

The Weekly Word
April 2-8, 2018

Basking in the glory of Easter, I open God's Word and continue my regular reading of Scripture. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, April 2: Romans 14- Disputable matters...

My take away for chapter 14 is simply stated, 'don't judge other believers or quarrel with them over disputable matters'. Easier written than lived.

To live this I need to first define what a 'disputable matter' is and this is where I ponder today. As I consider this phrase I would say a disputable matter is...

First, we have to consider what are 'non-critical faith matters'. I flip this considering what are indisputable matters... like the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Trinity and the like. They remain indisputable matters. They are not something over which Christ followers can disagree. They are essential... the matters which define the Christian faith. Therefore, disputable matters are secondary matters. Paul mentions two, what we can and cannot eat and sacredness of special days. Clearly these are non-salvific matters, thus they would be considered disputable.

A second case of disputable matters could be something over which true students of God's Word can disagree. There are other non-salvific matters over which the church has been divided for centuries. I think of the mode or baptism or how to describe Christ's presence in the sacrament of Communion. Rather than judging one another, allow people to hold their biblical positions and treat them as sisters and brothers in the faith. (Please note: I spoke about true students of God's Word. God's Word is the source of our faith. I am not speaking about concocting things that I want to believe because I want to believe them. We are bound to God's Word and there are issues of interpretation where faith-filled believers might differ.)

Across the span of the church there are any number of disputable matters which divide. So be it. I don't anticipate being given the ability to bring the various sides together so that they have one view. However, I can work to remind sisters and brothers of different strips that Christ died for all and He alone is our center and source.

I guess another way I could live this chapter is to work toward living as sisters and brothers in Christ remembering we are all on Jesus' team and the disputable matter differences we have are not worth destroying fellowship.

Lord, on this Monday after Resurrection Sunday, how can I live as a unifier rather than divider of Your Church? I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, April 3: Romans 15- Considering my motivations...

There were phrases in the opening 2 sentences that surprised me. This is one of the joys and benefits of reading a passage slowly. *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.*

I have never considered that I might bear with the failings of others to please myself or that I might do good to my neighbor in a manner other than to build them up. The wheels of thought began churning...

Serving others in order to please myself. As I ponder that I see how it is very possible. I could serve others to

Show my goodness to others

Fulfill a vow to the Lord or self

Earn a hearing before God so that God might 'have' to do something for me. (I think of people who give to God so that God 'has' to give them 10 times more).

The more I think about this there are many reasons why I might serve others for reasons that please myself. In fact I am sure I do this...

Ouch, the prick of God, the Holy Spirit, stings.

Likewise, I can have many motivations to serve others that ultimately are not based on the simple desire to build them up! Many of the reasons above could play here as well.

And again I am guilty of this as well.

Ouch, the prick of God, the Holy Spirit, stings.

I am left to consider my motivations... as I seek to live this seemingly simple word from the Lord. *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.*

Oh, God, as I look at my motivations I am realizing how sin-filled to the core I am. Continue, Lord, to bring my sins forward that I might see them, realizing all the more how much I need a savior... how much I need Jesus. I pray in His name. Amen.

Wednesday, April 4: Romans 16- So many people...

I love this chapter of the Bible. I know that is quirky, but I love the list of all the names. If my count is correct there are 35 people named in this chapter. Of those 35 I recognize 3 of them from other NT passages. So we meet 32 new people in this chapter, all of whom have helped or touched Paul's life and ministry in some way.

Often reading the NT I get the impression, except for a helper here and there, Paul was a lone ranger, sharing Jesus around the world as a one-man evangelism tour de force. Reading this chapter reminds me that none of us are lone rangers, not even Paul. We all need others. In big ways and small ways we all need other people to help us manage the way of life.

We don't know how all these brothers and sisters worked with Paul or what they did, but Paul's words make it clear how hard they worked for the Lord God.

We may not know anything other than their name listed here, but God knows. And the Gospel message would likely not have reached my ears and heart without thousands of men and women who faithfully lived for the Lord.

And this is part of my love for this chapter. Beyond the headlines and headliners of the New Testament are hundreds and thousands of faithful people serving Jesus here and there and everywhere. The sum of their efforts is what propels the Gospel around the globe.

When my life is over, no one will write a book about me. My memory will fade into the ether. But by God's grace, the Gospel will have been advanced and people will have been loved and pointed to Jesus. That is what truly matters.

It takes all hands faithfully working at the tasks God assigns to advance the Gospel and fulfill God's commission to take the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth. And every Christ follower gets to play her or his God ordained role.

What will God have you do for Him, His glory, will and kingdom today?

*Oh, Lord, may I put my heart and soul into every task You send my way today. I pray this in Jesus' name.
Amen.*

Thursday, April 5: Galatians 1- The present evil age...

Many chapters in the New Testament have numerous touchstones, places that call out for deeper contemplation. I never quite know what verses the Lord will highlight and have me return to contemplate. Today it was an element in a description that I cannot recall pondering before. The thought that grabbed me was in verse 4 but I will include the immediate context of verses 3-5.

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins **to rescue us from the present evil age**, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

While every day the news' feeds blare about this bad thing and that tragedy, wars and terrorist bombings, school mass-shootings, the opioid crisis and yet, I never really consider our present age evil. Oh, evil things happen but to paint that age as evil is a different view of things than I would normally have.

But as I consider this Paul is far more accurate and right than I truly want to believe. And part of the reason I am not inclined to use Paul's language is that it indicts me. When evil things happen, I can point to them and think, those 'bad' people did 'xyz'. At the same time I can kind of absolve myself from the evil. However, if I consider the 'present age evil' I have to point at myself because I am part of this 'evil age.'

It is natural that people of the world want to be positive and upbeat about the direction of humanity. That is, after all, all they have. But the church with its eternal perspective should have a clearer view and God's Word says Jesus *gave himself for our sins **to rescue us from the present evil age***. I don't think the Lord is saying everything is evil, but at our root we are evil – opposed to God largely because we are selfish putting self above all things. Consider Eve and Adam's sin in the garden. I could mull on this for hours...

My take away, I am part of an evil age. I, and my human, cohorts are in rebellion against the Lord and we all desperately need the redemption of Jesus, without which we cannot live in relationship with our creator, God and Lord.

Lord, the human heart, my human heart, is in need of reformation, which can only happen when it is surrendered to Jesus. I surrender to You, Jesus. I bow and acknowledge you, Lord of the world and Lord of my life. In your name I pray. Amen.

Friday, April 6: Galatians 2- Wise mature Christ-honoring counsel...

Given the wonder of having the Bible in my language, and deep desire to spend time in the Word, there is a potential problem that I begin to read it as a 'loner' or individual. This can be multiplied when in addition to Scripture we consider those things God speaks to us personally.

What is a check and balance that I am not running off in a wrong direction, deceived –even sincerely deceived –by my best thinking? The body of Christ, wise sisters and brothers, in the present and throughout history... this is my safety net.

I was impressed as Paul continued giving his testimony. In verse 1-2, he writes: *Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I*

*presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. **I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.***

It was the words I bolded that caught my attention. Paul was a man of the word, steeped in the OT as a student of Gamaliel would be. He also knew what it was to speak directly with the risen Lord and to be directed by dreams and visions. Still God directed him (notice the words, *I went in response to a revelation*) to seek out other esteemed leaders.

Ahh, the wisdom of trusted brothers and sisters. Over and over again in my life I have benefited from the counsel and wisdom of other believers... checking a thought, processing what seems like a word from the Lord, and keeping my theology within the bounds of orthodoxy. Like Paul I want to be sure that I am not running my race in vain. However, let me say, I need mature men and women of the word who will give me truth not just what I want to hear!

So you have people you trust, esteemed friends with whom you can seek the Lord together or at least discern things together. This is a gift...

Think about it...

Lord, thank You for men and women in the body who have counseled me, and helped me, hear, discern and live out my faith in You. Thank You for the wisdom of the church of the ages and esteemed leaders who keep me on track with You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, April 7: Galatians 3- The amazing presence of the Holy Spirit...

When I think about New Testament books that speak about the Holy Spirit, Galatians is not a book that comes to mind. I think that is why all the talk about the Spirit in this chapter surprised me.

Arguing for faith in Jesus rather than works of the law as the saving event, Paul appeals to the presence of the Spirit in their lives. He probes:

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (2-6).

I read and re-read these verses. The Holy Spirit and miracles –Paul’s language indicates that the Spirit is responsible for the miracles –are proof that faith (believing) is our connection to God, not the law!

As I pondered this I am convicted by the state of the church today. I don’t know any pastor who would point to the presence of the Spirit and miracles as proof that faith is the doorway to life in God. This pierces my heart, largely because I, as a pastor, would not think to use this argument. Uugh.

What has happened?

Where has the wonder of the Spirit gone? Where is His power? Where is the expectation that God will do what only God can do?

My heart is wondering and lamenting at the same time...

Lord, is there something in me blocking the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s work seems so matter of fact in Paul’s writings. I am wondering why that isn’t the case in my life or the life of the church I know in my country and throughout much of the world.

Lord, open me more fully to the work of the Spirit. If there are any blocks in me, remove them, I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sunday, April 8, 2018, 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.