

The Weekly Word

March 3-9, 2014

Lent arrives this week. Lent is a good time to concentrate a little harder on growing our faith in Jesus. And growing begins with God's Word and obedience to it/Him. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, March 3: Galatians 4– Relationship with God...

Sometimes when describing the Gospel, I (and others) say things 'like have faith in Jesus and believe in Jesus' The Bible uses these terms. My thoughts on the last two chapters have been filled with that language because Galatians uses that language.

Other times I use the language of having a 'relationship' with God. The different ways to communicate the Gospel is an attempt to reach the most people with the wonderful message of Jesus Christ. Each language set connects with a different facet of the Gospel message.

Verses 4-7 provide a wonderful understanding of the relational aspect of the gospel. *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

The Gospel proclaims to the world that through faith in Jesus Christ a person is brought into a son*/child/heir relationship with God as Father. We can now call the God of the universe, *Abba, Father!* Just think about that for a moment. Abba is Aramaic for Father, but with the loving filial overtones of what is meant by 'Daddy.' Those who walk with Jesus can call God, the Father, 'Daddy.' What could speak more clearly of the relationship God grants us than this?!?!

At this point, I push back from the text and keyboard and simply think, ponder and delight in the gift of being in such close relationship with God that I can (and do) call God 'Daddy.' Wow, I invite you to do the same.

Oh, God, what a delight!! You invite me to crawl up onto Your lap, squeeze into Your arms and be with You, speak to You, to simply feel the security and delight of Your presence holding me, protecting me and watching out for me. I am safe with You, Lord, God. I am safe in Your everlasting arms.

Thank You for calling me into this relationship with You. Thank You for offering me (us) sonship and a place with You as Your beloved.

Thank You, Daddy. Thank You, Father. I love You. Amen.

*I hope the sonship language isn't a barrier for you to hear the wonderful message of God's Love. The NT writers use 'son' language because in their day the son inherited property of the father. And the son bore the father's name. Using 'son' language was the obvious way to communicate the incredibly close connection God brings a person into when any person puts her or his faith in Jesus Christ. What the laws and culture of the day didn't generally allow for, God saw to, that every person irrespective of gender is brought in a full, life-long, legacy and inheritance producing relationship once they put their faith in Jesus. As Paul wrote in the last chapter, in Christ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (3:28)*

Tuesday, March 4: Galatians 5– More about the gospel...

As this chapter unfolds, two more facets of the Gospel are uncovered.

One is hinted at in verse 2, *Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.* The Gospel message cannot be mixed with other modes of salvation. With faith, one cannot hedge one's bets by human works. It is one or the other. Thus Paul says that if you go the 'circumcision route', then Christ –the Gospel message of faith in Jesus Christ, is of no value. A person can travel only one road at a time.

This underscores the nature of faith, which is total belief in Jesus Christ, period. End of discussion. No hedging bets or mixing in any other religious route. For first century Jews, the pull of another religious route was to go back to their roots of following the Law. For 21st century people like ourselves, the pull might be

- eastern philosophies and new age principles, or
- horoscopes, fortune-telling and other forms of divination, or even
- following the human made religious rules of various Christian denominations

rather than faith in Jesus alone.

There is plenty to chew on here... and some may stop and linger here in prayer.

The second aspect of the Gospel message that I saw came toward the end of the chapter beginning in verse 13, *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*

As humans we can easily pervert the idea of faith in Jesus as opposed to the works or religion and tease ourselves into believing that faith puts no requirements on us. "Since I have faith in Jesus I can do anything I want." No, Paul reminds us. By faith we are set free from the tedious following of human religious rules and we are set free to *serve one another in love*. Paul builds on this foundation to explain faith's new way of living, living that blossoms with the fruit of the Spirit... *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* (23-24).

Again there is plenty to chew on here... and I am sensing the call to pray.

Lord, I bless You for the Gospel. I confess that it is oh so very easy to find myself mixing in elements of works and trusting in what I have done, rather than what You have done in Jesus. Please forgive me.

And, Lord, forgive me, too, when I allow my faith to become 'a do nothing faith', a selfish, loveless faith which looks out for me and cares not for others. Forgive me, Lord. Oh, how I need this forgiveness.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Wednesday, March 5: Galatians 6– New creation living...

Paul concludes his letter with an interesting statement. *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation* (15). When, by faith, we accept the Gospel message and are adopted into God's family, we become a new creation. A newness of life flows into us by the Spirit and we begin to live differently. We live with love for God and others.

Another aspect of the Gospel message is this new life we begin to live.

Earlier in chapter 6, growing out of the reference to love and the Fruit of the Spirit in the end of chapter 5, Paul gives a practical picture of new creation living.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (1-10).

Some bullet highlights

- Restore those who have fallen
- Carry one another's burdens
- Test our own actions and don't compare yourself with someone else.
- Carry your own load
- We reap what we sow

Paul puts on a capstone with this final word. *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

New creation living in a sentence; as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

There is a principle I can work on...

Lord, a straightforward word, but one I need help living up to. Oh, Holy Spirit, give me the impulses to live up to this word. When I slip back into my self-centeredness, convict me that I might grow in my love for You and service for others. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, March 6: Ephesians 1– Overwhelmed...

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (3).

We have so much to praise God for! He has blessed us in incredible ways.

This chapter is so rich, I could pause at virtually any point and have so much to meditate upon.

So many blessings are touched on in today's Word. God truly has blessed us with so much.

The first paragraph speaks of our being chosen, our redemption, adoption and forgiveness.

Oh, yes, God's grace as well.

The next paragraph mentions that we are secure, our inheritance is guaranteed by the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

Then comes an incredible prayer. A prayer to know God better... to have our eyes enlightened so that we might know the great inheritance that God has guaranteed for us.

I sit here overwhelmed

We REALLY do have so much to praise God for!!!

Oh, God, my mouth sings Your praise... Praise You. Thank You. Bless You. You have given so much and give so much. I am overwhelmed by Your grace, Your giving. You lavish upon me (upon us) so much, all of it underserved. Yet, here I sit pressed down by the weight of your grace and wonder and blessings and all I can utter is Thank You. Bless You. Praise You –Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Praise You. Amen.

Friday, March 7: Ephesians 2– Jesus is everything...

Ephesians continues to be very rich. Verse upon verse is laden with food for my heart, mind and soul.

I found myself dwelling upon the final 3 sentences of the chapter. *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (19-22).*

Fellow citizens and members... God has placed us in His family. Think of those phrases as metaphors. I have friends who have come to the US from other countries and have become naturalized citizens. It is quite a process, including a certain amount of time lived in the US, various background checks, and multiple trips to immigration, taking and passing of tests and then a swearing in. In Paul's day, if you weren't a citizen there was a considerable payment to become a citizen. Yet in Christ, God 'does the work for us.' Through faith in Christ, God grants us citizenship based on Jesus' work on the cross. What a gift. A gift not to be taken lightly.

Membership, whether a club, or society, church or team has various requirements, too. Again, God pays all the dues, whatever they might be, to guarantee our entrance.

Jesus is the glue that holds everything together and He is the foundation upon which people of God are built. Jesus is everything. Jesus accomplished everything regarding our salvation.

We have a song in worship we sometimes sing, which is basically a lyrical reciting of the name "Jesus." I have heard comments that it is too simple or too repetitive. But you know, it is true. Jesus is everything!

Lord, Jesus, You are my Hope, my Deliverance and Deliverer, my Savior, my Lord, my Redeemer, my Payment, my Sovereign, my Anchor in storms. Jesus, you are my Everything.

I surrender to You.

Praise be to You, Lord Jesus. My Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, March 8: Ephesians 3– Praying for others...

This is the second time Paul has written a prayer in this letter. Listening to others pray is one way we learn to pray. Paul prayed:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (14-19).

Paul prayed to the Father, and first lauded Him.

Paul prayed that his friends would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit and that this Holy Spirit strengthening would bring Christ to the forefront of their heart.

Paul's prayer is Trinitarian; Father, Spirit and Jesus Christ all are named.

Paul prays that love will grow... that his friends would grasp (what a great word) Christ's love for them in increasing measure.

Paul prays that understanding this love would fill them with the fullness of God. Remember God is love (1John 4:16)

There are times to pray for specific issues in a person's life, a health need, a situation, etc. But what I hear in Paul is to never lose sight of the bigger picture. The person, that grows in Christ, in love and that God in his fullness –Father, Son and Holy Spirit- is actively working and maturing our pray-ee in love and fullness.

Hmmm, as I continue to pray daily for family, friends and the world, using Operation World (www.operationworld.org), it seems this would be a tremendous posture to adopt amidst my intercessions as I pray. Maybe I should commit this prayer to memory along with the Lord's Prayer and others, so that I can pray it intentionally as I pray...

Teach me, Oh, Lord, to pray. Show me how to grow in prayer. Amen.

Sunday, March 9, 2014, 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.