

“Journeys and Destinations –These Four Things”

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“Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” (Acts 15:22-35)

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Pastor Wally said that discipleship must have an element of strengthening and encouragement. Do I agree with his assertion that I “must” (an imperative...not an option) strengthen and encourage other believers? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Does my response to the above question only include those to whom I am friendly...those I enjoy being around? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Since I’ve confessed Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I am a disciple who has been tasked by Him to “go and make disciples”. Who am I discipling/mentoring and in what way(s) do I purposefully attempt to strengthen and encourage that person? Explain.

Pastor Wally spoke of the Corinthians and their “hyper-grace” belief “emphasizes the grace of God to the exclusion of other vital teachings such as repentance and confession of sin. Hyper-grace teachers maintain that all sin, past, present, and future, has already been forgiven, so there is no need for a believer to ever confess it. Hyper-grace teaching says that, when God looks at us, He sees only a holy and righteous people. The conclusion of hyper-grace teaching is that we are not bound by Jesus’ teaching, even as we are not under the Law; that believers are not responsible for their sin; and that anyone who disagrees is a pharisaical legalist... They even teach that Jesus’ words spoken before His resurrection are part of the Old Covenant and no longer applicable to born-again believers.” (Gotquestions.org) Today there are those who rationalize that something is OK and should be permitted, “as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else.” For example: “Dear Mom,” wrote a university student, “I wanted to let you know that John and I are planning to move in together next semester. I know this will be disappointing to you, and want to reassure you that I value the principles you gave me, but we have been dating for a long time and we really love and respect each other. Sharing a single apartment would also save a lot of money. I still expect us to get married sometime, and I hope this makes sense to you. We’re not turning our backs on God, but we think this will be best for us.” Why is such a mindset needed for those who claim their “truth” “as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else”?

In the letter to the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, the council pointed out that “...it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” The Common English Bible translates it this way: “The Holy Spirit has led us to the decision...” When it comes to decisions in my life, does the leading of the Holy Spirit always control or do I at times allow my feelings control the decision? Explain.

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well...” (Acts 15:28-29) Have we in some way(s) expanded the list from four things that we should abstain from doing? If so, in what way(s) have we expanded the list? If not, why not?

Have I attempted to substitute one (or more) of the four requirements established by the Holy Spirit for something else (e.g., replace abstaining from sexual immorality with something like ethical living defined as “[p]eople who...follow a moral code, mostly defined by society but also in part by the individual)?)

Pastor Wally said that Christianity forces me to consider my actions as it impacts others. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, said: "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." (1 Corinthians 10:23-24) Jesus defined who my neighbor is: "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:29-37) "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." (1 Corinthians 8:8-13 – Emphasis added) Pastor Wally said that these four things were not up for debate (see Revelation 2:14; 19-23). So, in light of the four things from which we are to abstain, what is my take away regarding why abstaining from those four things seem to be so important to God? Explain.

Pastor Wally defined sexual immorality as being "sexual relations that are not in accord with God's design and standard for sexual relations". In my mind, is there even such a thing as "sexual immorality" in the 21st century? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally said that "[f]reedom in Christ means we no longer live for ourselves, but rather we can now live for others"...but do we? Do I live for others and not for myself? If so, how so? If not, why not?

What should/does living for others look like in my day-to-day life?