

# St. Paul: On The Same page

09.01.13 Week #262

**Day One:** Deut. 30:15-20

*This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life...*

Are we really faced with life and death decisions?

Every time you drive a car you make a series of life and death decisions. It would require only a slight twist of the wheel to move your car a few feet into the wrong lane. A press of your foot on the gas instead of the brake could end a life. In driving, and in many other things, tragedy can be only inches away.

And yet we don't do those things. Why? We choose to safeguard our own lives and the lives of others because we know how precious they are.

Is it a burden to choose life? Sometimes it does mean going out of our way. Sometimes it does mean slowing down or delaying our own progress. But we know it's worthwhile, for the sake of life.

*"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life..."*

Deuteronomy 30:19

Over the years, you've made choices about sexual morality, about drinking, speaking, spending, friends, work and play that had lifelong consequences, for good or bad. They brought blessing or harm. Was it really a burden to choose the better thing? Or was it a gift that you always had an option that led to blessing?

Yes, God warns us against rebellion. But he sets before us LIFE. And the price to choose it? ...It's free. It's his gift to us in Christ.

*Prayer: Father, you know that I have often made foolish choices. I am weak and sinful. Lead me. Help me. And bless me with the love you have shown me in Jesus. Amen.*

**Day Two: Philemon 1-21**  
*I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.*

Onesimus (pronounced oh-NESS-ee-muss) was a slave who came to faith in Jesus. Paul asks Philemon to release him from his slavery. To us that seems like an obvious step. But would you do it?

Remember, many people in those days were “slaves” because of their debt. They were working off a financial obligation. What if someone owed you a large sum of money and was slowly paying it back... and then that person skipped town, leaving you in the hole?

Now you hear from your former pastor and friend that your debtor has repented, come to faith in Jesus, and that the pastor wants him to work for the church. He asks you to forgive the debt so that this person, now your brother in Christ, can serve freely. Would you write off the debt and lose the money?

Now it seems harder, doesn't it? We'd never make someone a slave, but we do think it's fair to hold them to their debts. And sometimes we extend that to non-financial debts. We hold onto grudges, keeping people waiting before we are willing to forgive them. But just like slavery kept Onesimus from serving Paul, we may keep people from serving with us in God's church just because we hold something against them.

God asked a lot of Philemon, but he had given Philemon much more. God may be asking a lot of you, but he has given you eternal life and forgiveness for all of your debt to him.

Is there someone who has a debt to you that God would ask you to forgive in order that you may serve together in his kingdom?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to be a generous person, but it's so hard to just let go of what others owe to me. Hold before my eyes the constant memory of the debt that I owed to you, dear Lord. And lead me to share that gift with others. Amen.*

**Day Three:** Luke 14:25-35

*“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

Hate? How could Jesus tell us to “hate” anyone?

Before you get hung up on Jesus saying that you need to hate your father and mother and wife and children, what does it mean that you are to even hate your “own life”? He is not using the word “hate” in an emotional sense, the way we usually do. But he is talking about letting go of something that we would normally value above every other thing. He is telling us about what must come first.

This is a stronger way of expressing his instruction, “seek first the kingdom of God... and all these things will be added to you.”

The airline safety lecture tells us to put on our own oxygen mask first before assisting others. That’s not hateful. It only makes sense. It’s a case of first things first.

Our oxygen mask is the cross. If we are not living

under Jesus’ cross ourselves, we will have no life or love to share with anyone else. Is that the order of things in your life?

Many times we want Jesus to come into our lives in order that we may have other things. The things we value most are the love of our family members and friends, comfort, peace, prosperity, and happiness. We want those things, and we’re willing to let Jesus take charge if he’ll promise that we will be blessed.

But Jesus says that’s backwards. Even if we could have all those things, they would be worthless without him. We would have those things in an empty way, in a living death, if we did not have life in him.

Jesus is first, because Jesus is the Son of God and source of life. And we trust him for all that follows after.

*Prayer: Dearest Jesus, pry open my fingers. Help me to let go of all those things that I cling to so tightly. And fill me with your Spirit so that I will trust you to give back to me all that you know is best. Amen.*

## Day Four:

*Some back-to-school things to think about...*

I confess. I watched the video of the Miley Cyrus performance at the MTV music awards show.

I watched it because it was talked about so much in the news, but if you have not seen it, don't bother. Not only is it offensive, crude, and immoral, but it's also bad music, lousy dancing, poor singing, and a strong sign that our culture is nearing the end of its road.

Why do I bring this up? Because the filth and corruption of the society around us is a strong reminder of how important it is for us to be about the business of teaching moral, cultural values of our own. I don't just mean etiquette or modesty. I mean teaching values... literally, what is of value and what is not of value.

We make great sacrifices to provide a Christian elementary school and preschool for that purpose. But that's not nearly enough. What we really need is for all of us, even those of us without children at home, to

be involved in "home schooling."

It is in our homes that everyone sees what we watch, how we occupy our time, what is most important to us. It is in what mom and dad, aunt and uncle and neighbor, do at home and how we speak there that the next generation will discover that Miley Cyrus and Robin Thicke are not examples of what real men and women are like.

You are probably not a celebrity. You may never be seen on TV. But wherever God has called you to serve, you have the chance to teach others this lesson: God cares about them as his children. They are not valued for their youth or beauty or money or talent. They are precious in God's sight because they are his children. And your care and respect for them is a sign of God's love for them.

It's back to school time. And you are a teacher.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, as the children go back to school, I know that I need to learn and grow as well. Thank you for the gift of a partnership in this congregation with my brothers and sisters in Christ. Help us be a blessing to one another in the year to come. Amen.*