

Friday: *American Idols?*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Reflect:

Implicit in these verses is the fact the Thessalonians once served idols. However they now serve God. What is the difference? There are many answers to that question; one has to do with the value something has. God has and gives value; idols both have and give none (e.g., Isa40:18-20; 44:9-20).

An idol could be money (but we do not like to think so in America – at least not how we, personally, view it), but do you realize money has no intrinsic value? It only has the value we attach to it. Therefore it is worth something to us only as a means of transaction. An idol could be safety, but safety only has the value we give it. In other words, would you rather be “safe” or see thousands turn to God?

God is the only entity that has intrinsic value (as humans, we have intrinsic value because we are made in God’s image). People either serve something of intrinsic value or they serve something to which they attribute value.

Respond:

What do you serve in your life that has no intrinsic value?

What is so alluring about this thing(s) you serve? How can God help you “turn” from it and serve Him more fully?

What is the relationship between “to serve” in verse nine and “to wait” in verse ten? Do you think “to wait” means do nothing?

Pray: Pray for Prairie View Christian Camp; another mission New Life supports. Pray for Bob Griffin and Larry Hayes – elders of New Life. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of any “idols” in your life; pray for the strength to respond appropriately when convicted. Continue to pray for protection from sin and strength during times of testing.

Saturday: *Preparation*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain...²...we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict...⁴...but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God ...⁹ For you remember...¹⁰... how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers...¹² we exhorted each one of you...

Reflect:

As you read the passage for today “blameless” likely stood out. The thought of being “blameless” appears daunting, yet it may seem almost possible tomorrow, at least for the few hours you will spend “at church.”

Seeking to “please God” is a key for Paul in this passage. In fact, it seems to be the determining factor for how/why Paul can claim blamelessness. It seems the majority of Christendom focuses on pleasing God on Sundays, in “church,” when we are “in his presence.” What about other days?

Remember, we are always in His presence; we are the church (we have covered that before). The church is the assembly of God’s people. Sunday morning is a wonderful time to come together as a group of Christians to worship God. Our worship on Sunday mornings is most rewarding for us (which is a nice by-product, not the intent of worship) when we have been worshipping throughout the week.

Respond:

How much time have you spent praising God (e.g. in song) this week, aside from last Sunday?

What can you do during the week for more of your focus to be on pleasing God...because you love him?

Pray: Pray for the National Missionary Convention; a mission New Life supports. Pray for Ed Asbury, Keith Krause, and Mike Haag – deacons at New Life. Pray those the Holy Spirit is prompting to come to New Life tomorrow will be obedient and come. Pray our worship service tomorrow will be pleasing to God.

Context is King

September 13 – 19

A verse without a context is a pretext for a proof text. What?!? Let me explain...

- Proof text – a verse used (often as a sledge hammer) to make a point (sometimes a personal “soap box”)...by someone who loves God.
- Pretext – an appearance assumed in order to cloak the real intention or state of affairs. In other words, a disguised way of looking “holy” when the real intention is having one’s own way...by someone who loves God.
- Context – the weaving together of words. In other words, it (initially) is the several sentences surrounding a given “verse” of Scripture – which is sadly (frequently) ignored...by someone who loves God.
- Verse – a) one of the short divisions into which a chapter of the Bible is traditionally divided, b) one of the most abused inventions of man (again by someone(s) who loved God) for understanding the Bible.

Therefore, if we ignore the surrounding sentences of any specific sentence in God’s Word (context) – we are in grave danger of misrepresenting God. The outcome can be devastating. Think I am kidding?

- “Judas went out and hanged himself; do likewise, and what you do, do quickly” (Matt27:5b; Lk3:11; Jn13:27b).

It sounds ridiculous – right? Exactly. No one (I hope) would avoid context to string those three verses together and command someone to kill themselves. Yet in reality similar examples happen every day – most far more dangerous than the Judas example. How is this? Because the way words are strung together sound so close to the truth people are deceived. Once the deception is discovered some lose their faith; others are hardened further against the Gospel.

Sobering fact #1: we have all been guilty of taking verses out of context in the past. Sobering fact #2: we will all be guilty of doing it in the future as well. Granted, I believe it will be done unintentionally – but it will still happen. What can we do?

We can start by taking a “20/20” vow. I.e., vowing to read 20 verses before and 20 verses after a particular verse in order to better understand what is taking place (context).

By the way, why did God put verses (and chapters) in the Bible? Well (strictly speaking), He did not. Stephen Langton and Peter the Chanter paved the way for our modern chapter and verse divisions in the Bible. Robert Stephanus introduced the current verse divisions in the New Testament in 1551 (they were first printed in 1555).

Now please do not take my opening explanation of the “pretext for a proof text” to mean those men did something atrocious. After all, they love(d) God and wanted to serve Him. In fact they did. They made it much easier for us to find events in the Bible. The stumbling block in all of this is how the church has not taught her people to read the Bible naturally instead of picking a verse here or there to “meet a need” (think “verse a day” calendars – uplifting...but limited if not dangerous).

Learning to study the Bible takes effort, but so does anything in life. Fortunately the rewards of learning to study the Bible outweigh any “cost” perceived to be involved.

Monday: Who are “we” and who are “you”?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

<p>Reflect: By looking at verse one it is not too difficult to conclude the “we” of verse two is Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy; the “you” is the “church of the Thessalonians.” I realize that may seem childish – but if we ignore context a verse can be made to say anything...</p> <p>It is instructive to note why Paul gives thanks for the Thessalonians. Granted, the fuller picture of what he means will unfold as the letter progresses, but it is clear how thankful Paul is for their “work” on behalf of the Kingdom.</p> <p>Some have described the “work of faith” as thinking the gospel through and bringing minds and wills into line with it. The word “labor” indicates the sweat of your brow – intense, hard work. To be “steadfast” means to endure, this is exactly what “hope” elicits in us. Biblical hope empowers us to endure any hardship which may come our way.</p>	<p>Respond: If Paul wrote this letter to New Life Christian Church, what would he thank God for as he remembered us?</p> <p>For whom do you pray regularly? Why? Do they know? What do you pray?</p> <p>Notice the “faith, hope, and love” triad (cf. 1Cor13:13). Why is the order different here?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for the CEA; a Kansas church planting organization New Life supports. Ask God to help you be more faithful in prayer on behalf of others (especially in being thankful for them). Continue to pray for workers in God’s Kingdom (Mt9:36-38).</p>	

Tuesday: Who are “we” and who are “you”?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5a⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

<p>Reflect: Obviously this verse means God hand picks all who are going to be saved. There is no denying it – God “elects” people for salvation. We are totally depraved and without His grace we are hopelessly lost for all eternity. We are wretched, but by His grace He’ll save some...after all He does love us.</p> <p>Well, not exactly. While there is truth in the above paragraph – once again, <u>who</u> is the “you?” Just like on Monday (vs2-3), the “you” is the “church of the Thessalonians” (v1). Nevertheless, let us not miss this fact – God’s grace saves us. We do absolutely <u>nothing</u> to earn our salvation. Salvation is rooted in God’s grace toward us and nothing else. But that does not mean we are passive in the process.</p> <p>Of more importance than debating about “chosen you” (which is a noun and not a verb by the way) is how Paul has used words reserved for Israel in the Old Testament (i.e., “loved by God” and “chosen”) to describe Gentile converts. In other words (keeping with the A.I.M. of this letter – cf. last week) Paul is reassuring the Thessalonians they belong to the Omnipotent Creator God (vital when we look more closely at historical background next week).</p>	<p>Respond: The noun for “chosen/elect” is also in Rom9:11; 11:5,7,28 – all of which deal with the nation of Israel. How much stronger does this make the case for the Thessalonians being God’s people?</p> <p>God chose Israel – a <u>group</u> of people (Deut7:6ff), not individuals. In fact, Rom16:13 is the only reference to an individual with “election” language.</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for Lincoln Christian Seminary, Manhattan Christian College, and Ozark Christian College; missions supported by New Life. Pray for the Unity and Purity of New Life. Continue to pray for God’s people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29).</p>	

Wednesday: Who are “we” and who are “you”?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:5b-6 You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

<p>Reflect: The title for these days may be getting a bit redundant...but keeping “context” in mind is vital. E.g., if a person wants to make v4 mean God “chooses” people for salvation...then by default do those who are “chosen” (which we think of as individuals in America) need to face “much affliction?” Those of us here in America had better hope not. Simply stated, we do not face much “affliction.” Moving on...</p> <p>We all follow someone. At the least it seems everyone has been heavily influenced by someone else. Sometimes those influences are positive; sometimes they are negative. Therefore, when we have an opportunity to choose who will influence us and consequently whom it is we will follow – we need to choose wisely.</p> <p>We get our word “mimic” from the Greek word translated as “imitate” in verse six. While mimic often has a smart-aleck connotation to it, there is nothing snide about seeking to imitate the life of Jesus.</p>	<p>Respond: Make a short list of people who have influenced you positively and negatively. Identify what each contributed to your life.</p> <p>Are you a good role model for another Christian to imitate (cf. 1Cor4:16; 11:1)?</p> <p>What is an area of life in need of “sanctification” so you can be a better role model?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for Shiloh Home of Hope and Emporia Christian Schools; two missions New Life supports. Pray for China – a place where “much affliction” happens daily...but also where the church is thriving. Continue to pray for God’s Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).</p>	

Thursday: Word of ~~Mouth~~ Example – the Best “Advertisement”

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

<p>Reflect: “What you do speaks so loudly that what you say I cannot hear.” A short yet powerful saying. Go ahead and read it again. Now think of the last time you <u>knew</u> you were upset and responded “No I’m not!” through clenched teeth. Our actions do indeed speak loudly.</p> <p>Paul writes their “faith” has become known everywhere. A natural question is, “How did people learn of the Thessalonians’ faith?” Part of the answer comes in doing away with a fallacy of modern thought that faith is a mental assent to something. That is not biblical faith. If that is biblical faith, people would have to be mind readers to know if someone possessed faith in God or not. We have a picture of biblical faith in verse three where Paul writes about their <u>work</u> of faith. Praise God for those whose actions speak louder than what they say...in the positive sense.</p> <p>The word for “example” indicates a pattern – a mold. In other words, if the initial response Christians in Thessalonica had to the gospel could be captured and packaged the value would be priceless. Notice also “you” (which is plural) became an “example” (which is singular). Although made up of individuals, everyone together influences how New Life is known.</p>	<p>Respond: Does a “work of faith” sound odd to you? What does James 2:1-26 say?</p> <p>What is the most recent “work of faith” you have done?</p> <p>How is New Life known through the Emporia area? Are we known? Should we be known? How would you like us to be known?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for Cookson Hills (a Christian Children’s home); a mission New Life supports. Pray for what New Life does to speak so loudly that people know an Awesome God is worshipped by those who serve and worship here. Pray for Brent McCrory – the preaching minster at New Life. Continue to pray for open doors to share God’s Word (Col4:2-6) and the boldness to do so.</p>	