

The Weekly Word

February 1-7, 2021

Hello Reading the Bible readers. This week completes Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, February 1: Ephesians 5:1-14 NIV2011

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

*"Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Paul continues his exhortation to God honoring living. Some highlights that capture Paul's instructions:

- *walk in the way of love*
- *not ... even a hint of sexual immorality... or greed*
- *watch your mouth*
- *Live as children of light*
- *find out what pleases the Lord.*

Paul has been hammering home that Christ followers should live differently. We should not live in the depravity that characterizes the way many in our world live. Rather we are to live to please God not ourselves.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Is my life different than the average person who does not profess Jesus as Lord? It should be. This is Paul's message and it is a message that speaks for people anywhere and everywhere. Social, political, cultural, ethnic, gender differences matter not. These words fit EVERYONE who follows Jesus.

If our lives are not obviously different then something is wrong in our faith...

Comparison is not easy because I do not know who my 'neighbor' is in the hidden recesses of her/his life. But this matters not. Paul is calling us to a godly way of living and I can evaluate myself against this and other passages like those of last week. God sees and God knows and we, as disciples, are to live honorably all the time, when people are watching and when they cannot see what we are doing. God always sees.

Paul is calling believers to live in a manner that pleases the Lord...

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Mirror time... I still have much maturity to seek. Just the other day I was working on an important document and I went to change a font and the wheel of death occurred. I had to force quit the program and lost much of what I had been working on. I got ANGRY instantly!

No one saw, no one heard but my behavior was not pleasing to the Lord. Today's text is a strong reminder how much growth I still need in order to live up to my calling...

Tuesday, February 2: Ephesians 5:15-20 NIV2011

¹⁵ *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,* ¹⁶ *making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.* ¹⁷ *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.* ¹⁸ *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,* ¹⁹ *speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,* ²⁰ *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Paul wraps up this lengthy section on how believers should live with a final charge. *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.* Christ followers are to be wise... that is live based on wisdom from God not wisdom as the world sees it. The warning about evil days is akin to saying evil is out to trip you up and get you to fumble your living.

In the classic Paul style he says, "don't do this.... do this". Don't get drunk instead be filled with the Holy Spirit. The don't/do pair presents an interesting comparison. Don't live under the influence of wine; rather live under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Where debauchery is an outcome of the influence of wine; speaking words from the Spirit, singing and joy to the Lord come from Holy Spirit influence along with true thankfulness to God *for everything*.

In these last sentences you have a picture of a life under Holy Spirit influence. And that is how we are to live.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

If we are going to be careful about how we live and live wisely before God then seeking the Holy Spirit's filling is essential. In chapter 1 we learned that every believer is sealed and marked with the Holy Spirit when they first believed, i.e. confessed Jesus as Lord. *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit* (Ephesians 1:13). So being filled with the Spirit has to be different than having the Spirit within us. After all Paul is encouraging people who are sealed and marked with the Spirit to be 'filled' with the Spirit.

Since the verb 'be filled' is a present (on going activity, something that must be continually acted upon) passive (Spirit works on us) imperative (a command, this is not optional), Paul is saying that we must continually yield ourselves to the working and leading of the Spirit who fills us.

This is a message for the whole church. All of us, if we want to live God-glorifying lives, need to learn to yield to the Spirit's leading and direction.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I cannot rely on what God the Spirit has done in my life yesterday or last year, but I have to continually open myself to the Spirit who has sealed and marked me continually listening and following His lead...

God is reminding me that He is my source and strength for living.

Wednesday, February 3: Ephesians 5:21-33 NIV2011

²¹ *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

²² *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.* ²³ *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*

²⁴ *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* ²⁶ *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,* ²⁷ *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* ²⁸ *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—* ³⁰ *for we are members of his body.* ³¹ *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."* ³² *This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

³³ *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Under the umbrella of verse 21 Paul speaks to wives and husbands about how they are to act in that relationship.

Wife, submit to and respect your husband.

Husband, love your wife as Christ loves the church.

This is the nutshell of these two paragraphs, although there is more in them. These two simple statements capture the essence of Paul's words.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

In a direct and strong manner Paul addresses principal relationships within the church in today's and the next two readings.

Verse 21, *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*, governs the relational pairs in each of the 3 succeeding sections. Mutual submission is the name of the game for life in God's family. Mutual submission, mutual support, mutual caring. In teaching this passage in any culture, mutuality must govern the teaching.

After verse 21 Paul lays out directly how life between people should play out in the church.

Wives and husbands... Paul began each pair with the party the ancient world expected should submit. The words spoken to these parties (wives, children and slaves) are basically what these people heard from every corner of society, sacred and secular. Frankly, the earthshaking aspect of Paul's teaching comes when he speaks to the dominant member of the pair (husbands, parents, masters). Society placed few constraints on these parties. God, however, directs a different way.

Wives submit (22) and respect (33) your husbands. Honor their wishes and directives. Treat them honorably. One could even go so far as to say 'obey them', even as the church obeys Jesus her Lord.

Verse 25 carries Paul's directive to husbands forcefully: ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. To ponder this is to be brought to our knees, husbands. Christ gave His life for the church... His love was sacrificial to the bitter end. This is how husbands should live toward their wives...

God's message, mutuality in relationship (verses 21, 26-33). Wives lay aside (submit) your life for your husband. Husband's lay down (love as Christ loved) your life for your wife. Marriages worldwide would look very different if Christ believing couples lived this way.

After reminding people about mutuality it might be best to address wives only from verses 22-23 and husbands only from 25-30. All too often we read the wrong verses. Husbands concentrate on how wives should act and wives focus on how husbands should act, when God wants us to concentrate on how we should act.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

God is instructing me to think practically about how I can love my wife better.

Thursday, February 4: Ephesians 6:1-4 NIV2011

¹ *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ² *"Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—* ³ *"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."* ^h

⁴ *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Children's role is to obey and honor their parents. As in the previous section, Paul then directs the dominant party –Fathers –not to exasperate their children. This, like with husbands, would be the shocker for the ancient readers. Fathers are also charged to train children in the instruction of the Lord. Again, Paul balances a 'don't do with a do'...

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Household life is a universal issue. How parents 'parent' and children are raised is of societal importance and God's word had direction.

Children should obey. And fathers should not exasperate children.

Why does Paul target fathers rather than parents? Likely because in the culture of the day the fathers held the power. Speaking to them meant if they understood then the rest of the household would understand that the goal is raising children in the Lord.

Training the next generation is our responsibility as fathers and parents.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

As a parent of adult children, my time of raising them is over. Still, I can continue to model faith and faithfulness and pray for my children and grandchildren...

Friday, February 5: Ephesians 6:5-9 NIV2011

⁵Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

⁹And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Slavery was common in the Roman Empire. 30-60 million men, women and children were slaves performing almost every task in the empire. Slavery was not racially based back then as we saw in my nation's history.

Since slaves were part of the household, Paul turns to address the relationship between slaves and masters, masters and slaves.

Slaves were to obey their masters as they would obey Christ. They were to obey all the time; when the master is looking and when not. And they were to serve well (wholeheartedly).

Like the two pairs above the stunning words were spoken to the dominant member of the pair, here the masters. Stunningly, masters were to treat their slaves "in the same way." But what does that mean, in what 'same way'?

This could refer to the immediate sentence (verse 7) serve wholeheartedly, thus saying masters should serve their slaves? Or maybe it is the idea of doing good (8) and masters should

do good for/to their slaves? Or maybe it refers to a more general reading as slaves are to do good to you so you, masters, should do good to your slaves?

One thing all of these have in common is that masters should treat their slaves in a way that honors their faith in Jesus. Paul continues giving more specific advice about not threatening slaves because you know that you both serve the same Lord who doesn't care if you are on the top or bottom of the hierarchy but will treat all with no favoritism.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Since we don't have slaves there is not a direct one-to-one connection with the present world. One might make a case about employees and bosses... Employees should work diligently all the time, whether the boss is looking on or not.

Bosses on the other hand should honor and not threaten their subordinates, remembering Jesus is Lord of both of you. Bosses would also be charged not to play favorites with employees, rather treat all employees fairly and without favoritism.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

What kind of a boss am I? Do I treat direct-reports fairly? Do I speak kindly to them and about them when they are not present because God hears all my conversations?

Saturday, February 6: Ephesians 10-24 NIV2011

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

²¹ Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. ²² I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.

²³ Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The first paragraph (10-17) is all about our being strong in the Lord and in the Lord's power, not our own power. It is the Lord's power and the Lord's armor that we are to put on. And while Paul describes the various pieces of armor the Lord has given us, the potency of the image is putting on the full armor. No soldier would enter battle with only a portion of his armor on. Soldiers go into battle fully armed. And this is Paul's point.

God has given us all this armor. Put it on.

Rome was the feared superpower of its day. And Rome revolutionized battle and warfare in two ways. One, soldiers were all given the same armor and battlement. Knowing soldiers were outfitted similarly, allowed them to develop tactics and training that would be army wide. So, if two battalions under different generals were joined in a battle they all had similar weaponry and similar training and knew similar tactics so in the heat of battle they could and did fight as one.

We are given similar armor for our battle with the enemy and together we, too can fight as one because we have been trained and outfitted by the same commander, the Lord God.

In paragraph two, Paul speaks not of our armor but our tactics... prayer, prayer in the Spirit, prayer filled and empowered by the Spirit of God. Paul says keep *alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people*. This is a far ranging call to pray for God's people everywhere. Then Paul asks for prayer for himself. I love his request, *whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.... Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should*. I love his desire to broadcast the word *fearlessly*. Such is the heart of the apostle.

The section closes with a nod to his amanuenses and a final blessing. *Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love*.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

For all believers everywhere and in every time God has granted us all the same armament for the battle we are in with evil and the evil one... What we need to do is put on the armor given to us and then employ God's dreaded tactic, prayer, prayer in the Spirit, prayer empowered and filled with God's Spirit. We can employ this tactic on behalf of all the Lord's people...

Pray for fearlessness among God's ambassadors as they walk this world and speak the word of the Lord to people of the world.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I fear that I have much to learn about prayer. God seems to be saying, "See how important prayer is for Paul? So it should be for you, Bill."

Sunday, February 7, 2021 - 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 an audio link to my sermons, <https://livinghopect.org/resources/audio-sermons>. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days. We also livestream our full services which are up on our YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgKURRsBX92qqIFgDF1iRWA>