

**The Weekly Word**  
March 26-April 1, 2018

We have reached Holy Week. In addition to our Bible reading I pray that the events and services of the week draw you closer to Jesus. Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

**Monday, March 26: Romans 8- Safe, secure, warm, comfortable and at peace ...**

For me, Romans 8 is one of the great chapters of the Bible. I could spend a lifetime in this chapter and never mine all its wonder and truth.

First, I am simply sitting as the entirety of the chapter continues to wash over me. It opens with no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, the Lord, and it concludes with nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, the Lord. What a faith-encouraging journey!

The source of all good things is Jesus! From beginning to end it is Jesus! It is all about Jesus! And if we have Christ then we have the Spirit (8). And the Spirit is God within constantly interceding for us and reminding us of our adoption. Through the Spirit we cry to God, the Father, as Abba... Daddy (15).

On a recent vacation I soaked in a natural hot spring. Depending upon my proximity to the source I could choose water from 85 to 100<sup>+</sup>. I bobbed for over an hour, my body relaxing and being refreshed by the warmth of the water. At one point, supported by a couple of pool noodles, I actually fell asleep as I floated in luxury, safe, secure, warm, comfortable and at peace. This is how I feel reading this chapter... safe, secure, warm, comfortable and at peace in the care and protection of Jesus.

*Thank You, God, for Jesus. My Rock and Protector. My Savior and Lord. His love protects me. The Spirit in me, because of faith in Jesus, leads and guides me. Today I am basking in God, in Jesus, in the Spirit.*

*Thank You, God. Thank You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 27: Romans 9- Stumbling over the stumbling stone...**

Faith or works? Earn or gift? My effort or God's effort? It is so easy to blur these lines and stumble over this stumbling stone. Israel stumbled.

*What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone (30-32).*

Abraham and the patriarchs launched the people of God 'in faith'. From the very beginning there were temptations to run after other gods. Faith is never easy and it does take effort but over time, as the faith got codified, a new enemy slipped in. The enemy... my effort, my work, my keeping of the rules/law, me, my...

The focus shifted from faith or trust... to rule keeping. Outwardly these opposites can look similar, but internally they are polar opposites.

Growing up my family went to church every week. It is what we did. For me God was going to get me if I didn't go to church. I didn't attend out of love; I attended out of fear and was

checking off worship a thing 'to do'. And while at church I was rarely mentally present, I was just putting in my time earning my church credit for the week.

Now in my life attendance at worship is a drive for me because I want to be with others worshipping my Lord. I am present and engaged. Love not duty motivates my attending.

From the outside these two behaviors looks similar but internally there is a radical difference... faith and love vs. duty and work.

Israel stumbled over this work/faith stumbling block but they are not alone. As my own life shows, Christians & churchgoers can stumble over this very same stumbling stone...

Right now God is calling me to a gut check. My faith actions...are they motivated by faith or duty, love or personal effort?

How about you???

*Oh, Lord, help me to keep my eyes up, on You, looking ahead so that I don't stumble over the stumbling stone. I pray this in Jesus, my Lord's name. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, March 28: Romans 10- The essence of the Christian Faith...**

There are times Paul writes in complex sentences. Other times he can distill the faith into concise statements. Chapter 10 includes one of his best concise statements.

*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (9-13).*

The message of Christianity... it is not a matter of race, or bloodline, or any other human distinction. It is faith in Jesus, declaring 'Jesus is Lord' and believing God raised him –shorthand for believing in the life, death, resurrection and saving work of Jesus. Christianity is not a matter of keeping rules and regulations... it is faith in Jesus and living accordingly.

As I noted yesterday, I do things due to my faith in Jesus (like attend weekly worship) but I do these out of love not duty. So there is effort in my faith but it is effort because I am loved not trying to earn God's love...

I pull myself back to the main point. The message of Christianity... is faith in Jesus, declaring 'Jesus is Lord' and believing God raised Him. And this I believe with all my heart and soul and mind and strength.

How about you???

I declare that Jesus is my Lord!

*Help me, Jesus, to live that declaration constantly and for Your glory. In Your name I pray. Amen.*

### **Thursday, March 29: Romans 11- Don't get cocky & pray for all...**

Theologically much has been written about the place of Israel in the heart of God now that Jesus has come and the Gentiles are invited into God's family. My personal devotions will not solve these issues. Instead they sustain me day after day as a Christ follower.

Reading this chapter two three word statements seemed to resound from the throne of grace. Don't get cocky. Pray for all.

They issued forth most clearly from verses 22-24:

*Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!*

Don't get cocky... *but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.* Israel got cocky, uppity. God would always come through, no matter how faithlessly they lived. But one thing we have heard over and over again in Romans is that we live by faith not by works. And we Gentile believers are just as susceptible to slipping into a works understanding as our Jewish forbearers were. God brought this to my attention two days ago and He is reminding me again with an added warning that if God cut off Israel for lack of faith He could do that to us as well. *Continue in his kindness...* in other words continue in faith, believe Jesus and follow Him.

Pray for all... *how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!* Pray with Paul that all Israel is saved. That God's first family is drawn back to Him even as Gentiles from around the world are coming to Him. There is lots of room in God's house, let's pray it is filled up!!! Jews and Gentiles. Males and females. Young and old. Slave and free. Capitalist and socialists. White and black and yellow and red.... Pray that all people everywhere will find their way home to the Lord.

*Oh, Lord, may it be so... Alleluia. Amen.*

### **Friday, March 30: Romans 12- So what should I do?...**

Romans chapter 12 may be the single most practical chapter in the Bible answering the question, 'So what should I do now that I am a Christ follower?'

After explaining the Gospel in detail in chapters 1-11 Paul begins an exposition of how the Gospel informs our living. If you want the 'so what of' Christianity here it is.

Verse one drew me in. Often I find myself lingering on verse 1 & 2 but today only verse 1. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* I found myself pondering it systematically.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy...* in view of everything Paul has taught about the Gospel... Understanding all God has done for you, here is how you should respond...

*Offer...* our life as believers is an offering, a free will offering to the Lord. We live this way not out of compulsion or threat of punishment but out of love, love for God. So we willingly offer...

*Our bodies...* the whole of ourselves. Heart, mind, soul, strength are all bound up in our bodies...

*Living sacrifice, holy and pleasing...* the imagery is stark and compelling. Sacrifices were killed and laid on an altar but in our case we are a living sacrifice. Blood is still coursing through our veins; we are living sacrifices. *Holy* (righteous) *and pleasing* to God because as Paul has taught us we are righteous because of Christ's gift to us. I also suspect that *holy* is to be understood as 'wholly' as well... we offer all of ourselves... as in our whole body.

*To God...* our offering is to God who has done all we need for salvation for us in Christ.

*This is your true and proper worship... offering ourselves to God is worship. Worship isn't just Sunday at 10am, it is every day as we give ourselves wholly, holy to the Lord.*

Such a rich chapter and this is just the first sentence. From this BIG picture description Paul moves to some facets of how we can and should live this out practically as we live our lives in Jesus' name.

*Oh, God, I can never repay You for what You have given me in Christ Jesus, my Lord. But just because I can't ever repay You doesn't mean I shouldn't live for You hour by hour. So I offer You my today... I pray it is a holy and pleasing sacrifice to You. Through the name of my Lord Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

### **Saturday, March 31: Romans 13- ...**

Paul continues the practicalities of how we should live as redeemed Christ followers. Again today Paul's plain spoken wisdom is apparent.

As I read about how a Jesus person should act toward one's government I couldn't help thinking about how people live in repressive regimes. When do we submit and when do we stand up for what is right in God's eyes? I have no answer, just some thoughts; there are other Scriptures which will need to be weighed. Scriptures like, 'we must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). These are never easy situations to live in.

But the primary verse which caught my attention this morning was verse 10. In his practical word on love, Paul under the Spirit's guidance, wrote: *Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

*Love does no harm to a neighbor...* I realize that this is a 'what not to do' statement, but I find it helpful as I was weighing how love calls me to act. Considering this statement, harm can be direct or indirect. Obviously I can harm someone by hurting them (direct) but I can also harm someone by not confronting a destructive behavior (indirect). Sometimes in my 'niceness' I don't want to confront people with difficult issues. (I am speaking about people I have the right or authority to speak into their lives, not sticking my nose in where it doesn't belong.) But my 'niceness' may actually not be loving... hmmm.

I don't normally think this way so I have to continue to let this steep more deeply into my life.

*Love does no harm to a neighbor.* A far deeper thought and way of life than I realized initially...

*Lord, guide me into being a truly loving person in all aspects of the word. As I ponder and pray this into my life, may Jesus, whose resurrection we celebrate tomorrow and whose crucifixion we celebrated yesterday, be my guide. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Sunday, April 1, 2018, EASTER 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.