

1 and 2 Thessalonians Lesson 6 3Q 2012

Friends Forever

Read Memory Text: "May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."
(1Thes 3:13)

Thoughts?

What does it mean to be "blameless"?

- Innocent?
- Not our fault?
- Healed and without residual defect of character?

What does it mean to be "holy"?

- In harmony with God?
- Love others more than self?

Here is a quotation from a book, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings*, written by EG White one of the founders of our church:

The great principles of the law, of the very nature of God, are embodied in the words of Christ on the mount. **Whoever builds upon them is building upon Christ, the Rock of Ages.** In receiving the word, we receive Christ. And only those who thus receive His words are building upon Him. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:11. "There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. **Christ, the Word, the revelation of God,-- the manifestation of His character, His law, His love, His life,--is the only foundation upon which we can build a character that will endure.** {MB 148.2}

We build on Christ by obeying His word. It is not he who merely enjoys righteousness, that is righteous, but **he who does righteousness. Holiness is not rapture; it is the result of surrendering all to God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father.** When the children of Israel were encamped on the borders of the Promised Land, it was not enough for them to have a knowledge of Canaan, or to sing the songs of Canaan. This alone would not bring them into possession of the vineyards and olive groves of the goodly land. **They could make it theirs in truth only by occupation,** by complying with the conditions, by exercising living faith in God, by appropriating His promises to themselves, while they obeyed His instruction. {MB 149.1}

Religion consists in doing the words of Christ; not doing to earn God's favor, but because, all undeserving, **we have received the gift of His love.** Christ places the salvation of man, **not upon profession merely, but upon faith that is made manifest in works of righteousness.** Doing, not saying merely, is expected of the followers of Christ. **It is through action that character is built.** "As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Romans 8:14. Not those whose hearts are touched by the Spirit, not those who now and then yield to its power, but they that are led by the Spirit, are the sons of God. {MB 149.2}

Do you desire to become a follower of Christ, yet know not how to begin? Are you in darkness and know not how to find the light? **Follow the light you have. Set your heart to obey what you do know of the word of God. His power, His very life, dwells in His word. As you receive the word in faith, it will give you power to obey.** As you give heed to the light you have, greater light will come. **You are building on God's word, and your character will be builded after the similitude of the character of Christ.** {MB 150.1}

Christ, the true foundation, **is a living stone; His life is imparted to all that are built upon Him.** "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." "Each

several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord." 1 Peter 2:5, R.V.; Ephesians 2:21, R.V. **The stones became one with the foundation; for a common life dwells in all.** That building no tempest can overthrow; for-- "That which shares the life of God, With Him surviveth all." {MB 150.2}

Thoughts about this quotation?

- The great principle of the law is love, which is the very nature of God
- Christ is the fulfillment of God's law of love and perfect expression of his character
- He who unites with Christ chooses to live in harmony with God's principles, and thus builds upon Christ
- Holiness is not a euphoric experience, but actual state of being, of choosing, of living in harmony with God's design protocols for life.
- Our choices, works, are not motivated from fear, insecurity, need for approval, duty even, but from love and reason.
 - Why does a husband buy flowers for his wife, because if he doesn't he is afraid she will be mad? Because if he doesn't he is afraid she will reject him? Because it is his duty and he must in order to fulfill his obligations? Or because he loves her?
 - Why does he not cheat on her? Because of fear or because of both love and reason, understanding God's design template for health and realizing love is selfless and healthy relationships cannot exist in violations of God's design?
- Our choices, based on our motivations, change us
- As we choose to do what we understand is right we get healthier and understand more
 - If we are physically unhealthy we don't have to know every detail of human physiology – we need simply to start doing what we currently know is healthy for us –

- Stop smoking
 - Stop drinking
 - Start exercising
 - Stop drugs
 - Get regular sleep etc.
 - With each truth applied we get healthier and our minds improve and we discover more truth to apply
- In choosing to trust God, in choosing to act in love, in choosing to surrender to Christ, we unite with him and receive the indwelling of his Spirit, which imparts to us the life of Christ

So, this verse from my paraphrase:

May he solidify your characters in purity and love so that you will be found Christlike in God's presences when our Lord Jesus comes back with all those in unity with him.

Is it possible? Can we be blameless and holy, without defect, restored to Godliness when Jesus comes?

Would God call us to this if it were not possible?

What would that look like?

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:43-48)

What does it look like to be holy and blameless? Would it be loving others more than self? Would it be being like Jesus in character, in the way we treat others?

Would it be in possessing a character that chooses to do right, even if it means injury to self?

- Jesus in the wilderness – tempted to turn bread to stone, chose to do right and not use power selfishly even if it meant starvation
- What about refusing to bow to Satan to save his own life?
- What about if home threatened to be foreclosed and refusing to cheat to save your home?
- What about make a mistake at work which could result in your censure, cover it up, or own up?

SUNDAY

Read second paragraph, “With verse 14...” thoughts?

Why does persecution happen? What causes a person to persecute another because of their beliefs?

- Control and power –
 - Chinese government realizes that religious beliefs have the power to topple governments, thus they repress religion and promote atheism, with the position that the state supersedes religious belief.
 - Papal/protestant conflicts – the papal system in history was not primarily concerned with saving souls, but retaining political power, thus it worked to repress the reformation to prevent removing its funding and power base
 - England in the 16th century put to death many Catholics because of fears that they were undermining the government. The pope gave a bull (edict) that Catholics were absolved of their loyalty to the protestant English government, which incited fear in the government of Catholics

- Misguided beliefs about God
 - Saul of Tarsus – sought to persecute because he believed he was doing God’s will
 - Certainly there are those of other religions, Catholic, Protestant and otherwise who have thought they were doing God’s will while persecuting others
 - They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. ³ They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. Jn 16:2,3
 - Puritans in America persecuted those who didn’t attend Puritan services believing they were protecting society
 - Islam – uses government to enforce religious law, stoning people for conversion to Christianity.

S.P. Haynes in his book, *Religious Persecution: A Study in Political Psychology*, published in 1904 states:

“For the priest, above all, toleration is necessarily a hard virtue. One ought not to lay great stress upon the old argument of the Hallam and Macaulay school as to the strength of vested interests, though it has a certain historical importance because the priest must subsist somehow. Vested interests are, after all, merely a secondary factor. But in the priest the emotional bias of the ordinary man has tenfold strength. By a natural process men who cling most to the instinct of veneration of the past and of enthusiastic obedience to present authority are drawn to the priesthood. They are often the most loveable and the most human of their kind; but their very strength of conviction and inaccessibility to plain reasoning in certain matters makes real tolerance for them extremely difficult. Indeed, they have often frankly admitted, especially in these days, that supernatural truths are bound up with the heart and not the head.” (Haynes, S.P., *Religious Persecution: A Study in*

Political Psychology. Duckworth & Co., London, 1904 p. 4).

Thoughts?

He is saying that there is a selection bias in which people who tend to have strong convictions, who are emotionally driven, and less objectively minded are over represented in the clergy. Thus, he argues that the clergy is more vulnerable toward persecuting others while thinking they are doing right.

Thoughts?

Two general types of intolerance:

- Intolerance within an organization, where if you don't conform to the ecclesiastical authority you are censured and expelled, and
- Civil intolerance. Haynes would argue that the clergy are intolerant within their organizations more so than other people, and when the government is overly influenced by the clergy then civil intolerance occurs.

Thoughts?

Kohlberg gave other insights into why persecution develops, and it has to do with spiritual maturity – or lack there of, with spiritually immature individuals persecuting the spiritually mature.

KOHLBERG'S STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

A. PREMORAL OR PRECONVENTIONAL STAGES: Behavior motivated by anticipation of pleasure or pain.

STAGE 1: PUNISHMENT AND OBEDIENCE:

Avoidance of physical punishment and deference to power. The immediate physical consequences of an action determine its goodness or badness.

The atrocities carried out by soldiers during the holocaust who were simply "carrying out orders" under threat of punishment, illustrate that adults as well as children may function at stage one level.

STAGE 2: INSTRUMENTAL EXCHANGE:

Marketplace exchange of favors or blows. "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Justice is: "Do unto others as they do unto you." Eye for an eye mentality. Wrong doing must be punished.

Vengeance is considered a moral duty.

B. CONVENTIONAL MORALITY: Acceptance of the rules and standards of one's group.

STAGE 3: INTERPERSONAL CONFORMITY:

Right is conformity to the behavioral expectations of one's society or peers. Individuals act to gain approval of others.

Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others within the group. "Everybody is doing it." One earns approval by being conventionally "respectable" and "nice."

Sin is a breach of the expectations of the social order.

Retribution, however, at this stage is collective. Individual vengeance is not allowed. Forgiveness is preferable to revenge. Punishment is mainly for deterrence. Failure to punish is "unfair." "If he can get away with it, why can't I?"

STAGE 4: LAW AND ORDER:

Respect for rules, laws and properly constituted authority. Defense of the given social and institutional order for its own sake.

"Justice" normally refers to criminal or forensic justice. Justice demands that the wrongdoer be punished, that he "pay his debt to society," and that law abiders be rewarded. "A good day's pay for a good day's work."

Injustice is failing to reward work or punish demerit.

Authority figures are seldom questioned. "He must be right. He's the Pope (or the President, or the Judge, or God)."

STAGE 4 ½:

Between the conventional stages and the post-conventional Levels 5 and 6, there is a transitional stage. College-age students that have come to see conventional morality as relative and arbitrary, but have not yet discovered universal ethical principles, may drop into a hedonistic ethic of "do your own thing." This was well noted in the hippie culture of the 1960's. Disrespect for conventional morality was especially infuriating to the Stage 4 mentality, and indeed was calculated to be so.

C. POSTCONVENTIONAL OR PRINCIPLED MORALITY: Ethical principles

STAGE 5: PRIOR RIGHTS AND SOCIAL CONTRACT:

Moral action in a specific situation is not defined by reference to a checklist of rules, but from logical application of universal, abstract, moral principles. Individuals have natural or inalienable rights and liberties that are prior to society and must be protected by society.

Retributive justice repudiated.

The statement, "Justice demands punishment," which is a self-evident truism to the Stage 4 mind, is just as self-evidently nonsense at Stage 5. Retributive punishment is

neither rational nor just, because it does not promote the rights and welfare of the individual. Only legal sanctions that fulfill that purpose are imposed-- protection of future victims, deterrence, and rehabilitation.

The freedom of the individual should be limited by society only when it infringes upon someone else's freedom.

STAGE 6: UNIVERSAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLES:

An individual who reaches this stage acts out of universal principles based upon the equality and worth of all human beings.

Persons are never means to an end, but are ends in themselves. Having rights means more than individual liberties.

This is the "Golden Rule" model. A list of rules inscribed in stone is no longer necessary.

At this level, God is understood to say what is right because it is right; His sayings are not right, just because it is God who said them.

Persons at this level have accepted God's invitation to "come and let us reason together".

THE FOLLOWING ARE OBSERVATIONS THAT WERE MADE BY KOHLBERG

1. STAGE DEVELOPMENT IS INVARIANT.

One must progress through the stages in order, and one cannot get to a higher stage without passing through the stage immediately preceding it.

2. IN STAGE DEVELOPMENT, SUBJECTS CANNOT COMPREHEND MORAL REASONING AT A STAGE MORE THAN ONE STAGE BEYOND THEIR OWN.

3. IN STAGE DEVELOPMENT, MOVEMENT THROUGH THE STAGES IS EFFECTED WHEN COGNITIVE DISEQUILIBRIUM IS CREATED, THAT IS, WHEN A PERSON'S COGNITIVE OUTLOOK IS NOT ADEQUATE TO COPE WITH A GIVEN MORAL DILEMMA.

4. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE FOR A HUMAN BEING TO BE PHYSICALLY MATURE BUT NOT MORALLY MATURE.

5. KOHLBERG BELIEVED THAT ONLY ABOUT 25% OF PERSONS EVER GROW TO LEVEL SIX, THE MAJORITY REMAINING AT LEVEL FOUR.

The Bible enjoins principles of modesty, humility, and wise stewardship of the money. Application of these principles might preclude the purchase of expensive jewelry, furs, flashy cars, or other items primarily for show. A person functioning at level six would have no problem applying these principles. Persons functioning at a level four on the other hand, might make rules about "jewelry" (in a church for instance) or red dresses, or cosmetics. But they might not even notice a flashy car or the lady who wears a new dress every single week. Those things aren't on the list. If Kohlberg's observation is true, then level 6 thinkers would be in the minority. They might even be misunderstood and persecuted by a level 4 majority (Christ being the primary example).

STAGE THEORY AND THE ATONEMENT

Level 1: Man sinned and offended God. God responded with angry vengeance taking the life of Jesus.

Level 2: God somehow struck a bargain with the Devil, a market place exchange of Christ's life, paid as a ransom to the Devil, in trade for the devil's releasing his hostages. In the popular version, Satan found out too late that God had conned him, when Christ rose from the dead.

Level 3-4: The Law must be kept. Man broke the Law. Someone had to pay the penalty. "The wages of sin is death." Jesus paid that penalty. The integrity of the Law was maintained.

There is an aspect of truth on the law must be kept when the law is understood as the law life is built upon.

Level 5-6: He demonstrated that separation from God is death. ("Why have you forsaken me?") Since we separate ourselves from Him, not He from us, He is not our executioner. He allowed Satan to play out his hand, exposing his selfish character for all both man and angels to see, and thus erasing all sympathy for the accusations of the fallen foe. God's character was vindicated.

Level 7: Atonement becomes at-one-ment. God did what it took to win our love and trust, destroy the infection of sin and restore us to unity with Him again. Neither God, nor His law, defined as the eternal principles upon which He bases His government, change, but our understanding of His law changes, and God speaks to us at each level of our understanding. It is a mistake to cling to expressions appropriate to an earlier age of understanding, regardless of how valid and useful they were in their own context, when more appropriate expressions exist.

We must be patient with our brethren who perhaps are just beginning their maturing process, and allow the pastor to preach for them sometimes. For even as God was laying down detailed concrete rules for the Israelites, He was already looking forward to the day when He would "write His laws on our hearts."

Why does persecution happen? Because people at one level feel a moral obligation to enforce the rules on those they believe are not following them.

The lesson asks us to read 1Thes 2:14-16:

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men ¹⁶ in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Then the lesson points out that passages such as this have been used to justify anti-Semitism. But, also points out that Paul was not speaking about a race of people, but a specific group of people identified, not by race, but by character – that of opposing God and His kingdom of love.

The lesson then asks, "How much ethnic prejudice lingers in our own hearts?"

Thoughts?

Do we have problems with people of different ethnic backgrounds?

Is it appropriate to judge someone by the color of their skin?
No!

Can there be tensions between two groups of people that are simply a result of taste, preference, experience, and have nothing to do with judgmentalism, prejudice, bias etc.?

For instance, could one group of people not enjoy the music common to another group? Does that mean one is racist?

Could one group not enjoy the food, spices, etc. of another group? If you don't like the food, music, even clothing, its just not what you enjoy, does that mean you are racist?

Can you love people from all backgrounds, while you don't enjoy the music, food, or clothing of that culture?

How about if one culture likes church to end at noon and another culture likes church service to end at 4 p.m. – if one doesn't like church ending at 4 p.m. does that mean they are racist?

The issue is – do we love people, and how we treat them!

Are all people equal? How are people equal?

Equal in moral worth and value as human beings.

Are all people equal in abilities? Do our abilities define our worth as human beings?

Can we ever confuse the two? What about in the military when it recognizes the moral equality of men and women – but some confuse their physical inequality and ignore the limitations of women in combat roles that might require them to carry a 250 pound wounded soldier over their back to an aid station?

If one recognizes objective differences in ability, does that mean one is racist, sexist, or prejudiced?

What is our responsibility as Christians when dealing with people from different races and cultures? To love people!

MONDAY

Read second paragraph, “Paul wants...” thoughts?

What do you think about the idea of giving criticism under the umbrella of love and concern for the one being criticized?

Good idea, right?

Have you ever had someone take this approach and you felt it was contrived, manipulative, “John, we’re only interested in what’s best for you....”

How do you tell the difference between someone who really cares, and someone who is pretending to care?

Would it be in the ultimate decisions, actions, behaviors?

I saw that many have taken advantage of what God has shown in regard to the sins and wrongs of others. **They have taken the extreme meaning of what has been shown in vision, and then have pressed it until it has had a tendency to weaken the faith of many in what God has shown, and also to discourage and dishearten the church. With tender compassion should brother deal with brother.** Delicately should he deal with feelings. It is the nicest and most important work that ever yet was done to touch the wrongs of another. With the deepest humility should a brother do this, considering his own weakness, lest he also should be tempted. {1T 166.1}

I have seen the great sacrifice which Jesus made to sacrifice. Said Jesus: "Love one another, as I have loved you." **Do you feel, when a brother errs, that you could give your life to save him? If you feel thus, you can approach him and affect his heart; you are just the one to visit that brother.** But it is a lamentable fact that many who profess to be brethren, are not willing to sacrifice any of their opinions or their judgment to save a brother. There is but little love for one another. A selfish spirit is manifested. {1T 166.2}

Thoughts?

TUESDAY

Read fourth paragraph, “Christian suffering...” thoughts?

What do you think about the idea of suffering?

Have you suffered? Do we have to wait until the “time of trouble” to suffer?

Have you ever been discouraged by suffering?

- Finances, too many bills, bankruptcy
- Loss of job
- Health problems
- Divorce
- Death of a loved one
- Isolation, loneliness
- Addiction,
- Betrayal
- Have you ever been misrepresented, lies told about you?
- Abused?

How do we handling suffering – as Christians? When we are tempted to despair?

Are we tempted to become angry, resentful, cynical, apathetic, give up?

Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement--days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God. . . . Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.... {CC 213.3}

Thoughts?

Read bottom green “What are things...” thoughts?

- Pray
- Bible study
- Know God
- Live healthfully
- Practice our trust in God
- Surrender control of outcomes to God

WEDNESDAY

Read last paragraph, “What was lacking...” thoughts?

What does it mean when we realize there is growing to do?
Does it mean we are not “right with the Lord” until we finish growing? Does it mean we are “lost” until we finished growing?

Or, does it mean, that we can only grow if we are in a saving relationship with the Lord? If spiritual growth is happening, if maturing of character is occurring, if spiritual wisdom, insight, love for others is increasing – would not all of this be evidence that one is in a saving relationship with Jesus, because such growth cannot occur outside that relationship?

THURSDAY

Read first paragraph “The second coming...” thoughts?

What does it mean every act of abuse will be brought to justice?

What does it mean every act of love or kindness will be recognized and rewarded?

How would you explain it?

- God will punish the wicked?

- Sin pays its own wage, which is death if not remedied?
- God endows rewards
- The rewards are built into the kindness as we experience the transformation that comes when living in harmony with God?
- We get recognition and affirmation from other intelligent beings?
- We experience love and acceptance from other righteous beings?
- All?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 1-3