

1 and 2 Thessalonians Lesson 10 3Q 2012

Church Life

When you hear the title what do you think?

- All persons who make up the body of Christ?
- A specific denomination?
- A specific local congregation?

When we think church life – do all church's have the same "life"?

Are all churches equally healthy? Can you describe a variety of experiences one might encounter in across the landscape of Christianity?

- Extremes – snake handling, poison drinking, white supremacists, those who espouse violence in the name of Christ
- Traditional – high church – formalism and rituals, Catholicism, Episcopal, Presbyterian
- Experiential – encounter churches- Pentecostalism
- Teaching/education – know the doctrines, know the Bible
- Contemporary – modern music, jeans, no pews
- Unitarian –

Where would Adventism fit?

Are all church encounters equally healthy? What would be practices that would tend toward a healthy church?

- Evidences of the Holy Spirit – which are what?
 - Truth, love and freedom
- Churches active in outreach, community, fellowship, loving others?
- Churches which engages the reason, uses an evidence based approach?

- Church which present truth, in love and leaves people free?
- Would how women are treated in the organization be an indication of spiritual health?
- If women are second class members, devalued in some institutionally sanctioned fashion, under the umbrella of holiness, would this indicate anything?
- If freedom to ask questions and hold divergent views, while still living a life of love, kindness, gentleness, patience, meekness, self-control, was not tolerated would this indicate anything in regard to the health of the church?
- If the church held power over individuals, particularly holding some element of forgiveness and salvation over the believer requiring the believer to give money or do certain rituals or else the church would not grant them rites necessary to salvation, would this be a sign of anything?
- If a church teaches a God construct that induces fear – sign of anything?

What about within the same denomination, are all congregations equally healthy places – equally alive with God's grace?

Would the picture of God that is taught impact the practices and ultimately the health of the church?

MONDAY - Read third paragraph, "In contrast..." thoughts?
How do we encourage the timid?

- Does the social environment of the church encourage or discourage people?
- If the social group is a critical, cutting, fault finding, negative, laughing at mistakes, judgmental environment, will that result in the timid being encouraged?
- Why does the church often have difficulty loving the sinner while hating the sin? Why does the church

struggle to make the sinner feel welcome, valued and cherished, while simultaneously making it clear the sin is to be hated? Why do 12 step meetings do such a better job at this?

- I believe it is because 12 step meetings operate under God's law of love, i.e. they approach the problem as a violation of the laws of health, this is a sickness to be cured.
- But churches too often operate under imposed law, and violations are crimes to be punished.

Thoughts?

SABBATH - Read Memory text: "Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good." 1Thes 5:20,21

Thoughts about this? What principle do you hear espoused? Is there a principle of openness to new ideas?

WEDNESDAY – Relating to "New Light"

Read first paragraph, "In 1 Thessalonians..." thoughts?

- What does it mean to despise prophecy?
- What is the gift of prophecy?
- Who is a prophet?
- Is it only those who make predictions of future events?
- Or is the gift of prophecy, the gift of being a spokesperson for the Lord, one who speaks the truth of God's kingdom?
 - How did the Jewish leadership treat prophets in the OT?
 - How did they treat Christ and the Apostles?
 - Would you consider Martin Luther a prophet? How was he treated?
 - What about other Reformers?
 - Jones and Waggoner? Did they bring new light? How were they treated?

Here is a comment from one of the founders of our church regarding how “new light” has been treated through history:

As the light and life of men was rejected by the ecclesiastical authorities in the days of Christ, so it has been rejected in every succeeding generation.

Again and again the history of Christ’s withdrawal from Judea has been repeated. When the Reformers preached the word of God, they had no thought of separating themselves from the established church; **but the religious leaders would not tolerate the light**, and those that bore it were **forced to seek another class, who were longing for the truth**. In our day few of the professed followers of the Reformers are actuated by their spirit. Few are listening for the voice of God, and ready to accept truth in whatever guise it may be presented.

Often those who follow in the steps of the Reformers are forced to turn away from the churches they love, in order to declare the plain teaching of the word of God. **And many times those who are seeking for light are by the same teaching obliged to leave the church of their fathers, that they may render obedience.** {DA 232.2}

Do you think this is an accurate observation of history? Do you think this continues to occur today? Why does this happen?

What about E.G. White? I have had emails and inquiries from all over the world regarding how I use EGW – “Why don’t you use here name? Why do you refer to here writings as ‘one of the founders of our church’ or ‘historic Adventism?’” Is EGW a prophet – and the answer is – what difference does it make?

Is something true because a prophet says it, or is it true because it’s true?

I have a relative who doesn't want anything to do with EGW writings because he is convinced she plagiarized some of her writings. My response is so?

If you had a loved one dying with a particular terminal illness, and a doctor wrote out a treatment that actually worked, if applied and would cure those with the illness. But sometime later it was discovered the doctor had plagiarized what he wrote from others, would you say, "well if its plagiarized then I won't use that treatment, even if it does work, or would you say, I don't care, it works!"

The question with EGW or any other writer, including Bible writers is – is what they have written true? If it is not, disregard it, if it is then utilize it. Don't get tricked into devaluing truth because of who wrote it.

Spokespersons for God, whoever they are, speak the truth, as they know it, but since truth is unfolding, then even the spokesperson, being finite, may very well change what they taught at one point and teach something else later. Any examples?

- The Levitical laws – taught by God at one point, but not later
- Others?

In what ways can we "quench the Spirit"?

The lesson gives three –

- Ignore the work of a true prophet
- Misinterpret the words of the prophet
- Give prophetic authority to someone not under the influence of the Holy Spirit

Are there other ways to quench the Spirit?

- Closing the mind to truth?

SUNDAY

Read fourth paragraph, “The language...” thoughts?

What do you think of the description of “carefully diagnose the condition of their followers...” and “apply the appropriate remedy”?

Is the lesson saying that God diagnoses and provides remedy? I like this language, don't you?

Then the paragraph finishes with “God is the model of leadership...”

Is it important to hold the right picture of God? Consider the following story and what it implies about the god being worshipped:

(CNN) -- An 11-year-old Christian girl has been arrested after being accused of blasphemy by burning pages of the Quran in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad.

According to a statement released by the president's office Sunday, the girl, identified as Ramsha, was accused by a local resident of burning pages of the Muslim holy text after she gathered paper as fuel for cooking.

Local media reports said the girl has Down syndrome. CNN was unable to confirm these reports, and a local police official said they are not true.

Qasim Niazi, the police officer in charge of the station near where the incident took place, said the girl does not have a mental disorder but is illiterate and has not attended school.

The accused girl had told him she had no idea there were pages of the Quran inside the documents she burned, he added.

Niazi said that 150 people had gathered on Friday where the neighborhood's Christian population lives and threatened to burn down their houses.

"The mob wanted to burn the girl to give her a lesson," he told CNN.

Other Christian families living in the area have fled fearing a backlash, he added.

The statement from President Asif Ali Zardari said he has called for an urgent report on the incident and added that vulnerable sections of society must be protected "from any misuse of the blasphemy law."

"Blasphemy by anyone cannot be condoned but no one will be allowed to misuse blasphemy law for settling personal scores," said the president's spokesman, Farhatullah Babar.

Critics of the controversial law say it is being used to persecute religious minorities....

The legislation makes it a crime punishable by death to insult Islam, the Quran or the Prophet Mohammed.

Pakistan is home to about 2 million Christians, who make up more than 1% of Islamic nation's population, according to government statistics.

What do you think of this report?

- What kind of a god would *want* his followers to treat others this way?
- What kind of a god would *need* his followers to treat others this way?
- Do their actions reveal anything about the kind of god they worship?
- Why is there god not capable of dealing with blasphemy on his own?

Do you think Christians or Jews have a better track record of dealing with blasphemy?

Read bottom green section, "In some cultures..." thoughts?

How should we relate to church leadership? Now this discussion we are about to have is for the spiritually mature, parental guidance is recommended.

First Question – who is the leader of the church? Who is the leader of the universe? How does God/Christ want us to relate to him? How does God relate to us? What methods has God used in leading his church? Keep this in mind as we go through the rest of the questions.

How did Christ relate to church leadership in his day?

- Did he allow church leadership to dictate his beliefs? Or,
- What he taught?
- How he treated others including women?
- How he kept the Sabbath?
- How he kept the law?
 - Does God want to dictate our beliefs, what we teach, how we treat others, how we keep the law? No! God wants us to do what's right because it is right, because we freely want to, not because he says so.
- Did Christ's teachings challenge practices that the Jewish leadership claimed were Biblical? (not stoning the woman caught in adultery, healing on Sabbath, teaching to love enemies)
- Did Jesus following the decisions of the Sanhedrin?
 - Why not?
- Did Jesus, and what he taught, cause division in Judaism?
- Do we have problems when leadership focuses on unity rather than truth, rather than allowing truth to unfold?

At the recent ASI meeting Ted Wilson, the President of the GC and, Mark Finley, the assistant to the President, were asked questions about church leadership, women's ordination and how members should relate to church leadership.

Mark Finley used the example of the meeting in Acts when Paul and others came to the leaders in Jerusalem to ask if the church should require Gentiles to be circumcised or observe feasts and the decision was to only require them to avoid idols, and food strangled and not to eat blood. Then he asked what if the various churches would have each done their own thing? And then he suggested we should follow this model because it brought unity.

Thoughts? Do you have any questions you would like to ask him?

I would ask Mark, what if the council at Jerusalem determined that the Gentiles should be circumcised and should observe feast days, and even followed Peter's advice and decide Jewish converts shouldn't associate with Gentile converts, then should the churches have followed that decision from leadership, for the sake of unity? Should Martin Luther have followed the decision of the church leaders of his day?

What he failed to make clear was that in the example from Acts the leadership in Jerusalem made the right decision, the decision which granted the most freedom and reduced restrictions. When it comes to women's ordination the leadership is making the decision with the most restriction and least freedom to more than half the church.

In Christ's day were the masses tending to follow the Jewish leaders, or was Christ drawing the masses away from what the Jewish leaders were teaching? Shouldn't Christ have taught the people to follow church leadership? Or, shouldn't the masses have said, "Well the Sanhedrin hasn't decided yet whether Jesus is telling the truth, and they say we shouldn't help people on Sabbath, so I must follow the decision of the General Conference for the sake of unity. Because it is better for one man to die than for the nation or church to fracture."

Thoughts?

The GC President said that when the church meets in General Conference session, with representatives from the entire world, that the Holy Spirit leads what is happening and when the GC votes an issue that it is a Holy Spirit led decision and thus should decide the issue and other individuals or groups should conform to the decision by the GC session. He referenced this quotation from EGW:

I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.
(3Testimonies, p. 492, 1875)

Should we accept this without thinking? Should we read and study and research and think?

Here is are some others quotations from EGW a little later in her life, note the change. For those who believe she was inspired, was she less inspired with these?

If it were possible, the **enemy** would clog the wheels of progress and **prevent the truths of the gospel** from being circulated everywhere. With this object **he** leads men to feel that it is their privilege to control the consciences of their fellow-men according to their own perverted ideas. **They dismiss the Holy Spirit** from their councils, and **then, under the power and name of the General Conference**, they invent regulations through which they compel men to be ruled by their own ideas and not by the Holy Spirit. . . . {Christian Leadership 31.5}

There is need of an education in regard to the rights and duties of men in authority **who have lorded it over God's heritage**. When a man is placed in a position of trust, who knows not what kind of spirit he should exercise in dealing with human minds, he needs to learn

the **very first principles** as to his authority over his fellow-men. **Right principles** must be brought into the heart, and wrought into the warp and woof of character.-- Letter 83, 1896 (May 22, 1896 to O. A. Olsen). {ChL 32.1}

Thoughts? What right principles might she be referring to? Could it be the principles of truth, love and freedom?

"It has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God." --17MR 216 (1898). LDE 50.3

One day at noon I was writing of the work that **might have been done at the last [1901] General Conference if the men in positions of trust had followed the will and way of God. Those who have had great light have not walked in the light.** The meeting was closed, and the break was not made. **Men did not humble themselves before the Lord as they should have done, and the Holy Spirit was not imparted.** {LDE 57.1}

The voice of the General Conference has been represented as an authority to be heeded as the voice of the Holy Spirit. But when the members of the General Conference Committee become entangled in business affairs and financial perplexities, the sacred, elevated character of their work is in a great degree lost. The temple of God becomes as a place of merchandise, and the ministers of God's house as common businessmen. **Their work is brought down on a level with common things.** Business cares and perplexities unfit them for the consideration of matters relating to the spiritual interests of the work, which require the keenest perception, the most careful thought, the most delicate tact, and the deepest spiritual insight. {14MR 278.3}

How should we respond to leadership?

Remember, the purpose of our class is not to tell you what to think, but to challenge you to think for yourself, to get you to examine the evidence, to exercise your God given reasoning powers and come to your own conclusions and in so doing remove lies, distortions and come to an ever increasing knowledge of and love for the truth. Because the truth always leads back to God!

MONDAY

Read second paragraph, “Paul encouraged...” thoughts? What do you think of the idea of warning those who won't support themselves, when they are capable?

What warning should they be given?

- Those that don't work won't eat? 2Thes 3:10
- That failure to provide for oneself, when one is capable...?
- That their own character development is being hindered? That they are going down a path of self-destruction?

Should social programs be designed to give away, or help restore and build up? To return a person to self-sufficiency?

What if a person would rather be homeless and beg and dumpster dive than get a job? What should we do?

What if mental illness is involved? Should we institutionalize people who are not a danger to self or others, and want to be free, but are impaired so they end up on the street?

Thoughts?

The sixth paragraph states, “But when leaders retaliate, it demonstrates that their leadership was not motivated by the spirit of Christ. It is crucial to sound church leadership to keep the good of others in mind.”

What does it look like in action when we practice Christ's methods in leadership?

What does it look like when church leaders retaliate?

- What did they do to Christ?
- How were the apostles treated?
- Martin Luther?
- What about EGW in our own organization? Was shipping her to Australia retaliation?

TUESDAY

First paragraph states, "Christians need to learn how to accept and how to offer constructive criticism."

Thoughts?

Any ideas to improve our ability to do this?

- Recognize our need – we are not perfect and always have room to grow
- Recognize the feedback you receive is the perspective of the other person and will be give through the lens of their mind, beliefs, perspectives, understanding, biases etc. which means it may be accurate or inaccurate
- Recognize the motive of the one giving the feedback, regardless of accuracy, is the person for me, or are they working their own agenda?
- Examine the methods employed in giving the feedback, is coercive pressure used, are you left free?

Any ideas on what interferes?

- Fear and selfishness – our own ego and pride
- Personality conflicts
- Misunderstanding

The lesson emphasizes the importance of rejoicing and being thankful for what Jesus has done – do we have anything to be thankful for?

Anyone what to share?

THURSDAY

End-Time Holiness

What does it mean? Why is it important?

When Christ comes what happens to those who have not experienced renewal of heart to be like him in character?

Is end time holiness real; is it achievable? Is it something declared or experienced, a reality that occurs in the believer?

What interferes with achieving this? Would it be lies about God, his law, his methods?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss the questions