

The Weekly Word
June 25-July 1, 2018

Happy Summer everyone. May God's Word and presence sustain you. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, June 25: 2Corinthians 6- Don't be yoked together...

What does God mean? *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?* (14).

What does it mean to be yoked to another person? Marriage is certainly a possibility. Business partnerships, certainly possible. Friendships? Clubs and guilds? Temples and pagan worship activities?

Whatever being 'yoked together' means it does not mean general connection or interaction. Paul (and the Spirit) are quite clear about this in 1Corinthians 5:9-11 (NIV2011): *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.* So it is certain that being 'yoked together' is not general association or friendship. We are, after all, supposed to be ambassadors for Christ, drawing people to the Savior.

So back to the first question, what does it mean?

Being 'yoked together' must mean some kind of a connection that binds us spiritually together in some way. Being a part of a guild where pagan practices are indulged in would certainly count. And marriage could be a possibility as well.

The question I hear in my spirit goes like this. "Bill, are you spiritually connected to anyone or thing who does not belong to the Lord?"

How about you?

Lord, search me... In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

Tuesday, June 26: 2Corinthians 7- Perfecting holiness...

Right out of the block, I knew the verse I was to linger upon after reading the chapter. *Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God* (1, bold mine).

I carry the responsibility for my life... I can choose to purify my life or to contaminate it. Me, the responsibility lies with me.

God, the Holy Spirit, lives in me, a gift of the Father and Son at the moment of my new birth in Jesus. In my merely human strength I could never choose to purify myself, but with the presence and power of the Spirit, I can draw upon God in and with me to give me the strength to purify myself.

The question is, do I have the want to do this? God is a gentleman. God will not force His will upon us humans. God will not even force His will on His followers. God invites us, woos us, charges us... and waits. Waits for us to acknowledge Him and desire to draw into Him.

So Paul entreats the Corinthians, and through his letter he entreats us, *let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

In the stillness, I ask God to go with me as I examine my life... and purge contaminants wherever they are found... in my thoughts, desires, hurts, fears, finances, relationships, appetites of food, drink, sex, and so on.

Holy Spirit, strengthen me for this task, a life-long task, because like weeds in a garden, contaminants continually pop up in my life. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, June 27: 2Corinthians 8- Intention and completion...

Paul's words about the offering raise the difference between intention and completion. And it is here that I found myself contemplating. The issue is highlighted in verses 10-11. *And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.*

Paul's third sentence reverberates within me. *Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.*

How often I intend to do some good thing... write a letter, make a call, give a gift, but then life gets in the way. For me it is not so much that I change my mind –sometimes maybe -rather I am thinking about the times I just don't get around to doing whatever I have said or thought I should do. I get busy with other things and forget to make the phone call. If I remember it will be hours or days later and the 'moment' for action has passed.

I could lay out similar scenarios for other intentions that never were completed.

I look back at Paul's words. *Now finish the work...* do what you said you would do! And if that word isn't enough, he continues: *so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.*

Willingness... matched by your completion of it. Ouch, that one stings.

Somehow my mind connects this passage with Old Testament concepts of vows. I realize an intention isn't necessarily the same as a vow, but they have a similar ilk. And the Lord speaks strongly about keeping one's vows to Him. Similar principle. Keep your word. Do what you said or intended to do.

It is the keeping of one's vow, the completion of one's intention that brings the blessing to self, others or both.

Think about it...

Lord, if I long to be a man of my word and a man after Your own heart then I need to finish the work and follow through on the Spirit promptings and God-honoring intentions that come to me. Lord, keep speaking and leading, also please provide me with the spirit-empowered strength to follow through. In Jesus' name. Amen,

Thursday, June 28: 2Corinthians 9- Generosity...

Generosity is a theme word from today's chapter. What is generosity?

From the chapter's context generosity speaks of people who sacrificially give for the sake of people in need. People who do something about alleviating the need of another brother in Christ who is in need.

It seems to me that one cannot turn generosity into a formula... From verse 7 there are some guidelines for generosity. *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give,*

not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. But these guidelines are far from a formula.

First guideline... generosity is individual... ***Each of you should give what you have decided...*** Tied to this generosity is driven by the heart which according to a Greek lexicon refers to the *'inner person*, the seat of understanding, knowledge, and will, and takes on as well the meaning *conscience*.^{*} Thus the hearts is the place of conscience, thought informed by faith...

Generosity is also an act of one's will, not guilted, forced or coerced, rather it grows from a heart that wants to do something and derives cheer or joy from being able to help.

Questions erupt within me:

--Is my giving characterized by generosity?

--Would God consider me a generous person?

--Am I willing to engage the need of others so that generosity might flower?

This are questions worth chewing on...

Lord, open me to true generosity. I pray in Jesus' name and for the sake of people in need and Your kingdom's expansion. Amen.

*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament – Volume 2.

Friday, June 29: 2Corinthians 10- Standards...

My thoughts and meditations were drawn to ending thought in verse 2. *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** (2).*

Paul's baseline is that we, Christ-followers, do not live by the standard of this world.

We are to live differently. We measure living, success, 'the good life,' by standards different than people who are not Christ followers.

But do I live by a different standard? This question plagues me. Do I? Do You live by a different standard, God's standard?

I find myself thinking through various aspects of my life... and I see as many standards similar to the world as I see distinctive standards? Have I capitulated?

My time with the Lord is filled with self-examination.

Lord, it is so easy to be sucked into living as the world lives. I am inundated by the world's thinking, values, examples, and there are times I cannot even tell where I have been infected? Over and over the OT people of God found themselves worshipping Baals... they slipped to the world's standards. Paul wrote this letter reminding the Corinthians that they had slipped down to the world's standards. Through them I am being reminded that I to slip to following the world's standards. Oh, God, forgive me and help me rise above to follow Your standards. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, June 30: 2Corinthians 11- Humbled...

Even though I have read this chapter over 40 times, I still sit here stunned and humbled by Paul's example of living all out for Jesus. His pursuit of and suffering for Jesus and the gospel shame me. My life and following of Jesus has been so easy compared to the road God had him traverse.

I know my road from the Lord has been different and to compare my journey with anyone else's, even more so someone of the stature of Paul, is wrong. Still I am humbled by Paul's

steadfast determination and love for the Lord... that he would endure all this gladly for Jesus and keep pressing forward in service to Jesus.

...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (23b-29).

When I hear people preach that God wants all Christians to prosper, meaning all Christians should be healed of all diseases and earn comfortable wages and live in fine homes, I choke, wondering if they have read what Paul endured for his faith?

This last thought, however true it might be, is a rabbit trail away from my time with the Lord allowing me to avoid the questions God possess to me in the quietness of my inner being. Questions, which go like this... “Bill, would you give your all for Me like Paul did?” “Bill, would you accept suffering if that was My will for you?” “Bill, do you trust Me –really trust Me –with your life? “Bill, where is your passion to spread My name and fame across the earth?” Bill, show Me your life scars from battling with world to advance My gospel?” And so God’s inquiry went...

Honestly, I didn’t know if I could answer these questions. Like Job, I found myself speechless before the Lord. I am not worthy to be His disciple. Thankfully God’s mercy and grace is far greater than my unworthiness...

Alleluia! Thank You, Oh Lord, for Your grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, redemption, care, gifts and presence. You alone are worthy. I praise You and bless You. Through Jesus, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

Sunday, July 1, 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.