

Happy and Holy in a Hostile World – Part 2

1 Thessalonians 2; Coast School of Theology; Earl Miles; 11-24-2019

Introduction

John Wooden, the eminently successful basketball coach at UCLA during its dynasty years, was asked his secret in producing stellar teams. His answer: "We master the basics. We drill over and over again on the fundamentals." - *Moody Monthly*, September, 1989, p. 4.

- Five weeks on the five chapters of 1 Thessalonians.
- On the topic of The Basics of the Christian Life: Happiness in God in a Hostile Culture
- First or one of the first epistles of Paul (49-51 AD)
- Thessalonica: A Hostile and Immoral Metropolitan City (Acts 17)
- Gospel Call: To be counter-cultural
- Chapter Themes
 1. The Nature of True Conversion
 2. **The Nature of True Gospel Ministry**
 3. The Testing of Our Faith
 4. The Temptation of Life in a Fallen World
 5. The Day of the Lord

Last Week: Chapter 1

The Nature of True Conversion

Theme: response to tribulation

“Those speak foolishly who ascribe their anger or their impatience to such as offend them or to tribulation. Tribulation does not make people impatient, but proves that they are impatient. So everyone may learn from tribulation how his heart is constituted.” – Martin Luther

Gospel ministry is the ministry of all believers, especially of preachers.

but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” – Acts 1:8

¹⁰ but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. – 2 Timothy 1:10-11

‘The lay preacher began to deliver a homespun discourse in his broad Essex dialect: “This is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand pounds a year to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look.

“But then the text says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Ay! many on ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. You’ll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some say look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, “Look unto *Me*.” Some on ye say, “We must wait for the Spirit’s workin.” You have no business with that just now. Look to *Christ*. The text says, ‘Look unto *Me*.’ ”

Assuming the perspective of Jesus, the preacher continued: “Look unto *Me*; I am sweatin’ great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin’ on the cross. Look unto Me, I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sitting at the Father’s right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!”

After he had spoken for about ten minutes, the layman apparently reached the end of his tether. Then, fixing his eyes on Spurgeon, he startled him by saying, “Young man, you look very miserable. And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you don’t obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.” Then raising his hands, he literally shouted: “Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!”

Far from taking offense at being singled out, Spurgeon at once saw the way of salvation. He hardly noticed anything the lay exhorter said after that, so taken was he with that one thought: “I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word—‘Look!’—what a charming word it seemed to me. ... There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun. And I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, ‘Trust Christ, and you shall be saved.’ ”

When Spurgeon arrived back home early that afternoon, his family immediately noticed the dramatic change that had come over him. His despair was gone, and he was overflowing with joy. “Something wonderful has happened to you!” they exclaimed. And he was only too eager to tell them all about it. “Oh! there was joy in the household that day,” he afterward reported, “when all heard that the eldest son had found the Savior and knew himself to be forgiven.” – vancechristie.com

Ministry and Opposition (1-2)

¹ For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain (empty or empty handed), ² but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition (agony).

How is suffering a hindrance to us? How do we overcome it?

- We can see the evidence of God's work/grace in other people's lives and, to some degree, in our own
- Past suffering can hinder future obedience
- Open doors for the gospel may not mean the absence of opposition
- Boldness to speak in the face of opposition requires conviction and compassion
- The gospel is the good news of God – from God, about God, to the glory of God.

‘At the Nicene Council, an important church meeting in the 4th century A.D., of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith. - Vance Havner.

⁵ Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ... ²⁰ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. – Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21

²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. – Acts 4:29-31

for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. – 1 Corinthians 16:9

“The Gospel cannot be truly preached without offense and tumult.” —The Table Talk of Martin Luther

Ministry and Personal Gain (3-6)

³ For our exhortation does not *come* from error (wandering, ie, from the truth) or impurity (uncleanness) or by way of deceit (guile); ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.

⁵ For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— ⁶ nor did we seek glory (power, exaltation) from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

What right and wrong ways to use communication?

- We are not to speak/minister by making people feel good (error/flattering speech)
- We are not to speak/minister by trying to get something from people (impurity/pretext for greed)
- We are not to speak/minister in order to control people (way of deceit/seek glory from men ... might have asserted our authority)
- We are not to 'please' (flatter) in order to get our 'pleasure' (greed) and secure 'power' (glory)
- We are to speak/minister as stewards of a divine message
- We are to speak/minister to please God

The Prosperity Gospel

'The prosperity gospel (also known as the "health and wealth gospel" or by its most popular brand, the "Word of Faith" movement) is a perversion of the gospel of Jesus that claims that God rewards increases in faith with increases in health and/or wealth. As Stephen Hunt explains,

In the forefront is the doctrine of the assurance of "divine" physical health and prosperity through faith. In short, this means that "health and wealth" are the automatic divine right of all Bible-believing Christians and may be procreated by faith as part of the package of salvation, since the Atonement of Christ includes not just the removal of sin, but also the removal of sickness and poverty.

What makes the prosperity gospel a false gospel?

David W. Jones outlines five errors of prosperity gospel teaching:

1. The Abrahamic covenant is a means to material entitlement.
2. Jesus's atonement extends to the "sin" of material poverty.
3. Christians give in order to gain material compensation from God.
4. Faith is a self-generated spiritual force that leads to prosperity.
5. Prayer is a tool to force God to grant prosperity.

"In light of Scripture, the prosperity gospel is fundamentally flawed," Jones says. "At bottom, it is a false gospel because of its faulty view of the relationship between God and man. Simply put, if the prosperity gospel is true, grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant, and man is the measure of all things. Whether they're talking about the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, giving, faith, or prayer, prosperity teachers turn the relationship between God and man into a *quid pro quo* transaction."

Where did the prosperity gospel come from?

The prosperity gospel originated as an offshoot of Pentecostalism in post-World War II America. While it started in local congregations and in tent revivals, the movement gained a larger following through the use of radio and television, and became firmly entrenched in the 1980s with the rise of “televangelism.”

While not all prosperity gospel preachers are Pentecostal or charismatic (and most charismatic and Pentecostal Christians are not associated with the prosperity gospel), the movement is still largely connected to revivalist and charismatic churches. This has made it easier for the movement to gain traction in Africa, South America, and other areas of the world where Pentecostalism is rapidly expanding.

Who preaches the prosperity gospel?

The man who could be considered the father of modern prosperity gospel teaching is Oral Roberts. The faith-healing evangelist became so influential that he started his own school, Oral Roberts University (ORU). At the height of his influence, Roberts oversaw a ministry that brought in \$110 million in annual revenue.

Kenneth Copeland, a student at ORU who served as a pilot and chauffeur for Oral Roberts, also became one of the most notorious (and wealthiest) of prosperity preachers. These men paved the way for the televangelists who became famous in the 1980s, including Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Benny Hinn, Pat Robertson, and Robert Tilton.

Today, some of the best-known prosperity teachers are Creflo Dollar, T. D. Jakes, Guillermo Maldonado, Joel Osteen, and Paula White.

How can we identify a prosperity gospel preacher?

In a 2014 sermon, John Piper outlined six keys to detecting the prosperity gospel:

1. The absence of a serious doctrine of the biblical necessity and normalcy of suffering, the absence of a doctrine of suffering.
2. The absence of a clear and prominent doctrine of self-denial is a tip off that something is amiss.
3. The absence of serious exposition of Scripture.
4. The absence of dealing with tensions in Scripture.
5. Church leaders who have exorbitant lifestyles.
6. A prominence of self and a marginalization of the greatness of God. – Joe Carter

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. – Ephesians 4:29

These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their *own* lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an* advantage. – Jude 1:16

¹⁰ For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain. – Titus 1:10-11

Ministry and Motherhood (7-8)

⁷ But we proved to be gentle (kind, mild) among you, as a nursing *mother* (nurse, mother) tenderly cares (cherish, comfort) for her own children. ⁸ Having so fond an affection (longing for, desiring earnestly) for you, we were well-pleased (thought it good) to impart (to give a share of) to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives (souls), because you had become very dear (beloved) to us.

How should we minister to others like mothers?

- The context of speaking is tender care.
- The context of speaking is fond affection.
- The context of speaking is sacrificial living.

John Newton's care for William Cowper

The phrase “habitual tenderness” is Newton’s own phrase to describe the way a believer should live. In writing to a friend he describes the believer’s life: “He believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him an habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit” (The Works of the Rev. John Newton, Vol. 1, p. 170). It is plain already what some of the roots of tenderness are in that sentence, but before we look at them more closely let’s get some snapshots of this man’s “habitual tenderness.” ...

When Cowper’s brother died in 1770, Newton resolved to help him by collaborating with him in writing hymns for the church. These came to be known as *The Olney Hymns*. But soon Cowper was emotionally unable to carry through his part of the plan. Newton pressed on writing one hymn a week without Cowper until there were well over 300. Sixty-seven are attributed to William Cowper (Ibid). The last hymn that Cowper composed for the Olney Hymns was “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” which he entitled “Light Shining out of Darkness.” The next day, in January 1773, he sank into the blackest depression and never went to hear Newton preach again. Newton preached his funeral sermon seven years later and explained what happened and how he responded.

He drank tea with me in the afternoon. The next morning a violent storm overtook him. . . . I used to visit him often but no argument could prevail with him to come and see me. He used to

point with his finger to the church and say: “You know the comfort I have had there and how I have seen the glory of the Lord in His house, and until I go there I’ll not go anywhere else.” He was one of those who came out of great tribulations. He suffered much here for twenty-seven years, but eternity is long enough to make amends for all. For what is all he endured in this life, when compared with the rest which remaineth for the children of God (Richard Cecil, *The Life of John Newton*, edited by Marylynn Rouse, pp. 129–130).

What would most of us have done with a depressed person who could scarcely move out of his house? William Jay summed up Newton’s response: “He had the tenderest disposition; and always judiciously regarded his friend’s depression and despondency as a physical effect, for the removal of which he prayed, but never reasoned or argued with him concerning it” (Ibid., p. 282). – John Piper’s short biography on John Newton

²⁴ The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. – 2 Timothy 2:24-26

Ministry and Fatherhood (9-12)

⁹ For you recall (remember), brethren, our labor (trouble) and hardship (toil), *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden (weigh down) to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly (piously) and uprightly (righteously) and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹ just as you know how we *were* exhorting (urge) and encouraging (comfort) and imploring (testifying, affirming) each one of you as a father *would* his own children, ¹² so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

How should we minister to others like fathers?

- The context of speaking is working hard not to be a burden.
- The context of speaking is doing what is right.
- The context of speaking is a fatherly sense of responsibility.

John Newton’s Counsel to a Friend

‘In a letter about controversy, he wrote a friend:

“As to your opponent, I wish, that, before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord’s teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write. . . . (If he is a believer,) in a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now. Anticipate that period in your thoughts. . . . (If he is an unconverted person,) he is a more proper object of your compassion than your anger.

Alas! “He knows not what he does.” But you know who has made you to differ (Ibid., p. 269). – John Piper’s short biography on John Newton

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

²⁵ “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶ Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. – Acts 20:17-32

Ministry and the Word (13)

¹³ For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work (works) in you who believe.

What is it that we really want people to respond to?

- What people need to hear is the Word of God (or a Word from God)
- What people need to receive is the Word of God (not us, per se)
- What people need to believe is that the Word of God is really the Word of God
- It is the Word of God that changes people, not us

Martin Luther

"Take me, for example. I opposed indulgences and all papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip of Amsdorf the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all. Had I wanted to start trouble.... I could have started such a little game at Worms that even the emperor wouldn't

have been safe. But what would it have been? A mug's game. I did nothing: I left it to the Word." (Luther's Works)

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. – Hebrews 4:12

“People will only see Jesus in us if they hear about him from us. There is no gospel without words.” —John Piper, from No Global Mission Without God’s Mighty Spirit

Ministry and Salvation (14-16)

¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, ¹⁵ who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile (opposed) to all men, ¹⁶ hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

Why is opposition to God’s Word so significant?

- Holding on to the Word in the midst of opposition is evidence of salvation.
- Opposing the Word is evidence of being hostile to God, no matter what you say.
- Our speaking to unbelievers is a necessary means of their salvation.

³ By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. – 1 John 2:3-6

Ministry and Joy in God (17-20)

¹⁷ But we, brethren, having been taken away from you (to make an orphan of) for a short while (an appointed hour) —in person (face), not in spirit (heart) —were all the more eager with great desire (lust, strong desire) to see your face. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once (once and twice) —and *yet* Satan hindered (impeded, detained) us. ¹⁹ For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation (boasting)? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy (ie, the fruit of gospel ministry, not ultimately and yet it is traced back to God).

How do people factor into our joy in God?

- Physical absence does not mean that people do not care.
- True ministry is focused on the person not the performance.
- Satan is a real opposition that we face.

- Joy in God is not separated from joy in God's people.
- Changed lives are the 'glory' of a faithful ministry.

Thank you for giving to the Lord song – Ray Boltz

And he said, "Friend you may not know me now."
And then he said, "But wait,
You used to teach my Sunday School
When I was only eight.
And every week you would say a prayer
Before the class would start.
And one day when you said that prayer,
I asked Jesus in my heart."

Thank you for giving to the Lord.
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord.
I am so glad you gave.

Then another man stood before you
And said, "Remember the time
A missionary came to your church
And his pictures made you cry.
You didn't have much money,
But you gave it anyway.
Jesus took the gift you gave
And that's why I'm here today."

One by one they came
Far as the eye could see.
Each life somehow touched
By your generosity.
Little things that you had done,
Sacrifices made,
Unnoticed on the earth
In heaven, now proclaimed.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. – 1 John 1:1-4