

The Heart of Paul's Theology

Lesson 3

Paul and the Thessalonians

Forum



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Contents

Question 1:	Did Paul sin by refusing to take John Mark on his second missionary journey?	1
Question 2:	Why did the Holy Spirit prevent Paul from ministering in Asia?.....	2
Question 3:	What do 1 & 2 Thessalonians teach about the timing of Christ's return?	3
Question 4:	How can we hope in Christ's return without forming inappropriate expectations?	4
Question 5:	How does diligent work in worldly occupations benefit our Christian witness?	6
Question 6:	Who is or was the "man of lawlessness"?	6
Question 7:	How can we discern prophets and false teachers today?	7
Question 8:	How can we affirm hard work without overemphasizing prosperity?	10
Question 9:	Is laxity always a sin?	11
Question 10:	What can younger, poorer Christians learn from the example of older, well-to-do Christians?	13
Question 11:	How do we deal with churches and church leaders that advocate false teachings?	14
Question 12:	When is it legitimate to leave a church?	14
Question 13:	What unique contributions do Paul's letters to the Thessalonians make to our theology?	15
Question 14:	Why did Paul say that believers that had died were "asleep"?	16
Question 15:	How should Christ's imminent return impact our view of building the kingdom?.....	17
Question 16:	How does the Holy Spirit separate us from the world without taking us out of the world?	17
Question 17:	How common were forgeries when the Bible was being written?	18

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Forum

With
Dr. Reggie M. Kidd

Students
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Question 1:

Did Paul sin by refusing to take John Mark on his second missionary journey?

Student: Reggie, I'm concerned about the argument over John Mark. First, was he the author of the Gospel of Mark? Secondly, what was the nature of the dispute between him and Paul? Later on in Colossians 4 we learn that the two of them were in prison together. It would seem that they reconciled things. Does that mean Paul committed sin by not going on his missionary journey with Mark?

Dr. Kidd: In the first place, I do think that Mark was the guy who wrote the Gospel According to Mark. It looks like he was recounting Peter's version of the gospel story. And it really is interesting what happens at the beginning of the second missionary journey, because Luke tells us that John Mark had abandoned the mission in the middle of the first missionary journey. Then there is no comment about it, there is no casting blame on John Mark or anything, it's just mentioned. But then at the beginning of the second missionary journey when it's time to go out again, Barnabas wants to bring his nephew, John Mark, along and Paul says, "No, I'm not having it." because he abandoned them. We don't know why John Mark left. We don't know if he was lonely and missed his mother back in Jerusalem. We don't know if he got upset because at the beginning of the first missionary journey, Luke keeps describing it as being Barnabas and Saul, Barnabas and Saul. His relative seems to be in charge. And then somewhere on the island of Cyprus there is a transition and when it's time for Saul to go speak to the Roman governor, who happens to share one of Paul's Roman names; he is Sergius Paulus. Saul is his Jewish name Paul is his Roman name. He starts using the Roman name whereas before he had just used his Jewish name and all of the sudden the narrative starts becoming Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Barnabas. And it looks like there was a transition in leadership in the mission. It could be that John Mark kind of felt like his relative had been muscled aside; we just don't know. But we know that it was a huge disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. And what it means in the short-run is that the mission multiplies because at the beginning of the second missionary journey instead of Paul and Barnabas working together in tandem, Barnabas takes his nephew John Mark and goes

back down to Cyprus. But Paul picks up Silas and then they head off into Turkey and go for the second missionary journey.

And then it looks like some 10 years later, like you said in Colossians 4, John Mark is now with Paul and then later on in 2 Timothy 4 at the very end of Paul's ministry just as he faces martyrdom, he asks Timothy to bring John Mark along with him and there's an expression of real warmth towards him. Now what's interesting is, you ask whether Paul sinned or whatever, what is interesting is that Luke never casts judgment in the matter and doesn't blame either party. And apparently, Paul and Barnabas split in such a way that neither of them kind of force the other to take a position or to go be repentant or anything like that. They just kind of left it open-ended and over a period of time, the Lord worked things out. And what's important for us is to recognize that they didn't push each other into a kind of disagreement that would be fatal to their relationship, and they gave each other time. And apparently over time the Lord worked his grace and changed somebody's heart and I think that is the important takeaway for us. Sometimes it's just impossible to say who's right and who's wrong. What is important is to keep the relationship intact as much as you can and then give the Lord time to work in your heart and the other heart and the work of the cross will eventually have its way.

Question 2:

Why did the Holy Spirit prevent Paul from ministering in Asia?

Student: Reggie, I was wondering why would the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 16 refuse to allow Paul to go on to Asia to bring the gospel? Isn't it generally a good thing for the gospel to go wherever it can? What would bring that upon to play in this situation and what kind of modern applications can we derive from that?

Dr. Kidd: Well, Andrew you are absolutely right. It is a good thing to go preach the gospel wherever you want to and it looks like Paul wanted to preach in Asia and he wanted to go into Northern Asian minor, which is Bithynia. And I'm sure there were a lot of people that the Lord eventually had his eye on up there but the problem is Paul couldn't be two places at once and as the narrative goes on in Acts 16 it's clear that the Lord wanted Paul to go across to Europe because the next thing that happened is that Paul winds up in Troas which is on the Western coast of Asia Minor which is ancient Troy and it's there that he has a vision from the Macedonian who says, "Come across to us." And Paul hears the yes there that is the reason for the no to minister to Asia and Bithynia.

Personally, I would have been so fascinated if the Lord had let Paul go up to Bithynia because one of the guys that is most fascinating to me from that whole period is a guy who would have been a young man when Paul was ministering named Dio Chrysostom who was a philosopher who grew up in Bithynia where Paul couldn't go and like I could so easily imagine Paul and Dio Chrysostom getting together and if Dio Chrysostom had become a Christian there might have been a whole new philosophical wave. But I don't

know, for some reason the Lord wanted Paul in Europe to take the gospel there and not to go into Bithynia at that time. And Jacques Ellul has this incredible book called *Betrayal of the West*. He was a famous French Christian Sociologist. You're a sociologist aren't you Michael? You would know Jacques Ellul.

Student: Yeah.

Dr. Kidd: Well, Ellul says the most significant act in all of Western History was when Paul in this itinerary got on that boat and sailed from Western Asia Minor across to Europe. It was more significant than Xerxes trying to go across to conquer the Europeans. It was more significant than Alexander the Great going over to conquer as much land as much land as he could over in Persia. The most significant thing, according to Ellul, was the gospel of Jesus Christ taking hold in Europe in the middle of the second missionary journey. So why didn't Paul go and why did the Lord say, no don't go to Northern Asia Minor, it's because I've got designs on Europe and for now you need to follow me and go where I tell you to go. And if there is a takeaway for us, well you know one of the Proverbs says, Proverbs 16:9, "The mind of a man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." This is a great example. Go for it with all you got but you have to listen to the Lord and when the Lord says, "No don't go there. Go there instead" it is because he has a good reason to go here instead.

Question 3:

What do 1 & 2 Thessalonians teach about the timing of Christ's return?

Student: In my lifetime many people have made predictions about Christ's return but none of them ever seem to come true. But people don't seem to get discouraged by that, they just make new predictions and hold fast to those. Is there anything in Paul's teaching in Thessalonians that can apply to our situation?

Dr. Kidd: Mike, that's a great question and I've lived longer than you, so I've seen them come and go too. I remember when I was in grad school, it was "88 Reasons Why the Lord is coming back in '88" and then the next year it was "89 Reason Why the Lord is coming back in '89." But you know the good thing is people know that he has got to come back. And we live in a world of sin and suffering, and he is Lord, and his Lordship just has to be manifest throughout all creation. I don't know about you, but I went to a lot of exams when I was in college just kind of doing a little rapture drill. "Lord, you know, it would be okay with me if you came back right now." And we have this sense that his return is something that we need, and we lean into it. So I can understand if some people are so committed to it that they are willing to listen to the promise of all the misery being taken care of like next year and just letting themselves get to next year. And then, kind of getting the "Ok, maybe we misread it. Maybe next year." But that can — I don't know if you guys have seen it — it can be really abusive too, like some teachers we have seen in

our time who use their made-up promises of when he is coming back to get people to do all kind of weird things.

Student: What about the people who live as though he hasn't returned yet in a different kind of way?

Dr. Kidd: People who, they are not worried about it and are just kind of living for themselves and they have lost the sense of urgency. Yeah, I have known people like that, have you?

Student: Yeah, I live like that sometimes.

Question 4: **How can we hope in Christ's return without forming inappropriate expectations?**

Student: Well, how do you get people to see the importance of the hope of Christ's return without jumping right into the predictions that are so rampant that you were just talking about? How do you find a balance between the two, of a practical atheism and not having eschatology on one hand and then this over-emphasized jump towards all of the end times type of things that we see?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I think one of the things to do, is to continue to point people back to the resurrection of Christ. And we were talking about the Thessalonians right now but it's really Corinthians where Paul has to argue that the most strongly because here are people who, they recognize that Jesus' body isn't in a tomb anymore but they've lost the connection between his resurrection and the need for their own resurrection. So my tendency is to point people to Jesus' resurrection but to remind them that Jesus' resurrection only means something because it's the beginning of our resurrection. You know, Paul calls it the first fruits of the resurrection back then.

In fact, in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming there is a great picture of this because there is this incredible, beautiful geyser named Beehive that only goes off every couple of days. And the only way that you know that that big geyser is going to go off is there is an indicator that goes off about 20 minutes before it happens and they have volunteers stationed out there to watch for the little indicator to go and as soon as the indicator goes, they know that the big geyser is going to go and then they get on the loudspeaker and tell everybody in the park, no matter what you are doing get over to Beehive because it is going to be spectacular. And for Paul, Jesus' resurrection is like that little indicator and once that indicator goes, Jesus' resurrection, Paul knows it is just a matter of time before the whole geyser goes and that would be our general resurrection. And the privilege that

we have is to between his resurrection and our resurrection and to get on the loudspeaker and call everybody to come.

So I think the big job for us is to continue painting the picture for people of what the real Christian story is. The move from the creation of us to be God's showcase, to the fall where we lost it, and then his sending his son to be the one in whom it all is going to be remade. And it has to be remade not just on the inside in our spirits but in our bodies and throughout the whole cosmos. And to just keep that in front of people, but not to let people get so sure that they know when it's going to happen that they start getting into silly behavior. And here is where we get back to the Thessalonian letters. Paul's interest is in helping people understand in the first place if people have died, they haven't lost out on the resurrection. God is going to raise them up. And one of the reasons he writes 1 Thessalonians is to assure these people that when the Lord comes back, the people who are in the ground they're going up first before all of us who happen to be living on the earth.

And then secondly, he wants them to know that they don't have to be worried about all these reports that seem to have been circulating back in his time about you know "Ok, Paul said the day of the Lord has already come and we even have this letter that he was supposed to have written." He says, "Look folks, things are going to have to happen." That there is this man of lawlessness that is going to have to emerge, and he is going to have to have this similar kind of complex of miracles around him that were like the one that he is purporting to represent himself, this man of lawlessness instead of the true obedient law keeper, Jesus. And he is going to set himself up in the temple whether that means a physical temple in Palestine or whether it means the church as the true and living temple of the living God. That's the prospect that really scares me, is this man of lawlessness getting in charge of the church and just making things really, really bad for believers. But for Paul, when that stuff happens — and the Lord is not coming back until that stuff happens — but when that stuff happens, we are all going to know it. And it's not going to be, so-and-so said or so-and-so said. We are going to know. So, he wants us to know that when the stuff starts going down, that means he is coming back we will all know.

And then the third things he wants us to understand is that our job, all of us between now and then no matter whether it's tomorrow, next year, ten thousand years from now is to live in a certain kind of way. And those are the ethics of chapter 4 in terms of our marital relationships and our sexual fidelity. We don't get into misbehavior. When it comes to relationships with one another, we practice brotherly love and when it comes to our jobs and vocations we don't go live on the side of some mountain and say, "Oh, you'll take care of me because the Lord is coming back." He has given us work to do. Some of us have so-called secular jobs and our job is to go do that to the Lord. Some of us will have more formally vocational ministry jobs and our job is to go tell them about the indicator geyser that's gone and the general resurrection that's going to come. And we are all called to tell that story and we are called to live in a certain way.

Question 5:
How does diligent work in worldly occupations benefit our Christian witness?

Student: What are some of the benefits, in terms of evangelism and living out a witness before unbelievers, what are some of the benefits of living a hardworking life, if you will?

Dr. Kidd: Man, that is a great question because for Paul just living that life is part of the witness. One of the things he talks about to the Thessalonians is he reminds them of his own manner of living among them like in chapter 2. And he talks about the way he had loved God well, the way he had respected them well, and the way he had not been motivated by greed and false motives and just trying to get them to like him. And Greek thinkers had this sense of there is this ideal of what it is to be a genuine, full human being, to love God, and to do right by others and to have self-control. But there is also a lot of thinking among Greek philosophers about how do we get the resources to do that? And one of the things that Christians modeled was not only here's what that life looks like but because of our relationship with Jesus living in us and the Holy Spirit making his life really present to us, we can treat each other differently. We can model a kind of self-control and a genuine care and respect for other people. And you know, Paul talks to the Thessalonians about how you were turned from worshipping idols to worship the living God and just by living out the simple Christian life there is evangelistic power in that and the worse things get in the world the more our just living the Christian life is itself is evangelistic. And often like Peter says in 1 Peter, people will ask, "Why do you live like that? Times are hard and everybody else's lives are being destroyed and you are hurting as bad as anyone else and yet in your tears I see that there's kind of a joy, there's some kind of hope. What's up with that and where does it come from?" And we have the opportunity to tell them.

Question 6:
Who is or was the "man of lawlessness"?

Student: Just to jump back slightly, you mentioned the "man of lawlessness." I mean there have always been jumps to who is this person? You know, people tie him to the anti-Christ in 1 John and looking at some of the old Roman leaders and such. But it's always gone down, and we've had a lot of world leaders that have had fatal wounds to the head and things like that. They always attach that. What do we make of this "man of lawlessness"?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I do think that Paul has in mind somewhere down the road, and he might have anticipated a picture of that in this rotten scoundrel Nero. But Nero, and some people try to say that he was just talking about Nero Claudius being the restraint in all that, but the actual events of Nero's death, it wasn't like he was struck down by the word of God coming out of Jesus' mouth. And you know we are still walking around in non-resurrection bodies, so he clearly wasn't talking about Nero. But it looks like he is looking down the corridors of history, way off into some remote point in time that's not even revealed to him, where the great satanic rebellion against Christ's victory will be personified in one single human being who will be the focal point for this concentration of evil energy that Paul calls the mystery of lawlessness, which he says is already in play in his own time. And just like Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of the resurrection that is to come and the whole era of the spirit is the ministry of that resurrection Spirit who's giving us new life in our inner man in anticipation of the outer resurrection of our whole being and the lighting up of the whole cosmos with his glory.

In the same sort of way, in a sort of reverse mirror image, evil has — a kind of a different evil — has been in place since Jesus' resurrection. Satan's knee-jerk reaction against the mortal wound that was inflicted on him in Jesus' resurrection. And I think, what we see over time in history is different individuals who were like little — this may not be the best term but it's all I can think of right now — little mini-incarnations of that great final figure. So it might have been Mussolini one day; it might have been Saddam Hussein in another day, or, you know, Osama Bin Laden or, you know, other figures that kind of approximate that kind of sinister leader of darkness. But one day that will all culminate in the guy. And again, I think Paul has the sense that when that guy is on the field, we will all know.

Student: That's that little geyser.

Dr. Kidd: That is a good analogy. There are these little geysers along the way and one day there will be just this intense, like Armageddon kind of evil. Every generation...we know in fact that temporally we are closer but every generation is going to have this understandable sense of "Well, I wonder if it's really us." I wonder if it's really us. And you are going to have those voices in the church that say, "It's us." And who knows how long it's going to be; the benefit to the church is that even when they are wrong, we are continually reminded, "Don't get too comfortable here." We are sojourners and pilgrims and our number one task it to tell people, "The big geyser is going to blow. You'd better be ready."

Question 7:

How can we discern prophets and false teachers today?

Student: Reggie, today we seem to struggle with the same things Paul struggled with in Thessalonica with all of the false prophets that were causing troubles. How do we discern those prophets and test those

prophets as he recommends? What kind of guidelines do we have as they still jump at us today?

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, just turn on the TV and just flip for a little while and you'll find somebody making you mad. And one of the things, I think, that believers struggle with in this is when they hear somebody say something that they know is wrong. Does that mean that everything they say is wrong? And can I trust somebody that tells me anything that's wrong? And Paul himself encouraged people to check him out according to the Word of God. He understood that what he was teaching was the summation of what Scripture had taught and his traveling partner, Luke, commended the noble Bereans for taking the message of the apostles and going to Scripture and checking it out. So Paul tells the believers in Thessalonica to discern the prophecies. By that I think he means, take what's taught to you and go to Scripture and check it out for yourself. Now, in the Old Testament if the prophet was found to be wrong, that was it. They were just stoned and left for dead. It doesn't seem like that's the way things are supposed to work in the New Testament. It looks like the Spirit is given as a general gift to the church and it's our job to listen carefully to what is being taught us and to assess and evaluate. I don't know have you guys ever heard of a teacher who has everything right?

Student: Well, no not at all but it seems like every heretic has his Bible verse. And you know so many of these verses we see in relationship to debates about women in the church, everybody is always jumping to verses in Paul, or spiritual gifts, everybody is always looking to verses to Paul. And everybody has what seems to be very credible arguments from Scripture. I mean, what do you do with that?

Dr. Kidd: Well, like you said, everybody's got their scripture and our job is know the Scripture well enough so we can recognize when somebody's taking something that is only part of the truth and abstracts it from the whole truth. And so, like when it comes to women, you have to go and see what Paul was saying at a particular time and place and then when he is saying "no," you also need to look at the ways he worked with women and like commended Phoebe and I think, sent the letter to the Romans along with Phoebe and expected her to help people sort it out. Well, you have to reconcile is, no, one shouldn't do "X" with the fact that he does have women do "Y," and then you have to assume that he also is ministering out of the same kind of heart that Jesus himself displayed when he was on the earth and he took women aside him and treated them as disciples along with everybody else.

Luke 8, I'm thinking of the women who were called who used their resources to serve the church. I'm thinking of the woman who washed Jesus' feet in chapter 7 of Luke. The Syrophoenician woman in Matthew 15 who is in the heartland of paganism where Jesus had brought the disciples to teach them after he has just taught them in Matthew 15 about it's not something that goes into a person that pollutes them, it's what comes out. And that how he was in this process of coming to make people clean which is going to include Gentiles as well as Jews. And he takes the disciples into Gentile territory, and he

ministers among Gentiles and this woman comes and he says — well, I forget exactly what her words are — “Oh, son of David.” And he just is quiet, and he is waiting to see if that get it and they go, “What? Jesus? This is a pagan Gentile woman.” And he does exactly what he expects them to do and says, “Well, I was only sent to the house of Israel, wasn't I?” I mean just the irony of the whole setting. He has gone to pagan territory obviously to reach pagan people, and they don't get it and she does. She goes — and again I can't remember exactly what she says — but she says, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” And she gets it. And then she goes like, “Well,” — and there is just deep irony in her voice — “I know. Even the dogs get crumbs from the table.” And he goes, “You get it don't you?” So he blesses her.

And the way that the disciples, none of them, the male disciples have no idea what is going on at the resurrection but the women show up. And he shows himself to the women and they go tell the men. So, there is this sense of, there's this heart in Jesus that surely Paul brought over and the whole conversation about how women minister in the church alongside men needs to take that into view. Not ignoring the “no's” but recognizing that there is this larger “yes” that is a part of it as well.

So, it is my understanding that any verse has a larger context. The largest context is the great story that the Scripture is telling of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. And whenever believers listen to any teacher they should be asking whether that person really understands where we are on that storyline. For instance, in the United States today there are teachers who are promising, “you name it, you claim it.” Jesus took all your sicknesses and diseases on himself on the cross, so you have the right to claim freedom from sickness and disease. The Lord blesses those whom he loves, so you have the right to go to God and say, “God, make me rich.” Well, there is just a little problem in the timeline here in the story of moving from creation, through the fall through redemption, to the final consummation. We live in this period of time where sin continues to exist at the same time the kingdom of righteousness has been established. And it means that what is happening in our bodies is that our bodies are going to decay and be corrupted because of the fall.

One day we will be resurrected completely whole. And Paul talks about how our outer man is fading away but our inner man is being renewed from day to day. And that means sometimes he will give us this sort of kiss from the future but none of us is going to get out alive apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And when decay sets into our bodies, it's not because we don't have enough faith. It's because the avenue for us to know Jesus is in the fellowship of his sufferings and the very decay of our bodies has now become a part of the whole redemptive process where he makes himself more sweetly known to us as we know him, as we move into our deaths. And sometimes that's you know, painful cancer. Sometimes it's bang, you are just gone, and the family has to put up with the loss of a breadwinner or a mom or a son or a daughter. And it's precisely that stuff that the resurrection has redeemed, and it is so freeing for God's people just to recognize that the verses that talk about happiness, joy, and you know, complete fulfillment, they are all absolutely true and ours. But we live in this period of the “now and the not yet” where some of those things we get and some of those things we don't but

we always get him in the midst it. I don't know. Have you guys had to work that sort of struggle out yourselves?

Student: Yeah. Every now and then I think about people who are on the low socio-economic bracket and I think about the prosperity preachers that promise them this life that is going to come if you just sow this kind of seed. And then passages like James come to mind where he says to take pride in your humble circumstances.

Dr. Kidd: Yes, exactly.

Student: I wonder, how much should we realize that, for some of us, our lot in life may be our humble circumstances, and maybe some are given more? But what do we tell people in light of all of this false prosperity message that's inundated in church? What do we tell Christians who want to pursue the highest things in life and maybe want to obtain some kind of wealth? I mean, how do we reconcile that and tell them they can do that?

Dr. Kidd: It seems to me that our job is to work hard. And to offer what we can to other people and it's the Lord's job to reward that the way he wants to. The guy I worked for my second job out of seminary, that was his attitude and man, I loved him. I remember we were talking about how much we were going to get paid by the church and whether we should go ask for more. And he said, "You know, I've always figured that my job is to serve and the elders of this church's job is their job to decide how much it's worth. And my call is to do my ministry as unto the Lord." I think that well that really sort of rebuked the envy and the avarice and the greed in me. And it just reminded me that my job is to serve. My job isn't to worry about what the reward is going to be.

Question 8:

How can we affirm hard work without overemphasizing prosperity?

Student: I was just concerned about Christians who, I even think in my life, where I may want to start a business as a young minister outside of the church. And I know that Paul was a tent maker but then I get concerned sometimes that that may be seen as you know, I am consumed by prosperity, and I don't want to mix that message of my ministry and that false message together. So, I just kind of wonder, what can we tell Christians that will encourage them that, yes, they can try to obtain wealth and they can pursue the highest things in life if you will. But without falling victim to being categorized as one of those who have fallen victim to the prosperity message, or you know?

Dr. Kidd: Michael, that's a great point. See if this helps. I think on the one hand, we can offer the general teaching that comes out of the wisdom theology of the Old Testament like the book of Proverbs. That in general, you work hard, you don't be lazy and you will get blessed. But two, there is the problem of the fall. There is the problem of sin. There is this irrationality that is built in. And the book of Ecclesiastes talks about that you know, "What prophet does the wise man have?" And you know you look around and it doesn't look like the people who ought to be in charge are always in charge. And the people who ought to get blessed don't seem to be getting blessed and the people who ought to be getting cursed, they seem to be getting blessed. And we just have to recognize that sin and a certain upside-down-ness and warped-ness of the whole cosmos is in play. But then third, what God is all about is working in the midst of situations that are often upside-down. And it's important for us not necessarily to assume that physical prosperity is a direct blessing of the Lord, nor is physical, even emotional, and financial hardship a curse from the Lord. Those are there because sin abounds. But in the hands of God, those are means by which he molds and shapes his people after his own heart of tenderness and compassion. and he builds character into us. And puts us often in positions where we can go and we can offer care, not from a position of superiority and arrogance but from real fellow understanding.

I know what it is to be poor. I tell you in the last few months, it's been kind of a time when some things in my life that I thought should be going in a certain direction, and have gone in another direction and it hasn't been much fun. And what I found myself doing is going to the Beatitudes where Jesus lays out what it is to be a part of his kingdom. And he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Theirs is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn. They are the ones who will know joy. And blessed are the meek. They're the ones that will inherit the earth." And we just have to recognize that the God who made it all and who has determined that one day it will be perfectly beautiful, pristine, radiant with his glory again has gone through this agonizingly painful, often very dark and dreary looking process to redeem it. But he has so committed himself to it that he has come in the flesh and taken the worst into himself and cares so much about us that he is going to make us over from the inside out. Sometimes that is going to feel good and sometimes it's going to feel bad, but he is conforming us to the image of his Son because he loves us.

Question 9: **Is laxity always a sin?**

Student: Reggie, is laxity always sin? Especially in our culture where we have this idea of working your whole life to somehow, at the end of your life, to retire and do nothing for the rest of your life. Are we called as Christians to be industrious in every circumstance? Is there some point where it's okay for us to get supported by the church?

Dr. Kidd: That's a great question, Michael. And what occasions it is here in the Thessalonians letters, Paul is upset because some people, apparently in view of their expectation that the Lord is coming right back, are not working anymore. And he says, "No, your job is to work with your hands." His sense is that we are all given some sort of gift and ability so that we have something to contribute to other people's wellbeing. And that's part of what it is to bear God's image. And it's important for us to do that. But I also think for Paul, he has got this sense as a person of Jewish heritage that there is supposed to be a rhythm, a Sabbath rhythm so that we don't just burn our batteries over the course of a life so that we just kind of get to the end totally exhausted. I think, I don't see him envisioning us just getting to a place where I've worked and worked and worked and now I just quit. I think his sense is that we work and rest, work and rest all the way through our lives and see our lives being not about amassing material wealth and paying enough dues so that finally we just check out. I think, for him it's about being productive members of societies and communities as long as we possibly can.

Now, it so happens that in the kind of world we live in, lots of people have the opportunity to stop the jobs they have been carrying out for a long period of time and then have resources made available to them so that they don't have to do that anymore. Those people are in a unique position to kind of go into another phase of ministry. I don't know about you guys but I have been in churches where you know we have almost been staffed by people who were accountants, or lawyers, or teachers who now are able to come and do really critical functions in our churches. Have you known people like that?

Student: My parents, essentially, about 10 years outside of retirement, they pretty much called it quits and signed on with a full-time mission, and they're loving it. And even though now all of their friends are retiring, and they can't do all of the stuff they would have liked to even 10 years ago, I mean, they are still just loving every second of it and feeling like they are contributing as much as they can towards the kingdom. It's an encouraging thing for people as well when they go from church to church to talk about their mission, just to tell them their story and say, "I didn't give up. This wasn't the end for me. It was actually just the beginning of the next week. You know, I had my Sabbath rest and then the next week began." And you know, that more than what they are actually doing, just their story encourages people more than anything else.

Dr. Kidd: Well, one of the most inspirational couples I ever knew was a couple I knew who had retired from the New England area and settled in south Florida where I was ministering in a church and God had put prison ministries on their hearts. And this man virtually single-handedly organized prison fellowship ministries in the state penitentiaries in the state of Florida just by the industry with which he went about it. He would set up interviews with wardens and explain what this ministry was all about, and he would go and he would recruit people from churches. And all those years of being a very successful businessman had put him in a position where he could do this and not that many people would have been able to do that. You know, if Anna in Luke 2 could spend decades

serving God's people by praying in the temple, it means that none of us are ever called off the field until the Lord calls us to himself.

Student: Yeah, I even think about my grandparents. They are all well beyond the age of retirement, but they are still so involved in the church. My grandmother is constantly cooking for the church. My grandfather gets us at 5:30 in the morning before his morning service and meets with a group to pray. And my other grandmother, she is well in her 70's and she still works. She does domestic work, and she is just as energetic as 20-year-old or something. So I just really think that's a great model when we see senior saints that don't have this idea that I finally arrived at this age where I can just slow down if you will. But they keep going and they are just so thankful, and they are just so on fire for the Lord. They exhaust themselves for the Kingdom and I think that's just so awesome to see.

Dr. Kidd: Yeah, there is nothing sadder than seeing a person get to a place where they feel like, "Well, I'm done." And they just cocoon and they die long before their bodies give out. And there is nothing more exciting than seeing people in their 70's, 80's and 90's that are just becoming more alive because they understand that God still has a purpose for them.

Question 10:

What can younger, poorer Christians learn from the example of older, well-to-do Christians?

Student: So what kind of lessons does that teach us that aren't at the point of retirement, where we haven't saved up enough money like they have to where they can do this? We still feel like we are just scraping by for the next paycheck, whereas they have saved up all that they need for the next 20 years that they may be alive. How does that impact how we live our lives?

Dr. Kidd: Well, in the first place, to go back to this work/rest pattern, I think it means finding a way along the way to not just let your life just exhaust you. But to find a way to lean into the times that the Lord gives you for refreshment and rest and use those times, really set them aside to look back on the labors of your hands and say, "Thank you, Lord," and get ready for the next round. Second is to save, to go into a disciplined, planned program of setting aside a certain amount of your income and you set aside money for the Lord and you set aside money for the government, and then, like you are paying yourself, set aside money so in the long haul if the Lord gives you enough that you can back off of other labors and be freed up to kind of go into another way of serving him. And that's one of the ways that people can keep themselves from just feeling depressed and behind all the time. Spend less now, save.

Student: You know Reggie, one of the things that encourages me when I get into one of those lazy spells, is we have a deacon at our church and he is 62. And he still plays basketball with us at the Memorial Day picnic and he is real good too. He is running up and down the court and it's unbelievable. And that just kind of encourages me that working hard is something that is all the way throughout your life.

Dr. Kidd: Amen. Well, I hope to be still kicking when I am in my 90s, which is still really far down the line.

Question 11:

How do we deal with churches and church leaders that advocate false teachings?

Student: Reggie, Paul taught the Thessalonians to follow the teachings of the established church rather than the church leaders. What happens when the church leaders are the established church and vice versa? And what do you do when they might be the only church in town? What do you do if they are causing everybody to go astray?

Dr. Kidd: There are times when it becomes clear that church leaders no longer believe the Scriptures, no longer believe the Apostles Creed, no longer believe the Nicene Creed, and the councils that had really established what Christian orthodoxy was by the middle of the 4th century. And sometimes believers in good faith have found themselves having sadly to leave those churches and find other churches. I'd say, number one, that my first job is to go to the church where I am and give them the opportunity to indicate that they believe or don't believe what orthodox Christianity is and call them to the Scriptures and to the faith of historic Christianity. And then if I feel that I am really on the outs, I really want to make sure that I'm just not making a very selfish, pride-driven, anger-driven decision on my own. I really want to be in fellowship with others who know me, who know my own prideful, sinful heart and are praying through this with me. And I don't want to just go and decide to be a Christian all on my own but I want to be in submission to his body someplace.

Question 12:

When is it legitimate to leave a church?

Student: Do you think the decision to leave a church, should that only be a theological decision? Like if you are going to say in the same town and go to a different church, same denomination, you know, similar types of situations. Since there is so much emotional

attachment and spiritual attachment to your brothers at this church, should there be something more or less than a theological decision that should make you change?

Dr. Kidd: Well, Andrew there can be lots of reasons for leaving one church to go to another church. You know, sometimes the Lord can simply, out of your giftedness, call you to serve in another church and that can be done in concert with the leaders of the church that you are in fellowship with. I'm not sure whether you are asking about taste in music or, you know, church "A" does a more liturgical kind of worship, and I would rather have something that's a little bit freer and I want to go over here. As much as I can, I really want to be in submission to the brothers, and I want to honor the commitment that I have made to the body of Christ and particularly to the part of the body of Christ that I am a part of. But it's hard to articulate a one-size fits all philosophy.

Question 13:

What unique contributions do Paul's letters to the Thessalonians make to our theology?

Student: Reggie, do any of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians contribute in a special way to our Christian theology? And what would we be missing in their absence?

Dr. Kidd: That is a great question, Michael. There is some really fun stuff in the letters to the Thessalonians and we would really be missing some good stuff if they weren't here. In the first place, there is nowhere else in Scripture that addresses directly the fact that those who have already died are going to precede those who are on the earth when the Lord comes back again. So, there is great comfort for those of us who have lost loved ones that we need to recognize that they are at no loss for having died. And then from Thessalonians Paul does some teaching in Philippians 1 and in 2 Corinthians 5 about the fact that those who have died are present with the Lord but even they are waiting until the Lord comes back again. But the real contribution of the Thessalonians letters is just to let us know that we can be encouraged because those who have already died in the Lord are not gone and that they will be with us. They will be with the Lord. In fact they will go before those who are still on the earth.

Secondly, he lets us know that we don't have to figure it all out about when he is coming back. He says, "He will come back. There will be this great epiphany, there will be this parousia, and between now and then there is just some stuff that is going to have to get worked out, and we can relax, and we can let the Lord take care of that. Meanwhile we can go about doing our jobs and living for the Lord."

And the third thing that Paul does in this letter that is really helpful — and I wish it had been paid more attention to over the history of the church — is in warning about people who are obsessed with the Lord's concern. He addresses two problems that often come

up when people get all hot and bothered about the Lord's return. In the first place, in chapter 4 as soon as he raises the question about times and seasons, he talks about the need not to engage in sexual misbehavior. He talks about living with integrity and holiness in that aspect of your life. And unfortunately, often when leaders get into this real speculative stuff about when the Lord's coming back again, in the back door they are starting to abuse their relationship to make improper sexual advances and breakdown all kinds of normal rules for how men and women are to treat one another. And the second thing that he talks about is people are stopping working and he says, "No, you need to keep working with your hands."

So, the one problem is just something that is just kind of anticipating that could happen, sexual misbehavior and kind of warning people off of. But the other is something that has actually come up in these communities where people are not working anymore, they are just sitting back letting everyone else take care of them while they just wait for the Lord to return. And it's really nice to have Paul already speaking to these kinds of problems that come up often when people get into speculation about the end times.

Question 14:

Why did Paul say that believers that had died were "asleep"?

Student: In 1 Thessalonians, Reggie, Paul described the people who had already died as being "asleep." Was he referring to soul sleep or what exactly is this period after death that Paul is describing?

Dr. Kidd: The language of sleep means, as far it looks, their bodies are still. But from what he says in Philippians 1 and 2 Corinthians 5, we know that he also believes that those people are present with the Lord. And so what has happened is that their bodies are at rest but their souls are with the Lord in heaven and they are enjoying some sort of fellowship with the Lord. He says, "It would be better when I die because I will present with the Lord. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." What is interesting is that he doesn't speculate a lot about what that existence is, but we get a window of insight into it in the book of Revelation when in chapter 6 and chapter 8 we have this picture of those who have died who their souls are under the altar. And their prayers continue to go up to the Lord asking, "Oh Lord, how long?" So in some sense those who have died have gone on beyond us but they have not received their resurrection bodies as yet. So it's not really proper to talk about those people as having graduated, you know, gone to glory. They are with the Lord but we all get to glory at the same time because we all get resurrected at the same time. And it's very interesting to find what comfort Paul takes in the fact that even death cannot separate us from the Lord and yet there is only one resurrection, and we get that all at the same time.

Question 15:
How should Christ's imminent return impact our view of building the kingdom?

Student: Reggie, how can the modern church balance a healthy view of building for the kingdom with Christ's imminent return in mind?

Dr. Kidd: Well, I think it helps a lot, Mike, to keep Paul's timeline in view. In his sense that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God's kingdom has come and it's been inaugurated. And the end of that process is the fact that the Lord is going to come back and going to consummate the work that he began. And we have the privilege of living in between the times where his work is being continued and the kingdom is being established without our having a sense that we are going to bring it in, in its fullness. He and only he is going to bring it in its fullness. So, we can have in this period of time this tremendous sense of privilege of being part of the answer to the prayer, "Father may your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Let your kingdom come." And we advance that kingdom because the King is already on the throne and yet that kingdom is not going to be fully realized until he comes back himself. So, it gives us this potential of living with the great sense of possibility and hope, and at the same time with a sense of realism and not taking ourselves so seriously. So, I think it's a great perspective that Paul gives us that we contribute to the kingdom but only the King is going to make the King fully here.

Question 16:
How does the Holy Spirit separate us from the world without taking us out of the world?

Student: Reggie, how does the Holy Spirit purify us but also separate us from the world? What does that look like from the corruption of the world specifically and how do you become a part of that separation without becoming your own entity?

Dr. Kidd: Well, Andrew, I think you asked the question really well. It's about being separate from the world without becoming this holy little huddle. And it's interesting to watch Paul talk about how there is this pattern of life that we are called to live, that is a pattern of life as he says, "I exhort in the Lord Jesus that you learn from us how you ought to live and to please God just as you are doing and do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through Lord Jesus and this is the will of God, your sanctification." He believes that the whole thing that's going on in us in our relationship with Jesus is that we are being sanctified, which means being set apart. But that doesn't happen on our own. It's the work, as he says later on — I'm in chapter 4 by the way, in verse 8 — "He gives his Holy Spirit to you."

What happens is that upon his resurrection from the dead, Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and then he gives the Spirit to us. And the Spirit's work is to work in us individually and to work in us together to make us God's separate holy people and yet he does not call us to physically, literally move out of the world but to live as a colony of his people in the midst of the world and to let the spirit's work in us individually and in us as his people, as we learn to proclaim his word, as we learn to love one another, as we learn to serve people in our community, working with our hands, offering our gifts and receiving some sort of support for that work. Those are ways in which we show his character at work in us so that we, the saying is often offered, "We are in the world but not of the world." And the being not of the world is the work of the Lord, not physically removing us from the world but making us a people who are accountable to the Lord, accountable to one another, and then serving other people. And that's how the Holy Spirit purifies us without just taking us out into the desert some place.

Question 17:

How common were forgeries when the Bible was being written?

Student: Reggie, were there a lot of forged letters in the early church? And how can we be sure that we don't have forged letters in the Holy Bible?

Dr. Kidd: That's a great question and Christians have thought about that from the very beginning. And it's relevant to us because 2 Thessalonians is one of the letters that there has been some conversation about in recent times. One of the things that we know from the 1st century is pagans as well as Christians had a pretty keen sense of intellectual property and whenever writers could find out that they had been misrepresented or somebody had passed off a letter as their own, they went after them. And we have no reason to think that Christians thought any differently about that. In fact, every time in church history in the early part of the church when documents were found to be not what they were thought to be in the first place, they were thrown out. The Acts of Paul and Thecla, for instance, was found out to have been written by an elder out of "piety" for Paul according to Tertullian around the 180's or so. And he was defrocked. And again, you can find non-Christians worrying about making collections of their letters and their writings to make sure they were really what they were supposed to be.

Interestingly, 2 Thessalonians is one of the places where we have some concern about it being expressed about the integrity or authenticity of the letter. Paul worries in 2 Thessalonians 2 about whether there might be some letters out there purporting to be from him saying that the day of the Lord is coming. He says, you know, "Those didn't come from me." And he closes the letter by saying, "I, Paul write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine. It's the way I write." You should be able to recognize that this is my hand. And as time has gone on, I think we have every reason in the world to think that the letters that bear the name of the person who wrote

them that are in the New Testament were actually written by the person who wrote them, including 2 Thessalonians.

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