

## 1 and 2 Thessalonians Lesson 3 3Q 2012

### Thessalonica in Paul's Day

Read memory text: "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (1Cor 9:19).

Thoughts?

Is Paul a slave? No – he states explicitly he is free – but makes himself a slave, meaning he freely chooses to act the part of a slave, but he is not a slave.

What is he trying to communicate here?

Would it have anything to do with the law of love?

Is he saying, that once he was set free from sin and death by Christ, he freely chose to become a servant, to give of himself in order to reach others so they might be free?

What kind of relationship does God want from us? That of friends or slave?

Or does he want free slaves? Those who freely choose to live lives that love others, that we freely choose to give of ourselves to help others?

This week Stephanie gave birth to Lennox Nicole – our new granddaughter – and we have already observed how both Michael and Stephanie are now slaves to that child. They have chosen to freely enslave themselves for the welfare of their child. And what motivates them?

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for

themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2Cor 5:14,15

What compels? Love, and what does it look like? That we no longer live for self but for God and others.

Isn't that what Paul means when he says though free he is a slave? A slave to loving other people?

Could this type of language ever be misunderstood? How might it be misunderstood?

Could people actually misconstrue Paul's words to mean that God wants us to relate to him like a master and a slave, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." And what might be at the root of such a misunderstanding?

Could it be a misunderstanding about God's character and law of love?

## SUNDAY

The lesson suggests we read John 11:48-50:

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

<sup>49</sup> Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! <sup>50</sup> You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

And then the lesson asks, "How were the political and religious decisions regarding the ministry of Jesus impacted by the arrival of the Romans in first-century Palestine and Jerusalem? Think through the logic expressed here. In what frightening ways does it make sense?"

Thoughts?

Do you think that if the Romans were not occupying Israel when Jesus arrived, that if the leaders of Israel were independent, King Herod, Caiaphas, etc. that they would have treated Jesus differently?

Do you think Jesus was treated the way he was because of the Roman occupation?

No, then what is going on in this passage? The Romans get used as a tool to manipulate the other leaders into turning against Christ.

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. Jn 8:58,59

<sup>22</sup> Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

<sup>31</sup> Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, <sup>32</sup> but Jesus said to them... Jn 10:22-32

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. <sup>18</sup> Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet

him. <sup>19</sup> So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” Jn 12:17-19

Were they concerned about the welfare of the nation or their own power and position?

What is going on here? These people are theologians, Bible professors, priests, pastors, leaders in the church. They have spent their entire lives promoting the “gospel” and working for God.

What would motivate people, who are leaders in the church, to want to stone someone?

- The belief that they are the bastions of truth, of orthodoxy and they must protect the poor ignorant masses from being deceived by others?
- That God wants them to act in ways that use power to coerce, pressure, stone those who present a message they don't agree with?
- That they recognize the rising popularity and are threatened with losing their own standing as the bastions for truth and thus losing power over others?

How should we treat people today who present a message that differs from ours?

Is it okay to openly debate, to openly present ideas that disagree with others, as long as one remains focused on the ideas, concepts, evidences, perspectives and continues to value the other person?

Is it okay to attack someone personally?

Why is it people will attack a person rather than the message? Is it because they can't refute the message so they want to distract away from the message onto other issues of controversy?

So what approach should we take? Present the truth in love and leave others free!

So back to the question in the lesson – was Christ treated as he was because of the Roman occupation? I don't believe so, but the Roman occupation was used to manipulate others into killing Christ.

Does the argument of the Jews make sense, better for one to die than the entire nation?

Or is it better for the entire nation to die than for us to do wrong, violate God's law and dishonor our Creator before the universe?

When we are faced with threats is it better to stay true to principle and honor our Creator or to sacrifice the innocent in order to protect ourselves, camouflaged as protecting the nation?

What happened in Nazi Germany? How many used this rationale?

What does Bible prophecy say in regard to the future? Might we be faced with decisions of compromise principle in order to save what appears to be a larger group?

How about at the end of every action, every communication, every decision, we were to end with this sign off: "To the Honor of Our Creator!"

Consider the implication, might it impact what we do? We live with the entire universe watching – do we live to honor our Creator in all that we do? Should we?

Bottom green section states, "How does the current political situation in your community affect the work of the church?"

Thoughts?

Should our churches be politically active?

- Prolife versus prochoice?
- Democrat or Republican?
- Pro-environment?
- Campaign for officials who support our values?
- Religious liberty?

Do we ever notice Christ or the Apostles focusing on politics in Rome?

Here is what one of the founders of our church said:

There is a large vineyard to be cultivated; but while Christians are to work among unbelievers, they are not to appear like worldlings. **They are not to spend their time talking politics or acting politics;** for by so doing they give the enemy opportunity to come in and cause variance and discord. {Counsels for the Church 316.5}

**God's children are to separate themselves from politics,** from any alliance with unbelievers. **Do not take part in political strife.** Separate from the world, and refrain from bringing into the church or school ideas that will lead to contention and disorder. **Dissension is the moral poison** taken into the system by human beings who are selfish. 570 {CCh 316.6}

Christianity. **How many there are who do not know what it is.** It is not something put on the outside. It is a life inwrought with the life of Jesus. It means that we are wearing the robe of Christ's righteousness. In regard to the world, Christians will say, **We will not dabble in politics.** They will say decidedly, We are pilgrims and strangers; our citizenship is above. {PH086 24.2}

**God has warned His people not to become absorbed in politics...** We are not to give our minds to

political issues. **God's people are walking contrary to His will when they mix up with politics**, and those who commence this work in the Southern States reveal that they are not taught and led by God, but by that spirit which creates contention and strife and every evil work. We are subjects of the Lord's kingdom, and we are to work to establish that kingdom in righteousness.-- Letter 92, 1899, p. 5. (To "Dear Brethren," typed June 16, 1899.) {3MR 41.1}

**Neither you nor any of your brethren had any work to do in arguing or writing or taking any part whatever in politics. God was dishonored by all who acted any part in politics.** God has chosen a people who are to proclaim the third angel's message to the world. They are to be a separate and peculiar people in this world of churches who are transgressing His commandments. . . .{3MR 41.3}

**The Lord would have His people bury political questions.** On these themes **silence is eloquence.** Christ calls upon His followers to come into unity on the pure gospel principles which are plainly revealed in the word of God. **We cannot with safety vote for political parties; for we do not know whom we are voting for. We cannot with safety take part in any political schemes.** We cannot labor to please men who will use their influence to repress religious liberty... The people of God are not to vote to place such men in office; for when they do this, they are partakers with them of the sins which they commit while in office. {FE 475.2}

Thoughts?

Is the church to spend its energy on politics? Why or why not?  
Is the church to spend its energy on promoting a message that transforms the hearts of men?

What kinds of methods are used in politics? Can we achieve God's goals while using Satan's methods?

Then what do you make of this by the same author?

Every individual exerts an influence in society. In our favored land, **every voter has some voice in determining what laws shall control the nation. Should not that influence and that vote be cast on the side of temperance and virtue? . . .** {GW 387.1}

The advocates of temperance fail to do their whole duty unless they exert their influence by precept and example--**by voice and pen and vote**-- in favor of prohibition and total abstinence. We need not expect that God will work a miracle to bring about this reform, and thus remove the necessity for our exertion. We ourselves must grapple with this giant foe, our motto, No compromise and no cessation of our efforts till the victory is gained. . . . {GW 387.3}

Thoughts? What do you hear in this passage? Does it sound political? Or does it sound civic responsibility? Is there a difference?

Is there a difference from fulfilling your duty as a citizen to live in harmony with God's principles, to witness the truth of his kingdom, to be a blessing to your community, to stand up for healthy principles, and becoming politically active? Or, should we become politically active on issues that are in harmony with God's kingdom?

Is there a difference in voting for a person and voting on a particular law?

Would it be okay to become political for a policy but not a person?

I thank the Lord with heart, and soul, and voice that you have been a prominent and influential member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. In the providence of God you have been led to the light, to obtain a

knowledge of the truth. . . . This light and knowledge you need to bring into your work, as you associate with women whose hearts are softened by the Spirit of God, and who are searching for the truth as for hidden treasure. For twenty years I have seen that the light would come to the women workers in temperance lines. **But with sadness I have discerned that many of them are becoming politicians, and that against God.** They enter into questions and debates and theories that they have no need to touch. Christ said, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." {DG 126.3}

What is going on – didn't we just hear admonition to be active in the temperance movement including voting, but now counsel against becoming politicians for the temperance movement?

What do you hear going on?

In this election year, what are the principles a Christian should apply to their lives in regard to politics?

MONDAY

Let's examine some of the common cults in Thessalonica in Paul's day. But before we do, let's set the context:

- Did Satan know a Messiah was promised? Yes Genesis 3
- Did Satan have a good idea when the Messiah would appear? Yes Daniel 7-9. (just like the wise men of the East)
- Did Satan have some general concept of what Christ was going to do based on the OT scriptures and Jewish practices?
- Do you think Satan sat back on a recliner waiting to see what would happen, or would he try to confuse the minds by creating various counterfeits?

**Osiris:**

Osiris was considered not only a merciful judge of the dead in the afterlife, but also the underworld agency that granted all life, including sprouting vegetation and the fertile flooding of the Nile River. He was described as the "*Lord of love*", "*He Who is Permanently Benign and Youthful*" and the "*Lord of Silence*". The Kings of Egypt were associated with Osiris in death — as Osiris rose from the dead they would, in union with him, inherit eternal life through a process of imitative magic. All people, not just pharaohs, were believed to be associated with Osiris at death, if they incurred the costs of the assimilation rituals.

Osiris mystery festival was celebrated in two phases, began on November 13 commemorating the death of the god, which was also the same day that grain was planted in the ground. "The death of the grain and the death of the god were one and the same: the cereal was identified with the god who came from heaven; he was the bread by which man lives. The resurrection of the god symbolized the rebirth of the grain."

The germinating seed symbolized Osiris rising from the dead.

The first phase of the festival was a public drama depicting the murder and dismemberment of Osiris, the search of his body by Isis, his triumphal return as the resurrected god, and the battle in which Horus defeated Set.

The passion of Osiris was reflected in his name "Wennefer" ("the one who continues to be perfect"), which also alludes to his post mortem power.

Parts of this Osirian mythology have prompted comparisons with later Christian beliefs and practices.

The Egyptians of every period in which they are known to us believed that Osiris was of divine origin, that he suffered death and mutilation at the hands of the powers of evil, that after a great struggle with these powers he rose again, that he became henceforth the king of the underworld and judge of the dead, and that because he had conquered death the righteous also might conquer death...In Osiris the Christian Egyptians found the prototype of Christ, and in the pictures and statues of Isis suckling her son Horus, they perceived the prototypes of the Virgin Mary and her child... And Osirian traditions became incorporated into Christian teachings, particularly in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus and Christ's descent into Hades.

Biblical scholar Bruce M. Metzger notes that in one account of the Osirian cycle he dies on the 17th of the month of *Athyra* (approximating to a month between October 28 and November 26 in modern calendars), is revived on the 19th and compares this to Christ rising on the "third day" but he thinks "resurrection" is a questionable description.

### **Serapis:**

Serapis (Σέραπις) or Sarapis (Σάραπις) is a Graeco-Egyptian god. Serapis was devised during the 3rd century BC on the orders of Ptolemy I of Egypt as a means to unify the Greeks and Egyptians in his realm. The god was depicted as Greek in appearance, but with Egyptian trappings, and combined iconography from a great many cults, signifying both abundance and resurrection. His cult was spread as a matter of deliberate policy by the Ptolemaic kings. Serapis continued to increase in popularity during the Roman period, often replacing Osiris as the consort of Isis in non-Egyptian temples. The destruction of the Serapeum by a mob led by the Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria in 389 is one of the key events in the downfall of ancient paganism, and the cult ceased to exist with the abolition of paganism in 391 AD.

Critics list Serapis of Egypt with minor details as having a story "very similar to that of Christ," offering these points:

- He was called the "Good Shepherd"
- He was considered a healer
- Christianity adapted the Serapian practices of using lights, bells, vestments, processions, music, etc.
- Serapis was a sacrificial bull, as Christ was a sacrificial lamb
- Serapis was annually sacrificed for the sins of Egypt

Many Greek gods contributed to his nature, including: Zeus, Helios, Hades and Aesculapius. Zeus brought to him the attribute of presiding over nature. From Helios he received the aspects of sovereignty and sun-god. Hades linked him to the afterlife and Aesculapius gave him the art of healing.

### **Cabirus:**

The lesson tells of a person named Cabirus who spoke up for the disenfranchised and was eventually murdered by his two brothers and became a godlike figure to the Thessalonians.

The literature seems to be split on this. There are several references to this story and concept in the historical record, but the majority of the references I could find described another god named Cabirus.

Karl P. Donfried in his article on the Cults of Thessalonica supplies reports that the city worshipped multiple cults, but most importantly that of Cabirus, who was the cities chief deity. According to Donfried, and others Cabirus was significantly connected with fertility and thus Paul mentions that the believers "turned to God from idols" (1:9) maintain personal "holiness (2:10-12) and avoid fornication (4:3). He contrasts holy living with

the "passionate lust of the heathen" (4:4). Paul's only other references to sexual immorality are found in 1 Corinthians and in a catalogue of works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19. Like Thessalonica, the city of Corinth was dominated by a sexual cult (Aphrodite). (Karl P. Donfried, "The Cults of Thessalonica And The Thessalonian Correspondence," *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 1985): 336-356)

Thoughts about these various gods worshipped in Thessalonica during Paul's day? How might these concepts impact the willingness of the believers to accept what Paul was teaching?

Do you see how the minds of men were confused by pagan beliefs? Do you see how Satan sought to counterfeit the truth to make it harder for the gospel to be believed?

Does this give insight as to how easy it was for pagan god constructs to enter Christianity? Especially in regard to God's character and law?

How would you approach the people knowing they believed such ideas?

Do we struggle today with any pagan constructs infecting Christian teachings?

TUESDAY

Read third paragraph, "The gospel has the greatest..."

What do you think of the idea of experimentation in presenting the gospel?

And what about the idea that it works best when the gospel impacts the needs of people?

Why is it often true that the gospel advances in times of trial and strife? Is it because such difficulties make us aware of how much we need something more than self, something more than this world can offer?

#### WEDNESDAY

The lesson talks about the popular philosopher coming to town to share philosophy and gain a following in order to make some money.

Read the last two paragraphs, “The dark side...”

How should we handle the issue of money and the gospel today? Should we accept travel expenses to go and present the gospel message? Should we accept speaking fees?

Should we fund ourselves and pay our own way? Is there a difference between covering expenses and making a profit?

What are your thoughts about this?

#### THURSDAY

Why did they meet in home churches? Was it because this is the best method or because that was their only option?

Should we take home churches as the eternal model of church meeting places?

What lesson do we draw from Paul’s example of providing for his own expense?

Is there a difference in what Paul did, in a time when travel took weeks and months to get from one place to the next, and once in town one would often stay an extended period, and today in which one might fly in for a weekend and then out?

Is there a difference in speaking at an event and living in a community?

Was Paul wanting to demonstrate that he had something to give to them and was not trying to get something from them? Is that the principle? Can we demonstrate that principle today? How?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 1 and 3.