

**The Weekly Word**  
December 31, 2018 - January 6, 2019

Happy New Year! May God bless you as you read His Word. Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

**Monday, December 31: Hebrews 2- Jesus did it for us...**

Verse 14 and 15 description of Jesus drew me in to contemplation: *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (14-15).*

Jesus became human to save us. He became human to save me. This thought is humbling. I don't deserve such love and care. I don't deserve it at all. I was a slave to sin and an enemy of God. Still Jesus came for me and for all the people of the world. His obedience, His life, death and resurrection broke the power of death itself; He broke the power of the devil. This thought reminds me of Colossians 2:12-15: *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

The devil is a defeated foe... I have to remind myself of this over and over again. Too often I do not live as if the devil is a defeated foe. Too often I give him more power than I should and worse, I neglect the power of God the Holy Spirit within me.

The letter to the Hebrews continues *he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might ... free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.* I need this reminder possibly more than the first. I am free of the slavery that the devil holds upon me. Death no longer is my nemesis. The Salvation Army uses the phrase, "Promotion to Glory" as a descriptor for death. Their phrase reframes death powerfully. Every one of us appreciates a well-deserved promotion. Promotion to Glory... that is the destiny of all who are in Christ. Death is defeated and our promotion is secured and guaranteed!

*Jesus to sit with You, to be encouraged by You, to be loved by You is a blessed position, one I do not deserve, nonetheless it is one you have granted. I am eternally grateful to You, my God—Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Amen and Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 1: Hebrews 3- Hang in there...**

There is a not so subtle thread running through this chapter, the temptation to fall away. This theme weaves a visible pattern throughout the chapter.

*And we are his house, **if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.** So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness (6b -8),***

*See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end (12-14).*

"If in deed we hold our confidence" and "original convictions" strike me as the heart of the writer's concern. Extrapolating backward, then, it seems that people were turning away; they were giving up on their faith, their beliefs, their confidence in Jesus and the like.

I don't know what particular pressures people back then were facing. Today's pressures are likely different but just as real. Turning away is a danger for all people in all times. It is easy to become lax and slip from consistency toward inconsistency toward apathy toward indifference toward...

Vigilance and diligence are essential for me to hold on. I need to monitor myself and my faith regularly. I need to do my spiritual reading and prayer and worship. It is good for me to pray with brothers and to serve God's people. All these actions are a way to keep the muscles of my faith active, healthy and strong.

Hebrews, chapter 3, reminds me to hang in there and keep at it. Don't give up. Believe and live for the Savior!

*Lord, give me strength to pursue You and to dig into my faith so that I am constantly available to You for whatever tasks You have for me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, January 2: Hebrews 4- Open access to God...**

God graces us with so many blessings in Christ. The writer of Hebrews continues encouraging his readers to hold on to Jesus. In the closing verse of the chapter the writer reminds us that God has blessing for us even in our time of need.

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (14-16).*

When we are in need God invites us to approach His throne... to come to Him personally and directly.

In the ancient world a person risked life entering the presence of the king without a summons. Remember the story of Esther in the book that bears her name? If the king doesn't extend his scepter then jail or worse could be her fate (see chapter 5). Only privileged people could enter a king's presence unannounced.

With that context, notice that we are invited into God's presence *so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*. We are not bothering God when we call out to Him. He welcomes us. He invites us. He leaves His door open to us. We are valued sons and daughters. And with that comes open access to God the Father. We will not be turned away or rebuffed.

I sit and ponder my open access to God for a moment.... This is one of the gifts God offers us when we enter His family through faith in Jesus Christ.

*Father, who are we that You would lavish so much love upon us? Praise You. Thank You. Bless You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Thursday, January 3: Hebrews 5- A faith that reproduces...**

This section of the epistle closes with a stern warning to people who cease to grow and learn the ways of God. Part of the writer's rebuke goes like this: *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!* (12).

Not only have these Christ followers stopped learning and growing, their doing so is hampering the church. They are depriving the church of men and women, who by this time in their walk with Jesus, should be teachers of others rather than babes in Christ.

It seems that the writer expects that Believers –seemingly all Believers –will one day be teachers themselves. I don't think that is over reading into this sentence. This fits with the end of Matthew where the disciples are to become disciple-makers. The goal for Christ followers seems to be some measure of reproduction. Someone pours into me and I in turn pour into someone else and so on.

I am wondering how well I am doing on this score. As I muse, these words are not simply asking me if I am guiding others to deeper faith. They are asking me if I am guiding others toward a deeper faith with the understanding that they are to guide others toward deeper faith.

This is a different model than I have experienced or lived and I am no wondering how to best live into it.

*Oh, God, what do I do with these thoughts? Are You asking me to alter my mode of operation? Show me, Lord, if you want the 'old dog' to learn new tricks. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.*

### **Friday, January 4: Hebrews 6- Facing a difficult word...**

My initial temptation was to NOT focus on verses 4-8 (the first paragraph below). They are difficult and troubling verses for me as I try to understand the ways of God. But then if I skipped over verses I 'do not like', aren't I stunting my growth in the Lord? So, I decided to use verses 4-12 as my word for meditation

*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned (4-8).*

These words are troubling. They challenge my Reformed understanding that God will preserve those who are His own. On a deeper more personal level, I think they create nervousness within me because they say I can still fall beyond salvation. I can fall completely out of favor with God. As long as I have life I can return to being an enemy of God. This frightens me. If my faith built on my effort??? UUUgh, the questions these words produce.

I found myself wondering what falling away means. I don't want to sound like I am trying to find a loop hole. I wondered about Peter who denied Jesus. Obviously denying Jesus was not 'falling away' since Peter was restored and became one of the great pillars of the early church. So, what does falling away mean?

Next I wondered how these words connect and with Paul in Romans 8:28-30.

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to*

*the image of his Son.... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Doesn't Romans teach that those whom God called, He... glorified. How can one fall away from being glorified?

Things aren't getting any clearer. In my wondering I decided to continue reading.

*Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (9-12).*

First the writer is saying that he believes better things for his readers and where he is going is captured in the last sentence, *We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.* So, the writer is trying to have his readers hang in there and not become lazy in their faith.

Now this is a word that speaks to me. Keep at it, Bill. Keep working your faith, Bill.

My thoughts flash with memories of wrestling matches from Mike's, youngest days in High School. His Senior year he won 34 of his 40 or so matches, the most on the team that year. Most of these matches were won in the last period. I tried not to shout out during the matches, but in my heart I was shouting, "You can do it, Mike. Keep working. You got this, just keep fighting. Keep grinding..." My son's strength was his stamina and grit. At the end-of-year banquet his coach gave Mike an award as the toughest wrestler. In his words to Mike, coach said 'of his 34 wins at least half were better wrestlers than he, but no one on the mat had more heart than Mike. And his heart won those victories.'

I have a sense that the writer of Hebrews believes the same of us... Heart wins the day, "You can do it. Keep working. You got this, just keep fighting. Keep grinding..."

*Lord, thank You for believing in me... thank You for encouraging me. And thank You for calling, justifying and glorifying me in Your time. In Jesus 'name I pray. Amen.*

### **Saturday, January 5: Hebrews 7- ...**

The conclusion of verse 25 reeled me in... *he [Jesus] always lives to intercede for them.*

First the 'them' is us. And the idea that Jesus lives to interceded for us floors me every time I come across it in Scripture. Jesus is praying for me!

I guess that shouldn't surprise me since the Gospels record Jesus praying for His disciples and us. Still the idea that Jesus *always lives to intercede* for me, for you, for His people stuns me. God Himself is praying for me.

I sit awed at the Lord and the many ways He works to protect me (and all who call Him Lord).

*Jesus words fail me... that You live to intercede for us. I am so grateful to be Your child. In Your name I pray. Amen.*

### **Sunday, January 6, 2019, 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.