

1 and 2 Thessalonians Lesson 2 3Q 2012

Preserving Relationships

What are the only things we get to take to heaven? Ourselves and our loved ones – nothing else on earth goes – we don't take our houses, cars, computers, computer games, books, Bibles, websites, artwork, clothes – and thankfully we don't even take these bodies!

We only take ourselves and the people we love. Should this truth make a difference to us in how we live?

The key thought states, "True evangelism leads to relationships that can stand the test of time."

Thoughts? What is necessary for a relationship to stand the test of time?

- Trust
- Love – Godlike love

And what is necessary for trust and love?

- Individual trustworthiness of character, i.e. renewed hearts where we love others more than self – which means a relationship with God
 - Which requires coming back to the truth about God as revealed in Christ
- And this change of heart, with trustworthy character results in:
 - Honesty
 - Patience
 - Freedom – love doesn't exist in an atmosphere without freedom
 - Understanding
 - Kindness
 - Truthfulness – with ourselves and others
 - Self-control

- Genuine caring for the wellbeing of others

What causes relationships to fail?

- Selfishness is the obvious answer but can anyone give some examples of what selfishness does to relationships?
- 2 weeks ago we had a Let's Talk on Domestic Violence – we discovered that people can appear pious, righteous, devoted to God on the outside, but be selfish and demanding, and abusive.
- Insecurity – fear what does fear do in a relationship?
 - Suspiciousness
 - Accusations
 - Control
 - Monitoring
 - Jealousy
 - Envy
- Addictions
- Resentment/bitterness/unforgiveness
 - Because we are human we do make mistakes, so we will be disappointed, let down, hurt by others
 - If we don't forgive, if we hold grudges what happens to the relationship?
 - What happens to us?
 - What prevents people from forgiving?
 - Fear – of getting hurt
 - Desire for revenge/wanting to make people pay
 - False sense of justice, its not fair....
 - What enables people to forgive?
 - Experiencing forgiveness themselves
 - Understanding the true nature of God's kingdom and the true nature of sin
 - Love for others
 - And where do these attributes originate? From God
- Biases, bigotry, prejudice, false beliefs

What does God provide for us that assists us in developing relationships that last?

- Grace – forgiveness, mercy, a new start with a new heart!
- A relationship with Him and the presence of His Spirit
- A new perspective
- Purpose
- Love
- Wisdom

SUNDAY

Read first paragraph, “When someone preaches...” thoughts?

Have you ever experienced anything like this?

What do you think are the reasons people would do this? What are the possibilities?

- Purposeful opposition to understood truth because don’t want to accept the consequences of what the new truth would mean?
- Unwillingness to accept a new truth because the result would cause emotional distress –
 - Spent 20 years writing a systematic theology text on a certain atonement model – but new evidence demonstrates that model is wrong, would one have a difficult time accepting evidence demonstrating the model is wrong?
 - New truth results in conflict with loved ones?
 - New truth results in change in lifestyle, diet, friends, work, habits, day of worship?
 - New truth could result in loss of reputation, scientist accepts God and creation?
- Genuinely believes the lie and is convinced the truth is destructive?

What is the best way to handle such opposition?

From the book *Christ Triumphant*:

Let Christ be seen in all that you do. Let all see that you are living epistles of Jesus Christ. . . . Let your life win the hearts of all who are brought in contact with you. There is too little done at the present time **to render the truth attractive to others.** There have been some who have, in speaking to the people, felt like making a raid on the churches. They sour minds by their censoriousness [judgmental and critical attitude]. We want our hearts mellowed by the love of Jesus. That is in God's order. **If not presented in the most pleasant, acceptable form, truth will be unpalatable to many.** While we must present the truth in contrast with error, let it be presented in a manner that shall create as little prejudice as possible. . . . {CTr 329.2}

Thoughts?

Out of the book *Evangelism*:

The best way to deal with error is to present the truth, and leave wild ideas to die for want of notice. Contrasted with truth, the weakness of error is made apparent to **every intelligent mind.** The more the erroneous assertions of opposers, and of those who rise up among us to deceive souls, are repeated, the better the cause of error is served. The more publicity is given to the suggestions of Satan, the better pleased is his satanic majesty.-- Testimonies to Ministers, p. 165. (1892) {Ev 166.1}

What do you think of these ideas?

It seems when people oppose the truth the best approach is to remain Christlike, and I will admit, it is a real spiritual battle, but with God's grace, remain loving, present the truth in love and leave others free.

What about the idea of contrasting truth with error? Why is this sometimes necessary?

- In order to help those in error to understand and comprehend the difference between the truth and error
- But, we do not contrast the two in order to humiliate, demean, criticize, hurt others or to aggrandize self.

MONDAY

Read first paragraph, “Persecution can be a two-way...” thoughts?

What would you suggest would be examples of inappropriate behavior?

- In the next paragraph the lesson points out that Paul said some of the Thessalonians were “busybodies” – what does that mean? How could that cause problems?
- What about criticizing a church group or other organization?
- Billboards calling certain behaviors Satanic or Mark of Beast?

In the 1890’s the US congress was poised to pass legislation that would require all citizens to observe Sunday as a religious day. If the government should pass laws requiring all businesses to close on Sunday and proclaim Sunday as a day of worship and spiritual renewal – what should our response be? Should we purposely stand up and draw attention or should we be cooperative?

Here is one person’s thoughts, written when congress was debating passing such laws:

To defy the Sunday laws will but strengthen in their persecution the religious zealots who are seeking to enforce them. Give them no occasion to call you law-breakers... Keep right on with your missionary work,

with your Bibles in your hands, and the enemy will see that he has worsted his own cause. One does not receive the mark of the beast because he shows that he realizes the wisdom of keeping the peace by refraining from work that gives offense, doing at the same time a work of the highest importance.--Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 232. {ChS 163.4}

Sunday can be used for carrying forward various lines of work that will accomplish much for the Lord. On this day open-air meetings and cottage meetings can be held. House-to-house work can be done. Those who write can devote this day to writing their articles. **Whenever it is possible, let religious services be held on Sunday. Make these meetings intensely interesting. Sing genuine revival hymns, and speak with power and assurance of the Saviour's love. Speak on temperance and on true religious experience.** --Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 233. {ChS 164.2}

Wow, is this how you would have responded? What are the pros and cons to doing this?

What do you think are the motives of those who wanted to legislate religious observance?

I heard on the news this week that the US park service is considering banning motorcycles from many of the parks because so many complaints, the noise from some bikes can be heard over 12 miles away in some parks. The reason they are considering this is not a desire to punish motorcycle riders, but to protect the tranquility of the parks for all who enjoy them.

Do you think those who promote Sunday legislation are motivated by a similar desire, not to make others worship or believe as they do, but to protect a day they find special from what they perceive as being polluted or desecrated?

What is the problem with this type of thinking? That other people can desecrate your spiritual experience by failing to observe your beliefs.

In Romans 14:5 Paul says “One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”

First, what does it say about God that he gives us genuine freedom to make up our own minds?

And a few verses later Paul states, “if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.” (vs. 14)

What do you understand these passages to mean?

How can something be sin because we think it is sin?

If you believe the lie that eating cheese is sin, what will happen every time you eat cheese? Your orbital and medial PFC will fire, impairing dorsolateral PFC, activating amygdala, causing the experience of fear, guilt, anxiety, shame, insecurity, activating the body’s immune system, activating inflammatory cascade, resulting in damage to brain and body.

Further, how does the person who feels guilt, anxiety, fear and shame act? Do they feel insecure, do they run and hide from God?

So, what is the problem – eating cheese? No! The problem is believing the lie, because lies believed break the circle of love and trust, activate fear circuits, and result in selfishness, severing our trust and unity with God!

But what about if you believe a lie in the other direction, as was taught 120 years ago by doctors, that cigar smoke is good for lung disease? If you believe this lie what happens? You smoke cigars with a clear conscience, but what happens to your body, including your brain? They get damaged.

But what if you believe a lie that the apple you just ate has been poisoned? What will happen?

The belief in a lie doesn't make something harmful good, but will cause something good to become harmful.

Satan is the father of lies and he seeks to infect our minds with lies so that our internal mental, physical and spiritual health will be damaged.

What would you say if a person bought 1000 Bibles and publicly burned them to protest Christianity?

What would Muslims do if someone publicly burned Korans?

What is the spiritually mature response?

- Does the burning of a sacred book change God?
- Does the burning of a sacred book by another person change you? – It depends on what you believe in regard to the act – this is Satan's trick – if he can get another person to do something, that infects your mind with a lie, he can get you to act destructively.
 - If you believe that God is offended, that it is blasphemous, that such action requires punishment and thus we riot to burn the embassy of a particular nation or hang the person who did it, then we are damaged.
 - But if we believe that the other person is only demonstrating what is in their heart. If we cling to the truth that all sacred books are going to be burned when Christ comes anyway, and that burning a book doesn't change God, His methods, or the truth of God's kingdom, then we have compassion for the one closing their mind to truth. We speak like Jesus, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

In the bottom section the lesson points out that the Bereans were more noble because they checked everything Paul said with the OT scripture.

Why is this a good idea? As we have said in here many times, this class is not here to tell you what to think, but is here to get you to think for yourself, to get you to examine the evidences and come to your own conclusions.

The lesson states as Christians “we have many things to learn and many to unlearn.”

What gets in the way of learning new things and unlearning old things?

- If we believe something is true how easy is it for us to “unlearn” it?
- Could it be a mindset that believes “I’ve got the answer I don’t need to be confused with any other possibilities?”
- Do we want to “arrive” at the truth, or do we want to be “growing” in the truth? Understanding that God is infinite and there is an infinity of new truth to discover?

Bottom green section asks, “What are some examples of the Christian church acting in ways that were clearly in the wrong?”

- Crusades
- Inquisition
- Burning people at the stake
- What about using church resources and energy to seek to get the “right” politicians in office? Did Jesus or the Apostles ever seek political change?
 - Is the church to focus on changing the state, or changing the hearts of men?
- What about public statements that blame God for natural disasters – accusing God of punishing cities for wickedness?

- Other examples?

TUESDAY

Read bottom green section, “How well...”

Do you think it is important to know what is being taught by other religious groups and by the non-religious community?

Why is this important?

If you don't know what the ideas, beliefs, arguments, biases of others are does it make it more difficult to present the truth effectively?

Then, with this attitude in mind, would we expect that if a Christian university, in its biology department, taught evolution, so that the students could be familiar with the way the science is presented in the non-believing community, the constituency of that Christian university would be supportive and thankful of such a good job in educating their young people?

Have you ever heard of a case in which a Christian university's faculty were attacked by their own constituency for trying to educate their students about evolution?

Why are some in the religious community afraid to have the evolution science presented?

Why are almost ALL those in the scientific community afraid to have creation science presented?

Could it be that both groups suffer from the same underlying problem – fear that evidence could undermine their beliefs?

I love this comment by one of the founders of our church:

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}

Do you notice that many scientist are not willing to be fair, they refuse to include evidence that undermines their preconceived ideas.

A book by Sanders, *Genetic Entropy*, does a great job of documenting the DNA evidence that the theory of evolution is wrong. He demonstrates the mutation rate in the DNA is so high that natural selection cannot eliminate the damaging mutations and over time all life on earth is in a slow state of decline. But much of the scientific community refuses to acknowledge this evidence and continues blindly down a path that is becoming increasingly exposed as wrong.

Do Christians do the same thing in any way? How?

WEDNESDAY

The lesson reviews how Paul approached people differently in different cities and affirms Paul for being flexible and not using a cookie cutter approach to evangelism.

What are different ways we can reach people with the truth about God and His kingdom of love?

- Making the truth about God's character of love the center
- Daniel/Revelation seminars
- Health fairs/seminars
- Creation science seminars
- Social events
- Bible study groups with friends/neighbors

- Book by book approach looking for truth about God
- Other ideas?

THURSDAY

The lesson points out that Paul had real heart connection and concern for the people in Thessalonica, and he longed to present the believers to Christ.

What can we do to develop closer relationships with each other and those with whom we share Christ?

Is it easier to connect with some people than with others?

If you find that it is difficult to feel a connection with some people does that mean there is necessarily something wrong with you or them?

Why is it sometimes difficult to experience a connection with others?

- Different personalities can be so different they just don't mesh – does that mean either one is necessarily “wrong”?
- Some people do have hardened hearts and are closed off
- Some people do have biological problems, which make connecting to others difficult
- Some people have been injured, hurt, abused, and have been so traumatized they are afraid to trust or get close

Is there a difference between loving others and trusting others?

What is the difference? What are we called to do?

When should we trust?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 3 and 4

