

The Weekly Word

October 7-13, 2013

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians fills most of the reading for this week. I pray this portion of God's Word reaches into your life as it did mine. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, October 7: 2Corinthians 9– Generosity...

Having read today's chapter, the word 'generosity' spins in my meditations, tumbling over and over. Generosity toward God... Generosity toward brothers and sisters in need... Generosity toward God through generosity toward others in need...

One big stumbling block keeping me from living generously toward God and others, is me, my lifestyle, my spending habits, my sense of what I need, I want, I deserve. When I don't have cash flow, I cannot be generous.

As I mine this thought, another stumbling block is unearthed, 'desire'. I don't know how it has been bred in me, but my initial response with respect to my money and resources is, that it is MINE! Obviously it is mine, but it is the impulse to keep it for me and guard it for me. That is troubling me this early morning. I am not referring to irresponsibility, but the all too natural and immediate impulse to respond to a need observed, with some selfish thought like, "I worked hard for this why should I give it away?" (as if the person in need didn't work hard).

Another instant internal response I often have is, "I might need this some day or gee, I want that extra *whatever*, so I better not give this away." I am a master at rationalizing myself away from generosity.

As I probe deeper, a third response surfaces, keeping face without being generous. It hurts acknowledging this one. It happens when I give a minimal amount (to keep face or assuage my hyper-active guilt) that doesn't come close to truly being generous.

God is pounding me with my lack of generosity...

Lord, enough please. Today has been painful, but full of truth. I constantly ask You to be honest and to probe me. It hurts sometimes...

Thank You for being faithful, for answering my prayers, examining my life and heart, for exposing darkness that still lives in me. Continue to shine Your light, that I may grow to be more like You; loving, kind, faithful, compassionate, and generous.

Lord, thank You for teaching me Your ways.

I love You, Lord. Be with me today. I pray, that my life might reflect Your character and point others to You. Amen.

Tuesday, October 8: 2Corinthians 10– The language of war...

I found myself considering the 'war' language that Paul uses to make his point in verses 3-6. War is fighting, combat, a life and death struggle for the soldier and even more so for the town, nations, or ethnic groups who are at war with each other. War is serious business; no one laughs about war. Paul, therefore, must be making some significant comments because he is using dramatic language.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete (3-6).

The battle inferred is that of the world verses God's Kingdom. Paul notes that we use weapons the world does not have. The world kills, maims, persecutes, destroys, imprisons. The world still uses these weapons. Every year brothers and sisters are martyred for their faith.

Christ-followers on the other hand use different weapons. I found myself making a list. We use:

The authority of Christ,
Gifts of the Spirit,
Love in the face of evil,
Prayer,
We bind and loose in Jesus' name,
And so my list grew.

The enemy cannot access these weapons because the enemy is not connected to Jesus. These weapons are reserved for Jesus and His army.

With these we *demolish arguments and every pretension ... against the knowledge of God*. I find it intriguing that our battle isn't against people, but the forces that motivate the people against the ways of God. I remember a visiting missionary to Muslims, who lived in a land where Muslims perpetrate violence against Christians, saying, "We do not hate nor are we against Muslims. Our battle is against the evil one who has blinded their eyes and is causing them to do these evil things." Well said. That I sense is Paul's understanding, too!

The goal is to *take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*. I generally personalize this, and I am sure that I am to make everyone of my thoughts captive to Christ. However, in this context, Paul seems to be saying that we are to take everyone of these 'anti-kingdom of God' thoughts that are motivating people to battle against God and take them captive so that the people will be freed from the tyranny of these lies! Again, we are in a battle for the salvation of lives in Jesus' name!

God is reminding me this morning that advancing the kingdom of God involves a battle. Good verses Evil. The Word of God verses the lies of the enemy. And I better be prepared with the armor and armaments of God if I am going to step into the fray and fight alongside my Lord and Savior, Jesus.

Lord God –Father, Son and Holy Spirit- as I start today, I don Your armor (Eph 6) and I check my weapons to make sure I have maintained them in good working order. Am I living obediently and listening to Your instructions so that I have access to Your authority when needed? Am I open to the voice of the Spirit that I might have His gifts in the moment of need and necessity? Do I love others, including my enemies, like Christ loved? Are my channels of communication (prayer) open and am I ready to answer when You call? This is even more important than having You on 'speed dial' when I am in need! Do I understand the power of Your authority and trust Your authority when I am engaged with the enemy?

Lord, I pray so... I pray so. Amen.

Wednesday, October 9: 2Corinthians 11– Measuring faithfulness...

How far we have come??? Paul defends himself from so called 'super apostles,' slick talking possibly even wonder-working preachers, who were distorting the Gospel. And what is his

defense? How rich he is? No. How big his church or car or house is? No. His prosperity? His amazing feat, visions, dreams, etc.? No, no, no!

Paul's defense is the number of times he has been beaten and humiliated and left for dead for the sake of the Gospel.

Sacrifice for Christ was Paul's hallmark of faithful service...

It used to be that people of the church honored sacrifice. Just read the lives of faith heroes, how much they gave –willingly gave, lovingly gave- for their Lord and the cause of Jesus.

Sadly, in our world now, a new breed of 'super preachers' are preaching that prosperity, wealth and worldly gain is the measure of God-blessed, God-honored lives. I see it in my culture but also in my travels throughout Africa.

Paul's words here and in the chapter to come seems to cut the root of this Gospel distortion...

Wow, this passage lit a fire in me.

Eventually as the fire in me lowered to a simmer, I heard God whisper some pointed questions:

- Bill, check yourself, see places where the seduction of 'me-first' is robbing you of a truly servant heart.
- Remember Bill, remove the log before you attempt to remove the splinter.
- Bill, would you sacrifice for me like Paul did? Would you? Would you have wanted to become part of My family if Paul's fate was to be yours as well?

God drove home to me that as distorted as the modern day prosperity super-preachers may be, God's care for me necessitated that I cooperate with Him walking His path, the narrow path. And that to do this faithfully meant that I have to take a hard and honest look at my life regularly, making sure I live faithfully to the Scriptures and obediently with Him.

And this is my prayer, Oh Lord, that I live faithfully to Your Scriptures and obediently to You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the one and only God.

I recommit and surrender again to You, Oh Lord. Use my life as You will for the advancement of Your Gospel near and far... and I will praise You still, no matter what my future brings. I pray this believing Your grace and Power will see me through to the end and not my own will power or strength. Halleluiah! Amen. Yeah! Romans 8:28-39!

Thursday, October 10: 2Corinthians 12– A lesson learned...

As I read Paul's statements in verses 7-10, I found myself focusing on verse 10 **bolded** below.

*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. **That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

The fact that Paul *delighted in weakness* is what amazes me. God taught Paul a lesson that would be difficult for me and likely most of us to learn yet Paul gets it. In fact, Paul didn't just get it, his life-pattern changed to embrace what God had taught him. Paul wrote that he *delighted in weakness*.

God's challenge slipped into my thinking. Do I embrace what God teaches? Do I internalize the lessons God sends my way?

In my life there is a gap between what I know from God's Word and how well I live what I know. Paul's life seems to have a much smaller gap...

Today's time with God is challenging me to narrow my gap!

Lord, I am marveling at Paul. He seems so willing to live and change and You desire. Change (growth) is more of a struggle for me. There are fits and starts. Old voices I thought were silenced, speak up at surprising moments. The other day I got angry at things not happening. As I was trying to complete a banking service, I was directed to the Internet. Thoughts and words erupted that surprised me. They did not honor You.

What dark place do these come from?

I pray for diligence to keep on persevering, that I might delight in the things that delight You. Through Jesus, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

Friday, October 11: 2Corinthians 13– God's word, plumb line of faith...

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves... (5). I love the way Paul puts the onus on us to test our own faith. Over and over as I read the Bible this year, God continues to remind me that I need to be monitoring my own faith. I need to be plumbing my faith to the line of Scripture. I need to take responsibility for my faith.

I also hear in these words that I have to be careful not to simply justify myself, but to honestly test myself and examine myself, not against others but against the pure Word of God.

Then as the letter draws to a close, Paul offers another great line. *Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection...* (11a).

Aim for perfection... don't settle for good enough. Keep working. Keep maturing. Keep growing. Keep seeking God and God's life and character in my (your) life!

If I think of faith as drawing closer to God, then what I am hearing God say is, to keep drawing closer and closer to the Lord. Keep checking your GPS (God's Word) to make sure you are on the way that leads to God.

Lord, help me to stay sharp in my self-examination. Keep me in tune with You so that I grow closer to You, more in love with You and more like You every day of my life. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Saturday, October 12: 1Thessalonians 1– Faith that works...

We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (3).

This line caused me to probe my own life. Would anyone say of me or you what Paul said of the Thessalonians??... *your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Lord, God, may this word be true of me. Help me Lord, help me to work, labor and endure for You, Jesus. Amen.

Sunday, October 13, 2013, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will

answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.