

The Weekly Word

Nov 14-20, 2016

May God continue to guide you through His Word. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, November 14: Romans 13- ...

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God (1).

This verse touched me viscerally.

I write these blogs a few weeks ahead of the date to provide me with a little cushion in case something comes up at the last minute. This means I am writing this shortly before the general and presidential elections in the US. I do not know if Hillary or Donald will be elected President for the next 4 years. I struggle with both as the next leader and figurehead of my country. And then I read verse one and the first section of this chapter. My heart has palpitations...

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities [of Donald or Hilary], for there is no authority except that which God has established. [Their Administration has] been established by God. This is so difficult for me to understand.

This is a case of Scripture I have to submit out of loyalty and trust in God not because there is some reason intrinsically in me that says "Oh, this makes sense."

As I open my thoughts to the world I can, in measure, feel the plight of sisters and brothers throughout the ages and the continents who have lived and are living under regimes far worse than I will face. They, too, had to make sense of this word from the Lord.

I have much to learn about 'being subject to governing authorities' ...

Oh, God, help me live faithfully to You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, November 15: Romans 14- Disputable Matters of faith...

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters (1). After starting the thought with this bold statement, Paul goes on to talk about food and special days for worship.

Disputable matters of faith... these are issues and concerns that do not relate to salvation per se. Paul reminds us that it doesn't matter what we eat; if for conscience sake someone you know doesn't eat some particular food what's the big deal? Really.

Don't make it an issue, Paul says.

There are things of substance, and there are things that are not substance; major in substance not the minor *disputable matters*.

Paul is clear in verse 14 that all foods are clean, but to make an issue and hurt someone else's faith (weaker though it might be because they don't eat something) is wrong.

As I thought about this, I realized there are places to draw the faith-line, but many issues that divide believers are *disputable matters*. I thought about the various denominations and worship traditions, most differences are honestly disputable issues:

Choir, organ, band or worship team... does it really matter? No, it is a preference.

60 minute, 90 minute or 2 hour service... does it really matter? No, it is a matter of preference and one person is not more spiritual than the other!

Liturgy or free worship... again, Scripture doesn't make a singular case.

I could continue the list... but this is Paul's point, which is the message of the Holy Spirit.

God is convicting me about pride and self-righteousness. I have my views on certain *disputable matters*, which grow from my study of Scripture. But other people have differing views built on Scripture,

DON'T MAKE A BIG DEAL, God is saying to me. Don't belittle others on *disputable matters*.

A second thought I have from this passage is to be convinced in my faith. Study, learn, grow and know what I believe and why... *Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind* (5). God has given us the gift of His Word. The Lord has given me a mind to think and process, I should be using all my faculties to the best of my ability to apprehend and comprehend my faith. And this is true for each of us...

Be convinced of your faith...

Lord, help me never to settle but to study to show myself approved... Help me to work at my faith, to study Your Word... to know what I believe and why I built on YOUR Word and Your Word alone. Lead me and teach me, I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, November 16: Romans 15- Endurance and encouragement...

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (1-6).

The life of faith is a marathon. Although certain aspects of faith may grow easier or more 'natural' as we mature in our walk with Jesus, walking with Jesus is always countercultural. The life view of people without the spark of Jesus within them is always at odds with people following Jesus... thus Paul's call to endurance.

Endurance, keeping at it, never giving up or giving in, standing our ground... the word pictures and descriptors are endless. Do I, do you, have the metal to stand with Jesus all the days of our life... no matter what life brings our way?

Jesus is both the model of endurance and the Giver of strength to endure...

There is a second prominent 'E' in today's reading... encouragement.

Returning to my marathon example... imagine completing a marathon without hearing one word of encouragement. As difficult as a marathon is, not hearing one cheering fan, one positive word from a coach, a friend, a family member; not seeing one smiling face. Imagine running a marathon on a deserted course all by yourself. Oh, my, how much more difficult that would be!

Paul says, *Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.* That encouragement. And again, *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other...*

The encouragement of others keeps us going when we are lacking the same strength within ourselves... And the point, help others endure.

As I consider this 'E' word, I am wondering who might I encourage today... How about you? Who might you encourage to keep on with Jesus?

Lord use my words, my smile, my 'atta boy' to help someone toward the finish line of faith, walking and enduring with You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, November 17: Romans 16- A people builder or people destroyer...

This is one of my favorite chapters. I know that its' content isn't stimulating nor does it contain some great Christian Truth. What I love is the list of people. I listen to these names and what Paul recalls about them and I smile. I can make a difference. I can be a friend, a 'father' in the faith, a co-laborer, a deacon and so on.

These were everyday people and they all figured prominently in Paul's life and ministry.

I can do that... I can figure in other people's lives and faith! I can make a difference in at least one other life... and maybe more.

I just love the power of people together. It can be so much more effective than individuals.

Reading this chapter today, I noticed from verse 17 that we also have the power to harm as well as help. *I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them* (17).

Divisiveness hurts people and God's family...

As encouraged as I am that I can make a difference in peoples' lives and can encourage them in the Lord, I am also feeling warned that stoking petty or chronic divisiveness is a horror in God's eyes...

I am asking myself... "What kind of person am I? A people builder or people destroyer?"

How about you, what kind of person are you?

Lord, I seek to be a people builder... please correct me when and where I fail and equip and mature me to be a better and better people builder as I grow in and with You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, November 18: Psalm 138- Praising God before other gods...

The first words off the page grabbed me, so after I finished reading the Psalm, I returned to verse 1. *I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart; before the "gods" I will sing your praise.*

I find myself convicted by this Psalmists' praise.

What first popped into my mind were times that I didn't stand and praise God in the presence of other 'gods'. And this was not as if Baal or some other false religious god was being lifted higher than the Lord. No, what came to mind were times when cultural 'gods' were being extolled and I didn't speak of the Lord and the counter-truths He decrees.

After the guilt subsided, and frankly some of it was false guilt because I had confessed these moments of weakness, I found my spirit soaring as this verse called me to higher places. I found myself saying, 'Yes, I can be like the Psalmist. I can stand for the Lord before gods of this world.

My culture says personhood doesn't begin until the moment of physical birth, so a person can legally get an abortion up to the moment before birth. UUUggghhh. I am not a 'stand outside abortion providers and shout ugly epithets at people' kind of person. But the next time abortion comes up in a conversation I can clearly articulate my position and stand on the side of life. That also means caring for women who find themselves in the vulnerable position of pregnancy without support and caring for women and children in difficult situations after the child is born.

My culture is also torn by race and ethnicity issues. Will I stand with the Lord and on behalf of care and dignity for all people no matter the race or nationality? I can.

I am reminded of two faith heroes, William Wilberforce and Mother Teresa. Both of these people stood with the Lord against gods of their day. Wilberforce stood and labored against the slave trade and Mother Teresa stood with the dying and discarded of Calcutta.

Sometimes praising the Lord in the face of other gods means standing against (Wilberforce) and sometimes it means standing with (Mother Teresa)...

Oh, Lord, I pray for strength to praise you in the face of false gods and that I know when praising You calls me to stand against and when it calls me to stand with.

Teach me Your ways, Oh Lord, my God. In the name of the one Lord of earth and sky, Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, November 19: Psalm 139- Known...

As my eyes settled on this Psalm, and particularly the first verses, one word streamed wonderfully into my thoughts... KNOWN. I am known by the Lord.

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

Along with the word 'known' came the words of the Tommy Walker song, "He knows my name." The lyrics go like this:

I have a Maker
He formed my heart
Before even time began
My life was in his hands

I have a Father
He calls me His own
He'll never leave me
No matter where I go

He knows my name
He knows my every thought
He sees each tear that falls
And He hears me when I call

This song touches my heart and certainly its sentiment grows from this Psalm and other places in Scripture. (You can listen to the song on YouTube:)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXRaQE_tSmo)

Oh, to be known by the Lord. Maybe for some people this is not a comforting thought but for me it is sooooo good. It gives me peace and comfort. To be known is to be loved. God knows me and He still loves me... AMAZING.

So here I am today, basking in being known... being known by God and being loved by God.

Thank you, Lord God. I feel so special and loved knowing that You know me intimately. You know my coming and going... You know my words before I even form them. What a gift, what a wonder... to be loved by the Lord.

Praise You and bless You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, November 20, 2016, 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.