

1 and 2 Thessalonians Lesson 13 3Q 2012

Keeping the Church Faithful

What do you think the title means? Faithful to Christ or faithful to the denominational organization? Is there a difference? Should there be?

What does it mean for the church to be faithful to Christ?

- Teach the truth about him
- Use its resources to take the gospel to the world (the true gospel)
- Practice his methods/principles (truth, love, freedom)

In practical terms what does it look like for the church not to be faithful?

- What about the church teaching views of God that incite fear of God?
- What about the church diverting its energy and resources into politics?
- What about the church using methods of coercion?
- What about the church refusing to grow in truth?

SABBATH

Read Memory text: “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.” (2Thes 2:15)

Thoughts?

Who decides what are the traditions to which we should hold and what are the traditions we should abandon?

Read first paragraph, “Churches are a lot...” thoughts?

Would this include the persistence on denying ordination to women?

What is present truth? Who determines it? How can we tell? What methods do we use?

Does our church today hold the following attitude that was written by one of our founders more than 100 years ago?

We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed. {RH, July 26, 1892 par. 7}

There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, **is not a proof that our ideas are infallible.** Age will not make error into truth, and **truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation.** {CW 35.2}

We are living in perilous times, and it does not become us to accept everything claimed to be truth without examining it thoroughly; neither can we afford to reject anything that bears the fruits of the Spirit of God; **but we should be teachable, meek and lowly of heart.** There are those who oppose everything that is not in accordance with their own ideas, and by so doing they endanger their eternal interest as verily as did the Jewish nation in their rejection of Christ. {CW 35.3}

The Lord designs that our opinions shall be put to the test, that we may see the necessity of closely examining the living oracles to see whether or not we are in the faith. Many who claim to believe the truth have

settled down at their ease, saying, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." -- Review and Herald, December 20, 1892. {CW 36.1}

How shall we search the Scriptures? Shall we drive our stakes of doctrine one after another, and then try to make all Scripture meet our established opinions? or shall we take our ideas and views to the Scriptures, **and measure our theories on every side by the Scriptures of truth? Many who read and even teach the Bible, do not comprehend the precious truth they are teaching or studying.** {CW 36.2}

Thoughts?

Do you like the attitude expressed in these quotes? Do you hear the doctrine of infallibility?

Do we have minds that remain open to new ideas?

Do we have minds that, while open to new truth, are fortified against deception?

How can we be open to new truth without being overly vulnerable to deceit?

- Think for yourself, don't allow another person to do your thinking for you. Hear what others say, then study the evidence for yourself
- Build your beliefs on testable truths, not claims without evidence. Then require your beliefs to harmonize with the testable truths.
 - Law of love as a design template
 - Law of worship, we become like what we worship
 - Law of liberty, love only exists in an atmosphere of freedom
- Use the life of Jesus as a lens which theories of God must conform
- Understand God's law as natural not imposed and examine theories through the law of love

How should we handle diversity of belief, opinion, and tradition?

If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking.

George S. Patton

Do we want everyone thinking alike? What do we want?

- Everyone operating from the same principles, motives of love, beneficence, kindness...
- We want everyone to have character like Jesus
- But we do not want everyone to have the same thoughts, ideas, talents, ways of thinking, skills, personalities... etc.
- When people have the character of Christ, loving others more than self, but also have differences of personality, ways of thinking etc. what will that look like?
 - What about when it comes to questions of music?
 - Church liturgy?
 - Dress?
 - The color of carpet for the church?
 - Women's ordination?
 - Why Christ had to die?
 - How are such things handled?
 - Are all issues equally important?
 - Do we change our view on truth in order to maintain peace?
 - What do we do? We present the truth in love and leave others free to decide for themselves. Which means will still love others, we don't work behind the scenes to injure, hurt, or damage the reputation of others.
 - We still want those who see things different than us to be our friends and neighbors in heaven.
 - Think about your own family members who see things differently, regardless of whether they believe the same as you, don't you want them to be in heaven?

- Shouldn't we cultivate such an attitude toward all people?
- Even those who burn our embassies?

SUNDAY

Read second paragraph, "The lives of..." thoughts? The lesson states, "Though salvation is a gift, the believer experiences it through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth."

I am not disagreeing with this statement, just wondering if it is easily understood? What do you understand this means?

How would you say the believer experiences the gift of salvation?

Here is a statement from one of the founders of our church, do you agree?

Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, gave himself for a fallen world, and **in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**. No greater gift can be bestowed upon man than that which is **comprehended in Christ**. And yet men wait, refusing to give to God **the allegiance of the heart**. But let the impenitent look to the plan of redemption, and ask themselves, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" **[what does this mean? Escape what? The inflicted wrath of an offended God, or our own terminal condition? Does it make a difference which way you understand it?]** It is perilous to neglect to render to God the **full consecration of all our powers**, for he has given them to man in trust. Will you not ask yourself, "How is it with my soul?" The great **gift of salvation has been placed within our reach** at an infinite **cost to the Father and the Son**. **To neglect salvation, is to neglect the knowledge of the Father and of the Son** whom God hath sent in order that **man might become a partaker of the divine nature**, and thus, with Christ, an heir of all things. **[what**

did you hear? The gift of salvation cost BOTH Father and Son. Why is to neglect salvation to neglect the knowledge of Father and Son? What was Christ's purpose? To somehow enable human beings to partake the divine nature, which means what?] **A neglect** to lay hold of the priceless treasure of salvation, **means the eternal ruin of your soul.** [why does it mean this?] The peril of indifference to God and neglect of his gift, is measured by the greatness of salvation. **God has done to the uttermost** of his almighty power. The **resources of infinite love have been exhausted** in devising and executing the plan of redemption for man. **God has revealed his character in the goodness, the mercy, compassion, and love manifested to save a race of guilty rebels.** What could be done that has not been done in the provisions of the plan of salvation? **If the sinner remains indifferent to the manifestation of the goodness of God,** if he neglects so great a salvation, rejects the overtures of divine mercy, refuses the gift of life purchased by the precious blood of Christ, **what could be done to touch his hard heart?** {RH, March 10, 1891 par. 2}

Thoughts? What do you hear being described? What problem is being addressed? Is it in harmony with 2Cor 10:3-5, that the war is over the knowledge of God?

So how does the sinner experience salvation? Is the description above in harmony with John 17:3, life eternal is knowing God?

What about his one:

The heart must be cleansed from its impurity; self-will must be exchanged for God's will; God's ways must be chosen before our own ways. Many names are registered on the church books that have no place in the Lamb's book of life. Let the question be asked with

deepest concern, "Is my name written there?" {ST, December 15, 1887 par. 9}

The great gift of salvation is freely offered to us, through Jesus Christ, on condition that we obey the law of God; and individually we are to accept the terms of life with the deepest humiliation and gratitude. [what does it mean to obey the law of God? To keep the rules? To avoid work on a certain day? Or to be in harmony with the design template upon which life was built? What are the terms of life? "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." (1JN 3:14) For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (MT 16:25)] **None will ever enter the city of God who do not reverence the statutes of its government;** and now is the time allotted to us to **gain the mastery**, through divine grace, over every rebellious thought and action; to work out our own salvation, not with boasting self-confidence, but with fear and trembling. [How do we work out our own salvation?] **We are not to pander to the prejudices and customs of this world** at the expense of our obligations to God. We should live as in the sight of Heaven, with no other object for our ambition and toil than the glory of our Creator and Redeemer; live, believing that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God." We should ask ourselves, **Am I fashioning my character after the Pattern God has given me?** Is my eye fixed on Jesus? and are my actions controlled by the influences of Heaven? ... We are to be in the world but not of it -- shining with the reflected light of Jesus. **We must not live for self**, blending into the darkness of the world; but kept from its evil **we must give our lives into an active, earnest service, as faithful soldiers for the Captain of our salvation. This will sanctify the soul.** While we seek the salvation and benefit of others, we shall be workers together with God, **learning his methods and partaking of his power.** {ST, December 15, 1887 par. 10}

Thoughts? What do you hear being described regarding salvation?

Why does living, through God's grace, to serve others result in sanctifying the soul? Does this mean we save ourselves? What does it mean? What is the balance between what Christ did for us and what we must do?

Do you hear Christ did something for us, which brings us the knowledge of God? And with that knowledge we respond with choices to align ourselves with him, in trust, we value and cherish his law of love. In trust we open the heart, experience his Spirit, which enlightens, and convicts, and gives us new desires. Then we exercise our power of choice to choose to harmonize with God's methods in the actions we take, in so doing we are empowered by the Spirit to live a life of love.

But, when we exercise our choice to love, we often will confront our own feelings of fear, or conflict with others. It is in choosing to do what is right, because it is right and we know it is right, that we experience growth and maturity.

The next paragraph states, "People's grasp of truth often slips with the passage of time, which is why we must always be affirmed by those who preach and teach us."

Thoughts? A lot of truth in this, our minds are so weak, we forget so easily, and if we don't use and reinforce it then we forget.

How can we help ourselves not forget?

Is there a difference in forgetting what your spouse asked you to pick up at the grocery store, and forgetting you love your spouse, or who your spouse is?

Is there a difference in forgetting what nations the 10 horns represent and forgetting your love for God, or who God is?

But, we can't forget who God is, if we never actually knew him. Is it possible for people to be raised in Christian families and churches and never actually know God? We can't forget something/someone we never knew.

What do you think about the idea that oral tradition is less subject to unintentional distortion than written tradition as it contains gestures, tone of voice etc.?

While it is true that it contains these gestures and tones which convey a richer meaning and detail, it remains subject to the accuracy of human memory. Maybe video tradition is less subject to distortion?

Last paragraph states, "But written tradition, as in the letters of Paul, is less subject to intentional distortion by those who would alter the gospel for their own purposes." Thoughts?

Do you agree with this? If we are talking about whether you get the information from the Bible yourself, or from the oral report of someone purposely twisting it, then yes written is less subject to distortion. But what if you are getting your Bible study from your preacher, commentary, theology professor and not studying for yourself?

How many tracts, books, and sermons are filled with Bible quotes, yet misrepresent God?

Does having the exact words of Scripture ensure the message will not be distorted?

Does it matter with what lens we come to the Scripture?

MONDAY

Read first paragraph, "In today's..." thoughts?

While many laugh at the idea of Satan, others live in fear of Satanic and demonic powers. Do we need to fear the power of Satan? Why or why not?

The fourth paragraph states, “The good news is that, though Satan is more powerful than we are, the Lord is more powerful than Satan, and we can find safety and power in the Lord.”

Thoughts?

Nothing false stated here – but is there a slant that might be misunderstood?

Is the controversy between Christ and Satan over who has the most power? Or was it over the use of power?

When we think of God’s power – what comes to mind? What is God’s power? Is the God’s power that Scripture talks about merely the power of physical might or something else?

Paul speaks of the power of the gospel – what is that power? Where does the gospel wield its effect?

Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment. – Mahatma Gandhi

I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him. – Napoleon Bonaparte

Paul talks of the divine weapons which demolish Satanic strongholds – where are those strongholds and what are the weapons?

Which is stronger – hate or love?

- Hate is powerful, no doubt, look at all the pain, suffering, and destruction that has come because of hate. But love is more powerful, love will destroy hate.
- Why does a soldier voluntarily get out of a foxhole under fire, and intentionally put themselves in harms way? Is it because of hate for the enemy or love for their friends?

Which is strong – lies or truth?

- Lies are powerful, no doubt, the Great Controversy and all the pain and suffering is due to lies – but what destroys lies – the truth and the truth is more powerful!

Which is stronger – slavery or freedom?

- What wins the loyalty of the heart? Slavery or freedom? Which has more power to build loyalty, threat of punishment or delivery from bondage, without anything expected in return?
- Greater love has no one than to give his life for a friend!

God doesn't need to coerce, or trick, or threaten, or impose his way, he has won our hearts, he has achieved our Remedy, and he has given it to us freely. He just longs for us to partake!

TUESDAY

Read second paragraph, “By the time Paul...” thoughts?

What do you think of authority?

What makes the teachings of Christ and the Apostles authoritative?

They are true, they are right, they are the expressions that the universe was constructed upon.

Then, do we take it because it they said it, or because it is true?

Then does it require we think about what they said and ensure we accurately understand what they meant, lest we take an authoritative instruction and turn into a lie?

Read last paragraph, “Paul was not idle...” thoughts?

Disorderly - anyone who did not follow the teachings and practices of the apostles?

Thoughts?

Any practices come to mind?

- Like not baptizing people at the moment of conversion and instead substituting the sinners prayer and putting someone through six months indoctrination first?
 - I would like to suggest that the way tradition currently handles conversion undermines the work of the Holy Spirit. That first love, which led to conversion, was in Bible times immediately validated with public baptism and the person was accepted, as they are, validated only on their acceptance of and love for Christ. It was grace – accepted into full membership, without works.
 - But we have interposed something between the believer and their “first love.” Tradition has put the barrier of indoctrination, required doctrinal learning, attestation to loyalty to an institutional church, change of lifestyle, jobs, diet, and dress all before baptism, which says you are not accepted as a Christian until you work to change. By this time

love is driven out of the heart and replaced with a burden of do's and don'ts.

- I have a hypothesis that if we returned to the Biblical model, baptizing people at conversion, then mentoring them in love, the church would be filled with people on fire for God and who love each other.
- Thoughts?

WEDNESDAY

Read last sentence of third paragraph and then fourth and fifth paragraphs, "If anyone is not willing..." thoughts?

How should we deal with members who are capable but won't work? What about non-members, those along the interstate with signs, "will work for food?"

Where do we draw the line between loving support and allowing someone to go hungry?

If the people on the interstate actually want only some money for food how long do you think they need to stand there to get enough for a meal?

Have you noticed when food bank certificates started being available where people could stop and give a certificate to such a person for a free meal, that the signs started changing around town to "out of town and car broke down" "Disabled and need rent money"

How do we minister to the genuine needy without becoming cynical because of the many scams going on?

What about this group Paul described who didn't contribute to the church but sat around criticizing what others were doing? How do we respond to such people?

Who is being damaged by such behavior? First themselves, and then any who are sucked in to their duplicity, and those whose reputations and ministry they are able to undermine.

But is there a difference in the type of damage done?

- What type of damage is done to the one gossiping?
- What type of damage is done to the one gossiped about?

THURSDAY

Read first paragraph, “The matter of church...” thoughts

What issues are appropriate for church discipline?

- Open ongoing sin
- Open rebellion against the principles of the gospel
- What about: “The hasty, reckless use of the faculty of speech lies at the foundation of nearly all the church troubles that exist. Evilspeaking should be dealt with as a misdemeanor that is subject to church trial and separation from church membership if persisted in; for the church cannot be set in order in any other way.”--Ms 74, 1897. {VSS 31.2}

Read second paragraph, “Matthew 18...” thoughts?

How about if the offender is an influential church leader and the offended is a timid young woman? Should the offended then go? What if the offender swore her to secrecy and convinced her it would be sin to say anything of his action toward her?

Read the third paragraph, “Here is the problem...” thoughts?

Which do you understand it to be? Is it the second, forgiveness, love, compassion – but what is not included? Trust – until when?

Isn't the goal of church discipline, the same as family discipline, to teach, heal, redeem and save the person from themselves, to help them overcome weakness in their character?

Do we still love our children when we discipline them? Were you ever disciplined as a child? Do you know you were still love?

Do we treat members of our church in such a way that they know we still love them when we discipline them?

How can we achieve this?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 1, 2