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WORDS FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Winter 2021-2022

Dear friends, old and new,

By the grace of God I am doing well--in every way. I'm still going back and forth between Ocean Springs and the Farm, dealing with responsibilities in both places. Right now I am in Ocean Springs to avoid being alone at the farm in these coldest months. Here I work daily, chipping away on a small mountain of unfinished work; Susan and I teach our Bible class on Sundays; and I work out in the weight room at the YMCA every other day, which is therapeutic in many ways.

My principal complaint is that I really miss you all, and I do mean y'all--all of you. I miss the face-to-face time in churches, meetings, conferences, etc., as well as private times together. Short of a major miracle we can't go back to that this side of Paradise, so to keep these newsletters a little more fresh, I will try to write, beginning now, a brief article called "Something Fresh." The first one is in this issue, below. --Tom

Something Fresh

The Authorized (King James) Version is my primary Bible because it is the only readily available English Bible that is complete. But I also prefer it because the Elizabethan English is not only beautiful, but can be revealing. For example: "thee," "thou" and "thy."

Only Elizabethan English differentiates between the second person singular (you as an individual) and second person plural (you as a group). Now read Isaiah 43:1. In the KJV it reads, "...Fear not for I have redeemed **thee** (you as an individual), I have called **thee** by **thy** (your

as an individual) name, **thou** (you as an individual) art mine."

Thee, thou and thy and thine are in the second person singular, making this precious promise very **personal**, and other passages more clear. Sure, this promise applies to all of us as a group; but only the KJV reveals that it is also a very personal promise--just for you.

This difference is lost in the modern versions.

This newsletter's excerpt from Tom's *Study Guide to the Entire Bible* is the Introduction to Galatians:

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians

This book is a letter to the churches of the Roman province of Galatia, which occupied the central portion of Asia Minor, the vast peninsula that, today, we call Turkey. The Romans called the people of this region "Galli," from which we derive the English words "Gaul" and "Gaelic"; these were the Gauls, the fierce Celtic tribes with whom Julius Caesar's legions had fought in his campaigns in Europe and Britain. The Galatians of the 1st Century were descended primarily from one stream of the conquering flood of barbarians that flowed into Greece from the north in the 3rd Century BC. Having been stopped by the Greeks at the cliffs of Delphi in 278 BC, they crossed over into Asia Minor with their arms and devastation. They soon occupied most of Asia Minor, exacting tribute from cities and minor kings, and hiring themselves out as mercenary soldiers. Galatia was the eastern limit of the

conquests of the Gauls. Having little religion of their own, they readily adopted the superstitions and mythology of the Greeks.

Under Augustus Caesar, the region became the Roman province of Galatia in 25 BC. About 48 AD, the apostle Paul took the Christian gospel there on his first missionary Journey; he also visited (and re-visited) the churches of Galatia on his two subsequent missionary journeys.

The Book of Galatians has been called “the Magna Carta of Christian liberty,” and the “Gibraltar of grace”; both names are justified.

Unlike Paul’s other letters to the churches he had founded, this epistle is strictly business; and it is extremely serious business in which he is engaging, because the concept of grace, the very foundation of the Gospel, was threatened in Galatia. This epistle contains no words of commendation, thanksgiving or praise; there is no request for prayer, and no one who was with him is mentioned by name. As Dr. J. Vernon McGee has expressed it, “This is [Paul’s] fighting epistle--he has on his war paint.”

It has been observed that Romans was written from the mind of Paul, but Galatians was written from his heart; however, it might be more accurate to say that Galatians was written from his gut. When we read, “Oh, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?” we can almost hear him crying out to them, with anguished voice and clenched fists.

After a rather restrained, and business-like, salutation of five verses, he immediately gets down to business; like Mark’s Gospel, we might say that the epistle to the Galatians “hits the ground running.” He states, with great clarity and force, the **uniqueness** and **sufficiency** of the gospel of Jesus the Christ. In a stunning statement to the Galatian churches he warns them that adopting Old Covenant legalism will forfeit the benefits of the New Covenant. He cries out to them, “If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing...Christ is become of no effect unto you...ye are fallen from grace!” What, we must ask ourselves, could possibly be more simple and more serious than this?

NOTE: *The Galatians Paul knew and ministered to were not all pure Gauls. They had undoubtedly brought with them Greek captives from their conquests in Greece, and intermarried with them; and, for this reason, some writers call*

the Galatians “Gallo-Grecians.” Some of the original inhabitants (those inhabiting the area when the Gauls first arrived) no doubt also survived; but the people Paul knew and ministered to were primarily Gauls.

*Their descendants are the Turks of today and they have retained the warlike ferocity of their Gallic ancestors. During the Korean War they were feared by the Chinese and North Koreans, and were decidedly unfriendly to everyone else. They usually looked angry, and never smiled; just being around them made me uncomfortable, and they were on **our** side!*

A. Author. Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, is the human author of Galatians; he says so, in 1:1 and 5:2. His authorship has been widely accepted from the beginning--since the mid-1st Century when the Church was very young (Paul and Peter were martyred under insane Nero, ca 63 AD), the time in which this epistle was written.

B. Place and Date. The Scriptures don’t say where, or when, this letter was written, and opinions vary. It may have been written as early as 48 AD; however, the consensus opinion is that the letter was written from Ephesus ca 52 AD, “on the road,” near the end of his 3rd missionary journey.

C. Occasion. In response to the preaching and teaching of Paul, the Galatians had accepted the gospel enthusiastically, and the churches had grown rapidly. However, the Judaizers had come behind Paul and struck the Galatian churches. These were the Jewish Christians who followed Paul, telling the churches he had founded that, in order to be Christians, in addition to receiving the gospel of Jesus as Messiah, they must be circumcised and observe the Jewish law. Apparently, the Galatians had embraced this legalistic heresy with the same enthusiasm as when they had first heard the gospel and come to the Lord.

This epistle is his attempt to correct the error that they had embraced.

Since the letter is addressed to “the churches [plural] of Galatia” (verse 2), it was obviously intended to be circulated and read in all of the churches there. It was undoubtedly circulated and read also in churches that he had founded elsewhere; this was the custom of the day.

And, after all, isn’t that what we are doing right now?

D. Theme. The theme of Galatians is the uniqueness of Jesus and the absolute sufficiency of the gospel. There are other things--wonderful things--in this book, such as the importance of helping one another, and a warning about pride; but the uniqueness and sufficiency of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the central message.

Food for Thought—The Stalking Lion and Elijah's Despair

The scripture tells us that our enemy is like a lion seeking and stalking prey to devour. He doesn't want to just hinder us a little; he wants to destroy us. Lions tend to avoid large, difficult prey like elephants or giraffes; they prefer smaller, weaker prey. Lions also lurk in tall grasses or other cover in order to stay hidden and undetected by their prey until they are very close, within striking range. That is what the enemy of our souls is like as well. He hunts us cleverly and stealthily within and through our thought lives. He speaks lies to us that we often believe, and he is also good at disguising those lies as our own thoughts. Either way—whether an untrue thought starts directly from our own stupidity and selfishness or whether it starts out as Satan impersonating our own inner voice—a stream of untrue ideas will flow through our thoughts on any given day. Satan uses them to stealthily position himself for attack. Untrue thoughts are like the tall grasses and brush he uses to get close to us. Therefore, we should remember this warning: **Don't believe everything you think.** Many of the thoughts that pass through our head are just not true and can prove disastrous sooner or later.

You may remember that Elijah, after the incredible, miraculous triumph in the contest against the priests of Baal, Jezebel sends him a message saying she is going to kill him. After what he's just experienced, it would make sense for him to say, "Who cares! I'm not too worried about her! My God can send fire from heaven if need be." But that is not his response. Despite the miracle that just took place in the eyes of a zillion people, Elijah goes into a spiral of

despair, and he crashes. When God eventually asks him what's going on, Elijah says he is the only one left who is a follower of God, that he is completely alone, and that Jezebel is going to kill him. God says, no, you aren't the last one, the only one; there are 7,000 people, God says, in the northern kingdom who have not bowed the knee to Baal (and this doesn't even count all the ones in Judah and elsewhere). Because Elijah felt alone, he believed that he was alone. Our emotions often make us think a thought is true when it is way off the mark in terms of accuracy. Elijah's thought error is a really good reminder of something important; **we can go into despair based on zero truth.** Even if Elijah had been the only God-follower on the planet, it would not have been a good reason for despair, but what he was thinking—that he was the only one left following God--wasn't even remotely true. The thought that sent him into despair was not even correct.

Elijah's story also is a good reminder that feeling alone is almost never a good thing; it was very much a part of Elijah's collapse. The enemy likes to get us to feel alone even if we are not (and likes to get us to become alone, if he can). When we check our thought life, if we notice that we're having quite a few thoughts telling us we're alone, we should be suspicious of those thoughts. Very often we are not alone, and we certainly don't have to stay that way if we are. If the feelings of isolation make us feel like not even trying to find or renew friendships or fellowship, then those thoughts are definitely the work of the enemy, and we should respond accordingly. The lies of Satan—whether lies of condemnation or lies convincing us we're alone—tend to bring about paralysis. Miserable paralysis is a like a calling card of our enemy's handiwork. Conviction from God leads to action in a good direction. Lies from Satan lead to paralysis.

Why did Elijah despair and fear? He'd seen many miracles, not just the fire from heaven. He'd seen the prophesied drought of 3 years, he'd been brought food by ravens (that's not normal), he'd seen a widow's oil and flour be daily miraculously multiplied, and he'd seen God bring the widow's son back to life. So, what happened to Elijah to bring him suddenly so low? I am guessing that he just simply had an unmet expectation. He probably expected Jezebel to

repent once she heard about the fire from heaven. When she did just the opposite, it seems to have knocked the wind out of Elijah's sails. But God hadn't told Elijah she would repent or resign. Elijah just appears to have expected that and to have been crushed when that didn't happen. We too often mistake our expectations for God's promises. Thoughts that count on our expectations being met are ones that need to be noted, checked, and set aside.

Elijah also used extreme words; he thought nobody was serving God except for him. Thoughts containing words like "nobody" or "everyone" or "always" or "never" tend to be inaccurate. Satan likes to use them. He likes us to think things like "she never understands anything!" or "I always mess things up" or "I will never be happy." Such thoughts are almost always untrue. Let's imagine that I just thought to myself, "Everyone at work is terrible!" (To be clear, I have not thought this.) Is "everyone" at work terrible? Well, it might be true that several are or that many are, but it is extremely unlikely indeed that all of them are. Might there not be one person who is a kind person or who tries to do what's right? There might even be two...or three...maybe a great many... We think such silly thoughts sometimes. I haven't even *met* everyone at my workplace, much less been privy to their deepest thoughts and motives. Laughing at how silly our thoughts can be is a great way to take the power out of them and thwart what Satan wanted to do with them.

And if we have a thought and wonder whether it's a wrong one or a right one, we can apply Jesus's test: does the thought produce good fruit or bad fruit? Elijah's thought ("I'm the only one!") bore bad fruit (he despaired and ran away). When we notice thoughts that bear good fruit, on the other hand, they are probably the true thoughts, and we need to hang onto them with both hands and remind ourselves of them often and speak them to others. --Sally

Bonnie's Passing

Bonnie left us and passed into paradise 25 January. She was my secretary/book keeper/office manager for more than 20 years

before becoming disabled with cancer. She did much of her work from home in later years and the last time she came to the office she struggled to get up our two steps.

I was in Ocean Springs when she died, and I couldn't drive there in time for her funeral. But she had expressed in her will her desire to have me conduct her funeral, so Susan and Sally made reservations and Susan and I flew up on Friday, conducted the funeral and burial on Saturday and



flew back on Sunday. It meant a great deal to her family, and to us. She is now rejoicing in Paradise in her perfect, painless resurrection body.

A FINAL WORD

Treasure and use each day as if it were your last, and never give up hope: God has a limitless supply of new beginnings, and He makes beautiful things out of broken pieces.