail, and sometimes in miraculous ways. That policy alone brought great glory to God.

We don't need to beg people and make emotional appeals or use pressure tactics to try to 'wring money out of them'. God provides for His people. That was the whole point of Müller's ministry. He trusted in the LORD, trusted that He would meet all of his needs, (and He did). Müller wanted that to be an example to the church as a whole, that that's the way we should live. We can trust Him to meet our needs; He is good, He's rich, and He is just...we just need to look to Him.

Well Müller did that, and God provided abundantly. During his ministry of 63 years he received nearly £1,500,000, (*pounds*). Now that was in the 19th century. I don't know what it would be today in 21st century dollars, but one estimation was it is about \$150,000,000. (Now that was an estimation that I read about 20 years ago, so more than that today.)

Müller glorified God in the way he sought the funds to feed and clothe orphans; and he glorified God in the way he handled those funds. As soon as the money came in, it went out. He kept very little for his own personal expense. At his death, his entire estate was worth £160, and that included the household furniture in the simple apartment in which he lived. He could handle money; he was a man of great integrity. God knew his heart...and blessed him for it. Paul was that kind of man. He didn't love money; he took great precautions to ensure that people knew that and had no doubts about his personal honesty and integrity of this mission.

The third “brother” mentioned is in verse 22. He, too, is unidentified, but his reputation was unquestioned. He had been, ‘tested’ many times, “...and found diligent in many things”, Paul said. All three of these men were men of character. Those are the kinds of people who should handle money in a church. And they do here. Deacons handle the money, and they are men of proven character.

But if anyone in Corinth had questions about these men, Paul wanted to allay their fears, so he gave his personal praise of them. In verse 23 he wrote, "As for Titus, *he* is my brother and fellow worker among you..." The apostle Paul knew him well, had seen his life—and the Corinthians knew him well.

Of the other two he said, "...*they are* messengers of the churches..." or literally, ‘apostles of the churches’. They were *not* ‘apostles of Christ Jesus.’ They were ‘apostles’ in a non-official sense...as men, ‘sent out by the churches.’ In that sense, there may be ‘apostles’ today, but there are no ‘apostles of Christ’ today, (as Peter and Paul were). So you don't have the *transliteration* of ‘apostle’ here—rather, you have the word, ‘*messengers*’, to guard against that error.

In that sense we do have ‘apostles’, though; as those who are literally ‘sent out’, (not technically apostles), and that's what these men were. And Paul said that they are, “a glory to Christ”, (vs23c), meaning, ‘a credit to Christ’...they reflected His glory in their love and their obedience, (and that is the highest commendation of praise).

These were the three that Paul had sent to the Corinthians, and he hoped that they would receive them as brothers and servants of the Lord. Verse 24; "Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you." In other words, ‘the churches’, (the Christian world), was watching the Corinthians and Paul wanted them to not fail to live up to the very good reputation that they had and his high opinion of them...and the opinion that he had expressed publicly.

That concern carries over into chapter 9 where Paul continues to encourage the Corinthians to finish collecting their gift, so that when the Macedonians arrived to collect all of this and then move on to Jerusalem, they won't be embarrassed by their failure to carry out their original commitment. He didn't think they would...he didn't think they'd fail. And he spoke of his confidence in them in verse 1 and 2, *(of chapter 9)*. He stated in verse 1 that, 'writing about this ministry, this collection for the saints', was "superfluous". It was unnecessary, because he said in verse 2, "I know your readiness." He had confidence in them.

They were a giving people. That's why he had boasted about them to the Macedonians earlier. His boast was that, "Achaia has been prepared since last year..." (vs2). They were way ahead of things; that's how eager these Corinthians were to contribute to this great work that was going on in the relief of the poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea.

Now that didn't mean, in saying that, that they had completed their collection and it was ready. It wasn't. He worried in verse 4, that the Corinthians would not complete that, that it would go "unprepared". So, what he meant by their "readiness", (vs2), was, 'a readiness of the will'. This was Paul's boast about them in the past, and what inspired the Macedonians, you'll remember. These poor Macedonians had heard about 'the zeal of the Corinthians', and they wanted to join in that work as well. And they did so 'beyond their means', actually...the Corinthians' zeal had stirred up most of them. And Paul reminds them of that.

But the zeal of the Corinthians, in itself, is not enough...they needed to complete the work, (that they *were* so zealous for), that was flagging at this time. And Paul was hoping the example of the Macedonians, who were poor Christians but generous "beyond their ability", (8:3), would inspire the Corinthians to resume their original plan.

Now, that's the way it works; we encourage one another; we motivate each other. Proverbs 27, verse 17, "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." The Corinthians had sharpened the Macedonians by their example...but the Corinthians,

in the meantime, had grown a little dull...so now the Macedonians were sharpening the Corinthians. And so it goes.

The best way to do that, (to sharpen one another), is not necessarily by telling people what to do, but by doing it ourselves—living it, being an example for others. That's what inspires people to live well, and Paul was confident that the Corinthians would respond well to all he said; and all that they saw.

His one concern was that they would not be organized and have the gift ready when this group arrived to collect everything and move on to Jerusalem. So he informed them in verses 3 and 4 that he had “sent the brethren”, these three, (Titus and the other two), in order to ensure that that would not happen. "...otherwise", he says, "...if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence." (vs4). In other words, ‘This confidence he had in them and this boasting he had in them, that would be put to shame.’

So again, his concern was that after boasting so much about them, and putting so much confidence in them, it would prove empty if he and the Macedonians arrived and the collection was not there. That would be embarrassing for all, and would especially be embarrassing for the Corinthians.

So Paul explains in verse 5 that it was necessary for Titus and the other two brothers to come to Corinth ahead of him in order to help them prepare the collection. He called the collection a “bountiful gift”, and said that he wanted it to be ready when he arrived, “...as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness.” (vs5b).

[The New International Version translates that, "Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given."] In other words, he wanted them to live up to their commitment...that was the right thing to do, to follow through with what they had promised to do.

It is important that we do what we say we will do; we keep our word. A person keeps a good name, not only by avoiding scandal, but also by honoring his word, keeping his or her promises. Paul wanted that for the Corinthians.

But, (and this is important), he wanted them to do it gladly, willingly, voluntarily. Not covetously, not grudgingly, not with a selfish heart that really wanted to hang on to the money after all. God is not pleased with people who give only out of a sense of duty... 'because they have to', (like paying taxes). He's not pleased with those who give because they think they will gain something by giving: Maybe gain God's favor; or gain approval of men. Ananias and Sapphira did that. That's Acts chapter 5, verses 1 and following. Read it...it was not a happy ending for them.

People give for various reasons—but what pleases God is giving out of *gratitude*, giving *freely*, giving *because we want to*. That's the way we should be; all of us should be that way. Our hearts should reveal to others an open hand, (and not a closed fist). We should be generous people, giving people...but people who give gladly.

Again, a generous spirit only comes by grace, and God has to put that into a person's heart. This goes back to chapter 8, verse 16, the first verse we looked at; 'Just as the Holy Spirit put earnestness in Titus' heart, he puts generosity in ours.' And we have a lot of generous people here, (I've mentioned that before), but we all need to pray that God gives us that kind of heart, that He gives us a Christian heart, that we reflect the character of Christ and the Triune God.

Still, more than prayer is needed...prayer is essential, but grace operates through God's Word. He imparts a good spirit through the reading of His Word, and the teaching of His Word—and learning of examples like these Macedonians, these poor saints who barely had enough to live on and support themselves, but gave 'beyond their means', to help these poor saints in Jerusalem.

God purifies the heart through faith as we read and study the Word of God; "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." (Rom 10:17).

As we hear His Word, as we read His Word, as we study His Word—He changes us... that's sanctification; He imparts the fruit of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works through the admonitions of Scripture, as here with the warning that failure of obedience 'brings shame on the saint, and casts a shadow on others...on the innocent'. Simply by association, it harms the witness of the church. We need to heed the warnings of Scripture. So to grow we need to read the Scriptures, read its warnings, read its encouragement, study it.

But we need to be careful about our reputation. Charles Hodge is right. "It is foolish pride which leads to disregard of public opinion." And those who disregard it, even though innocent, may find themselves asking, "Which office do I go to get my reputation back?" We need to walk in this world, live in this world, wisely, circumspectly.

But most importantly, we are changed by reflecting on the Person and work of Christ. That goes back to chapter 5, verse 14, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;" And what Paul is saying there is, as we reflect on what He has done for us, the life that He has given us, the forgiveness that He has gained for us, the love that He has for us at every moment ... as we study that, as we reflect upon that...we cannot but be affected for the good.

And that's how God deals with us. Not so much with rods to force us to behave and be generous, but by showing us the love of His Son—which calls forth love from us. That's God's way; He draws us with 'the cords of love' ...He doesn't drive us with threats. And realizing that we have been forgiven, and we have been forgiven much, we then also want to forgive and do much, and live as our Lord lived.

Realizing what He sacrificed for us, we will want to sacrifice for Him. That's what Paul is saying in that great statement about being, 'compelled, constrained by the love of Christ.' (ibid.). It's not that he's constrained by his love for Christ, [though that fits in, he is constrained by the fact that Christ loved him so much to pluck him 'as a brand from

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the burning’], rather, it causes him to *want* to love and serve faithfully. So realizing all of that, (what He sacrificed for us)—changes us, affects us.

And what did He do? Well Paul began earlier, when he said, ‘He was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich.’ (2Cor 8:9). And rich indeed we are! He gave all of heaven up, came into this world—had nothing and sacrificed His life so that we would have everything.

Well, knowing that leads to a selfless life. We want to live for Him for no other reason than we love Him. We want to live a careful life to protect His name...and a caring life to be a blessing to His people. The LORD blesses those who live like that. Proverbs 28, verse 27, says, "Those who give to the poor will lack nothing." He honors and protects the generous, and He gives them a good name. Only when we ignore that do the rods come; and when the rod comes, it can come in a dreadful way.

So, may God give us such a spirit, such a desire, to live a careful and caring life as Paul did—as Christ did.

But if you're here without Christ, we invite you to believe in Him. He died, and He bore the penalty of sin, so that all who believe in Him will be forgiven and have eternal life. So look to Him...that's all you need do.

Remember that story of Spurgeon, the young boy. He comes in out of the snow, and comes into this Primitive Methodist Church. And this man, who was not normally the preacher, just a layman, got up (because the preacher was snowed out), and he begins to preach. He preaches for about 5, 10 minutes...and he runs out of things to say.

But he sees Spurgeon sitting there, this young man, and he says, "Young man, you look miserable! And you'll be miserable all your life until you look to Christ! Look to Christ! —It's all you need do!"

And that's true. Simply believe in Him as God's Son, and your Savior. Trust in Him and not yourself. You'll be saved. Trust in Him!

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It's not the things you do, not what you give, not what you sacrifice for others!
It is **not** by the works and the deeds that we do!

It is by simply *receiving* the gift of life that Christ offers, and that He has obtained fully through His person and work. May God help you to do that if you have not.

And help all of us seek to live for Him, selflessly.

(Closing Prayer) LORD, we look forward to that day when we will see Him face to face. It's beyond our comprehension what that will be like, but You've obtained that for us by choosing us and sending Your Son to die for us, and sending the Spirit to draw us...it's all of grace. It's all Your work, and we give You praise for that.

We pray that we will live looking forward to that day, and live a life that reflects the goodness and the grace that we've received from You, from Your Son, and the Spirit. We thank You for that.

Now,

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine on you,

And be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,

And give you *shalom*, peace.

In Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)