

The Weekly Word
May 27-June 2, 2019

I pray that the message and love of God in Ephesians and Philippians fills you with life and peace. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, May 27 Ephesians 4 – A new attitude of the mind...

With chapter 4 Paul moves to the ‘so what’ of the faith. In this one chapter Paul touches on a number of facets of life. The aspect that caught my attention is in verses 22-24, a complex sentence with many parts. *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

The aspect that caught my attention is in the second half. As part of Paul’s description of the new life those who follow Christ are to live, Paul writes, and that we are *to be made new in the attitude of your minds.*

The idea of being made new in the attitude of our minds struck me. It is not only the information of the minds that has to change, but the attitude of our minds. What is Paul saying with this statement? I mused for a while.

This reference seems akin to Romans 12:2: *be transformed by the renewing of your mind...* How we see the world, how we think about the world and the mental construct we use to understand the world has to change. It is as if we put on a new pair of glasses that allow us to see the world with Jesus’ eyes and to interpret events through with Jesus’ attitude and inclinations rather than our sin-distorted attitudes and inclinations.

I have so much to learn and grow into here... so much.

Lord, help me to grow to be more like You. May my actions and attitudes reflect You and Your life in me. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Tuesday, May 28: Ephesians 5 - Greed...

Verse 5 intrigued me. *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* Strong words.

It is clear that Paul is warning the Ephesian Church family that persistent activity in these areas reveals that they are not honestly redeemed. They are not following the way of love, exemplified in Jesus.

Immoral... the KJV translated this, whoremonger, someone who is sleeping around, pursuing sex outside of marriage for pleasure. How often was Israel led astray by sexual desires with neighboring peoples?

Impure... probably refers to someone who continues cultic connections with his/her former religious inclinations.

Greedy... lover of money.

I find it interesting that Paul connects these three areas of persistent sin with idolatry. I can kind of understand the connection with the first two since sex in the ancient world was regularly tied in with cultic/religious practices. But greed? Hmmm.

One commentator's writing helped me: For passion, whether for money or for sexual indulgence, is in effect putting an idol and object of desire and worship before God.

I found myself wondering about my world. For the people I know, sex isn't connected to religious practice in my world. That said, sex is certainly trumpeted by the world I live in as something worth pursuing. Just scan a checkout counter tabloid and see how much sex plays a determining part in life.

Then there is greed. My world is wracked with greed on so many levels, from corporate executives who get immense golden parachutes while paying people a livable wage is belittled. The whole sub-prime mortgage fiasco seems to have been fueled by greed. And most advertising is fueled subtly by greed, the desire for more and better.

My heart is churning because so much of my culture seems to be fueled by greed. Nestlé's exporting baby formula to the developing world to protect their bottom line when it knowingly had devastating effects on the young children. Mother's milk is so much better; add to this the problem of contaminated water in developing world. It seems unconscionable... yet the bottom line pushed it. GREED.

My wonderings is not so much against these unnamed people and corporations, but how much of this thinking that pervades my culture creeps into me?

Have I grown greedy or maybe better, miserly? Do I seek to hoard my resources rather than be generous with those in need??? Does a better future get in the way of my desire to know God and worship Him?

Ugh.....I am feeling a bit exposed by the Lord as I ponder this passage.

Lord, I am feeling the need to be still. To lay down my pen and to allow Your grace and presence to fill me. Move me to where You desire me to be. Open my mind to Your way. Allow Your attitude for fill and direct mine. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – Ephesians.

Wednesday, May 29: Ephesians 6 – Our real enemy...

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (12).

With this sentence, Paul reminds Christians that our real enemy is Satan and his minions. Some people may be against us. Some governments may pass laws against the Christian faith. In parts of the world some terrorists target Christians. And while all of these situations are perpetrated by humans, Paul reminds us that behind these acts is the influence of the evil one, who is the real enemy of the Church.

One important take away from this teaching is that no one can battle evil forces with merely human efforts. As believers we have to press into the Lord, put on God's armor, which means filling our lives with the presence and righteousness of God, and pray... pray for ourselves and pray for the advance of the Gospel throughout the world.

Lord, I need help in my prayer life. When I read verses like this, I realize that I do not pray enough for the advance of Your kingdom. Teach me, Lord... teach me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Thursday, May 30: Philippians 1 – The place of suffering...

I struggle understanding the place of suffering in the life of a Believer. New Testament writers say quite a bit about suffering –suffering for the Gospel. Often suffering for the Gospel is mentioned in such a way that it is a privilege to suffer for the name of Jesus. This is part of my struggle... the idea of privilege of suffering and walking in Jesus’ way of suffering.

Paul mentions suffering in this paragraph... my ears perked up so I pondered his words today.

Whatever happens [to Paul], conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have (27-30).

Musing number 1: *without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you...* So many people live in fear that terrorism is going to happen to them. Due to a rash of religious institutions being attacked in the last weeks, the Police in our town organized a safety meeting for religious leaders in the town. I know the attacks have been terrible, but the odds of an attack happening on any one particular church, synagogue or mosque is quite small. While it is wise to be responsible, we are to live *without being frightened*.

Musing number 2: *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him...* it seems that Paul is saying it is an honor to believe and suffer for Jesus. This thought rattles me. It is so far from my ‘desire the easy life’ that pervades the consciousness of people in my part of the world.

Paul is certainly not telling the Philippians to seek suffering, but that the suffering that is happening to them has been granted them on behalf of Christ. “Granted to them” now that’s a mind bending thought. Like faith (belief) has been granted to them, so to suffering has been granted to them. Hmmm, suffering as gift.

I really don’t know how to process this. It is so far from my normal thought patterns. I think I am going to have to let this one steep...

Lord, I don’t understand the idea of privilege or gift of suffering. I am not asking for suffering but, Lord, should it be part of what You grant me, I pray for strength to endure even as Jesus and Paul and many saints before me have endured and so shined a great light on You, Jesus, as their Lord and Savior. I pray this in Your name. Amen.

Friday, May 31: Philippians 2 – Putting others first...

When I opened the chapter I was struck by the NIV headings for sections one and two:

- Imitating Christ’s Humility
- Do everything without grumbling.

Immediately I knew this would be a practical word from the Lord.

As I read the chapter one sentence in each of the two sections stood out to me.

- *...Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others (3b-4).*
- *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, (14)*

God started nudging me with the humility message. Does it get any plainer than what Paul wrote; *value others above yourselves*. There you have it, the Christian Life in a nutshell. Value others above self. And if that isn't plain enough Paul continues, *not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others*.

Put the interest of others before self. Such is the way of Jesus. Such is the way of the cross. Paul sets this thought by noting that Jesus left everything and descended all the way to the cross.

I wish this was easy but it is not. I struggle regularly with putting others before myself. The way of Jesus challenges me regularly.

Paul follows this up with a word about attitude. It is not simply that I should put others before self, but I should do it graciously... *without grumbling or arguing*. God is anticipating a heart change not merely a behavior change.

Thankfully God has given every child a new heart. For this I am eternally grateful, but I have to learn to live according to God's new heart and give up living by the selfish heart I had when I was an enemy of God.

So much to learn. So much growth still needed, and this after 40 years of walking with Jesus...

Oh, Lord, I need Thee every hour. I need You for direction. I need You for strength to do what I should do to live up to Your will. I need You as an example on how to live. I need You encouraging me every step of the way. Yes, Lord, I need You every hour... In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, June 1: Philippians 3- ...

My meditations zeroed in on verse 7, *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ*. And I wondered, 'Do I?'

I realize each of us is different and God leads each of us on our own path. However, we learn from those who go before us. Later in verse 17 Paul writes, *Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters...* These are God-inspired words. So following Paul's example is a word from God, therefore I cannot glibly write off what Paul wrote about considering loss all of my earthly and religious good deeds and 'trophies' *for the sake of Christ*.

So what does it mean to consider loss all my gains?

As I sit and consider this, my first thought is that nothing I do humanly has any spiritual or godly gain; only my faith in Jesus has any spiritual merit. It is so easy for me to begin patting myself on the back for doing this or that religious/pious action, quiet times, mission trips, etc. etc. And, yes, these are good things. They are part of the *good works God prepared in advance for me to do* (Ephesians 2:10) but they do not gain me extra merit in God's eyes. They do not make me a better person or Christian than other people. I have to continually remind myself that Christ is my salvation and Christ alone. I cannot add to it. And I cannot boast to others about anything but Christ and what He did for me...

As I sit on the eve of worship, this is a great thought to carry me into worship tomorrow.

Jesus, you are everything and I am nothing. I cannot add a mite to Your gift of salvation. I can, however, give my heart and soul to the good works the Father has prepared for me to do. And I pledge my life to that, Lord. In Your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen

Sunday, June 2, 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 Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.