

The Weekly Word
December 25-31, 2017

This week the year comes to an end. Where does time go? How rich a year it has been.
Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, December 25: 1John 2- Merry Christmas... obedience is God's desire...

John writes, *But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did (5-6).*

Obedience is so important. It is easy to say "I believe" but obedience shows we believe. Words are easy, action and follow through is much more difficult. This is true in all areas in life. Saying 'I love you' and living 'I love you' are very different. When it comes to faith, living it is called 'obedience'. John says... obey; that is when we know God has truly transformed a person by His love.

So now I have to consider my life. What are the areas where I struggle with obedience??? Where do you struggle with obedience? Today's time with Jesus starts by considering this question.

John follows his call to obedience with a pointed statement. *Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.* The image of living as Jesus did struck me. I tend to be a visual person, so I can see Jesus living. From the Gospels I can imagine how Jesus would act in many contemporary situations and that helps me think through how I should live as a follower of Jesus.

I fall so short of Jesus' ideal, still thinking how Jesus might act in a given situation helps me see how I should live.

I am back to evaluating my life... this time based on how Jesus would live. I am reminded by the phrase, WWJD, What would Jesus do? While I cannot be absolutely certain in every situation how Jesus would act, the more I read the Gospels and the New Testament the clearer my picture of Jesus becomes.

Lord, to be like Jesus, to obey You and Your will and way. These are my goals and ideals. But Lord, I cannot do this on my own. I need the presence and coaching of the Holy Spirit within my life. Guide me O h Holy Spirit, that I may grow in my living like Jesus. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, December 26: 1John 3- Love lavished on us...

With all the decorations of Christmas around me, I was attracted to verse 1. *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!...*

Love lavished on us, isn't that what Christmas is truly about? God lavishing His love on us by sending Jesus to become one of us. Amazing.

The story of the Incarnation never gets old for me. That God would become human to save a sinner like me! That God would become human to invite me back into God's family and adopt me as one of His children... even more amazing!

Today I sat and I thought about the great gifts of God that come with Jesus.

- Love

- Forgiveness
- Redemption
- Adoption
- A new family
- An inheritance that will never spoil
- Presence
- Peace....

The list goes on and on and I am forever grateful and filled with wonder at God's lavish love for me, for you, for the world.

Alleluia! Christ is born today! The hymn writer sings. O God, I am so blessed by being Your son. Thank You and bless You for Your lavish love. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, December 27: 1John 4- Love, love, love...

Love, love, love. Love, love, love. All you need is love... sang the Beatles on the on 27 June 1967 to a televised crowd of over 400 million people. Yes, all we need is love. And the love we need is God's love in us so that we can give His love away to others.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. ... And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister (7-12, 21).

Love is not sex. Love is not lust. Love is sacrificially giving of our selves to others. Love defined by God is Jesus dying on the cross for people, people who followed Him and people who had Him killed. This is the love God is asking of us who follow Jesus. This kind of love is the costliest gift we can give to another human being. And we can only do this whenis we have been filled first by God's love for us.

Contemplating this I have to think through how I live in every interaction of life. Do I love the other person with God's kind of love? This is the question the text is asking of me as I sit with the Lord as the sun rises outside my window.

Do I love others as God has loved me?... Do you?

Think about it...

O God, I fall short of your command to love, every day... probably most of every day. I guard self. I look out for #1. I turn a blind eye rather than turning my other cheek. As I think of Jesus hanging there for me, for us, I don't come close to that kind of love. Please fill me anew with Your love so that I can give it away. Holy Spirit, show me when I am being selfish... so that I can change my ways and live more in line with Your command to love. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, December 28: 1John 5- Love and obedience, two truths, two actions ...

John has a way of stating the truth of God simply. Verse 2 is an example of his ability to do so. *This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.*

There you have it, a simple ‘formula’ for faith... loving God and obedience to His commands.

Love and obedience, two truths, two actions...

Love God... echoes of the first of the two great commands ring in my head. Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul mind and strength...* (Deuteronomy 6, Matthew 22, Mark 12, Luke 10). Loving God... it really says it all.

And love has certainly been an often repeated refrain of John’s in this letter and throughout his New Testament writings. And with good reason, it was Jesus’ summary of the law and the prophets.

Obedience... the beauty of this second facet is that it prevents ‘faith’ in Jesus from being reduced to postulates or sentimentality. Love in our time is often reduced to warm feelings, partly because we don’t understand the biblical definition of ‘agape’ which is the word for love that John uses. But by paring love with obedience John has underscored the active part of love that can be so easily lost by we sin-filled humans.

Again obedience is an often used refrain from the pen of John to describe faith in God. And a significant aspect of obedience in John’s writings is loving our brothers and sisters, which he learned from Jesus. For Jesus the second half of the greatest commandment was to love our neighbors as ourselves.

While it has been helpful to muse on love and obedience, I hear the inner voice of my Lord saying, “So how are you doing with love and obedience, Bill?”

Now I have to stop and still my heart before the Lord... and look inside.

Loving God... do I with all my heart and soul and mind and strength? Oh, golly, how I fall short of that. I do love the Lord. If I am honest, my love for God can be conflicted and watered down by love of self and others... My heart begins to cry for forgiveness and strength to grow and mature.

And similar things could be said about obedience. I do obey, but...

Father God, I would be lost if I didn’t have an advocate standing before You, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. (1John2:1). And I would be lost if I didn’t have an advocate teaching and reminding me of everything Jesus said –The Holy Spirit (John 14:26 and 15:26). God, Your love is so deep that You prepared for all my (our) shortcomings. I am, for the umpteenth time, blown away by Your grace, mercy and love. As I journal it is getting harder to type because my eyes are filling with tears of joy and tears of love and tears of gratitude. I do love You, Lord God –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. And I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Friday, December 29: 2John- Love wisely...

Love is the cornerstone of the Christian faith... Loving God and others. John has been making this abundantly clear throughout his writings. He emphasizes it again with in this brief epistle. *It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love* (4-6). Walking in truth is connected to loving; and loving is connected to walking in obedience.

The walking imagery reminds me that the love and obedience John writes of is active, energetic requiring effort on our part.

But as I read on the love John speaks of is not thoughtless or naïve either. ...*many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work* (7, 9-11).

Clearly John is not advocating being mean to people who are deceiving others with false teaching but neither should we show them the same level of hospitality and love we would for a fellow believer. If this lady were to house one of these deceivers for a few nights, then she is supporting their work and ‘ministry’ in her community, which might result with people in her town or home being deceived. Naïve love like this is not warranted under the command of love because we do not want to advance deceptive and wrong teachings about God and truth.

As I ponder this, I believe John is advocating thoughtful love. Thoughtful is not a mechanism to get myself out of loving people, but rather the application of spiritual wisdom so that my love bears godly fruit.

Jesus, Father, Holy Spirit, now I pray for a heart big enough to truly love others as You, Oh God, would have me love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, December 30: 3John- Who do you admire?...

In this personal letter, I found myself attracted to a piece of general advice John offers to his friend. *Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God* (11).

Its simplicity is its strength and practicality... *do not imitate what is evil but what is good.*

So much of learning in life is by imitation, some intentional but much is simply picked up unconsciously by watching those we admire. Many of my parenting habits were imitations of how my dad parented me, picked up by me seemingly by osmosis. I don't recall deciding to do these things, yet they were ingrained in me by observing my dad.

Likewise imitation is both intentionally and unintentionally learned. Accepting this truth I apply it to John's advice... *do not imitate what is evil but what is good.*

There is the intentional aspect. I need to be conscious of the traits I see that I want to emulate, making sure that they are honorable and God-fearing traits. But subtler is paying attention to those whom I watch with admiration. I need to beware that these people are themselves honorable and God-fearing people lest I unconsciously imitate traits of people who are evil.

Who do I watch and admire? Are they honorable and godly? These are the questions the Lord seems to be asking of me as I sit with Him today.

Lord, help me to find worthy people to emulate so that I grow in my living for You. This is my prayer, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, December 31, 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.