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**November 2022 “WHAT WOULD PAUL WRITE?”**

Dear Friends,

The Apostle Paul is one of the greatest individuals in the entire Bible. God used him to write more New Testament books than anyone else. When we read about his journeys and the places where he ministered, we are reading just a small sampling of the cities and regions in which he preached the gospel and established churches. The letters he wrote to various churches give us a unique insight and perspective of the Believers in those churches.

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. (Romans 1:8)*

*I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*

*(1 Corinthians 1:4-7)*

*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now (Philippians 1:3-5)*

*We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth (Colossians 1:3-6)*

*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father*

*(1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)*

*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure*

*(2 Thessalonians 1:3-4)*

- To the churches at Colossae, Thessalonica and Rome, Paul writes about their faith, work of faith, faith growing exceedingly, and faith spoken of “throughout the whole world.” The whole world Paul is writing about is essentially the Body of Christ. Christians in Rome and Thessalonica were facing increased persecution. The city of Colossae was facing a serious economic downturn, and heretics had begun spreading false doctrine among Believers. In spite of this, Christians were holding on to their faith in Jesus, continuing to press into Him, and trusting God to get them through every hardship and challenge.
- To Corinth, he writes that the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them. In spite of all the carnality and division within that church, they held fast to the belief that Jesus is the only way to salvation. This is quite a statement considering that Corinth was one of the most wicked and pagan cities of that era. Immorality was rampant and numerous pagan deities were worshiped. For the people of the Corinthian church to fully embrace the gospel of Christ was, indeed, quite a testimony.
- About Thessalonica, he writes they were known for their patience, mentioning that quality in both of his letters to that church. This word patience comes from the Greek word, *hupomoné*, which means to persevere and bear up under any and all adverse circumstances; the quality of character which does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. This type of patience does not simply grin on the outside, all the while fuming, complaining, and feeling overwhelmed with discouragement on the inside. It is a patience that is birthed out of the life of Christ in a Believer. Peace is directly associated with this kind of patience.
- Paul states that the Corinthians are enriched by Christ in all utterance and knowledge. The word “enriched” comes from the Greek word “*ploutízō*” which means, “wealth, to make rich.” However, in this passage it has nothing to do with financial or material increase. Notice it states they are “enriched by Him,” meaning God. Therefore, the enriching is spiritual in nature. Then we’re told how God enriches them: in all utterance and knowledge. This is a specific reference to not just teaching, but to tongues and interpretation, along with prophetic declarations. Paul gives much more detail about this in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14.
- Concerning the church at Colossae, Paul states that the word of the truth of the gospel was bringing forth fruit. First and foremost, the fruit being produced by the word of truth was the salvation of the lost. The Colossian Christians were not afraid to share the message of salvation through faith in Jesus. But along with this was the fruit of spiritual maturity: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, as well as conforming to the image of the glory of Christ, all of which are mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 and 2 Corinthians 3:18.
- The Philippians were commended for their fellowship. The fellowship Paul is speaking of is not the kind associated with church parties and congregational meals. He called it their “fellowship in the gospel.” This is referring to their faithfulness in financially supporting Paul’s ministry. In fact, during a period of time they were the only church sending him offerings. This is borne out very clearly in Philippians 4:10-19.

- The Thessalonians and Colossians were also known for their love, labor of love, and abounding charity (love). This is not human love that even the lost talk about. This is the love that can only come from God, and which is a part of the born-again life. It's a love which looks beyond life's struggles, realizing that nothing is better than being a child of God. The kind of love mentioned here is that which is quick to forgive others, no matter what they've done. The labor of love Paul writes about is a Believer's love of God which results in serving Him and others without the need to be coerced.
- Another characteristic of the Colossian and Thessalonian churches was their hope. The word "hope" that Paul used is from the Greek word "elpis" which means "desire of some good with expectation of receiving it." This is not wishful thinking. Rather, it is a hope based on the knowledge that the thing hoped for is guaranteed to happen. The only way this kind of hope is possible is if that which is hoped for has as its foundation a source that is unfailing: the promises of God and His Word.

The Believers at Colossae and Thessalonica knew whom they believed and were persuaded that He was able to keep that which they had committed unto Him. They had a hope the world knew nothing about, and that hope gave them a confidence that nothing happened without God knowing about it. They had a hope that was fresh every day, just like the eternal mercy of God. They were stable in their day-to-day lives because their hope was built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and righteousness.

- One more notable attribute of the church at Corinth was that they came behind in no gift. Paul wasn't speaking of financial offerings. He was making reference to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit identified in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11,

***But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.***

As we see, each of the five churches mentioned had very notable and significant characteristics and habits pertaining to their walk with God. All of which brings up a very critical question:

### **What would Paul write to the church at (where you and I attend)?**

- Do you and I attend a church where the majority of the members are living by every word that proceeds from God (Matthew 4:4)? We all claim to be people of faith, but are we? Do we demonstrate our faith life not just in church, but wherever we go? When surrounded by trials, does our faith lift us above the fray? Do we have works of faith, or faith in works? Without faith, it is impossible to please God; does He find us pleasing? What would Paul write about our faith?

- Is the testimony of Christ confirmed in our congregation? Or is compromise embraced and tolerated? The testimony of Christ is a testimony of holiness. It is also a testimony that rejects any other “path” unto God. There is no other name by which anyone can be saved, and that is the name of Jesus. What would Paul write about our testimony of Christ.
- Do the people in our church demonstrate the quality of character which does not cave in emotionally to adverse circumstances or succumb under trial? Is our congregation one that rejoices in the Lord always, or one that complains? Is there an atmosphere of peace in our church when people walk in? What would Paul write about our patience?
- Is the church we attend open to the operation of all the 1 Corinthians chapter 12 Gifts of the Spirit? Do we accept and respect tongues and interpretation? Do we recognize and honor prophetic declarations? Or does our church frown on such things, maybe even to the point of declaring them no longer valid for Christians? Are we being enriched by God in all utterance and knowledge?
- Are the people in our congregation demonstrating the fruit of the word of truth? Are we growing and maturing in Christ; or are we living in a spiritual stalemate of complacency? Is the fruit of our character the same as what Jesus demonstrated?
- What is the love walk like among the people of our church? It is true that everyone has a different personality, and most people have some friends closer than others. But it doesn’t take long to figure out who is quick to forgive and who hold grudges. God has revealed in His Word that refusing to forgive can have an impact on where we spend eternity. We are told to love as we are loved (1 John 4:11) and forgive as we have been forgiven (Colossians 3:13).
- Do the people in our church live with wishful thinking concerning their hope in the promises of God? Or is their hope one of expected results? When people speak do their words convey a mindset of “it’s done,” or a mindset that is unsettled and full of more questions than faith?

Looking at all this from a different perspective, what would Paul write about us as individuals? Regardless of what others in our church do, are we demonstrating the commendable traits Paul recognized in the churches he addressed? Are we becoming more like Jesus, or are we comfortable simply comparing ourselves to others as though they are the standard for spiritual growth and maturity? There is a song I’ve heard sung in churches throughout the years, the message of which should be the theme for every Christian’s life:

To be like Jesus  
 To be like Jesus  
 On Earth I want to be like Him  
 All through life’s journey  
 From here to glory  
 I only ask  
 To be like Him

Though there are many variations of the lyrics, the theme of that song is still the same: to be like Jesus. This is God’s desire for each of us. As we continue to spend time with Him in prayer, His Word, and worship, He will keep working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. May we all grow in the Lord to the point that Paul would have nothing but good to say about our lifestyle and our witness for Jesus.

In His Grace,

*Jim*

P.S. – The fourth Thursday of each November is when Thanksgiving is celebrated in the United States. Traditionally, it is a day on which we have a nice meal and thank God for the many ways He has blessed our lives. Modern, liberal thinkers and educators have tried to eliminate references to God as the reason for this holiday. However, archived documents written in the early days of our country reveal that the first Thanksgiving took place in 1619. Giving thanks to God is not simply a religious exercise, it is God’s will. If you would like to have a CD of a special sermon I preached about thanking God, please use the form below to request, *Giving Thanks: God’s Will*.

### 2023 REVIVAL NOW! CONFERENCE

Our Revival Now! Conference will be held Sunday, April 23 – Friday, April 28. Services will be held morning and evening. There is no charge to register or attend. All services will be held at our church. I’ll be sending more information in future letters. If you have any questions, email me at PastorJimGCC@gmail.com.

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\_\_\_\_\_ Check here to receive a CD of the sermon *Giving Thanks: God’s Will*.

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