

The Weekly Word

Dec 12-18, 2016

The march of Advent continues... the birthday of the Savior approaches. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, December 12: 1Corinthians 13- The most excellent way...

The chapter break was placed at a peculiar location. Most certainly the last sentence of chapter 12 is the intro to the topic of chapter 13.

And yet I will show you the most excellent way (12:31). And the most excellent way is the way of love, which is beautifully laid out in the entirety of chapter 13.

Love is to be the way of the Christ-follower.

You know angelic languages... use them with love or they amount to nothing.

You have spiritual gifts... they are to be used with love or they amount to nothing.

You have a heart for service and sacrifice... use them with love or they amount to nothing.

Love is the way, the manner of living, the attitude, the foundation for living as a Christ-follower. Period. End of story. There is no other way that can match the way of love. None.

When in doubt ask what love would do...

And what would love do?

Love would be... *patient, ...kind... not envious, not boastful, not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*

This is love that is the way of Jesus. And that is the MOST EXCELLENT way... And this is how I am to live...

It is time to take stock is how I am living. Am I on the most excellent way or not?

How about you?

Lead me, Oh God, lead me onto the way of love and may I never leave Your path. Amen and amen.

Tuesday, December 13: 1Corinthians 14- Love and gifts...

After laying out the way of love... that love is the most excellent way and should be the guiding principle for how we connect and interact with others, Paul takes on problems in worship. His basic point, love should guide the way we act toward others. Love desires that we all help others to grow, to be edified. Love wants the best for others rather than showing off for self.

Gifted people at times have a way of making others feel less about themselves. This should not be the way of Christ-followers.

Paul leads off this chapter with these words, *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy (1).*

Gifts are helpful and important but it is the building up of everyone in the church that is important, not anyone showing off his/her gifts. This is why prophecy in worship is more important than tongues (unless the tongue is interpreted). Why is this? Because someone

speaking in a foreign language does not help anyone grow in the Lord. Whereas speaking some instruction, revelation or knowledge in a language and manner everyone can comprehend is good for others and the body of Christ gathered in worship.

What do I do with all this?

I must use the gifts I have for the benefit of my brothers and sisters. I need to use my gifts and abilities in a way that builds others up rather than building me up. Especially in public gifts, the attitude God desires is selflessness. It is not about me... it is about building others up in the way of Jesus by using my gifts with 1Corinthians 13 love.

Lord, help me to see others, rather than self. Help me see what benefits Your body, not myself. Help me live the way of love even as I seek Your gifts. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, December 14: 1Corinthians 15- Resurrection sets the stakes high...

A dramatic shift in topics happens with the first verse of chapter 15. Whether sparked by thoughts of worship (ch 14) or it is another topic questioned by the Corinthians, Paul launches into an exposé on the surety of the Resurrection.

He is so certain of the Resurrection that he writes: *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised* (14-15).

If there is no Resurrection then Christ has not been raised, all our believing is useless and we are lying about God and His ways.

Those are bold assertions. And such is the faith we can have in the Resurrection! Christ is alive and all who believe in Him will be raised. This is Paul's basic point.

If we belong to Jesus we will be resurrected.

This truth has sustained people in life's most difficult situations and it is an apt balancing agent for those in luxurious situations. Nothing in this life is worth jeopardizing our faith and the guarantee of resurrection that comes with faith in Jesus. Nothing.

This life is 40-60-90 years. Resurrected life is eternal... no good thing in this life is worth the scuttling of our faith... no luxury, no job, no bonus, no award, NOTHING.

Belief in the Resurrection is a powerful truth...

Think about this. I know I am.

God, thank You for raising Jesus and raising all of us who are in Jesus. I praise You for Your gift of life here in this life and in the next. May I live to honor and bless You all the days of my life until I live with You in eternity forever. Amen.

Thursday, December 15: 1Corinthians 16- 2 powerful sentences...

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love (13-14).

Is there a simple way to sum up a letter like 1Corinthians? Can Paul find a few words to drive home the various points of his letter? I think he did just that in the 2 sentences above.

Be on your guard... it is so easy to slip and fall. *Be on your guard*, writes Paul. And that is an apt word. I have to be mindful and careful. I have to monitor my life, thoughts and actions. When I fall, I need to confess it, receive God's forgiveness, get up again and move on. I have to keep my eyes open to the influences of the world and God's enemy. A perfect shorthand reminder is *be on your guard*.

Stand firm... make your commitment to stand your ground. Don't give in. Don't take the easy way out. Push yourself when necessary to live right and do right by the power of God, the Holy Spirit, within you.

Be courageous... this ties in with standing firm. Too often we want the faith to be easy and everyone to like us. But it takes courage to stand with Christ. The world is opposed to Jesus so there will be times that courage is needed to stand with the Lord. We will take our lumps and we need courage not to cave but to stand.

Be strong... Many of the early Christians suffered for their faith and suffering takes strength. Strength is needed to be courageous and to stand with Jesus. So Paul continues to build his word picture.

Do everything in love... Having painted the picture of what we are to do, Paul now tells us how to do it... through LOVE. Echoes of chapter 13 reverberate in this sentence. While love is the critical word in the sentence, 'everything' comes in a close second. It is not do 'somethings' in love; it is do everything in love. Love is to be our calling card, our first and last impression as believers.

All the problems addressed can somehow find their answer in these 2 sentences. *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.*

I hear God say, 'This is for you, Bill' ... can I do it? Will I do it?

I pray so, Lord. I will need Your help to guard, to stand, to be courageous and to be strong. Incline Your ear to me, Lord, that I may honor You in what I do and how I do it. I pray Through Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Amen.

Friday, December 16: Psalm 146- My heart soared...

Immediately as my eyes settled on to this Psalm, my soul was lifted...

Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

I will praise the LORD all my life;

I will sing praise to my God as long as I live (1-2).

In fact, my heart continued to soar to the heavens and to my Lord as I read/prayed this Psalm.

Two short phrases caught my attention as my soul began to soar, *all my life... as I live.*

The psalmist was not making a declaration for a day; the psalmist was making a lifelong pronouncement. This is what I will do today and every today of my life... *I will praise the Lord, I will sing praise to the Lord, I will call out, I will rest in, I will exalt the Lord, my God, and Him only.* (I added and Him only because of where the rest of the psalm goes.)

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save... (3).

The Lord is the only one to whom the psalmist will look. I suspect that this Psalm is a declaration to the world and to the psalmist himself.

There are times in life when we have to speak ourselves into right action. And this Psalm plays well during those time as well as days like today when my heart immediately begins to soar as these words enter my spirit.

Oh, Lord, I am carried to You on the wings of this Psalm. I will praise You all my life; I will sing praise to You, my God, as long as I live. Lord, some days these praises will roll off my lips like water over a waterfall and some days my mouth will be parched like a dry desert arroyo, no matter my personal feelings. Lord, I will return to this Psalm and sing Your praise. For You alone are worthy and You alone have saved me. In the name of the Father, Jesus, His Son, and the Holy Spirit I sing and pray. Amen.

Saturday, December 17: Psalm 147- Delighting in the Lord...

[The Lord's] pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of the warrior; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love (10-11).

This was so helpful today... it just drew me in. The Lord does not incline toward human strength but rather those who delight in Him.

In our world where strength and might rule, where the one with the biggest gun wins, it gives me peace to think that such is not God's way.

God delights in people who fear Him... people who reverence and understand His greatness.

The Lord delights in people who put their honor in His love, love which never fails.

On the eve of worship this 3rd Sunday of Advent, my heart warms as I consider the love of God who would become human in order to connect with us and save the likes of us.

I submit and I surrender and I bask in the delights of the Lord...

What a wonderful way to live on this eve of worship.

Praise to the Lord who reigns on high who rides in majesty... Praise to the Lord who left it all to save a sinner like me. Halleluiah! Amen.

Sunday, December 18, 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.