

## The Weekly Word

January 2-8, 2017

Welcome to 2017! I pray that your time in God's Word and prayer will cause you to grow in faithfulness to the Lord. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

### Monday, January 2: 2Corinthians 10- A new way to live...

Paul sets up a comparison between two ways to live... we can live by the standards and 'tools' of human society or we can live by the standards and 'tools' of God. Paul's word to the Corinthians spoke directly to me...

*By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people **who think that we live by the standards of this world**. 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 (1-6 bold mine).*

I found myself wondering what the standards of this world are.?<sup>2</sup> Wandering mentally through the two letters to Corinthians is saw some glimpses ...

Lawsuits... using the power structures and human reasoning of the world to win one's way.

Controlled by sex and appetites... rather than love and devotion to the Lord.

Divisiveness... my group is better than your group, my leader is better than your leader, etc.

Pride... my gifts are more important than your gifts.

Boasting and bragging... about one's credentials.

Such was the way of the world then and surprisingly still is today. With all our boasting (there's that attitude again) about how we are advancing and becoming more civilized, it seems we still are the same base self as humans.

Paul on the other hand argues for believers living on a different plane, where we access divine power to demolish strongholds. Where we allow the love of Jesus to permeate us so that we act differently toward others...

Surrendering our wants and rights for the sake of unity in the body.

Where we see the blessing and benefit of everyone regardless of what gifts the Lord has given them.

Where we live on a higher standard when it comes to our appetites (sex, food, drink) no longer controlled by them.

Where we see the whole and not just subgroups and where human elements of race, gender, economic status, and ethnicity are not divisions to be fostered.

Where we can take captive all worldly attitudes and live by godly attitudes.

Quite a difference in one's manner of life...

Now questions emerge in my heart.<sup>5</sup> How am I doing? Can I identify my weaknesses for worldly ways, so I can surrender them to the Lord?...Lord? ...

*Reveal to me, Lord, where I need to grow; where I am depending on worldly ways rather than Your ways. Show me Lord. Grow me Lord. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen*

### **Tuesday, January 3: 2Corinthians 11- The upside down way of God...**

I was struck hard by the contrast between the apostle Paul and his 'boastings' verses the super-Christians lauded by the church in Paul's day and today. It is clear that Corinth honored and lauded 'super' leaders who had polished tongues and made names for themselves in the same ways people of Acacia and Rome made names for themselves.

And things are still the same...

I cannot read another person's heart so the thoughts flooding my mind must be tempered with grace and humility. BUT... Paul fills his resume with sufferings, ~~and~~ beatings, ~~and~~ lack of material possessions and statements that both Jews and Gentiles have tried to suppress him and kill him. In simple terms Paul resume is filled with sufferings and loss from his Gospel service. He didn't profit from the Gospel, but gave himself away for the advance of the Gospel. These, it seems, are true measures of an apostle and servant of Christ.

I cannot speak to the opponents in his day, but headlining Christian leaders today sell millions of books; ~~and~~ plan Christian cruises where we can travel in comfort and listen to these teachers teach; ~~;~~ and some enjoy ostentatious living of worldly success. We honor in our Christian leaders similar things the world honors in their leaders.

As I sit here this morning something seems wrong with this picture. And this something has been attached to the church since the beginning, which is why Paul penned these words in the first place.

I am not sure what to do with these thoughts. Here are some things that are bubbling up from within me...

- 1) I sense that I should always be checking myself internally, by examining my heart. What are my internal measures of faithfulness... how much am I giving myself away in service to Jesus?
- 2) I need to carefully avoid self-righteousness; My task is to walk with Jesus and play the role He has for me and to use my wealth and influence as lavishly as I can for Gospel advancement.
- 3) I should steep myself in the words of Jesus about servanthood and sacrifice, allowing these Jesus ways of the kingdom permeate my life rooting out worldly ways of honor, prestige, power and wealth as my motivating life dreams.

So much more thought is needed here.

*Lord, help me to brood on this as I go about my day. Show me how to live Your character in my world, no matter how counter cultural it will be. I pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, January 4: 2Corinthians 12- Strength vs. Weakness...**

Continuing God's upside down theme, Paul offers a word from the Lord. In my Bbible, which lists Jesus' Words in red print, the words that caught my attention are red. These are one of the few Jesus words found outside the Gospels.

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (9a).*

Paul was struggling with a 'thorn in the flesh', which apparently is some physical ailment. He prayed three times for God's healing and three times God said "No. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"

Talk about an upside down answer! God's words run counter to the way of our human world. In our world the person with the power wins. Biggest army... wins. Biggest bank account ...wins. Biggest wins and this is certainly how the game is played in most human societies.

But the Lord says to Paul, I have a different way. And by extension what God said to Paul He says to us.

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"*

I let that rattle around in my thoughts for a bit. It is revolutionary and it is scary because it is so not how my world lives. As fast as this sentence tumbles around, equally fast concerns with it surface within me. I immediately wonder...

Will I get taken advantage of?

Will I have to forsake my ~~con~~fortable life?

Will my peers, inside and outside of the church, ever take me seriously?

Will I live or will this cost me my life?

Variations on these themes continued to tumble. In essence I am saying to God, "Really?!?"

Admittedly when I feel weak these words bring comfort. After all God will provide His power to my weakness and "I win." But when I think about the many ways I sit in the seat of comfort and power—I am white, highly educated, male, and financially comfortable—these words are a bit frightening, because the way to God's power is through weakness. And I really don't like weakness.

The Lord's words and the promptings of the Spirit probe some of the deepest recesses of my life. And my best response today seems to be to allow them to probe deeper and deeper.

An illustration from my shop just hit me. I have been learning a new skill, hot pipe wood bending. Hot pipe wood bending has 3 major steps:

1) Soak wood for 3+ hours.

2) Press the wood, slowly at first, against a scalding pipe. As the wood heats, the fibers relax and can be bent into a shape you desire.

3) Clamp wood in the desired shape until it cools and dries out.

Soaking loosens and relaxes the fibers. The heat causes lignin bond around the wood fibers to loosen. The bending repositions the fibers and clamping holds them in the new position while the new bonds cool, dry and re-set.

God is taking me through a similar process...

He has been soaking me... time in ~~H~~is ~~W~~ord

Then He applies pressure... a new opportunity for service or some 'trial' testing my faith metal.

~~Finally~~ Finally, He generally leaves me in a situation for a while as new godly attitudes and character traits form and become part of me...

*God, I pray that I will learn the lesson that Your grace truly is sufficient for me... Amen.*

#### **Thursday, January 5: 2Corinthians 13- Examine yourself...**

*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? (5).*

This morning God's ~~W~~ord is plain and clear. *Examine yourselves...*

Paul instructs, Paul teaches, Paul corrects and he will confront them in person when he comes. Until then the best advice he can give is for the Corinthians to examine themselves. The onus is on them...

And the Spirit nudges me that the onus is on me to examine myself. God's Wword is open before me. Anytime I want to know what God says or thinks on a matter, all I have to do is open and read. God instructs, teaches, corrects and encourages through His Wword. God will confront and judge me when Jesus returns or I die, which-ever comes first. Until then the advice God gives is the same advice Paul gave the Corinthians, that I

*examine myself to see whether I am in the faith; test myself.*

*Do I not realize that Christ Jesus is in me—unless, of course, I fail the test?*

And this is good advice for all us, that we examine ourselves against the truth of God's Wword...

*Lord, help me to be honest before Your Wword. ~~+~~ To hold Your Wword as a plumb line for how I should be living, acting, thinking and dreaming, I pray this in Jesus' -name. Amen.*

### **Friday, January 6: Joshua 1- A life God honors...**

The words the Lord spoke to Joshua as he assumed leadership of Israel after Moses' death called me to meditate.

*"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (7-9)*

As I listen and internalize these words, the central tone struck by this word is obedience... complete and unwavering obedience. *Obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left.*

Meditation and contemplation throughout the day on the law is the primary chord of the tone struck in this word. Meditation as used in Christianity is filling ourselves with God's Wword with the goal of enhanced obedience not merely knowledge or understanding. *Meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.*

This word to Joshua works for anyone. A life that God honors is a life of obedience and love; a life that sits with God, loves the Lord and lives for the Lord.

How am I doing with this? How am I doing with my

Sitting...

Loving...

Living for and obeying...

the Lord, my God?

Now my daily meditation truly begins as I put my life to the Joshua test.

*Lord, to live a life that honors You, ~~+~~ This is my desire. Help me, Lord, I am weak and selfish. Help me. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

### **Saturday, January 7: Joshua 2- ...**

A small detail from the story sparked my thoughts this morning. It came from the first verse. *Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.*

Joshua has succeeded Moses as leader of Israel. They are perched on the edge of the Promised Land the Lord had~~s~~ sworn to give them. And still Joshua decid~~ed~~s to secretly send out spies. I wondered about this.

Couldn't this be construed as a 'lack of faith?' Rather than simply 'trusting' God and marching on to attack, Joshua does what many military leaders would have done.?

I don't know. I am perplexed about this.

I can read 'faith' into both sides. Faith to simply march out and seize the land the Lord has sworn to you. Or faith, believing God has given you the land and you are now determining the best course of action... some might even call this seeking confirmation!?!?

It seems to me that God rarely has us turn off our brains. God uses our intellect; intellect surrendered to faith in God ~~A~~almighty.

I am quite certain that Joshua believed his actions to be faith filled. What information he was hoping to gain I do not know. But for Joshua this was step one in faithful leadership of Israel. For Joshua, seeking information isn't faithless, it can be faithful.

### **Sunday, January 8, 2017, 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](mailto:office@pcogonline.org).*

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