

“Farewell – Part 1”  
Pastor Wally Contreras  
October 31, 2021

“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:17-21)

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Pastor Wally pointed out that October 31<sup>st</sup> is Reformation Day, the day Martin Luther nailed a list of 95 questions or theses (a common practice in the day) to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church on October 31, 1517 entitled “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” in order to generate public and academic debate regarding the church’s practice of indulgences. Martin Luther had a problem reconciling church practices against his understanding of Scripture. Indulgences were a type of payment for sin given to the church so those paying would be absolved of sins. (You could even purchase indulgences for folks who were already dead.) Written as questions and not accusations, the theses (plural form of thesis) centered most on Luther’s belief that only faith leads to salvation and God desires for believers to seek repentance. In Theses #82 he asked “Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church?” Luther wanted to know, if it is truly possible to buy one’s salvation through indulgences, why the pope wasn’t using the wealth of the church to buy people out of hell instead of using it to build magnificent churches. A 2006 Times poll found that 17 percent of American Christians identify explicitly with the prosperity gospel movement (an umbrella term for a group of ideas that equate Christian faith with material, and particularly financial, success), while 31 percent believed the idea that “if you give your money to God, God will bless you with more money” and 61 percent agree with the more general idea that “God wants people to be prosperous.” In October 2020, Kenneth Copeland, founder of the Kenneth Copeland Ministries, was estimated to be worth \$300 million; Pat Robertson, founder and CEO of the Christian Coalition, was estimated to be worth \$100 million, Benny Hinn, televangelist and known for his regular miracle healing crusades - \$60 million, Joel Osteen, pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, - \$40 million...and the list goes on and on. Are “Christians” still trying to buy “indulgences” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Explain.

Pastor Wally highlighted last week’s Digging Deeper discussion of Romans 14:12 (“So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”) But wait! There’s more! Check out Matthew 12:36 and 16:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10, and 1 Peter 4:5. Accountability - “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to

you.” (Hebrews 13:17 – emphasis added.) and “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2) As C.H. Spurgeon put it: “No elevation in piety will exclude us from that last solemn test, and no weakness will serve as an excuse. The man of one and the man of ten talents must alike be reckoned with. Weak Christians are exempted from many trials by the gentleness of God, but not from the ultimate trial, for we shall each one of us give an account of himself unto God: the strong and the weak... We shall have to give an account each man for his own actions, for his own thought, for his own words, for his own intention; nay, not only of that, but of himself. We shall each man have to give account of the state of his own heart, of the condition of his mind before God, whether he repented, whether he believed, whether he loved God, whether he was zealous, whether he was truthful, whether he was faithful... We shall then have to give an account of our judgments of others. [see Matthew 7:1-2] We shall not have to answer for what they did, but for our daring to judge and condemn them... Then give another look to your God and Savior and say, “My Lord, I know you are my Judge; but you are also my Redeemer: I accept the place of condemnation, but I see that you did stand there in my behalf, the just for the unjust, my substitute, bearing my sin and punishment. Blessed Lord, I accept You as my substitute; I yield myself up to You; I stand now tried, condemned, punished, dead, raised again in You, and therefore pardoned, acquitted, justified, beloved, accepted for Jesus’ sake.” Oh, is not this a blessed ending to a solemn sermon?” What will I say to my “Who’s Your One” who is standing just in front of me in line to be judged by God?

Buckeyes love to stress that it is THE Ohio State University. Paul stresses that he was “serving the Lord” (Acts 20:19, emphasis added.), not just my Lord, but THE Lord which imparts the ideas of authority, power, and control. Is it possible to serve Him with true humility without grasping what it truly means to serve THE Lord? Explain.

Paul served the Lord with humility, tears and trials. How would I describe my service to Him?

Do I believe that God will agree with my assessment? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Do I need to re-think my motivation, priorities and/or methods of serving Him and why?

Some people believe that suffering develops character (“Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich stärker,” (“What doesn’t kill me, makes me stronger”) comes from a principle laid out by Friedrich Nietzsche in his book “*Twilight of the Idols*”), but Pastor Wally says it reveals my character? Though both thoughts are probably true to some degree, which has the potential to impact me and my life more and why?

In what way(s), if any, have I “suffered” as a result of my serving THE Lord?

Paul “did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable”. It takes courage (and grace) to share a difficult message with someone...some might call it “tough love”. How about me? Do I tend to water-down or sugar-coat a difficult message? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally pointed out that in Acts 20:21, Paul’s declaring, teaching and testifying kept the main thing, the main thing, namely “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”. As discussed previously in these notes, Martin Luther (and Spurgeon) spoke of the need for true repentance. Pastor Wally said that there are two changes that must occur...a change of mind and then a change of direction. Pastor Wally said that the two are separate and distinct actions on my part. Is it possible for me to change my direction without first having truly changed my mind? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Paster Wally said that I need to become a doer of the Word and pointed to James 1:21-25 (“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”) How frequently does the issue of convenience or consideration of the nature of the task come into play when it comes to me being a doer of the Word? Explain.