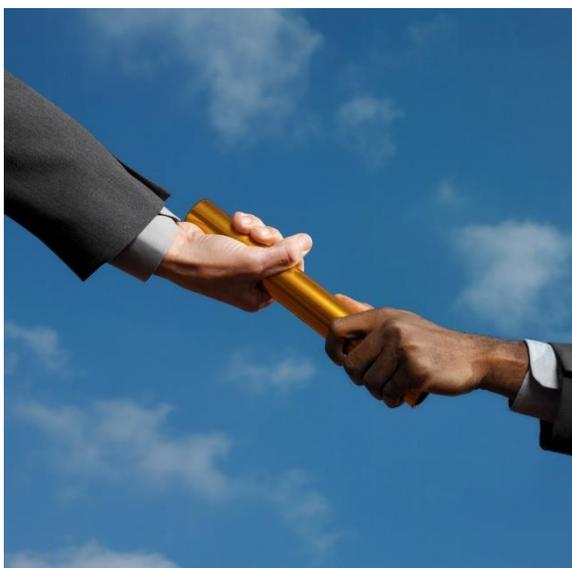


May 2018 Bible Reading Plan

Living Worthy of Our Calling

(May 1-20)

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. . . . I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:1-6)



From the Pastor as we prepare to receive a new Senior Pastor:

Back in 2014 I attended a seminar led by Ken Sande, the author of the book *The Peacemaker*, a book which I have recommended very highly! and believe every Christian could benefit immensely from his Biblical treatment of Peacemaking. During the seminar, Ken Sande mentioned that he was writing an article about Pastoral Transitions: Good and Bad. I had been emphasizing Peacemaking here at WPC and in three of the prisons in our area, and it was that comment by Ken Sande that sparked me to speak to the Session about developing a transition plan for whenever that should occur.

I had come to the conclusion that it would be beneficial for WPC for a Senior Pastor transition to take place for a number of reasons, but my great concern was that it truly benefit our church, and not prove a detrimental transition. There is no way to absolutely guarantee a good transition, because there are a number of different variables, and because we are all sinners. But I wanted it to go well, because I love this church, and long for it to prosper spiritually, and hopefully, numerically as well.

A lot has taken place since I first spoke to our Session. And now it has come to a climactic point. We have elected the man who will serve as the new Senior Pastor: Michael Chad Watkins. And I am excited for you! I think there is every reason to expect that Chad's ministry here will bear really good fruit. And I fully expect that it can be a wonderful experience for him and for his family. This is in many ways a really, really good church! We are not perfect, and we all have a lot of growing yet to do, this writer not excepted! But we have solid foundations, and God has gathered a wonderful and diverse fellowship of believers.

But transitions are often hard, and not altogether unlike many marriages. All you have to do is listen to young marrieds who choose to make up their own vows to realize how naïve they often are, indeed, how "stupid" some of their statements often are. Am I being harsh? Maybe. But I've listened to some, and they sounded "stupid" to me! I don't really mean that in a demeaning way, like it may sound. I just mean their statements were often devoid of wisdom about the reality of two sinners living together over the long haul.

Keep in mind that pastoral transitions are often not altogether unlike marriages. Most of us who have been married for any significant length of time know that good marriages require some hard work, and some of us – note the "us" – know we have failed in many ways. All of which is to say that this transition, for all of the prospects of being a great transition, will nevertheless require watchful attention and diligence.

This month's readings, or the portion of the month we'll cover in this Bible Reading Plan, are intended to focus on various matters that are

critically important for a pastoral transition, but more than that, for relationships in general. Much of the Christian life pertains to relationships. First and foremost is our relationship with the triune God, but our relationship with the Lord is intimately tied to our relationships with one another. We fool ourselves if we think the former can be good while the latter is bad.

So, I encourage you to use this month's Bible Reading Plan, and to do so prayerfully and thoughtfully, intent to not only read God's Word, but to apply it and obey it. Don't merely be a hearer.

Remember Westminster Larger Catechism # 157 *How is the word of God to be read?* Answer: The holy scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.

Bill Tyson, pastor

HOW TO PRAY FOR OUR MISSIONARIES

1. Apologetics Resource Center ARC, Partners in Asian Ministries PAM/India. Clete Hux, Director. ARC Quarterly provides to us the process of understanding the times and the alien philosophies opposed to God's truth, as well as understanding and effecting the antidote of both knowing God's truth and being the truth in our home, neighborhood, and culture. This is the Church's wake-up call.
2. Ronda Coon Women's Home is one of the two local ministries supported by WPC in which you are encouraged to serve. The home is for women in situations who are in need of shelter and nurturing to assist them toward independent living. Bible study is held with the women on Thursdays from 7-8 pm.
3. Good News Jail & Prison Ministry, Okaloosa County Jail. This ministry offers Bible Studies to inmates which are then completed, some of which are brought to WPC for grading. Become a grader: ablacks657@aol.com. The annual fundraising banquet was held April 26, two months earlier than in past years.
4. Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF), Cyprus, Pastor Victor Atallah. Outstanding monthly newsletters bring so much news about how the Lord continues to use electronic communications to reach people in countries unable to hear about Jesus Christ.
4. Presbyterian & Reformed Commission on Chaplains (PRCC). Pray for fruitful, Spiritual counseling for the military members on new assignments and children prepare to start in a new school.
5. Brenda Carter, MTW, San Yi, Taiwan. Supports Hakka church plants and pastors, a new Hakka Seminary, leads seminars, and serves on several school, college and seminary boards. Brenda represented MTW at a conference in Singapore and taught a ladies class in a Hakka seminary.
6. Rev. Chuck & Wyema, MTW, church planting in Europe. Chuck is stretched with being called to preach and teach in several local countries. They are eager for David & Marcia to return 'home' in June. Chuck leads services in Farsi after the service at International Presbyterian Church.
7. Rev Clay and Darlene Quarterman, MTW/Kiev, Ukraine. President, Evangelical Reformed Seminary on HMA. An open house was held on a Friday night, then they spoke during Sunday School to bring the congregation news on their 40-year long ministry. Pray for the end of Russian aggression in Ukraine.
8. David & Jan, Enterprise/MTW/Europe. They provide support for church plants in Europe and Africa. David leads Enterprise and Jan

leads ladies' activities. They celebrated their 40th anniversary with their children, spouses and grands with them in Europe.

9. David and Jill Martin, MTW/Odessa, Ukraine. Teachers for missionary kids. Innovative class activities which encourage learning and memorization. Praise for the school's progress, the dedicated students. Pray for end to Russian aggression.
10. David & Marcia, MTW/Europe. Speakers at the 2018 WPC Missions Conference. Brought the reality of refugees to the pulpit. HMA 'til May 2018. Want to meet Muslims? Drink tea with them. Pray for Visa approval, their finances and timely return to the field.
11. Manila, Philippines, pastoral support for church plants and outreach in extremely depressed areas. Pray for Grace, humility, friendship, warm relations, safety and teachable hearts.
12. OneChild Ministry, Ang Bahay Parola (The Lighthouse), Manila, Philippines. New contact in the US is Pastor Dee Hammond at Chestnut Mountain PCA in Georgia. ABP has a newly established adoption and foster care program with 5 children ready for adoption into Filipino families. Pray for open homes and hearts.
13. Kiev, Ukraine Seminary/MTW. Seminary students' support. Many international students need housing. Pray for the Lord to open doors for a seminary dormitory/library.
14. Perry & Betty, MTW/Mediterranean. National elections held for the first time in 5 years, using immigrants, the EU and a desire for national sovereignty as scapegoats. The Vatican held a forum on *exorcism* to combat fortune tellers and Tarot card readers. Roman Catholics are fearful and ignorant of using Scriptural truths to combat potential threats, rather than acknowledging God's absence in their lives.
15. Robert & Lisa Stewart, MTW/church planting, Tokyo, Japan. Praise for a growing congregation, larger church site and new seekers, for Youth Group growth. Who would like to visit this exciting ministry?
16. Joel and Stephanie Swanson, son Pascal. MTW/Toulouse, France, Church plant. Prayer walk for neighborhood; for the Muslim refugee family who are new to the neighborhood; for 'Pierre' who is a new seeker; Joel's intense language study; the French pastor and his family, and for fruitful visits with neighbors.
17. Dr. Tom and Connie Edwards. Hope Health Center, Fairfield (Birmingham) AL. Medical trips to Haiti, semiannual medical trips to Ivory Coast. Pray for humility and for protection against pride the clinic staff, volunteers, and patients. Pray for the local Alabama patients that they see Christ in those who treat them.

18. Verne & Alina Marshall, MTW, Santiago, Chile & Cuba. Pray for churches in Cuba; for a problem pastor who is divisive, without compassion or love, and uses social media to criticize people and doctrines – this greatly affects our small presbytery. Pray for granddaughter Amelie fighting a rare form of bone cancer.
19. Franklin & Beth, MTW/Europe/Enterprise. Media Production, Videographers. Sensitive ministry. Pray for fruitful contacts, good health, church plants, growing ministry and funds for additional recording equipment. Video links are received, which YOU could view if you were on our Missions Prayer Chain.
20. RUF/Univ. of Florida. Rev. Brian and Jessica Thomas. Our first year is ending, as is our 5th year with RUF. “I can’t imagine my life without these rich years... RUF/UF is headed in a good direction; I’m encouraged how God is working in and through this ministry.”
21. RUF/Florida State University. Rev. Kelly and Caroline Jackson. and their family as they wind up their first year at FSU. Pray for fruitful student outreach as they prepare for beach ministry. Their support is increasing, pray for good stewardship of resources to reach students for Christ.
22. Dr. Barrett and Bryanne Jones and children. Their stay in Malawi extended many months beyond original plans. Malawi officials granted adoption for little Chisomo. The wait now is for the US approval.
23. Pastor John and Sarah Ellen Carson. Pastor Carson and Sarah Ellen, retired from World Witness, continue to volunteer at Uganda Bible College, Africa and Leith APC church in Scotland. Praise for their many family members who continue the legacy in missions.
24. Rev. Scott and Katie Moore and five children. Trinity Family Ministries, Mobile, AL. This church plant by Grace PCA in Mobile, a good possibility for periodic mission trips. Faithful and effective prayer in a dangerous, depressed community. Violence and deaths are not uncommon.
25. Matt Elder/Arizona State University - Hope4ASU.org is a fruitful evangelism. For Spring Break they spent three days at San Diego State U, meeting students, sharing our stories and helping them get connected to ministries at SDSU. By the end of the trip, nine students prayed to surrender their lives to Jesus!
26. SALAMA, at risk children’s ministry/George Crook, Nashville, TN. Pray for spiritual and physical nurturing, and protection for the ministry, and growing trust in the Lord Jesus Christ!

27. Dr. Lloyd Kim, MTW Coordinator. Pray for an effective prayer and emerging vision focus for each region, team and country for newly planted churches and teams.
28. Pray for the Missions Ministry Team and the Strategic Planning Team in developing the revised Policy and Procedures Manual in planning for support decisions. Pray as the team identifies mission trips for 2018 and Conference speakers for 2019.
29. Pray for 1% of WPC members with the desire to go, long term or short term, to the mission field. Pray for more members to join the Missions Ministry Team – Treasurer, someone to develop and maintain a data base, and pray-ers!
30. Pray for plans for the 2019 Missions Conference.

PRAYING FOR OUR PASTORAL TRANSITION:

Bill and Mary Ann Tyson

- Pray for Bill and Mary Ann as their house in FWB is under contract. Pray as they make plans to move to Nashville.
- That Bill would be able to complete their moving plans without interruption to the ministry at WPC.
- For safety in their travels back and forth to Nashville.
- That they would find welcoming neighbors and quickly develop meaningful relationships.
- For God's timely provisions to be supplied in a way that will build faith in him for all their needs
- For Bill to conclude and finish well his ministry with us at Westminster.

Chad and Michelle Watkins

- Thankfulness for the rental unit they found which will allow them to save money for a future home purchase
- For the rental home to be ready without delay in the renovations being accomplished
- For the Watkins girls to quickly make friends within the congregation
- For Chad and Michelle to be well cared for and find a welcoming church family at WPC
- For grace to abound as the Watkins adjust to a new congregation and as they minister to us
- For wisdom and discernment as Chad and the Session plan and set ministry priorities for the future

Congregation

- Thankfulness for the unity displayed as we reached unanimous agreement to call Chad Watkins as our next Sr. Pastor.
- For our congregation to work through a time of mourning with the loss of Bill and Mary Ann.
- For excitement and hope as we consider what God could do through the ministry of Chad and Michelle
- For our unity to continue as we receive our new pastor in a spirit of love, patience and kindness.
- Protection from any misunderstandings, discouragement, criticism, grumbling, impatience, and division

Knox and Mary and Their Family

- Thankfulness for the ministry the Whites have had among us, showing us an example of the transforming love of Christ
- That God would strengthen them as a family in their love for one another
- That Knox would continue to grow in his pastoral gifts under the ministry of a new pastor
- That Knox and Mary would be a great help to our future pastor and his wife in both fellowship and ministry
- For the White family to be nurtured and blessed under the ministry and shepherding of our future pastor

*If you haven't read the pastor's introduction letter, please read that

Read Ephesians 4:1-6.

Would you agree that to urge someone to walk "worthy" of something is to urge him to walk in a manner that reflects that thing's "worth" or "value"? If that is true, then the "worth" or "value" of the thing determines the strength or force of the exhortation, does it not?

1. So, if that is true, what does one have to know about verse 1 to determine the strength and power of Paul's exhortation? _____

There is a portion of Ephesians that I did not pay a great deal of attention to for a long time, namely, chp 2 vss 11-22. It was while preparing to teach Ephesians to a class at African Bible University several years ago that the importance of those verses came to life for me. Paul is speaking about the relationship of Jews and Gentiles, and of Christ's purpose to "create in himself **one new man** in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross..." It was that "one new man" that caught my attention. It is a corporate term, meaning that it includes many from Jew and Gentile alike who have been reconciled to God through the cross, so that they are fashioned into **one new redeemed humanity** living in the midst of a mass of fallen humanity. These are "being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (2:22). So this new redeemed humanity that is being gathered into one body, the Church, is the temple of God, purchased and redeemed by the blood of Christ, the Son of God.

So, what force is there to an exhortation to live *worthy* of being called to be a part of this new redeemed humanity, purchased at so high a price and for so great a purpose? Were we to read chapters 1-3 in their entirety, we would find the most panoramic and grand exposition of God's redemptive plan found anywhere in all the Scriptures, and now he exhorts us to live worthy of that. What more could he say to add force to the importance of what he is about to say when he turns to describe what it means to live worthy of being called to be a part of all of a new redeemed humanity?

Let me state my point in all of this, and then let's explore it a little. The point is that the first thing that Paul zeroes in on as he unfolds what it means to live worthy of this calling to be part of a new redeemed humanity in the midst of this mass of fallen humanity is our relationships within the church, and he devotes 16 verses to that one matter. It is obvious that this ought to be an extremely high priority to us, and it becomes especially important as we make a pastoral transition. So let's explore this subject as we prepare for a new Senior Pastor.

2. What is Paul's main concern in Eph 4:1-6 as to what it means to live worthy of our calling? _____

3. How many "ones" does Paul include in vss 4-6 to emphasize how important it is for us to maintain unity at WPC? _____

4. From these verses in 4:1-6, in your own words describe practically what will they require of you for you to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

5. What, or who, are likely to be your greatest challenges when it comes to maintaining “peace,” keeping in mind that “peace” is not merely avoiding conflict? “Peace” – Biblically – is maintaining good healthy godly relationships, which is far more challenging. That becomes obvious in Eph 4:30-5:2, so read those verses and then return to the question: what, or who, are likely to be your greatest challenges when it comes to maintaining good healthy godly relationships within WPC? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflecting back on Eph 4:1-3, and your answers to questions 4 & 5 above, give some time to praying for God’s help that you might live “worthy” of the calling to be a part of the new redeemed humanity purchased at so high a price for so great a purpose as to represent God’s presence in the midst of a mass of fallen mankind. WE are to reflect God’s image to that mass of fallen mankind, of which we were part until God intervened in our lives, and brought us from death to life, so that we placed our trust in Christ and acknowledged him as our risen Lord. (I am assuming that such has taken place in your life. If not, please take the initiative to seek counsel from the pastor or one of the elders.)

And if you listed some people within the congregation that will be your greatest challenges when it comes to maintaining good healthy godly relationships, take some time to pray for them too.

Read Genesis 4:1-10.

1. What is one of the very first evidences of the Fall of mankind? _____

If you have been using the Bible Reading Plan, you probably remember a passage that referred back to Genesis 4:1ff.

Read 1 John 3:10-15 and 4:7-11,19-21.

Yesterday we noted that genuine believers have been called to be a new redeemed humanity – new creation – in the midst of this fallen humanity among whom we live. And our lives are to be distinctly different. Here in John, John makes it clear that it is not surprising if the world hates us, just as Cain hated Abel. But it is not to be that way among brothers (and sisters) in Christ! John is making a similar point as Paul about our relationships with fellow believers.

2. Reflecting on the verses you just read in 1 John, how serious is this matter of loving one another? Explain your answer to that: _____

3. 1 John 4:11 obviously reflects back on the verses before. WHY ought we to love one another in light of vss 7-10? Keep in mind that the “so” of verse 11 is likely not short for “if God loved us so much,” but “if God loved us in such a manner.” Think through this carefully, and write all you can about “WHY” we ought to love one another in light of vss 7-10. _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: If you haven’t already described yourself in question 3, reflect on who it is that you are saying that God loves when you say he loves you. Are you just especially loveable so that he loved you? Or, did you reflect on your unloveable characteristics? What do we usually focus on in other believers whom we struggle to love? Just think about it, and pray accordingly.

Read Ephesians 4:17-24, a very important passage!

After spending 16 verses of chapter 4 talking about relationships within the church, Paul now contrasts how we are to live with how many non-Christians live, and makes it evident that we are not to live as they do – remember, if we are in Christ, we are a part of a new redeemed humanity which is being transformed back into the image of God that was so marred by sin.

We saw the phrase “one new man” in Eph 2:15 on May 1st. We find the phrase “new man” again here in 4:24, except that for some unknown reason the ESV has translated it “new self.” That is not correct. Paul is saying that when these believers heard about Christ (vs 20) in the beginning, they were taught to put off the “old man” and to put on the “new man.” But although it has a personal application, which I suppose is what “new self” is supposed to communicate, the term is a corporate term referring to our having been a part of the old fallen humanity. We were called to put off our connection with that old fallen humanity and its practices (which is what he refers to in vss 17-19), and to put on all those things that should characterize the new redeemed humanity. The reason that is important, and why I am stressing it, is that Paul is not saying merely that as individuals we are to be concerned to put off our old “self” and put on the new “self,” as though it were a “it’s just me and you God, that’s what counts” sort of thing. He is saying we put off our identification with the fallen mass of mankind that we were part of from birth, and identify ourselves with the new redeemed humanity that Christ is creating, that “one new man” he spoke of in Eph 2:15.

Why is that so important? Because it is not “it’s just me and you, God, me and you.” It’s “us” – my brothers and sisters in Christ – “us and you, God, us and you.” We are a part of a “body” that has been reconciled not only to God, but to one another, or at least we are supposed to be. That was why Ephesians 2:11-22 jumped out at me as being so important. The church, *and our involvement with other believers in the local church’s expression of the larger Church of Christ*, is critically important. Living in peace, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in peace, is what living worthy of our calling is all about! The individualistic attitude of professing Christians who think “it’s just me and you, God, me and you that count,” is horribly wrong!

I can struggle with relationships just like you can, but I know that I am struggling with my own sin when I do, and I hope you realize the same. We are called to live in community with other believers, and to maintain good healthy godly relationships.

Having said all of that, notice Ephesians 4:21-22. The phrase the ESV translates “deceitful desires” ought, I think, to be the “desires of deceit,” that is, the desires that grow out of untruth, lies.

1. Think back to Genesis 3 when the serpent told Eve, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...” What was he doing with respect to her “desires” by his lies? What ought to have been her “desire” in that moment? _____

2. I realize that you may wonder what I was asking in question 1, so let me try asking in another way. John 8:29 records Jesus saying: “And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” So, what was Jesus’ “desire”? _____

3. Now, let me ask again: What was Satan, that old “serpent,” doing when he told Eve that God knew that when she ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, her eyes would be opened, and she would be like God, knowing good and evil? How did his lie impact her “desire”? _____

Ephesians 4:23-24 speaks of the renewal of our minds so that we put on the new man, created after the likeness of God – and here the ESV has – “in true righteousness and holiness.” But again, I think it ought to be translated differently, as “in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

4. If that is correct, what truth? **Read 4:20-24 again.** What truth? _____

5. What was Jesus’ “desire” in John 8:29 above? _____

6. What will be our “desire” if we live according to the truth as it is in Jesus? And what will be the result in our lives according to Eph 4:23-24? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Let me spell out what I have been aiming at and trying to suggest by my taking you back and forth from Genesis to Ephesians, and then you reflect back on it to see if I am on target. What Satan did by his deceit and lies was to turn Eve’s “desire” from pleasing God to pleasing herself. And is that not what Paul is describing in Ephesians 4:17-19, a life lived for self? That corrupts our lives. But Jesus kept his “desire” focused on pleasing his Father, and his life was characterized by righteousness and holiness of character. The “truth as it is in Jesus” keeps us focused on pleasing God. That is our great struggle, to nurture the desire to please God by focusing on the “truth” as it is in Jesus. Make that a matter of prayer. Jesus said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up the cross daily, and follow me.” That is the *daily* battle, the conflict of desires – ours versus his. We want to nurture the desire to please him, to serve him, to love him, and we nurture that desire by the truth of the Gospel as we read and meditate on the Scriptures, and as we gather and fellowship with other Christ followers. We can’t do it on our own, and in fact, much of righteousness and holiness pertains to relationships with others.

Read James 3:13-4:12.

This again is dealing with congregational peace or conflict. James has spoken of the power of the tongue in chapter 3:1-12, and has commented: "How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness...setting on fire the whole course of life, and set on fire by hell." (vss 5b-6) Strong words!

James 3:13-18 are verses I have read to the Session each year throughout most of my ministry here, to speak of how we are to interact as members of the Session in light of our different personalities and perspectives, and they do really well!

1. What do you notice about this passage that is similar to some of what we were dealing with yesterday? _____

2. Looking back over the entire reading, what fuels conflict? Note all the things you can find that lead to conflict and broken relationships: _____

4. Now go back through and list the things that make for good healthy godly relationships, whether with the Lord or his people: _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect back over your lists above, and spend some time praying about areas that you may address, positively or negatively. Spend some time particularly reflecting on James 3:13-18.

These two passages address a similar concern, namely the peaceful relationships within the church. They speak of certain qualities we must have and exercise if genuine peace is to be achieved and maintained. Ken Sande, the author of *The Peacemaker*, is presently working on the development of “Relational Wisdom,” which actually is similar to what James speaks of in 3:13ff. Let’s compare these two passages somewhat today.

Read James 3:13-18 and Ephesians 4:1-3 again, and put some marker in each so you can turn back and forth.

Notice that Eph 4:2 speaks of walking with all humility and gentleness (or meekness). James 3:13 speaks of the “meekness of wisdom,” the same word as “gentleness” in Eph. James 4:6 speaks of the “humble,” and that Greek word is part of the word “humility” in Eph 4:2. So there are clearly close relationships of thought in these two passages. **Look up Colossians 3:12**, where the two words occur together again, along with some others.

1. From what you can tell, why are a lot of these words grouped together as they are? _____

2. Eph 4:3 speaks of being “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and James 3:17-18 mentions “peace” 3 times. So “peace” is obviously VERY important to both authors. What fruit grows out of interactions of Christians committed to maintaining good healthy godly relationships as they debate their different perspectives and thoughts about various things like we do in our elder meetings? And what keeps it from going bad? _____

3. The phrase “open to reason” in James 3:17 is a translation of a Greek word that means persuadable, ready to listen, ready to be convinced. What does that reflect about a person, and how does it contrast with the spirit described in 3:14 & 16? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: “Peace” does not mean avoiding all conflict! That is “flight,” generally a wrong response to conflict. HOW we engage in conflict of ideas is what is most important. People committed to the truth and to doing what is right in God’s eyes, will still often see things differently, and have to respectfully work through those. Often God uses that to produce wiser decisions than those a single person might make (see Proverbs 11:14; 15:22). Pray about how you and the rest of us will deal with concerns that may arise.

I have been emphasizing the importance of maintaining “peace” in the church, understood as good healthy godly relationships. Lest I be misunderstood, *read Galatians 1:6-12 and 2:1-5 and 11-21.*

1. That does not sound like “peace”! Why? _____

2. What do we learn from these passages about “peace”? _____

3. Paul’s response to those preaching a different “gospel” in 1:6-9 is different from his confrontation with Peter in 2:11-21 (or some portion of those verses). What do you think the difference reflects? _____

4. *Read 2 Timothy 2:22-26*, where Paul is not perturbed because false teachers are leading the believers in Galatia astray at the risk of their souls, but is here speaking of how he and we might interact with some whose views and emphases are wrong in other situations. Why is Paul’s response different in this case?

One has but to think of the nature of Paul’s calling and ministry to realize that he is not for “peace at any price.” He was constantly interacting with people of views contrary to the Gospel and the truths of Scripture. But context and purpose made a huge difference in what he did, and how. For example, in Acts 19:8-10 we find Paul boldly reasoning with Jews and trying to persuade them about the “kingdom of God,” and when they stubbornly refused, proceeding to reason daily in the hall of Tyrannus with Gentiles for two years or more. That doesn’t sound like Galatians 1:6-12! Context and purpose should make a huge difference in how we interact with someone.

For your Meditation and Prayer: Think through how you interact with others in various contexts, and reflecting on the above passages and thoughts, pray about how you interact with others. Do you need boldness to be willing to engage others where they are Biblically wrong? Do you need more patience and meekness when interacting with others in the church with whom you differ? Etc.

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

Let’s focus on vss 1-2 & 6-11 today. These verses contain some of the greatest truths of the Gospel. In the course of 6 verses, one travels to the highest of heights to the lowest of depths and returns to the highest of heights, not so much spatially as in terms of status and experience.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, in its chapter on Christ the Mediator says the following – read it carefully as background for this passage:

WCF 8.2 The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

WCF 8.4 This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that He may discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered; with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession; and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

1. Look back to Phil 1:27, and taken with 2:1-2, what is Paul’s primary concern for the congregation? _____

2. On May 1 we focused on Ephesians 4:1-6, and particularly on the exhortation of Paul that they live **worthy** of the calling to which they had been called, which I suggested was to be part of that one redeemed humanity that Christ is creating in the midst of a mass of fallen humanity. How does that exhortation to live **worthy** ..., and the one in Phil 1:27 compare? _____

Now let’s skip to Phil 2:6-11. Phil 1:27 spoke of living “worthy of the gospel of Christ,” and 2:6-11 focuses on the Gospel, as seen above in the quotation of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and contains an overview of the entire sweep of the redeeming work of Christ, from his taking to himself man’s nature, passing through the experience of the Cross and Resurrection, to his Exaltation to the right hand of the Father. A key statement with respect to Paul’s purpose in recounting these Gospel truths is that he “did not count equality with God a thing to be

grasped.” What does that mean? One of the difficulties is that the word is only used once in the New Testament, and not at all in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and not often elsewhere. However, it appears from a couple of major studies that the idea is that “he did not count equality with God a thing to be held on to for his own advantage” as one might have expected, but rather that he reflected his nature in self-giving, by humbling himself and taking to himself a human nature . . .

3. Is that consistent with what the following passages exhibit about the character of God -- Father and Son? Explain your answer below:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

For your Meditation and Prayer: Ephesians 4:32-5:2 calls upon us to be imitators of God, as beloved children, and to walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. So we are to be like our heavenly Father as his children, and walk in love like Christ the Son. The Son is the perfect image of the Father, so becoming like the Son is becoming like the Father. So reflect on these verses and make them a matter of prayer, that you and others of us may become more like our Father and like our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:32-5:2 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

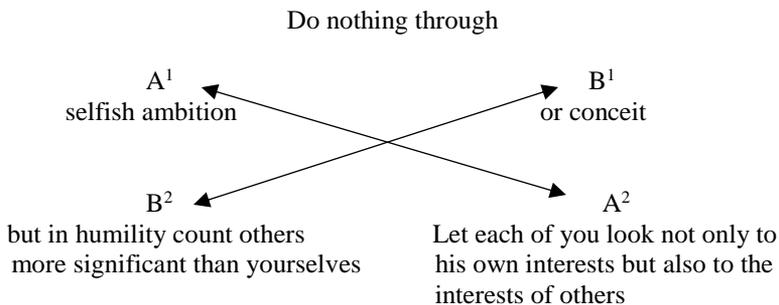
Tomorrow we will see the point of Paul’s putting Phil 2:6-11 before us.

Read Philippians 2:1-11 again.

In January 2016, when we first asked the congregation to use a Bible Reading Plan we would prepare for them for 6 months, we made a point to try to teach **HOW** to read and study the Bible. So we incorporated “principles of interpretation” as part of our studies. One of the key principles is simply “context, context, context”! We must pay close attention to the immediate context of verses or passages, and to the larger context within a book, and beyond that to the entire Scriptures, because this is the very Word of God, and behind the human authors is a greater Author – if I may put it that way – who so superintended and led the writers that the result is the very Word of God. So its message is consistent and coherent.

The point here is that Paul didn’t just throw in Phil 2:6-11 for no purpose. And 2:5 is the link between vss 3-4 and 6-8 especially. But the ESV doesn’t make that as obvious as I think it ought. It translated vs 5: “Have this mind among yourselves, which *is yours* in Christ Jesus.” I don’t know why the added “is yours” to the latter part of that statement. The Greek simply reads: “which also in Christ Jesus.” And the idea is this: “Have this mind or way of thinking which I have just described in vss 3-4 among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus.” And then Paul describes how it was in Christ Jesus in vss 6ff. So let’s look at the passage in that light.

Verses 3 and 4 form what is called a chiasmus, from a root word meaning a crosspiece. It is an ABBA pattern, where the first item is paired with the last, and the middle two together. So look at the structure of vss 3-4:



You can see how A¹ is defined by A² and B¹ is defined by B².

1. How do verses 6-8 model for us the exhortation of verses 3-4? In other words, how were Jesus’ actions in vss 6-8 a model for us interacting with one another in the manner Paul commands in vss 3-4? _____

2. I want you to reflect on this further: Did Jesus have the right as God to look only to his own interests rather than to ours? Explain why you answer yes or no:

3. Would it have been “conceit” – i.e., and exaggerated opinion of himself – if he had counted himself more significant than us? Explain why you answer yes or no:

4. If – as Paul implies – Jesus freely chose to look not only on his own interests (and well-being), but also on ours, and if – as Paul implies – Jesus freely chose to humble himself and count us whom he redeemed in some way more significant than himself, is it too much to expect that we would do the same toward one another rather than reflecting selfish ambition and conceit by looking only or primarily at our own interests and considering ourselves more significant than others, even to the point of fracturing or damaging relationships and disrupting the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, of which Paul spoke in Ephesians 4:1-3? Explain your answer?

For your Meditation and Prayer: I purposely used the words “freely chose” in the question above, because it would not have been wrong for Jesus to consider himself more significant or important than us, nor would it have been wrong for Jesus to focus on his own interests and well-being above ours. The fact that he “freely chose” to do the opposite is an amazing act of grace and love! It is worth our thinking and meditating on that fact. Paul has used the greatest truths of the gospel to drive home the exhortation in vss 3-4, and the fact that Jesus DID freely choose to do what he did, to humble himself even to the point of bearing the guilt of our sinful rebellious acts and thoughts and words, which were against him as God, and to put our interests ahead of his own, makes clear how important he regards our striving for what Paul said in Phil 2:2 – “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind,” that we might stand “firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,” not to mention, that we might honor our Lord by doing so! Reflect on these things. They give us good reason to be grieved over our selfishness, and to thank and praise our God for his lack of selfishness, while at the same time, not venturing to presume upon this grace and love, which can be deadly, because he is also “a consuming fire” to those who treat him with such disregard and presumption.

May 10 *Philippians 2:1-11 and Ephesians 4:1-6*

Read Philippians 2:1-11 and Ephesians 4:1-6 again.

Today may be a lighter day, but I trust you will use it well. What I want to encourage you to do today is twofold:

In light of what we have dealt with thus far, as we make a pastoral transition very soon, it is vitally important that you be committed to living “worthy” of the calling we have received. What does that mean? We are part of that one new redeemed humanity that is to exhibit before the world IN THIS LOCAL CHURCH OF WHICH WE ARE A PART, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-3). I said “in this local church of which we are a part,” because some could try to escape the responsibility at the local church level by saying they are a part of the larger Church, and that is not appropriate. We don’t follow particular preachers. We follow Christ, and we do so within local churches, not vaguely in the larger Church. Paul deeply regretted the divisions in the church at Corinth, and people saying: “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas [Peter],” or “I follow Christ,” the latter perhaps with some measure of pride or disdain of others, because Paul doesn’t seem to think it was proper. He made the point that “Christ is not divided.”

My purpose is just to drive home the importance of Paul’s exhortations about unity and striving to maintain that, because a transition is an ideal time for our great enemy to do all he can to bring harm to the church, and a time when we are sometimes vulnerable to temptations that can disrupt unity and relationships that we are not even aware of.

I fully expect this church to make a really good transition, and one that I personally hope will prove a huge benefit to the church. Perhaps I am too concerned that it would be so, but I am also aware of dangers, and don’t want to not emphasize the importance of paying close attention to these exhortations in Ephesians and Philippians which we have been considering.

So, for today, I want you to take these two passages that you have read, and to pray through them, praying for yourself and others, praying for grace and wisdom to practice what these passages tell us to do, praying for Chad Watkins and his family as they transition here and he begins his ministry, praying for the elders and deacons as they guide and serve the church and work with Chad. Pray that the Lord will help you personally to see what great power the example of Jesus ought to have in our lives to motivate us to do what these passages put before us. Spend time thinking and praying over these in some detail.

Read Ephesians 4:7-16.

Paul is continuing to deal with life in the church, and still with unity in view throughout, but there is a major shift of emphasis at verse 7.

1. What change in emphasis do you see, especially between vss 4-6 and vs 7 or verses 7-11? _____

2. What challenges does the fact that we have different gifts within the church pose for maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? And why?

3. I imagine different ones of you have been under more than one pastor in your lifetime. Can you identify different gifts that some of them had? Did you appreciate the gifts of one or more, more than the gifts of others, even if you appreciated several? Why? _____

4. If you are familiar enough with the Bible, can you see different personalities in various ministers? e.g. Paul, Timothy, Barnabas, Peter, Andrew, etc. Did God use all of these men? Did he use them the same? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: For the major part of my life now, I have been a pastor, so I have not had the opportunity to be under the ministry of many pastors for any length of time. However, I have watched my home church, which has had 4 long-term pastors, and now a 5th that likely *will* be, and each has had a quite different contribution to make to the church. I have met many ministers over the years, and have observed and sometimes profited from their various gifts as well. Reflect on the fact that God uses different men at different times to accomplish different things in churches. Pray for Chad Watkins, that he can be used to accomplish a number of things over the years that I have not been able to do, and that the congregation will recognize that, and greatly appreciate it.

Read Ephesians 4:7-16 again, but we'll focus differently.

Verse 7 had suddenly turned from a stress on unity to one of diversity in unity. By that I mean that Paul never leaves the importance of unity in the body, but at verse 7 he begins to emphasize that Christ gives different gifts to different people, but each is to use his gift for the building up of the body, so that from Christ “the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (vs 16).

But for the moment I want to focus on one of the gifts mentioned in vs 11. There, either four or five are mentioned. There is some debate about whether “shepherds” or “pastors” is a different gift than “teachers,” or whether it is speaking of “shepherd/teachers,” or “pastor/teachers,” as one gift, because there is only one article – like “the” – governing *both* the word for “shepherds” or “pastors, depending on how it is translated, *and* “teachers.”

At least the first two gifts were limited to the New Testament era until Christ finished giving the revelation that became the foundation upon which the Church was to be built. It is harder to tell about “evangelists,” but they were not the regular leaders of the churches. Which leave the “pastor/teachers.”

1. What does Paul affirm as their primary duty? _____

2. What is to be the goal of their ministries according to vss 13-14? _____

3. In light of the nature of the goal, what appears to be the main focus of their ministry? Besides this text, look up the description of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus as recording in Acts 20:20-21, 24, 27-28, and 32. What is emphasized?

Vss 15-16 shift to the ministry of the members who have been equipped by the shepherd/teachers, and they are to “speak the truth in love” to one another. What truth? Glance back to Acts 20:27, and ahead to Ephesians 4:20-24, keeping in mind that the Book of Ephesians is likely Paul’s summary of “the whole counsel of God,” covering a panoramic perspective on God’s redemptive plan, and of how we are to live the Christian life.

4. So, what is the pastor/teacher’s primary duty? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Pray for Chad Watkins as he prepares to undertake the office of pastor/teacher at WPC.

Read Ephesians 4:7-16 again.

In the past couple of readings we have focused on God giving different gifts to different men and ministers to accomplish different things, and the value of those various gifts. No two ministers are alike, and should not be expected to be alike. We have also focused on the primary task of a shepherd/teacher, namely, to equip the people by feeding them the word of God until they attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of Christ, so as to not be tossed to and fro by the winds and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

1. So, if that is the task of the shepherd/teacher, what is the responsibility of the saints according to this passage? _____

2. Read the warning in Hebrews 3:7-4:2, and the exhortation in James 1:19-22. What do these passages teach about the responsibility of those who hear the Word of God preached or taught? _____

3. Back to Ephesians 4. What do verses 15-16 teach about the responsibilities of the members of the church? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Read Westminster Confession of Faith 26.1,2 and WLC 160, and use those to guide you in what you pray for today, and spend some time in prayer.

Read Ephesians 4:7-16 and 4:1-3 for a final time, for now.

1. We have read of the diversity of gifts, of the duties of the shepherd/teacher, and of the responsibilities of the saints, the members of the church, all of which involve mutual ministry to one another. What qualities are absolutely necessary in order to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – good healthy, godly relationships? _____

2. Look up as many of the following texts where you find the various qualities found in Eph 4:1-3 that are necessary on the part of all if we are able to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:

Humility -- Acts 20:19

Eph. 4:2

Phil. 2:3

Col. 3:12

1 Pet. 5:5

Gentleness or Meekness -- 2 Cor. 10:1

Gal. 5:23

6:1

Eph. 4:2

Col. 3:12

2 Tim. 2:25

Tit. 3:2

Jas. 1:21

3:13

1 Pet. 3:16

Patience, or literally, Longsuffering – Rom. 2:4

2 Cor. 6:6

Gal. 5:22

Eph. 4:2

Col. 3:12

2 Tim. 3:10

4:2

Bearing with one another in love -- Matt. 17:17

Eph. 4:2

Col. 3:13

2 Thess. 1:4

For your Meditation and Prayer: Reflect back on any of these verses that might have especially stood out to you, and pray accordingly.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9.

1. There is more in 1 Corinthians about “spiritual gifts” than any other New Testament epistle. These first verses give us some indication why that might be the case. What do they reveal about the church in Corinth with respect to “spiritual gifts”? _____

Now read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.

2. In spite of being well-endowed with “spiritual gifts,” in these verses we get our first glimpse that all is not well in the church of Corinth. What has happened?

3. Using your imagination, why might the problem addressed in 1:12 have occurred? What sort of factors might have occasioned the sort of thing Paul mentions? _____

4. Why is that a very appropriate word for us at WPC at the moment? _____

5. How does Paul address the issue – or at least begin to – in this reading thus far? _____

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9.

6. If all you knew about the church in Corinth was Paul’s comments in 1:4-9, would you have expected the situation as described in these verses? Turn to James 3:13-18 – which we read back on May 4-6 – and re-reading those verses, does the situation in Corinth bear testimony to the importance of James’ teaching? Explain your answer? _____

If you noticed that today our focus is 1 & 2 Corinthians, and you are worried about how much that is to read, relax. We are just going to note what happens in a church that fails to practice the things we have read in Ephesians 4:1-16, Philippians 2:2-8, and James 3:13-18. So bear with me as we merely survey some issues in the church at Corinth to impress on our minds the importance of carefully guarding relationships, and the importance of realizing that spiritual maturity and spiritual growth is evidenced most in good healthy godly relationships. We ought to expect that in light of the fact that the two great commandments deal with loving God with all our hearts...and our neighbor as ourselves.

So let's compile a list of problems in 1 and 2 Corinthians:

1. We have already noted the division evidenced by focusing on one leader over another – “I follow Paul” or “Apollos” or “Cephas” [Peter] ... Our commitment must be to Christ and his people in the spirit of Philippians 2:3-4, and our focus on the Gospel.

2. 1 Corinthians 5 reveals that they were tolerating sin in their midst, and were unconcerned to address the situation with discipline.

3. **1 Corinthians 6 – Read vs 1-8** – what is the issue here? _____

4. 1 Corinthians 7 – reveals unbiblical perspectives on marriage, proper sexual relations within marriage, and divorce – we won't read here because it is rather complex, and time won't permit today.

5. 1 Corinthians 8-10, although again too long and complex to read today, reflects a self-oriented spirit that is more concerned with “what things do I have liberty to do as a Christian” than with how can I build up my brothers and sisters in Christ, and avoid doing things that harm them.

6. 1 Corinthians 11 reflects an unwillingness to accept God's ordained perspectives on male/female relationships, and later in the chapter a lack of concern for other believers and self-oriented participating in the Lord's Supper without regard to other believers.

7. 1 Corinthians 12-14 reflects the self-oriented perspective they have about spiritual gifts, failing to see that the Spirit gives gifts to lovingly minister to others, not to enhance our sense of importance or self-dependence. Right in the midst of two chapters about problem perspectives towards spiritual gifts is 1 Cor 13, the great love chapter. And this is the heart of the problem in Corinth. **Read 1 Corinthians 13, a brief but powerful chapter about what needs to be at the heart of our lives.**

8. 1 Corinthians 15 reveals a wavering faith in the truth of the Gospel, particularly the resurrection. So here there is the weakness of faith in God and his Word, which is foundational to our lives. All that we have said about peace and love does not set aside the importance of the truth revealed in the Scriptures. Both go together.

9. 2 Corinthians reveals other problems, but one of the greatest centers on the willingness of the people to receive leaders who tell them what they want to hear rather than what God has revealed in his Word. The Corinthians loved hearing

preachers and teachers who were not altogether different from some today who stress health, wealth, and prosperity, and do not address sin or the need for repentance, or the reality of a righteous judgment in the future, etc. Paul found it necessary to defend himself in some measure in chapters 11 and 12 in order to protect the Gospel he preached, because the people were accepting of the sort of preachers I just mentioned, and were accepting criticisms of Paul that such false teachers were making.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-11 to get a feel for the way these other teachers are undermining Paul, and the way the Corinthians are falling prey to them, while not appreciating Paul the Apostle.

For your Meditation and Prayer: I realize this is an odd day's reading, and is mostly a recounting of problems. Why do this? My purpose is twofold, I suppose: 1) That you would be aware of the importance of having and maintaining good healthy godly relationships, which must be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, and must be maintained in the spirit of Ephesians 4:1-3 and Philippians 2:2-8, and, 2) That you keep in mind that such peace and love is not incompatible with a commitment to the truth as it is in Jesus, which is set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Ephesians 4:1-16 makes that especially clear.

Finally, as we make the ministry transition that is in process even as I write, that WPC would carefully guard against divisions like those that developed in Corinth, and that you would be very much aware that God has richly blessed WPC with a strong commitment to the Word of God, and with a fellowship for the most part characterized by love for one another, that you would receive your new minister with readiness to hear the Word I am convinced he will bring to you, and will joyfully enter into a new phase of WPC's life that I believe will enrich the church through the ministry of another of God's servants.

Please pray diligently, that the Lord will not allow the enemy to get a foothold in your midst, and that the leadership and congregation will have the discernment to see the subtleties of his attempts to do so.

Read Hebrews 13:7-17 with a view to what the responsibility of the leaders are.

1. What responsibilities are reflected in vs 7? _____

2. Why do you think the writer included vs 8? Read it in context to see if you have any clues. _____

The Book of Hebrews makes it evident that this congregation has suffered for their faith, this text seems to reflect continuing conflict and reproach which must be borne and endured.

3. What responsibilities of leaders is reflected in vs 17? What do you think that includes? _____

Read Acts 20:17-38.

4. What similar emphases do you find here as in Hebrews 13:7-17, and how can you expand on what you noted in Hebrews from what Paul says here about his ministry and what it included? _____

Finally, read 1 Timothy 5:17.

5. What responsibilities of leaders do you find here, and what can you gather from the words “especially those who...”? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: Leadership in the church is a heavy responsibility, and there is actually no end to what could be done in several areas. So, pray for your leaders, and especially for Chad Watkins as he comes to serve you.

Read Hebrews 13:7-17, but this time with a view to the responsibility of the congregation to the leaders.

This is a subject that is difficult to address as a leader because it seems self-serving. But it is a vitally important matter. Too many in congregations do not take what is said here seriously enough, although I can testify that for the most part this has been a great congregation for supporting their pastor, and I trust, their elders. I personally have spoken very highly of WPC to others. Still, it is an important area to address, and is easier to do when you can do it on behalf of those who come behind you – like Chad Watkins – or whom you leave behind you – like our elders.

1. What responsibilities does the congregation have according to vs 7? _____

I asked yesterday why the writer included vs 8, understood in its context. A key is found in the very next verses, which though perhaps not specifically as relevant to our challenges, nevertheless contain a principle that is as relevant today as then, and the principle is suggested by vs 8. The principle pertains to the fact that in the Word of God there is what is called “progressive revelation,” meaning, that over the course of the centuries during which the Scriptures were written, God was unfolding his redemptive plan, so that some things revealed earlier would give way to their fulfilment or usefulness, and not remain binding today. For example, sacrifices have ended with the sacrifice of Christ. The food laws served a purpose in the Old Testament of reminding the people of Israel that they were set apart from the other nations, which were regarded as “unclean,” and they were not to adopt their practices, or intermarry with them, etc. When the Gospel era arrived with the death and resurrection of Christ, and the commission is given to disciple the nations, the food laws are set aside as having fulfilled their purpose, and no longer being of use. The same was true of certain laws pertaining to the civil government.

However, the Word of God came to its final expression with Jesus and those whom he chose to write the New Testament books, and the “progressive thinking of **man**” does not trump the Word of God, as though we can write off its teachings as relics of the past, accepting and tolerating teachings of our day that are called “progressive” or some such term or concept. That pertains to the significance of “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” It is why the writer tells the congregation to not be led astray by some teaching that goes contrary to what they have been taught.

2. What responsibilities does the congregation have toward its leaders according to vs 17? _____

Read Psalm 106:19-36, particularly noting vs 32-33.

Psalm 106 is a part of the hymnbook, or Psalter, of the Old Testament. When we were studying the Getty’s *Sing* book recently in small groups, the point was made that the Psalms model for us what our singing must do over time, namely, to cover a full range of experiences in life so that our singing prepares us to face good times and hard times alike. This particular Psalm recounts the incredible grace of God to tolerate and forgive his peoples repeated disobedience over and over and over again. But it also makes a point about the impact that had on a man who was one of the greatest leaders of all time: Moses.

Turn back and read Numbers 20:1-13, the passage behind Psalm 106:32-33 that I suggested you note as you read a few verses from Psalm 106.

3. I had you read Psalm 106 from verse 19 because I wanted you to be reminded at how Moses had interceded for the people lest they fall under God’s judgment (vs 23). Moses did that on more than one occasion. And yet, what effect did the constant murmuring and complaining have on Moses in Numbers 20, and recounted in Psalm 106:32-33? _____

4. Was Moses held responsible for his action? How? _____

5. What is the significance of the words “on their account,” and what responsibility might they bear for that? _____

For your Meditation and Prayer: I think it is important for the congregation to realize the impact they can have on leaders, for good or ill, and that they bear a large responsibility for the damage done many a leader, whether pastor, elder, or deacon. Leaders are responsible for their people too. I am not ignoring that, nor suggesting that pastor and elders and deacons are not responsible for their own reactions and more than I am suggesting that Moses wasn’t. But this I would say: Leadership in a congregation is a heavy responsibility for multiple reasons, and if a man like Moses, who is described as the “faithful” and the most “meek” man on the earth – which means he was not prone to strike back when attacked – [if he] gave way under the constant grumbling and complaining of the people, those of us who are not nearly so strong as he, may give way much earlier, and to our detriment. Hebrews 13:17 makes the point that the congregation is responsible for the joy of their leaders. Most of you have done wonderfully well in that regard, but always be mindful of it, and especially as a pastoral transition takes place. I have commended you to Chad Watkins, and will do so again. I trust that you will give him and his family, and your elders and deacons as a whole, great joy!

