

The Weekly Word

July 6-12, 2020

Having just celebrated the 4th of July and our country's independence we get to continue reading Romans and then 1 Corinthians both of which contain God's Gospel message, which is the story of humanity's greatest freedom, freedom from sin and death. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, July 6: Romans 14- Side bars to the faith...

There are some elements of the Christian faith that are non-negotiable. The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus is one. Faith in Jesus through grace is another. There are others and they are not up for debate. They are core, central, and foundational. The Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed are excellent declarations of core truths.

Beyond the core are peripheral concerns. And it is peripheral issues that lead most often to disagreements within Christianity.

Paul tackles two in this chapter... food and sacred days. Likely underneath these issues stood traditions springing from Jewish and Gentile upbringings. Jewish people followed dietary laws and celebrated special days that Gentiles did not celebrate. Paul reminds us our entire lives are lived by faith and if faith causes one person to not eat things and faith of other people allow them to eat everything, so be it as long as they are doing these things out of faith in Jesus.

He goes on to chide us not to judge others on peripheral matters and then even further not live in such a way that our lives cause others to stumble. An example might be if my faith allows me to eat pork, I don't have to flaunt my eating pork in front of believers, who because of faith, do not eat pork. My love for others should drive me to live in ways that build up rather than tear down.

I don't know that food and even sacred days are big issues in my world today. Still there are peripheral issues today that should be handled similarly.

I was going to print a list of similar items I see in my culture that fall into the peripheral category but then I decided to remove the list because printing them might violate the spirit of this text by creating undo judgment just by naming certain behaviors.

This is not an easy principle to incorporate into life, but one for the harmony and welfare of others we all need to wrestle with regularly.

Oh God, help me live in a manner that builds up rather than tears down. Help me not to judge others on peripheral matters but leave the judging to You. Similarly help me be staunch on the core of Jesus and faith... In His name I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, July 7: Romans 15- Hold your plans loosely, God may have other ideas...

As I read this chapter the modern proverb came to mind, "the best laid plans of mice and men." Then Proverbs 19:21 tumbled into my thoughts as well, *Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.*

As the chapter winds down we learn Paul's plans to visit Spain by way of Rome and he hopes the Christians in Rome will support his missionary journey to Spain. We also learn that he is in route to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor.

Acts tells us that Paul's trip didn't go as planned. Arrested in Jerusalem he eventually makes it to Rome but as a prisoner standing trial before Caesar. We don't know if he ever made it to Spain. So Paul had his God honoring plans but God had other plans. And God's design gets implemented.

As a Jesus lover it is good for me to develop God honoring plans for life. At the same time I (we) have to hold my plans loosely, being ready to accept whatever designs and plans God willed for us. And what might even be more difficult is learning to shine brightly for the Lord in God's design and plan, particularly when they differ from 'my plans'.

Looking back over my three and a half decade life as a pastor, I smile. My desire was to travel west. I have been in various groups, which opened with an icebreaker question, "Are you a mountain or water person?" I am a mountain person. Mountains and space and cool air and hiking breathe life into me. God, however, kept me in the east and for the largest portion of my ministry in a coastal town. God had a different design plan for my life. A smile broadens on my face... I told the Lord I was His and would go where He sent. I pray I have been faithful to God's call...

Paul was constantly adapting to God's call and plan. In his brief biographical sketch he mentions, *For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem* (26). Reading Acts 16 we learn Paul had no plans on going to Macedonia, in fact he tried to go everywhere but Macedonia. Then God sent a dream that called him to Macedonia. Here again Paul's plans were in one direction and God's designs needed him to go another.

God honoring plans are good so long as we hold them loosely so we are able to follow the path God desires us to walk.

To readers, I am wondering if you have God honoring plans? If so are you open to God taking you in another direction?

I hope and pray I am as driven to honor God as Paul and as open to go wherever God leads...

Oh God, I pray so... Amen and amen.

Wednesday, July 8: Romans 16- The essence of faith is Jesus ...

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them (17).

A strong warning for Paul upon which to conclude his letter. How dangerous is it to put obstacles in the way of people coming to faith in Jesus? VERY!

God's message of salvation in Jesus by faith through grace is God's gift to humanity. Anytime we layer anything upon this and require anything in addition to this we are putting obstacles in people's way. There is nothing necessary beyond faith in Jesus Christ... confessing Him as Lord. As Paul said in chapter 10 verse 9: *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.*

I sit tonight and meditate on Jesus... Lord, Savior, God.

Jesus, fill my thoughts with thoughts of You. Keep my eyes fixed on You. You alone can save. Alleluia. Amen.

Thursday, July 9: 1Corinthians 1 – I am too worried at times about what people think about the message of Jesus...

Today's reading got me wondering. I am too worried at times about what people think about the message of Jesus...

Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (23-25).

Not everyone is going to believe the message of Jesus. There will be scoffers (and avoiders) BUT, and this is important, there also will be people *whom God has called* and they will believe because God is at work in their lives.

I wonder if sometimes I get too tied up in knots worrying about making the **best** presentation of the gospel, rather than just presenting as I am able in the moment and then trusting God, who must be at work anyway, for people to come to Jesus. Obviously this doesn't mean that I don't prepare and pray. It just means that I can trust the Lord to call those He has called. They will hear in God's perfect time for them.

Looking back to verse 23-25, I hear God saying, "Just share my good news. Hearts I am working on will respond." If find comfort in knowing God is at work and it is His call that ultimately leads people home to faith in Jesus. I am just the mouthpiece and certainly no more and not less either...

Lord, use me to spread Your good news to others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Friday, July 10: 1Corinthians 2 –God has prepared unfathomable good things for all who believe in Jesus...

Paul reaches back into the Old Testament quoting the book of Isaiah, *However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who love him (9).*

My heart was blessed by the realization of the goodness of what God has prepared for us who love him. According to Isaiah it is beyond anything human eyes can see or ears have heard. In fact we –humans –cannot even imagine or conceive of how good things will be that God is preparing for us. I mean this is 'blow us away with goodness' good!

What God is saying is that even when I push my thoughts to think about the goodness of God and what He is preparing for us in eternity I don't come close.

This unfathomable goodness of God is another reason why out of love and thanks I should be dedicating all my energies to serving and loving Him here and now.

I remember a little song we used to sing when I was younger, *God is so good. God is so good. God is so good, He's good to me.* I looked it up and found it had a few stanzas in addition to this chorus. The first stanza goes like this:

No height or depth can separate
Your steadfast love we can't escape
Your faithfulness, an endless sea
So full of grace and mercy
We sing
God is so good
God is so good
God is so good
He's so good to me

Yes, God's faithfulness is an endless sea!

Lord, I lean back and bless You and thank You. You are so good. You reached down and saved a wretch like me. I deserve nothing and You gave me everything in Christ. Thank You, Lord. Amen and amen.

Saturday, July 11: 1Corinthians 3 – Wisdom, Is God’s fruit living in me?...

How should we discern wisdom in others or self for that matter? Often wisdom is equated with how much knowledge a person has. And certainly this is part of it; however knowledge is only head stuff if it isn’t life directing.

Paul writes to open the chapter:

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? (1-3).

Paul notes that it is the manner in which the Corinthians live that shows him they are not yet mature. Instead they are still ‘worldly,’ immature, because they are creating divisions over which teacher they like best. Somehow they are affirming human teachers more than Christ. Add to this, jealousy and quarreling over these choices. All of this shows Paul that they are still enamored with things that entice everyday human people rather than things that are born by the spirit of God.

Maturity by extension is shown by how well a person lives the faith not how well they talk the faith. Certainly true faith involves knowledge. But it also means that the Fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23) is being made manifest in their lives. Arguing and quarrelling and jealousy about human teachers is clear evidence that the fruit of God is not living in them.

So now I have to look at myself. Am I divisive, jealous or argumentative? These are negative qualities pointed out in this passage. There are others. Better I realize to flip from negative to positive and look to see if positive character traits are growing in me. Is God’s fruit living in me?

Lord, I have many areas of life that remain which need Your maturing work. Continue holding the mirror of Your Word in front of me, then by Your grace I may grow in godliness and faith. This is my prayer. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sunday, July 12, 2020 - 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.