

## 2. Preserving Relationships (3Q 2012—1 and 2 Thessalonians)

**Biblical material:** Acts 17:5–9, 10–15, 16–34; 1 Cor. 1:18–2:2; 1 Thess. 2:17–3:10.

### Quotes

- You can kiss your family and friends good-bye and put miles between you, but at the same time you carry them with you in your heart, your mind, your stomach, because you do not just live in a world but a world lives in you. *Frederick Buechner*
- Our greatest joy—and our greatest pain—come in our relationships with others. *Stephen R. Covey*
- Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships. *Stephen R. Covey*
- The quality of your life is the quality of your relationships. *Anthony Robbins*
- Almost all of our relationships begin and most of them continue as forms of mutual exploitation, a mental or physical barter, to be terminated when one or both parties run out of goods. *Wiston Auden*
- Eighty percent of life's satisfaction comes from meaningful relationships. *Brian Tracy*
- Almost all of our sorrows spring out of our relations with other people. *Arthur Schopenhauer*

### Questions

What does this study show us about relationship and the gospel? What was Paul's motivation for his missionary journeys? How does this relate to the situation in our day? On a wider scale as part of the great controversy, what does this study have to say about how we are Gods witnesses? What of the approaches Paul used—what can we learn from them?

### Bible summary

Acts 17 continues the story of how Paul worked to share the gospel not only with the Thessalonians but with many more in the other cities of Macedonia. Even though he was busy with what he was doing wherever he was, he still remembered those he had met. That's the reason for his letters—to stay in touch with those who had accepted the good news of Jesus. Paul writes to his new friends in Thessalonica, telling them he has been anxious to return and visit them again. "After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy." 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20 NLT.

This shows the depth of Paul's commitment to preserving his relationship with those who are young in the faith, wanting them to succeed and doing all he can to encourage and help them. He tells them he prays earnestly for them, and he sends his co-worker Timothy to them (1 Thess. 3:1-10). He mentions his visit to Athens, when he spoke on Mars Hill using a philosophical approach. He seems to have decided that approach had not been too successful and he speaks to this in 1 Cor. 1:18-2:2. His

argument is that the message is God's, even though it is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Greeks...

### **Comment**

“Paul must not have been satisfied with the outcome of his encounter with the philosophers of Athens, for in Corinth he decides to take a more direct approach to the Greek mind. In doing so, he does not reject the idea of ‘meeting people where they are,’ for he clearly promotes such an approach in the same letter (*1 Cor. 9:19–23*). What he demonstrates in Athens and Corinth is that the process of meeting people where they are is not an exact science; it requires constant learning and adjustment.” (Wednesday’s lesson).

This study shows that Paul was willing to use a variety of approaches in presenting the good news. While some seem to have worked better than others, he recognized that one method does not reach everyone, and that the presentation of the good news does need to take into account the audience. In the same way that Jesus saw every opportunity to share the good news as a unique event, so must we. This is why a “formula” Bible study can never work as a substitute for a true discussion using God’s word that addresses individual interests and concerns.

The essential “take-home message” here is that we do not see people as “evangelistic contacts” but as personal friends we want to help and stay in touch with. Paul shows genuine concern for those who have accepted the gospel, wanting to know how they are progressing and trying to do all he can to help them. As his other letters show he is willing even to take the risk of being misunderstood by condemning sin and confronting error—but this comes from a heart that truly loves and has great concern.

In this way Paul reflects his loving Lord, who was willing to call those arrogant people who thought they had achieved the law “whitened sepulchers full of dead men’s bones.” Not because he wished to cause them pain, but because he wanted them to respond and accept his healing salvation.

We have much to learn of Jesus’ love. In the way that Paul truly loved his extending family of fellow-believers, we need to truly love and care for our fellow brothers and sisters—seeing in every last one a unique individual who needs to know God’s love for them. In this way we will wish to preserve our relationships.

### **Ellen White Comments**

All the discourses that we give are plainly to reveal that we are waiting, working, and praying for the coming of the Son of God. His coming is our hope. This hope is to be bound up with all our words and works, with all our associations and relationships.-- Letter 150, 1902. {Ev 220}

We are all woven together in the great web of humanity, and whatever we can do to benefit and uplift others will reflect in blessing upon ourselves. The law of mutual dependence runs through all classes of society.--PP 534, 535 (1890). {2MCP 431}

It is through the social relations that Christianity comes in contact with the world. Every man or woman who has tasted of the love of Christ and has received into the heart the divine illumination is required of God to shed light on the dark pathway of those who are unacquainted with the better way.... Social power, sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, must be improved to win souls to the Saviour. --4T 555 (1881). {2MCP 622}

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