

## The Weekly Word

May 3-9, 2021

Hello Reading the Bible readers. I would love to read your feedback on my new format for this blog. Philippians 4 and Galatians 1 are up this week. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

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

### Monday, May 3: Philippians 4:1-3 NIV2011

<sup>1</sup> *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*

<sup>2</sup> *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.* <sup>3</sup> *Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

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

Paul has been pleading with the church to stand firm. Now as he begins to draw his letter to conclusion, Paul makes one final broad statement to the church followed by application to help two prominent women reconcile.

Verse one concludes his prior arguments and leads to Paul's desire that the Church of God stand firm in the Lord. Paul desires this out of love.

Some commentators believe that versus two and three are the true reason for this letter... that the church in Philippi would see Euodia and Syntyche reconciled. I'm not, convinced that we can make the case that that is the primary reason for the letter, however it certainly fits with what Paul has been saying throughout the letter. I think back to chapter 2, in particular, and the plea to put others before oneself.

Paul pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to find the ability to become of one mind. I understand this means to reconcile. So troubled is Paul by the difficulties between these two women that he asks his true companion, whoever that might be, to come alongside these women and help them reconcile. These women have contended at Paul's side and labored for the gospel, so to see them torn apart breaks Paul's heart.

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

The Lord weeps when His people are divided. In John 17 Jesus prays that we may be one like He and the father are one. So it is perfectly understandable that Paul, sensing the heart of God, weeps with these two women who are at odds with each other. Verse 7 notes that these women contended at Paul's side. And as I read that word, I got the strong sense that they contended together at Paul's side. What tore them apart?

History reminds us that Paul and Barnabas, the first great missionary duo of the faith, had a bitter argument and separated. But history also tells us that those two men reconciled. It's almost as if Paul understands that reconciliation is possible -the gospel works- and he's pleading

with the church to come alongside these women that they too might experience the tremendous reconciling gift of Jesus.

What a word that is to the church, both on a local level where disagreements separate believers and on a denominational or national level. Oh, God, may we join forces with sisters and brothers across the spectrum of Christianity to advance your gospel around the world.

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

The Holy Spirit is asking me to review my relationships particularly among my brothers and sisters to see if there are any relationships that needs to be repaired. If breaks in relationship surface, may I be able to repair... in Jesus' name Amen.

### **Tuesday, May 4: Philippians 4:4-9 NIV2011**

<sup>4</sup> *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* <sup>5</sup> *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* <sup>6</sup> *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* <sup>7</sup> *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>8</sup> *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* <sup>9</sup> *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

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

As Paul moves to the conclusion of his letter, he speaks highly practical words and challenges about how our everyday lives can reflect our devotion to God and God's presence in our lives.

Paul begins with a call to *rejoice in the Lord always*. The two portions of that sentence must remain connected. Rejoice, exude joy about or in the Lord. Paul is not simply saying to exude joy because your favorite sports team wins or a friend calls with good news. Paul bids us to see in our relationship with the Lord reasons for joy and to let **them** become expressed through our rejoicing.

Paul then speaks to our manner of life, let our manner of life be governed by gentleness. Gentleness is not a word that most people I know would aspire to. Yet this is precisely what the Lord presents to us through Paul's very specific instruction. Next Paul gives us a prime reason why we can rejoice in the Lord and exude gentleness, *the Lord is near*.

It is easy to allow this last statement to get lost in Paul's exhortations. *The Lord is near*, we are never separated from God. God is with us! And because God is with us we have His power to live differently.

Paul continues to paint another difference we get to live. We get to live without anxiousness. Anxiety is rampant in our society and the fact that we can overcome anxiety is a wonderful gift. I certainly do not want to minimize what people face who have various degrees of clinical anxiety, but I also want to recognize that in verse 6 God gives believers some tools to deal with natural anxiety that rises in all of us. Prayer and petition with thanksgiving is a gift given to those who are in His family. God says we can come to Him at any time with any

request... Come to me with a deep sense of thanksgiving that I am with you, and I am for you. Let thanksgiving for what I have done in your life gird your prayers and petitions for what you need right now to combat the anxiety growing in your life. You do not have to live life alone; you can live with the Lord God at your side. When we live in this manner with prayer built on thanksgiving, we are told that the *peace of God* which is beyond all human understanding *will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus*. Can you see how God guarding our hearts will help us combat the natural anxiety that fills us in strange or difficult situations.

In the second paragraph of our reading today Paul invites us to lift our gaze and our thoughts from the squalor of our world towards things that are noble and good. In a cascading sentence Paul invites us to look towards whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable... He summarizes, *if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things*.

The computer world taught us the phrase, garbage in garbage out. If we put in poor data we will get poor results. Paul challenges us to live by a similar creed. If we are constantly taking in the bad, the profane, the vulgar, the disgusting of our world it will come out of us. By contrast if we take in things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy then good things will come out of us.

Paul concludes this section inviting us to learn from him and put into practice the things we have seen in his life, implying that he is living the way he is teaching us to live. He concludes with this thought, *And the God of peace will be with you*.

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

Looking back over my summary above I realized that I included what the passage means in my description of the passage. Therefore, I will add only one thought here.

The first paragraph ends with the promise that *the peace of God* *will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus*. The second paragraph concludes, *the God of peace* *will be with you*.

I love the word play in Paul's two concluding thoughts. I emphasized them with bold and underline. I simply invite you to roll those two phrases around in your heart and in your mind: the God of peace and the peace of God. Both are gifts given to us because of our relationship with God through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

How gentle is my life? Is my gentleness evident to all? These two questions burrow deeply into my inner being this morning. It seems that God is reminding me when I do not see gentleness in my life, when people are experiencing harshness from my life then I need to take stock and return to the base directives of today's passage. Namely:

- Am I rejoicing in the Lord?
- Am I prayerfully with thanksgiving handling every situation that comes my way or am I allowing natural human anxiety and worry to grow in my life?
- Am I taking in and thinking about good and wholesome things in life?
- Am I emulating people of gentleness and love?

Thank you, Lord God, for today's reading. Amen

### **Wednesday, May 5: Philippians 4:10-23 NIV2011**

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

<sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>21</sup> Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. <sup>22</sup> All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

<sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

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

Paul concludes his letter with a heartfelt thanks for a gift of support accompanied by Epaphroditus that he received. The first paragraph of our reading gives some exemplary modeling by Paul regarding how to live with or without wealth in our world. (I will offer more on this point when I answer the next major question in my devotional time.)

Paul continues thanking the Philippians, noting they have supported him a number of other times in his life and ministry. Clearly their relational connection is deep and loving.

Paul has a wonderful way of thanking the Philippians even as he is praising God and blessing them with a practical blessing for their gift. Just listen to the end of 18 and 19. *They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.* <sup>19</sup> *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

Paul concludes the letter with a brief doxology followed by a greeting to those who will receive the letter. For all his intensity as an apostle and human being, Paul has a tender place in his heart for brothers and sisters that he knows.

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

In thinking about what this passage communicates to Christ followers of all times and places I focus on the end of verse 11 through verse 13. *I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.* <sup>12</sup> *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* <sup>13</sup> *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

These words are rich in practical wisdom. Learning to be content in any and every situation is a faith skill from which every believer can benefit. Paul's example seems to be that, as believers, we can in fact learn this faith skill... Being content in every situation.

Paul shows the range of circumstances that we can endure with contentment... Being hungry or well fed, living with plenty or in want. I find it fascinating that Paul mentions both poles of life. When it comes to contentment my mind naturally thinks of learning to be content when I lack something. But Paul also reminds us that when we have plenty we can live a discontented life. There is much for me to chew on in these words.

The secret for finding contentment in any and every situation... Verse 13: *I can do all this through him [Christ] who gives me strength*. Learning to build our lives, truly build our lives on the Lord Jesus allows us to find contentment no matter the rages of life buffeting us at any given time. In Jesus we have the strength and power to live Christ honoring contented lives. This is Paul's message to believers in every day and every age.

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

Can I rest, and live joyously culminating in fruitful kingdom life? This is where the Spirit is probing me. Am I satisfied with the life upon which Jesus is leading me? Satisfied, contented... would other people use those words to describe me?

### **Thursday, May 6: Galatians 1:1-5 NIV2011**

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—*<sup>2</sup> *and all the brothers and sisters with me,*

*To the churches in Galatia:*

<sup>3</sup> *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

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

The opening of Paul's letters often gives hints into the content and tenor of the particular letter in question. With the Galatians letter, Paul opens with an assertion of his apostleship, *an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead*. His unequivocal declaration of apostleship, not from men but by Jesus and the Father, clues us into the fact that Paul will be asserting this apostleship throughout the letter. Certainly, Paul will be taking on some significant issues from the point of view of an apostle **call by God**.

It is worth noting that Paul writes to the churches (plural) in Galatia.

Even as Paul offers grace and peace to his hearers, he does so asserting that the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself to rescue us from our present evil age. Again, this language seems to indicate that pressures bear upon us from our present evil age and were it not for Jesus and His rescue we would be doomed. The primacy of Jesus' rescue of sinners is presented to us within the first few verses of Galatians.

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

Leaning on Paul's last point I think about what this passage means for all Christians. Every human being is in grave trouble and danger. Sin has wrapped its tentacles around us and sin has affected every part of who we are. The reformers spoke of total depravity, the understanding that every part of the human being has been ravaged by sin. Total depravity does not mean that we are as sinful as possible but that sin has reached into every corner of every human life. What we learned from Paul is that Jesus is the One who rescues us from the present evil age and the tentacles of sin that gripped us tightly. Jesus is the One who saves. We could never have disengaged ourselves from the present evil age by ourselves, or through our own willpower or goodness. Only Jesus can rescue us. And this is a continuing word for the church and the world. We all need Jesus.

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

A smile sits on my face as I realize anew the gift Jesus has granted me when He rescued me from the clutches of the evil one who rules the present world. Jesus has done for me what I could never have done for myself. I am forever grateful to the Lord my God, Jesus Christ the Lord.

**Friday, May 7: Galatians 1:6-10 NIV2011**

*<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*

*<sup>10</sup> Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

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

In these verses Paul outlines the crux of his argument in Galatians.

The Galatians are being duped into abandoning the gospel of grace in order to turn to another gospel (which as the letter unfolds we will learn is a "gospel" built on the following of the Jewish law). This is a perversion of the gospel given through Jesus and preached by Paul. So adamant is Paul about this that he says anyone who preaches a perversion of the gospel is under God's curse.

Paul closes this brief section with a rhetorical question, *Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?* He adds an exclamation mark saying *If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

One can only wonder what is being said about Paul that he would add these comments.

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

In this section Paul does not explain what 'the other' gospel is, still Paul attacks vigorously any notion of another gospel beyond the gospel of grace found in Jesus Christ. Any gospel other than the original gospel of grace is no gospel at all.

The church must vigorously hold onto the gospel of grace. Preaching the gospel of grace, defending the gospel of grace and calling out any other gospel is one of the important teaching functions of the Church of Jesus Christ. This will not win us approval from men but it does carry God's approval.

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

The spirit reminds me how important it is for me first to live under the realm of grace. I cannot earn my way to Jesus. Everything is by the gift of Jesus. I must never forsake this singular firm foundation. And if/when I slip into any kind of gospel built on my efforts then I have slipped off the path of Jesus.

I am reminded of Paul's words read recently in Philippians about how everything I have done is garbage compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (see Philippians 3:7ff). May my heart, my life and my faith always be built on Jesus and never be constructed on anything I have done.

### **Saturday, May 8: Galatians 1:11-24 NIV2011**

<sup>11</sup> *I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin.*

<sup>12</sup> *I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*

<sup>13</sup> *For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup> But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. <sup>17</sup> I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.*

<sup>18</sup> *Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.*

<sup>21</sup> *Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." <sup>24</sup> And they praised God because of me.*

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

Paul is reciting his credentials for the Galatians in anticipation of the words he will speak to them. Probably the most important credential featured in his words is that he received his gospel call and revelation of the gospel directly from God. Paul's was a unique situation, one where God broke directly into his life rather than using other human beings to bring the gospel to Paul.

Paul explains a bit of his life in Judaism and how he was advancing studiously even beyond men of his age. But then God broke in and changed' the trajectory of his life. Paul was now



focused on Jesus and the gospel with the intensity and drive he had previously focused on Judaism.

I wonder if Paul's comment *that the gospel I preached is not of human origin* was a direct comment against the many rules and regulations of Pharisaic Judaism which Paul had pursued with vigor prior to his encounter with Jesus.

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

One key teaching from these words is that the gospel is not a 'human created' religious system, rather it is a direct revelation from God.

A second inference from this passage is that each person has a unique call and plan from the Lord. No one will ever be a Paul again. But neither will anyone be you or me. God calls each of us in unique ways that fit who we are and what He wants us to do.

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

The primary reminder for me is that the gospel is not something that human beings have made up or constructed overtime. Rather the gospel is the very plan of God brought into existence through the voice of God and the Savior Jesus Christ. And whether I am living faithfully or I am presenting the gospel to others, it is never my best idea but always God's gift to humanity.

**Sunday, May 9, 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](mailto: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/UCgKURRsX92qqIFgDF1iRWA>