

How to Walk and to Please God

Written on: January 1, 2022

Article by: Paul Birston

1 Thessalonians Introduction

Phillip II (382–336 BC), King of Macedon from 359–336 BC, and father of Alexander the Great, named his daughter Thessalonike in honour of his joint victory with the Thessalian confederation in the region of Thessaly over the king and armies of Phocis, a region to the south. Princess Thessalonike was born the same day as this victory. Her father Philip II reportedly said, “Let her be called victory in Thessaly.” So Thessalonike is a combination of *Thessaly*, the place, and *Nike* which is Greek for victory.

Princess Thessalonike of Macedon married her father’s fifth successor Cassander who founded the city and named it in her honour ca. 315 BC. The Romans took over Macedonia ca. 148 BC and Thessalonike became a capital city. Marc Antony made Thessalonike a largely self-governing free city in 41 BC.

Thessalonike is strategically located with an excellent port on the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean Sea and the *Via Egnatia*, the main east-west Roman highway linking Rome to Byzantium and the ancient international trades routes through the eastern Roman Empire, Israel, Egypt and beyond to the Far East. The *Via Egnatia* connected Thessalonike to Philippi, named after Philip II, 160 km to the east. Berea, where Paul visited after Thessalonike, is 73 km west. Paul’s journey by sea from Thessalonike and Berea to Athena (Athens) would be approximately 515 km.

Thessalonike’s easy access north to the Balkans, including a route to the Danube River, further enhanced its position as a commercial, cultural, political and military centre in New Testament times when Paul first came to Macedonia in response to his night vision: “a man of Macedonia was standing and pleading with him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” (Acts 16:9).

Thessalonike had many of the essential features of God’s prior work to prepare it to receive and spread the gospel (Galatians 4:4): excellent access by major international road and sea routes, the Greek language, the *lingua franca (common)* language of the Empire, employment opportunities, a diverse multi-cultural population and a synagogue in keeping with God’s purpose to bring the gospel to the Jews first and then the Gentiles (Acts 26:23; Romans 1:16; 2:9–10) and Paul’s custom of first visiting synagogues with the gospel to reason with the Jews from the Scriptures upon arrival in cities new to him (Acts 17:1–9; 18:19).

The prosperity of Thessalonike is evident in Paul’s ability to find work there and set an example for the believers (1 Thessalonians 2:9). Paul confirms the strategic location of

the city as one from which the gospel spread to other parts of Macedonia and Achaia (1:8) where the Christians of Thessalonike also had influence by their positive example.

Opportunity and Opposition

The great strengths and opportunities of Thessalonike are also behind some of the challenges faced by Paul and the new Christians there.

Thessalonike's royal history, favoured self-rule status with the Romans and a firmly entrenched Jewish presence of the dispersion, help to explain some of the resistance to Paul, his coworkers, new converts and the gospel: "they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7). This is the same objection the Jews made to Pilate before Jesus' crucifixion in John 19:12. In Luke's record of the citizens dragging Jason and the believers before the Thessalonian city authorities, Luke identifies them as *politarchs* (πολιτάρχας, "elected officials" in 17:6), a unique title attested to in an inscription on Thessalonike's Vardar city gate. The opponents forced Paul and Silas to leave Thessalonike for Berea (Acts 17:10–11ff) with Timothy presumably following (17:14–15).

The new Thessalonian Christians continued to face opposition after Paul, Silas and Timothy left (1 Thessalonians 12:13–16). Knowing this, Paul was concerned enough to send Timothy back to "to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith" (3:2). He reminds them of the inevitability of suffering affliction for their faith (3:3). Timothy returned to Paul in Corinth with "good news of your faith and love" (3:6). After receiving Timothy's report, Paul wrote to them ca. AD 52, not many months after he was forced to leave, to further instruct and encourage them.

The wealth and multi-cultural make up of Greco-Roman Thessalonike as an international port on the *Via Egnatia* trade route also made new members vulnerable to worldly influences, including sexual temptation. Paul exhorts them on "how you ought to walk and to please God" (4:1)... "For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from *sexual immorality" (4:3; **porneia* is the root of pornography). Paul further says God is able to "sanctify you entirely" (5:23)

Many consider 1 Thessalonians to be Paul's first letter and 2 Timothy his last. In a chilling affirmation of the worldliness of Thessalonike's riches, privilege and pleasures, Paul wrote Timothy, "for Demas, *having loved this present world*, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10).

In light of the opposition they faced and the resources they had at their disposal, the Thessalonians were also tempted to quit working, withdraw from society and prepare for Jesus' immanent return. Paul sends them valuable information about Jesus' return and the last days in 4:9–5:11. He exhorts them to keep working and living exemplary lives in peace with one another. Evidently the problems persisted. Paul will provide further revelation on correctly understanding the last days and the imperative to work in 2 Thessalonians.

As he does for the Ephesians and Corinthians, Paul instructs the Thessalonians on the eternal dimensions of their new life in the Holy Spirit, God's armour for spiritual warfare, spiritual gifts and the power of praise, prayer, prophecy and testing everything according to God's Word (1:13; 4:4-5:22).

How to Walk and to Please God Today

Today, about 1970 years after Paul wrote to our brothers and sisters in first-century Thessalonike, the modern city of Thessaloniki, the second largest in Greece, remains an influential centre of artistic culture, commerce and education. Providentially, the modern city covers most of the ancient city with the exception of the heart of the Greco-Roman agora/forum with surrounding shops, baths and theatre. This remnant is a reminder of the opportunities and challenges the first-century Christians there faced which are still with us everywhere today.

To guide us, Thessalonians contains many encouraging truths and themes:

Chapter 1:

- * labouring by the motives of faith, love and hope
- * living as examples of the gospel's transforming power

Chapter 2:

- * receiving the Word as God's vs. the word of men

Chapter 3:

- * the need for strength and encouragement of our faith
- * standing firm in the Lord
- * allowing God to establish our hearts in holiness

Chapter 4:

- * our sanctification and honour in a highly sexualised society
- * love of our brothers and sisters in Christ

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* leading a productive quiet life of godly behaviour as a witness to the world

Chapter 4 and 5

* Jesus' second coming again (*parousia*) as a thief in the night

* the resurrection of the dead

* meeting the Lord in the air to be with Him forever

Chapter 5

* walking as sons and daughters of light in the last days

* encouragement and edification

* appreciating hardworking leaders

* living in peace

* rejoicing always

* being constant in prayer

* being thankful in all things

* careful examination of all messages claiming to be from the Spirit

* holding fast to the good, abstaining from evil

* God's sanctification and preservation of spirit, soul and body

* God's faithfulness to His promises of sanctification and salvation

In these last days of opportunity and opposition in which we live 1 Thessalonians teaches us many valuable lessons on "how to walk and to please God" (4:1).

How Is Your Record?

Written on: January 1, 2022

Article by: Tim Johnson

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Perhaps some of us will shy away from such a question. But when we consider our purpose to take the gospel to new people and encourage our brothers and sisters, a good record is essential.

1 Thessalonians 2 emphasizes the record of Paul when he was in Thessalonica and began the church with the preaching of the gospel. If you read the account of his brief time with them in Acts 17, we see the opposition of the Jews, the violence of the mob, and the false reports of disloyalty to Caesar in this very pro-Roman city. This young congregation faced tough opposition. Escaping further violence, Paul was ushered to Berea and on to Athens. But it seems the slander continued in Paul's absence.

What better way to destroy the church than to undermine it? Enemies often have long memories. And so they maligned Paul, fired volleys of criticism at the church, and sought to recapture Jews who had been converted by him to Christ. It's always easier to discredit someone when they are not present to defend themselves. Paul decided to undo the damage from a distance by reserving space for a rebuttal in his letter to this fair congregation in Macedonia's largest city. From his words in chapter 2, we learn the importance of a good record.

To begin, he pointed out what they already knew: that he didn't cowardly shy away from Jewish mistreatment; he had come to Thessalonica to boldly "speak the gospel of God amid much opposition" (v1–2). His work had been a great success, not something "done in vain" (ending in emptiness or failure, as his opponents no doubt claimed). The apostle was not afraid of their lies.

Next, he reminded them of his genuine demeanour while with them (v3–4). His opponents cried out "He's full of error! His motives were impure! He used deceitful tricks!" But Paul had been examined and approved by God to be the one to bring them the gospel, and he behaved in a way that pleased his boss, not men. People can usually tell if someone has selfish motives and is not genuine in nature. We must be careful about this in our work with people. Do we love them and God, or do we give the impression we love ourselves and desire some sort of selfish gain?

Paul had no secret motives that would prompt him to use flattery or deceit. Overblown compliments can be spotted easily, and people are wary of greed in a person (v5). In fact, Paul reminded them how he and his colleagues "worked night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you" (v9). In our money-hungry world today, it's so important

to be generous, kind, and to keep from giving any impression we are anxious for donations. The Thessalonians remembered this apostle of Christ who was not a burden to them in any way. What a breath of fresh air in their own society where traveling leaders of idolatry did their work with their hands out for cash.

When Paul and Silas first arrived in Thessalonica, they didn't conduct themselves as if they were greater than everyone else, seeking glory and fame. They "proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children" (v7-8). These preachers really cared. They exhibited "fond affection" as they shared the gospel and also their own lives, "because you had become very dear to us." What a marvellous record these men had: they taught the gospel gently, and they shared their own lives. I once asked a brother to go and teach a man who had requested a Bible study. He went, but only carved out a short amount of time to spend with him, and then later came back complaining that the man wasn't receptive. Our brother wasn't willing to take the time to build a relationship with this lost soul and teach the gospel with patience. We must do better if we're going to persuade men to believe.

There was nothing of substance that could be honestly charged against Paul and Silas. Their record was spotless, and the Thessalonians remembered it. Paul said, "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers" (v10). What sparkling qualities they had exhibited to these new Christians. This is what deflected all the harsh criticism and slander of those who opposed the faith. Their great record stood like a rock in a sandstorm.

It's not our reputation alone that matters as we live our lives for Jesus, it's also the effect it has on new people. Paul acted blamelessly so that the Thessalonians would learn to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (v12). His good record would instil similar great qualities in these new Christians, no matter what his critics said.

I'm afraid that sometimes we are in a rush to teach and baptize people. We long to see our auditoriums full, to witness people come to the Lord, and to experience new energy that fresh people can bring into the church. But we can be guilty of pushing people before they are ready to obey, to make people feel manipulated, and thus create a shadow over our record. I've found myself guilty of this in the past while doing mission work and being conscious of the expectations of supporters, and the hunt for results. Self-correction was needed so as not to simply please men, but God. Let's learn from Paul's defense in 1 Thessalonians 2 and strive to conduct ourselves as he did.

How is your record?

Barrie, Ontario

The Word of God At Work In You Who Believe

Written on: January 1, 2022

Article by: George Mansfield

1 Thessalonians 2:13–20

Welcome to this study of 1 Thessalonians 2:13–20. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with these verses.

“Did you know that First Thessalonians is possibly the oldest piece of literature in the New Testament, written about twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus? The Gospels, describing the life of Jesus, were written a decade or more later, to preserve the stories the disciples had told” (*How to Get Into The Bible* by Stephen M. Miller).

Probably all of us know that Jesus died on a cruel cross to make spiritual salvation possible. Salvation from sin, a gift given to sinners, is surely the greatest present we can imagine. Paul confirms this and many other eternal truths as he wrote to the Thessalonians and by extension, to all of us today.

Consider the following:

1) Paul was constantly thankful to God for each of these brethren – who had heard the Gospel from him and “accepted it, not as the word of men, but ...the word of God” (2:13). This is the inherent claim of all scripture, which Paul will explain in another place is “given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). It is full, final and complete...nothing more is needed.

2) Paul informs the church at Thessalonica that their endurance in the face of persecution had been preceded by the saints in Judea (2:14a). They were imitating the Judean churches. Those who imitate godly behaviour are applauded in scripture (1 Thess 1:6–10) Christian living can be imitated, and when it is, it is pleasing to God. Even though Jesus paid the full price for our sins, we may be called upon to share in his suffering through persecution.

The guidance that we receive from God’s word is often all that keeps us from condemnation in this life and certainly in the life to come. As John Bradford concluded

(in the mid 16th century), while observing a group of prisoners being led to execution... that “there but for the grace of God go I”

When we hear or meet a person who is lost in sin, it behooves all of us to reach out to help. That is what Jesus did and wishes to do again through us.

3) The decision to follow Jesus as had the church in Judea had caused the brothers and sisters from Thessalonica to suffer in a similar fashion Jesus (2:14b). We are reminded that this present world often punishes good and rewards evil. And while this is far from ideal, it is the cost of following the Galilean carpenter – a cost that all believers are encouraged to count in advance.

The decision to follow Jesus is a decision to accept persecution. Knowing this in advance strengthens us for ‘hard times’ when they come.

4) It was persecution that cut Paul’s first visit to Thessalonica short. He was forced to minister to them through his mission team and the written word. While he was with them, he set an example of personal industry and sacrificial living. He reminded them of this when he wrote: “For you recall brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” (I Thessalonians 2:9).

Paul was willing to pay any price necessary in order to share the gospel (2:9). As he would later remind the Ephesian elders, he did not fail to proclaim the ‘full counsel of God’. (Acts 20:19-20). He did not neglect to share anything that they needed to know about God’s plan of salvation, acceptable worship and daily Christian living. Elements of these may be gleaned from I Cor 15:1-6

On a personal note, I was recently asked to talk to a young lady regarding the topic of water baptism. While she thought I would discuss water and immersion, etc., it seemed wise to me to delay a discussion of those steps, explaining first of all what Jesus did for us; what He requires of us; what baptism includes and how these all fit together. This person followed these spiritual guidelines of the Bible and the rest is history.

Conclusion

Paul called upon the church at Thessalonica to remember both his way of life and the message of salvation. They served as witnesses along with God Himself, of his blameless conduct and faithful ministry. (2:10) This allowed Paul to exhort and implore like a father, to follow his good example. (2:11). In so doing, they would know how to walk in manner worthy of God (2:12).

For This Reason


“We”, meaning Paul or Paul and his companions, always thanked God for the opportunity to preach the word to them. This gospel message was and is not difficult to learn and repeat. We need to commit it to memory and to live by it. The death, burial

and resurrection of Jesus, FOR OUR SINS.” is the heart of the gospel. It is that simple! Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–6.

Truly “Jesus paid a debt He did not owe, and we all owed a debt we could not pay, so we needed someone to wash our sins away.” They received the Word, “Not as the word of men but for what it really is, the word of God!”

What Jesus did, he did for the benefit of the whole world. When God’s word is allowed to do it’s work, it brings men and women to salvation. It is up to us, to trust and obey, for there is no other way. Jesus Himself is “the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me!” (John 14:6).

Beamsville, Ontario



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Concerning Brotherly Love

Written on: January 1, 2022

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

1 Thessalonians 4:9–12 (ESV) “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”

It always impresses me that Paul expects so much from the converts at Thessalonica. We forget that these were new converts. We forget that they had received, at most, a few months of Christian teaching. Yet he calls them to a standard of behaviour that modern congregations expect of only a mature few (if they expect it of anyone). But he expects it of the Thessalonians; and (for the most part) they seem to be rising to his expectations. Their love extends beyond their own city to the entire region of Macedonia. But he does not want them to rest contented with what they have attained. He calls them to continue to grow in this regard (10).

As they grow in their brotherly love, he expects that the growth will be manifest in their lives.

Live quiet lives

He expects that they will seek to live quietly (“*aspire to live quietly*,” 11). The quietness intended here is not silence. It is not a matter of never speaking or making any noise. It is a matter of not making needless fuss. The late Raymond Kelcy quipped regarding this verse, “A man might be a boilermaker and still be in obedience to that command.” Today, now that boiler making is an unseen task, we might say, “A man could operate a jackhammer for a living and still live a quiet life.”

Mind your business

The opposite of the boilermaker living a quiet life would be a person who worked a quiet office job, but who was constantly making a different kind of noise. The verse also says, “*mind your own affairs*.”

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Although many in Thessalonica were making good spiritual progress, there were some who really needed this warning. In 2 Thessalonians the apostle will speak of those who are “*not busy at work but busybodies*” (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

Work with your hands

The Thessalonian Christians had also been told to “*work with your hands.*” Even if someone avoids gossip, and avoids causing trouble to others, that person’s life will still not bring glory to God if they do not work. These days, we are constantly told that we are “consumers.” Many seem to be living up to the name. Too many people consume. Not enough produce. Christians, of all people, should not live this way. We were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). At that point in the biblical record God had been seen primarily, if not exclusively, as the Creator. So, whatever else the “image of God” may mean, it certainly means that we are supposed to produce rather than consume.

Although the Apostle has been very complimentary toward the Thessalonians (9–10), he will later repeat the command “If any is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Evidently, there were some among them who were lazy. This should never be.

Proper walk

Lazy, self-indulgent behaviour on the part of Christians brings a reproach on the church (1 Timothy 5:5–7). Hard work, on the other hand, “adorns” the gospel (Titus 2:10). The context of that verse in Titus indicates that hard work on the part of a Christian, whether a slave or a woman working in her own home, will silence the criticisms of unbelievers and cause them to be more likely to listen to our message. The statement here in 1 Thessalonians 4:12 is not as detailed, but it points in the same direction. Christians who take care of themselves are a credit to the church. Christians who clammer for government assistance are a detriment to the church.

Talk is cheap

A lot of people claim to love their brothers. Before the pandemic, many went around hugging other Christians. But the real proof of love is less demonstrative and more mundane. A quiet, gossip-free life of hard work shows love for the church. Gushy claims of love prove nothing.

So let us hear (and heed) the Apostle again,

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (1 Thessalonians 4:10–12, ESV).

Matsapha, Eswatini, Africa

Always

Written on: January 1, 2022

Article by: Peter Morphy

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

We trust that over the past few weeks you have been blessed with times of joy and celebration with family and friends. You also had the opportunity to pray and give thanks for relationships, health, safe travels and the many abundant blessings from the Lord. Whatever our current situation we can find something to be thankful for, which should cause us to pray to the Lord who gives us life, strength, hope and victory, which when we think about our spiritual blessings, we find great joy.

Paul wrote about joy, prayer and thanksgiving in 1 Thessalonians 5. The challenge of this admonition is not for us to occasionally participate in these spiritual disciplines, but to live in them at all times. How can this be?

This is more than just a suggestion for Christian growth; this is God's will for us in daily living. It seems Paul knew that the disciples in Thessalonica wanted to know God's will for them. In this short letter, Paul states "this is the will of God for you" twice. Previously, he wrote, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour" (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

In the next chapter, Paul writes, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)

The command to be joyful continually was given to the Israelites as they were entering the promise land. Among many of the laws that were given, the Lord said, "And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all that you undertake" (Deuteronomy 12:18). While rejoicing out of duty is difficult, we also read of much joy in an intimate relationship and in the faithful worship of Jehovah (Psalm 5:11; 16:11; 32:11; 40:16; 90:14; 97:12).

Paul often wrote of the joy he had in Christ. Yet, looking at his circumstances and the constant struggles, disappointments and persecution, he had a good excuse to become discouraged, bitter and complain about his condition. Yet he found joy in prison, in rejection and in persecution (Philippians 3:1; 4:4).

We don't want bad things to happen to ourselves or anyone else, but we know that the tests, trials and temptations of life can knock us down. We may not shout songs of joy for our times of struggle and sorrow, but we can find joy because the Lord is with us in

and through the pain. We know there will be victory and celebration in the future glory through Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote that even through afflictions, hardships, dishonour, slander and having nothing, he could still say “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). Paul also wrote, “In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy” (2 Corinthians 7:4) and “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake” (Colossians 1:24). In a similar way, Jesus endured the pain and suffering of the cross because He knew there was joy on the other side (Hebrews 12:2).

We, too, can find strength in God’s power, comfort in God’s grace and hope in God’s promises. Remembering, when it is easy to forget, will fill our heart and mind with the joy of the Lord.

If rejoicing always is challenging, how are we to pray without ceasing? Should we stay home in our prayer closet all day talking with God? What about sleeping at night? Even our most seasoned “prayer warriors” take a break from prayer. Most Biblical scholars teach that we are always ready, willing and able to pray, regardless of the time, place or situation in life. Warren Wiersbe writes in his commentary “the word means constantly recurring, not continuously occurring.”

The sons of Korah prayed early in the morning (Psalm 88:13). David prayed in the evening (Psalm 141:2) and the middle of the night (Psalm 42:8). Nehemiah prayed before talking to the King (Nehemiah 2:4). The disciples prayed for boldness (Acts 4:31). The church prayed for missions (Acts 13:2–3). Paul and Silas prayed in the jail in Philippi (Acts 16:25). Paul prayed for the salvation of his friends (Romans 10:1) Paul prayed for the churches (Colossians 1:3).

We should always be aware that the Lord is near. Close enough that we can talk and we know that He is listening and He cares. When we see something beautiful, we can thank Him. When we are worried, we cast our cares on Him. In times of pain, we seek comfort. When we



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are lost (physically, emotionally, spiritually), we ask for direction. When we are tempted, we pray for strength to overcome. When there is a decision (big or small), we ask for wisdom. When there is an opportunity, we pray for success.

In addition to our unceasing prayer, we are to give thanks in everything. We often fail to recognize how much the Lord has blessed us with an abundance of possessions, personal and religious freedom, access to healthcare, relationships with family and friends, and innumerable spiritual blessings in Christ. We, out of all the people of the world, should be the most thankful. One of the most telling signs of gratitude is our conversation with our father and with other people. If we are constantly complaining, comparing or craving more, we will not have heart of gratitude.

Everything that we do should be in the will, authority and power of our Lord. When we live according to God's plan, we can be thankful because God is with us and we are bringing praise to him. Paul writes, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17; also see Ephesians 5:18–20).

We are instructed what not to do and what we are to be doing when we pray in faith. This focus is more about the condition of our heart over the words that we say. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

Rejoice, pray and be thankful always in all ways. Paul exhorts us to "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Bible references are from the English Standard Version.

Royal Oak, Michigan

Giving

Written on: January 1, 2022

Article by: Dave Knutson

There is nothing quite as moving as the birth of a child. The entry of an eternal soul into a world of light, air and sound. The continuation of the chain of humanity that reaches back to the first marriage and the first breath. It is fascinating to watch the daily progress of an baby...so slow... yet so fast. It begins with a oneness between mother and child...a symbiotic bond. For the first few months the child has no sense of his own individuality. But with time, there is a sense of emerging person-hood. The child discovers that there is a you and a me in this world. That discovery of own self is very important. "I Am" is the beginning place for everything else that we will seek to do in life. It occurs to me that until you know that you are an individual, a person in your own right, you can have no sense of ownership or possessions.

While it is a sign of growing up, this discovery can be annoying to parents. You know that Sam or Sue has gotten the concept of possessions, when suddenly everything is "Mine" Mine, Mine. There is little time lost between the discovery of Me & Myself, and the claim that certain things are "Mine".

The word Mine is not only a formative when it comes to character, but a word that shapes the world of business & commerce, the world of love and family. The word has a ring of exclusivity to it. It points to those things that are mine and mine alone. Not to be confused with the things which belong to my brother or sister and are therefore common property.

Now I don't want you to get the wrong Idea here. Mine is not a bad word. In and of itself, it is not even a negative word. It flows from the sense of individual person-hood that God has given to us. If "I Am": if I am a person in my own right, then those things belonging to me are mine. That is, they have a special and exclusive relationship to me and me alone.

There is perhaps no one individual in the Bible who uses this word more often God does. "God is the possessor of heaven and earth. He states: "The earth is mine and the fullness thereof" Ps 24:1 The book of Deuteronomy alone has 43 direct references to God giving the land of Canaan to Israel so that they will come into possession of it

Ownership is at the very heart of the Biblical message...because it precedes giving. It is a necessary ingredient in the story of Grace. Unless you know that you are a person in your own right, you cannot possess. Not your own life, and not anything outside of yourself in this life.

Unless you possess something, you cannot give. Personhood and ownership come first.

Now It is a sign of emerging maturity when a child takes some treasured possession and lends it to another. Or when he places it in the hands of his friend and says..."it's yours"

When you look into his eyes and know that his heart-strings are still attached to the gift...but he gives it anyway...and maybe he even gives it for that reason.....you know that he is growing up.

Giving is all about relationships. It is about You and somebody else.

You can possess something all by yourself. You can be an owner without any company at all. But you cannot give without someone to receive. You cannot be a benefactor, without someone else who receives the benefit. And you cannot give without involving yourself with other people. Perhaps it goes without saying that you cannot give that which you do not possess.

There must be a giver, a receiver and a gift.

Now all acts of Godly giving have three things in common:

1. Giving begins with the right motivation.
2. It requires the right attitude.
3. It is consummated in the right gift

Let's talk about these three as they pertain first of all to God.

John's Gospel brings them together.

"For God so loved the World, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

God had a motive for sending Jesus into the world. He loved us. As we stood under the judgment of eternal damnation...He loved us. Dead in our trespasses and sins...He loved us. With our backs turned to Him and to the truth of His word...He loved us. Beyond human remedy and without hope in this world...He loved us. Alien to His kingdom....ignorant of His ways....defiant to His will.....His love rose above it all.

The love of God was not an afterthought. It did not come into being at some point in time. It was not just God rising to meet the occasion. The love of God is eternal and like God, it is without beginning or end.

Paul says, that it took place before time...and in love..



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He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:4-6)

God had the right motive. He did this to make us the objects of His love. To make us like God... holy and blameless.

At one time, we were someone else's children. But now, by adoption we are children of the Most High God. Adopted through divine agency...grafted into the family by God's one and only son with all of the privileges of that family.

The possessor of heaven and earth loved us and for that reason He gave his one and only Son. There can be no higher motive.

You know, when the motive is right, then the attitude will be right.

Jesus was not just sent into this world, He came of his own free will.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (tenaciously held onto), but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

Attitude is everything. It shapes actions. It colours behaviour.

It turns obligation into privilege...it changes the things that I have got to do into the things that I want to do.

It walks willingly in the valley of the shadow of death for His name sake.

It pours out self-will on the ground and allows itself to be filled with the purposes of God.

The attitude of Jesus blazed a trail for us to follow. It is a high road to travel and if we stay on it, it will mean the death of us.

Jesus assures us that without the right attitude, we just will not last to the end of the journey.

That is why Jesus said:

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it." Matt.16:24-25

As the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus calls us to share His attitude.

To trust God.

To seek servitude over equality.

To consider others to be more important than ourselves.

To look out for one another's interests.

To stand in the place of the one who gives, instead of the one who receives.

Motive and attitude go together. For God So loved the world that He gave his one and only Son. Motive and attitude produced the right Gift.

Throughout the Bible, God is described as the source of every blessing.

The one whose love for mankind is evident in good gifts. Food and shelter...the rain that falls on the just and the unjust. The gifts of family, health and prosperity. By themselves, none of these are a true measure of the love of God.

Instead, God so loved the world, that He gave his One and Only Son. This gift was not external to God. It was not inexpensive. It was not impersonal. It was not trivial or unimportant.

The gift was alive...A person, not a thing. There was no more treasured possession in heaven or earth. The price was way beyond measure...at the limits of God Himself.

You see, giving...real giving begins with the "I Am" in each of us. Not something outside of us... but ourselves ...heart..body..mind..& soul. God gave nothing less – and He expects us to follow His example.

Jesus touched on a principle when he said:

" What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul. Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?. matt.16:26

The things that are external to your life are of less importance than your life.

Would you trade your eternal soul for a house, a car, a career , a husband or a wife? What price do you put on your soul? What price do you put on your life?

It is beyond price. It is all that you are.

What Jesus was saying is this. Your soul is not yours to keep. On your own, you cannot possess it into the life to come...you cannot hold onto it. In order to truly possess it, you must make it the possession of Jesus Christ. To find your life, you must lose it....lose it in the cause of Christ. Until you are a Christian, you cannot begin giving in the way that Jesus gave.

As a Christian, God does not want your money. He does not want your house, your car, your time...He wants you. He wants you, heart and soul, body and mind. He wants all of you. Jesus did not die on the cross to save your stuff. He died on the cross to save you.

God did not sacrifice a few mountains or even a few solar systems to save you. In his Son, God sacrificed himself. The Hebrew writer says that God gave Jesus a body for the purpose of sacrificing it. (Heb.10:5, 10)

Jesus was God on earth...All the same, He came to do the Father's will. His whole life was used up doing the father's will. Christ's life on earth was not His own. His goals belonged to the Father: He lived and breathed to do the Father's will. He was ambitious for the purposes of

heaven. He brought every appetite under the Father's control. His hopes and dreams all came from the Father.

That is what God wants from you and me.

Only God gives without first receiving. And only God can give the gift that enables us to become givers. He loved us...and gave His Son to die for us...So that we could truly possess life.

That's why Paul said:

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body"

(1Cor.6:19-20)

Do we really believe that? That we do not belong to ourselves?

There is a lot of talk among religious people about having the Holy Spirit...almost as if God were just another one of our possessions. Now It is true that God has given us a gift...and that gift is His Spirit. But we do not possess Him. Instead, He dwells in us as we have become His place to live. His presence within us is evidence that we belong to God...that God has taken ownership of us.

On the one hand, the thought of power is exciting to many people. And the presence of God's Spirit in us promises power. But the truth is that the power of the Spirit is for the purpose of doing the will of the Father. To fight successfully against selfishness and sin....so that God's will might be done here on earth as it is in heaven.

What I would like for us to ask ourselves this morning is this: do we really believe that we are not our own? That God actually owns us completely?

If we say yes, then what does that mean? Practically speaking, what difference does that make? Is it possible for God to be the owner if I am still calling the shots?

How long do I think that God will be satisfied to call me His child if I don't bow to His wishes? Words are important, but sometimes actions speak louder than words. I may claim that Jesus owns me, but act otherwise.

Sometimes our actions may say: I would like to enjoy the benefits of sonship without any of the cost. But Jesus called on all who would be His disciples to count the cost. To love God more than all other human relationships. To be willing to die for Him, if it came to that. There is no free lunch; spiritually speaking.

My actions may suggest that my time is my own. I will participate in worship when I feel like it, and no more. But Jesus warns us not to make a habit of forsaking the assembly. He cautions against falling away and leaving our first love.

And when I do show up here on Sunday morning, I expect to be served.

Jesus said: "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet,

you also ought to wash one another's feet".

I would like to be lord of my time...Lord of my coming in and going out.

The boss of my life. What I do with my time is no-one's business but my own.

There are 168 hours in the week. If we get 8 hours of sleep a day, that means that we are awake for about 112 hours each week. How many of them do we plan to give to the Lord? If We truly belong to the Lord, they are not ours to keep.

Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Not much has changed. He went on to conclude: "Let us work while it is still day...the night is coming when no man can work" Time is of the essence.

You know, I have heard stories told by people who have had a brush with death. Without exception, they say that it has changed their lives. They now savour each moment...they feel the need to make their time count for something.


In Jesus' words, the only way to save your life is to lose it!! Since your life and mine is measured in time; what else do we have?

We have been bought with a price, the truth is, that we are not our own. And if I am not my own, then I should find out what my owner wants me to do. And then make every effort, every single day of my life, to do His will.

But unless we really believe that we belong to Jesus, there is no point in talking about "giving" in the traditional sense. Because giving and belonging are tied together and cannot be separated.


There was a famine that swept through Palestine during the reign of Claudius in about the middle of the first Christian century. it profoundly affected the welfare of the church and the relationship of its mixed membership.

Paul gathered relief funds from Gentile congregations all over Asia and Europe and brought these to the elders at Jerusalem. In the course of reminding the Church at Corinth about their commitment to help, Paul makes an amazing statement about giving. He said:




The newspaper dismissed them with three brief words - "The children escaped." But the newspaper was wrong. They did not escape. Whether grown and out on their own or still young and at home, they all suffered. Not even the four year old grandchild was able to escape the aftermath which drifted across four generations.

Based on a true story, *The Mist on the Mountain* is their story. The story the newspaper missed.



Virginia Morgan Hipwell was born and raised in Scioto County, Ohio. After high school, when a Canadian captured her heart, she moved to southern Ontario. She and husband Don share the family farm with their daughter and her family. Two of their three sons live in Ohio while the middle one resides in Saskatchewan. They have grandchildren in all three locations and great-grandchildren in Ohio. For several years, Virginia served as an associate editor for *Gospel Herald* writing a monthly column titled "Through a Woman's Eyes". She has also written numerous poems, a few short stories and lyrics for some Sunday school songs.

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Just in time for Christmas giving! This historical novel is available only from the author for \$20 plus shipping. Contact Virginia via email at stompdoube@gmail.com or on Facebook.

“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favour of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. (2Cor 8:1-5)

Two things stand opposite one another.

The Macedonian churches were experiencing a great affliction and living in deep poverty. Nevertheless, they had an abundant joy because they had truly come to know the grace of the Lord. And that abundance of joy overflowed in a wealth of liberality.

Deep poverty...great affliction <—> abundant joy...rich generosity So they gave as they had means? No, they went way beyond their means. They begged, they earnestly pleaded for the privilege of sharing in the support of the saints. To be so honoured...to be partners in the work of God.

How did they do it? What was their secret? It was no secret at all. The first thing that they did... before anything else, they gave themselves to the Lord. They started at the only place that a person can start...with themselves.

Once you give yourself to the Lord, then the rest is easy. Once you give yourself to the Lord, then all other gifts are anticlimactic. Once you give yourself to the Lord, your mind will be changed and what you used to think of as giving will become stewardship.

Gifts that we might give in the service of the Lord are not really changing ownership when they pass from one human hand to another...they still belong to the Lord. If you belong to God, then so does your stuff. People who belong to God do not belong to themselves...they have been bought with a price. That is a fact, a spiritual reality

The Christians in Macedonia took that spiritual fact and acted on it. New as they were to the faith, they understood what God had given them...and they wanted to give in return. They had received spiritual riches...so they gave themselves one spirit at a time, to the Lord.

They got the order right. And then, though they were living in poverty, they gave beyond their means...they gave sacrificially.

All of which raises the question: have we given ourselves to the Lord? Do our lives say that God owns us? Are we giving our stuff to God but holding ourselves in reserve?

The truth is that God wants you...your stuff can't make the journey. There is no place for it in His world of imperishable people. If we haven't done it yet, let's get it right.

Let us give ourselves to the Lord by starting over again in our commitment and service to the Lord. And let us be faithful...as long as there is time and opportunity...as long as it is day...for the night is coming when no man can work.

Let us give up what we cannot keep, to gain what God will not let us lose.