

The Weekly Word

March 21-27, 2022

Hello Bible readers. This week we will be reading Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter 3 and 4. I hope you are blessed as you join me. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, March 21: Colossians 3:8-4.1 NIV2011

¹⁸ *Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*

¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*

²⁰ *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

²¹ *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*

²² *Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.*

^{4:1} *Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*

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

In today's reading Paul outlines for the Colossians how Christians are to behave in marriage between husbands and wives, in families between children and fathers, and in the work world between slaves and masters. In a world where the husband, father and master had supreme authority, it is amazing that Paul gives instructions to both parties in each pair.

Wives are to submit to husbands and husbands are to love their wives and not to be harsh with them.

Children are to obey their parents and fathers are not to embitter their children, lest the child become discouraged.

Slaves are to obey their masters in everything while they are being watched and even when they are not being watched. Masters are to provide what's right and fair for their slaves because as Christians they know they have a master in heaven, the Lord God Almighty.

In the midst of Paul's instructions to the slaves there is a word that seems as if it would fit as instruction to any of the six groups. Paul writes, *whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters*. Without much alteration these words could have been spoken to wives, husbands, fathers, children, slaves and masters. No matter who you are and no matter where you fall in the hierarchy of life, *whatever you do work at it, do it with all your heart as if you are working for the Lord...*

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

Paul's advice, *whatever you do work at it, do it with all your heart as if you are working for the Lord...* seems like apt advice for anyone who is seeking to follow Jesus. Whatever we do we should do it with all our heart as if we are doing it specifically and directly for the Lord.

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

The Spirit presses me particularly as a husband and worker with these words... Am I treating my wife in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do I love her and care for her as if she were the Lord Himself?

And am I working for the church I serve as if I am serving Jesus personally? Am I giving my best all the time? These are the probing questions that the Spirit is pressing into me as I let these words breathe life in my inner being.

What does this passage mean and say to us?

Now to the church, are we living out our faith towards other people in the church and people outside of the church, treating them as if they were Jesus Christ Himself? Do we give people inside and outside the church the impression that they are as precious to us as Jesus Himself would be?

I know I have much growth in this area, and I sense we, as the church, have much growth in this area. Amen.

Tuesday, March 22: Colossians 4:2-6 NIV2011

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

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

In my ponderings of this short passage, I decided to look at Paul's exhortations to the Colossians separate from Paul's request for prayer.

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.... ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Paul gives two exhortations to faithful living. The first is to pray. In fact, Paul says we are to devote ourselves to prayer being watchful and thankful. To devote is to give one's heart and soul to something, to press into it. Paul is telling us as believers we are to press into prayer, giving our heart and soul to prayer.

His second exhortation really has to do with witness. We are to live in such a way with outsiders (people outside the family of God) that our lives create opportunities to share the hope we have in Jesus. *Make the most of every opportunity*, Paul writes. Then Paul shifts from our behavior to our words saying that we need to sprinkle into our words seasoning, comments that might invite questions of faith. Then our answers can speak of our faith in Jesus.

In between these two exhortations, Paul asks the Colossians to pray for him and to pray for open doors to share the gospel of Christ. Finally, Paul asks them to pray that when given a chance he might speak God's message clearly. The obvious intention is that he might present the Gospel in ways that people could hear it and turn and trust Jesus.

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

In my reading, this passage is one of the strongest calls to prayerful living in the New Testament. Devoting oneself to prayer gives prayer a priority rarely seen in most Christians lives (I know this is true for me). Then in addition to prayer we are to live in very practical ways, lives that would cause people to see a difference in us and ask questions. How hard this is. We are often co-opted by the world in which we live, yet God's Word through Paul's pen is for us to live differently, radiating Jesus Christ to the world.

In Paul's request of the Colossians for prayer, we are also reminded how important it is for the church to bind together in prayer for one another, for our witness and our living. Prayer is not simply something I do for myself, it's something the body of Christ does for one another.

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

Paul's call to devote oneself to prayer shames me. How often I feel that prayer is the weak link in my spiritual life. History tells me I am powerless to change this aspect of my life. Lord, I need the constant work of your Holy Spirit in me to deepen my prayer life to the level it might be considered a devotion of my life. Help me God, help me Lord, to grow to be a man devoted to prayer.

What does this passage mean and say to us?

When I think of this passage in terms of us, the collective church or body of Christ, I see a great need for us as well to devote ourselves to prayer. Lord, help us to be people of prayer; help us to understand how important it is to pray. I don't want to make too much of this however, in this brief passage Paul calls the Colossians to devote themselves to prayer before he calls them to look at their lives to see how they are living. The order of how Paul expressed these exhortations is the second indication of how important prayer is for the church and for the individual believers of the church.

Wednesday, March 23: Colossians 4:7-18 NIV2011

⁷ *Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant ^a in the Lord.* ⁸ *I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.* ⁹ *He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.*

¹⁰ *My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)* ¹¹ *Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.* ¹² *Epaphras, who is one of you and a*

servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.¹⁴ Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

¹⁶ After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

¹⁷ Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord."

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

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

With today's reading we come to the end of the book of Colossians. Paul concludes his letter by naming many co-workers in Christ. Two of whom are carrying the letter, *Tychicus* and *Onesimus*, who we know from Paul's letter to Philemon.

Next Paul names a number of people who are apparently with him (either they are in prison also or they are attending to and helping Paul who is in prison). These people are known to the Colossians. When Paul names them, he writes a specific connection he has with each of them. They are coworkers, servants of Christ, people who are working hard for you and other believers, the people of prayer, people who are mature and fully assured and so on. There's even one person, *Nympha*, who hosts a church at her house.

Finally, the letter concludes with a greeting and encouragement to read the letter and another letter Paul sent to *Laodicea*.

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

There is not a great deal in this passage of "Christian" teaching. However, Paul models genuine love for others in the faith and a recognition of how our lives are interdependent with one another in advancing the Gospel. Paul lauds a number of people for the ways in which they model and advance the cause of Jesus Christ in the world. This for me creates a challenge to pay attention to how people work for Christ and to affirm that regularly.

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

I am wondering if I acknowledge the ways many people help me and support the cause of Christ in and around me. Am I as forthcoming with praise as Paul is in these final paragraphs of his letter to the Colossians?

What does this passage mean and say to us?

How we treat one another matters. We are in the business of advancing Christ's claims together. No one of us is more important than anyone else. And no one of us can do everything on our own. We need one another; encouraging one another in the labor for Christ is always a good thing.

Thursday, March 24: Romans 1:1-7 NIV2011

^{1:1} Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life ⁴ was a descendant of David, ⁵ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power ⁶ by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁷ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ⁸ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁹ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Today's reading is the 'envelope' for Paul's letter to the Romans. And while the essence of these verses conveys who the author is and who the recipients are, it is clear that Paul places a great deal of weight on his apostleship in the opening 6 verses.

The letter to the Romans is essentially Paul's self-introduction to the church in Rome. Paul will outline his calling and his theology in the hopes of garnering support for the advance of gospel ministry around the world. Given that it is an introductory letter it is not surprising that Paul gives more extensive information about himself as the author of the letter.

Paul describes himself as a servant of Christ Jesus and an apostle who was set apart to (advance) the gospel. Paul then explains that the gospel was promised beforehand in the Holy Scriptures (the Old Testament). The essence of the gospel is found in Jesus, God's Son, who is a descendant of David and who by God's power was raised from the dead. It is through Jesus that we, the church, received grace and through whom Paul received to call to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Lastly, Paul notes that those to whom he is writing in Rome were among the Gentiles called to belong to Jesus Christ.

He then describes them as God's holy people.

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

Central to Paul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles and the gospel message he has been preaching is Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul would have no calling and the world would have no gospel without Jesus Christ. His resurrection from the dead is God's power displayed in the world. Everything rests on Jesus. Jesus' gospel was promised through the prophets and writings of the Old Testament scriptures. This has been God's plan through all the ages

From the very first stroke of Paul's pen in this letter to the Romans the centrality of Jesus Christ as Lord and Jesus Christ as the Son of God is emphasized. This is essential for the church to hold onto this truth.

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

Sitting with these words this morning my heart is drawn to Jesus. Having just finished reading Colossians where Jesus is central to everything and now hearing this opening to Paul's letter to the Romans with Jesus at the core, I am reminded that Jesus is everything and pressing into Jesus is my highest and wisest calling and approach to life.

What does this passage mean and say to us?

Likewise, when I consider the “us” of the church, God is reinforcing the essential truth of Jesus. Nothing will ever supplant Jesus, that's the essence of our faith. Rules and regulations, worship styles and music preferences are mere window dressings compared to the essence that is Jesus Christ the Lord, God's Eternal Son and our Savior.

Friday, March 25: Romans 1:8-17 NIV2011

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, ^c that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” ⁿ

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

In these verses Paul lays out his reason for the letter. Paul has heard about their faith, likely having met many people from Rome in his travels. Paul has been praying for the church and people of Rome and now sensing it is God's Will for him to travel to Rome to meet the Roman Christians in person.

His desire, always the apostle, is to impart spiritual wisdom to them and to be encouraged and strengthened by them. Paul also shares that he tried to go to Rome on a number of occasions but that he has been prevented (probably a nod to God closing the door for him to travel to Rome). Paul believes that since God is now opening the door for him to go to Rome there will be a harvest of righteousness through his preaching while he is in Rome.

Paul next begins to share a bit about his life and faith. He is obliged Paul writes (probably a nod to his calling) to go to both Greeks and non-Greeks, people who are wise and people who are foolish... In other words, Paul is called to go to all kinds of people to share the gospel. And because Rome is made up of a myriad of peoples, he is eager to preach the gospel there as well.

Paul understands that the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes... Therefore, he is not ashamed of the gospel. And what is the gospel? The gospel is the righteousness of God revealed (ponder that statement before reading on). Yes, the gospel is the message of Jesus that brings salvation to people like you and me. Yes, the gospel is the story of Jesus, yet when we burrowed down into the gospel, we realize the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. (As we will learn later in this book, the gospel is the atoning death of

Jesus God satisfies for punishment to every human being by substituting Jesus' righteous atoning death for our own death. Again, as Paul will say later, God is both just and the justifier.) And the righteousness that God reveals is a righteousness that is from beginning to end by faith, for *the righteous will live by faith*.

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

The core truth of the gospel is explained. The gospel is the righteousness of God revealed. The gospel is all about what God has done for us as sinful human beings. In the gospel a *righteousness that is by faith from first to last* is revealed.

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

The words of Paul are reminding me that the gospel message is about what God has done for me, an undeserving sinner. I merit nothing; God gave me everything through faith in Jesus Christ.

What does this passage mean and say to us?

This passage, especially the final paragraph, reminds us -the church- that we are not superior or better than others in any way. We have simply been graced by God to embrace His gospel. We neither merit nor earn God's embrace, it is gift given to us. It is by faith from beginning to end. As such we cannot take credit or feel superior to those who do not have faith. Instead we, who are God's people, must remain utterly humble that God chose to save us through belief in his gospel message.

Saturday, March 26, 2022: Romans 1:18-32 NIV2011

¹⁸ *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,* ¹⁹ *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*

²¹ *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* ²² *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools* ²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.*

²⁴ *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.* ²⁵ *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.*

²⁶ *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.* ²⁷ *In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

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

After reading this section I'm wondering if I should have subdivided it so that I could ponder its many deep truths more thoroughly. Still because it is one continuous argument, I stayed with my original plan to ponder this section as a whole.

Since each paragraph conveys a central thought it's probably clearest to consider one paragraph at a time.

Paul opens with a demanding statement that God's wrath is being revealed against those *who suppress the truth by their wickedness*. This is a strong statement because it shows that people are actively working against the truth of God. The word 'suppressed' pictures a person who is pushing hard against a spring in order to collapse the spring. It is an active intentional pressing against. People are not simply benignly ignorant of God; they are actively working to undermine God's general knowledge of Himself in the world. In verse 19 Paul goes on to teach that God made Himself plain to the world in the creation of the world. In other words, there is a general revelation in the world that should cause peoples' eyes to lift and seek its Creator. But since people do not lift their eyes to the Creator they are as Paul put it *without excuse*. (Paul will later write plainly, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, Romans 3:23.)

Paul continues to explain. Suppressing the truth of God occurs as people choose neither to glorify nor thank God even though they know he exists. Refusing to acknowledge God their thinking grows even more futile, and their foolishness grows even more darkened. People in this state claim to be wise but they are not. They exchange the glory and worship of Almighty God with the worship of created beings like birds and animals and reptiles.

As a result, God simply gave them over to their own sinful wishes and desires. In their hearts and actions, they travelled from bad to worse; sexual sin increased. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped creation and created beings rather than worshiping the Lord God Almighty.

As depravity grew in intensity God released His restraint upon them. People began indulging in indecent sexual activities, women with women and men with men.

This behavior, however, is not the only indicator of human moral decay. As their minds depraved even more people became filled with every kind of wickedness... Paul lists: *evil, greed and depravity.... envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice.... gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.* (One only needs to open an Internet news browser to understand how true Paul's statement is.) Paul caps his teaching with the final sentence, *Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things*

deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

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

This passage teaches us that humanity is not neutral with respect to God. Human beings are actively working against God and his will and His way. They “suppress” the truth. It is this activity against God that warrants God's wrath poured out against us.

While homosexual actions are part of humanities subversion of God's truth in our world, these actions are not alone in revealing our capacity to turn our backs on God. Paul goes on to name many other against God, activities frequented by humanity namely, *evil, greed and depravity.... envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice.... gossips,*³⁰ *slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;*³¹ *they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.*

In our generation, it is important that we, the church, recognize all these forms of suppression of God's truth. Homosexuality is no more a sign of a depraved generation than people who gossip or are greedy. My sense is we must caution ourselves from creating a hierarchy of depraved activity.

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

Before Christ saved me, I was among this generation who suppressed the truth and lived a life opposed to God. Therefore, I need to be very careful not to give in to feelings of superiority. Instead, I need to grow in sympathy for people who are suppressing the truth, realizing that only by the grace of Jesus Christ can they begin to embrace the truth.

What does this passage mean and say to us?

We, the people of God, need to 1) guard our own lives from these truth suppressing behaviors. And 2) we need to look hard at the full range of truth suppressing activities and call out each one, not simply one or two, that we find particularly egregious.

Sunday, March 27, 2022 - 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>

