

The Weekly Word
August 14-20, 2017

Summer is steaming ahead and so is our time in God's Word. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, August 14: Ephesians 5- Find out what pleases the Lord...

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God... and find out what pleases the Lord... Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is (1-2, 10, 17).

This grouping of verses caught my attention. Together they call me to press into God's way and to live into God's example.

I was particularly taken with verse 10; *find out what pleases the Lord*. As I pondered that thought it hit me, it is not always obvious to me what pleases the Lord. My corrupted human heart does not automatically lead me to God's way. I must constantly be measuring my natural inclinations against God's Word to see where I am in line and where I am out of line with the Lord and His *way of love*.

Diligence, exploration and even some trial and error are three descriptors that come to mind as I ponder the idea of finding out what pleases the Lord.

Diligence... I must work at this. Like a profession in any field, I must hone and develop habits. I need to spend the time to master the attitudes, to match my heart beat with the heartbeat of God.

Exploration... what pleases God will not come naturally to me. So I must explore new ways of living. God's Word is full of new ways. The end of this chapter highlights a new way of marriage so different than the human way. I must explore God's new ways.

Trial and error... this will mean I have to try new ways of living. I don't expect that my initial forays into God's new ways of living will always be correct or best. And as life changes and I enter new seasons, I will continually need to adapt and grow. Thinking about the example of marriage, loving my wife as Christ loved the church requires different actions and attitudes at different times. First married, with young children, with teen children, both working, empty nest, each season has its own actions that please the Lord.

I'm back to the words *find out what pleases the Lord*. What does that mean for me today? How should I act today in order to please the Lord?

This is a question I need to learn to ask myself daily, maybe even hourly....

Lord, I am yours, You bought me with the price of Jesus' blood. I need the work of the Holy Spirit in me to live up to Your example of love and to find out what pleases You. Please grace me with Your Spirit that I might please You and live for You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, August 15: Ephesians 6- Will you pray for me...

Paul the great apostle, church planter, pioneer and missionary asked the church of Ephesus to pray for him. Paul asked them to pray, not for his health, or his wellbeing but asked them to pray *that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery*

of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (19-20). That's a man of faith, that's a disciple-making disciple.

I am humbled by Paul's dedication to God's cause, humbled yet strengthened.

As I sit and read and ponder, Paul lifts my aspirations... to be a man of faith and a disciple-making disciple.

Will you pray for me *that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

Oh, God, give me an army of intercessors who will pray for me like the Ephesians prayed for Paul. Through Christ and for the sake of Gospel advance in this world, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, August 16: Philippians 1- Pondering suffering for the Lord...

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. **This is a sign to them** that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. **For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him**, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have (27-30).*

Paul seems to be saying to the Philippians that they are honored by Christ... and the honor is that they suffer for Him.

The concept of suffering for Jesus, as an honor, is so far from my thinking and experience, I am not even sure how to process this thought as I sit.

Yes, I spent 3 weeks in Nigeria this summer, but it was hardly suffering. Oh, there were lack of conveniences that I am used to—safe drinking water, A/C, healthy well balanced meals and other 1st world issues. When I got sick friends got me medicine within 24 hours and I was better in 48 hours, hardly suffering. And most of my summer has been a joy, eating produce from my wife's vegetable garden, enjoying the beauty of our yard, having friends over to enjoy an evening swim in our pool, enjoying a 3-generation family trip in Europe. Honestly, I don't know if I even understand 'suffering for the Lord.' In so many ways my life is so privileged.

As a pastor I can't recall the last time I spoke on 'suffering for Jesus.' And that is probably because I haven't.

I am struggling to know what to do with this idea of suffering for Jesus. I know we are not to go and look for suffering, as if it is a human work to earn God's delight. The self-flagellation of ascetics in the past, I believe, is a distortion of the Gospel and a biblical understanding of suffering for Jesus.

My culture and country tolerates the Christian faith, so I am not hampered in any way from practicing my faith at home. Like I said, I am not sure I understand 'suffering for the Lord.'

So here I sit this morning, wondering what to do with God's Words on suffering... no answers; many questions.

Father, even as I struggle to understand this idea about suffering for Jesus, I know that Your presence is always a safe place. A place to be myself with all my failings... Your love, You say, covers a multitude of sins. I am so grateful for this. Lord, whisper those things I need to know about suffering. I will trust You and live for You, empowered by Your Spirit, as well as I can. If suffering comes my way, I pray for strength to honor You in the way I suffer. And if suffering is not in Your divine plan for my life, then I pray for strength to honor You in my life of blessing. Either way and every way I seek to honor You, my Lord and my God—Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thursday, August 17: Philippians 2- Of one mind...

Sometimes when I read, I like to take out the extra modifiers and clauses that are part of the text so I can consider the heart of the sentence or paragraph. When I do this with the opening paragraph of today's reading here is what I come up with.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, ... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ... In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus... (1-2, 5)

Paul is pleading with the church to be of one mind, in other words, to have the same mindset. But interestingly Paul is not instructing them to have his mindset. It is not that they must agree and think like Paul. Instead all the church including Paul should seek to have Christ's mindset. Jesus is our Unifier and Jesus alone is our Lord. We should strive to be like Him.

And what was true for the Philippians remains true for me and all believers today.

Yes, we should be of one mind, but it is the mind of Christ, not the mind or anyone else. Following this plea Paul gives a vivid picture of the mindset of Jesus...

[Jesus] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (6-8).

Jesus willingly and sacrificially gave up everything so that we might be saved.

That is the mindset I am (we are) to have... to willingly and sacrificially give up anything and everything for others to know and grow in Christ.

Oh, God, I fall so short of this.... Forgive me. Restore me. Empower me to be like Jesus. Amen

Friday, August 18: Philippians 3- To know Christ...

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (7-11).

The context makes it clear that Paul is warning Philippians about falling back into the legalism of Judaism, and following the law as their source of salvation. Salvation is by faith not by law; attaining Christ, not living up to some human made law is the Gospel way. Paul's deepest desire is *to know Christ...*

This strikes a chord in me... *to know Christ*. Knowing Christ personally and intimately is the foundation of faith. Paul says a similar thing in Romans 12:2, *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will*. The transforming of our minds—what we know and think about and how we see and process the world around us is what transforms us. So it is that Paul seeks *to know Christ...* an example for all of us.

Knowing Christ leads to living and doing for Christ! This is the faithful 'order'. To reverse these... to put the doing before knowing is a wide open door to legalism, which Paul warns against in Colossians and Galatians.

So back to me and my life... am I putting my heart and soul into knowing Jesus Christ? Ingesting His Word and distinguishing His heartbeat, so that I can be listening for His voice and follow His lead?

Oh, Father, send Your Spirit that I might know Your Son, I pray through His name. Amen.

Saturday, August 19: Philippians 4- The importance of getting along...

How important is getting along in the church and being of one mind (which we learned from chapter 2 means being of one mind with Jesus)? It must be very important because Paul addresses two women, pleading for them to get along and for others to help them.

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life (2-3).

There is no doubt that these are women of faith. Their names are written in the book of life and they have contended at Paul's side. In other words they are visible, faithful coworkers who are associated with Paul and his work.

Their association with Paul gives him some leverage and possibly even some responsibility to see if he can repair whatever the damage may be. This is precisely what Paul does.

First he calls on the two women to seek repair by following the principle he laid out in Chapter 2 ... to be of one mind that is the mind of Christ.

Next he calls out to his 'true companion', whoever that might be, to help the women and for this person to seek the additional help of Clement and others if needed.

Paul is pulling out all the stops. Unity and these two women, repairing whatever damage lies between them, is that important!

Broken relationships, particularly those within the church, need attention...

Do you have any broken relationships that need repair?

Are you aware of any broken relationships in your fellowship? Now do you have an association, which might allow you to help effect repair? If you don't have an association you can always pray for them. Unity is that important.

Lord, I pray for Your church. That we, the people of Your church, would seek to be of one mind—the mind of Christ. That we would repair damage and live as one people blessed by our God and beacons of light for You in our dark and hurting world. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, August 20, 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.

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