

Valued Above All

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In 2023, a pro-life volunteer was standing near an abortion clinic by a buffer zone in England. She was arrested and charged for silent prayer. She was acquitted, but is now facing being reinvestigated after further instances of silent prayer – rising concerns about “thoughtcrime”. We may say this is totally stupid in charging someone for a “thoughtcrime”. How do you get hard evidence of a “thoughtcrime”? We may look at this as being totally crazy, but we’re starting to see a breakdown of normal law and order and being replaced with evil laws and thoughts. We haven’t had to face such attack on our faith. How would we act if it happens? St. Augustine had stated, “Jesus Christ is not valued at all until He is valued above all”. How much do we really value our relationship with Jesus Christ? If your doorbell were to ring and upon answering it you discovered a law enforcement officer before you with a warrant for your arrest, charging you with being a follower of Jesus Christ, would there be enough evidence in your life to convict you? Is Jesus valued above all?

The believers during the New Testament days were being attacked in all directions. Not only were they being attacked by hardline Jews, but also by Rome. Plus, they had to deal with those who wanted to teach their own theology which created false teaching. After Jesus was killed on the cross, it would soon be open season against His followers. All the disciples except for John would be killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. We can read the letters of Peter, John, and Paul and find much evidence that would convict them on their faith and love for Jesus. Paul, who was not of the original disciples, would be killed as well for his faith and love for Jesus Christ. Peter, John, and Paul all knew what was at stake for the early Church. They knew the struggle all the new Christians would face because of their faith. The Christian Jews would know about the struggle because their ancestors had to face persecution all through their history. Most of the Gentiles didn’t face what the Jews had to face on a daily basis, but that was starting to change. We have more letters from Paul than we do from Peter and

John. Paul had his hands full trying to help the Gentile Church to be really for what they may have to face against Satan and his followers. There was a key element that was needed for the Church to be able to survive and it goes with what St. Augustine stated and I'll include it here again because it's important, "Jesus Christ is not valued at all until He is valued above all". Let's look at one of Paul's letters to the Church that may help us to better understand what it means to value Jesus Christ above all.

Let's turn to 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-4, where we read this, "1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

² We always give thanks to God for all of you, making mention *of you* in our prayers; ³ constantly keeping in mind your work of faith and labor of love and ^[a]perseverance of hope ^[b]in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, brothers *and sisters*, beloved by God, *His* choice of you; (NASB- www.biblegateway.com)

Paul had helped to start this church and in just three weeks into his ministry, he had to leave because of the uprising against the Gospel message. Paul had to leave Silas and Timothy behind to help with the new church. Silas and Timothy would join Paul at a later time. Paul thought much about this church and Timothy, who Paul sent back again to the church to check on it, would give him a report on what was going on within the church and the evidence from Timothy would give Paul material to write about in this early letter from Paul. We find that this Thessalonian church is faithful, work in love, and believed in the of hope found in Jesus Christ. These new converts were on the right track in following Jesus. In verse 3, we find that Paul talks about the young church's work of faith and labor of love. The Greek terms that Paul uses for these two words are strong terms. For work, Paul means to toil, as in effort. Labor means to toil that drains strength (Wesley Bible Curriculum). Not only did this church toil and work for Jesus in reaching out to people for Jesus Christ, but they toiled to the point where it drained their strength. In other words, this young church tried hard to do the work of Jesus Christ in the place and time they were placed in. They were all in for Jesus. They worked for Jesus till it drained their strength. Wow, that is

serving Jesus in love. I think the church of today has become a little lazy. Maybe we don't even realize how we no longer work for Jesus till our strength is drained. I worked at a Weis Market store that had a group of workers that only did enough work to get by. They did not drain themselves in their work. There was no excitement or dedication in their work and that store didn't grow in sales. I worked at another store that was the opposite. The workers there would work hard and the department heads wanted the store to make more profit. They would drain their strength because they wanted to make the store better. The difference between Christians and the good store is that we should be better workers because of our love for Jesus. We want to work for Him till our strength is drained. Paul also lets them know that he was praying for them as well, which probably helped motivate the church. Prayer is one of the things that brings encouragement for us when we do work for Jesus. Christians praying for each other helps to encourage one another in continuing to work for Jesus. Not only that, but we do this hard work for Jesus because we value Him more than anything else. It's easy to work for someone you love than for someone that rubs you the wrong way.

What evidence can we have that shows we work hard for Jesus because we value Him above anything else? Paul continues with this letter by stating this in 1 Thessalonians 1: 5 – 10, “⁵for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sakes. ⁶You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word during great affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place *the news of your faith toward God has gone out*, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹For they themselves report about us ^[c]as to the kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from ^[d]idols to serve ^[e]a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from ^[f]heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is*, Jesus who rescues us from the wrath to come. (NASB – www.biblegateway.com)”

Because of their faith in Jesus; they had become imitators of Jesus through the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples this before He was taken up into Heaven in Acts 1: 8, “But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (NLT)” One piece of

evidence that shows we are working hard for Jesus is that we are doing it through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit drives us and gives us the love to be able to love our neighbor that helps to compel us to work till our strength is drained. If we haven't given our lives over to Jesus, we don't have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us to work hard for Jesus. Plus, we won't have the type of love needed that compels us to reach the lost for Jesus. Jesus knew we needed help to do work for Him. We need to realize that we need to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to drive us to work hard for Jesus. If we don't, then we will only do what is enough to get us by. This young church Paul is writing to is excited to work for Jesus. Are we?

Not only does working hard for Jesus till our strength is drain shows that we value Jesus above everything else, but there's something else Paul mentions about the Thessalonian church that we can learn from. In verse 9, Paul tells us that the believers of Jesus had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. This is very important evidence for valuing the Lord above all. The Thessalonian Church had to deal with idol worship. Four major roads led into the city and it had a major port. It is said that it was one of the largest cities in Macedonia and may have had a population of around 100,000 people. The city had many shrines throughout the city to worship false gods. Greek thought was also taught in this city. I looked up the Greek term that Paul uses for "idol" and it means an object that is worshiped – formed by casting or carving (Strong's Concordance). Not only can we carve an idol with our hands, we can carve an idol with our minds. Idol worship has been a major issue throughout history and is still an issue today. We can worship money, our job or career, a person, or anything we start to replace God with. This could also mean ourselves which in America Individualism has become a major issue. Its all about me, myself, and I. The Thessalonian church had made a clean break of idol worship and had totally focused on the Lord. The church realized that God was the living and true God. They believed the message Jesus gave in John 17: 1-3 during His prayer to His Father, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone in all the earth. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life – to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. (NLT)" This is who we worship and only worship. You can't worship two things at the same time. Jesus makes this statement in Matthew 6: 24, "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (NLT)" However, many

people try to worship God and other things and that can't happen. Over time, your love for God will become less and less and before you realize it, you no longer have a loving relationship with Jesus. He'll just become a lifeless mental image to you. There is a push in our society to embrace socialism, which comes from the teachings of Karl Marx. In a nutshell, it's a human teaching on how the state can create utopia on earth by human thought and force. Some have embraced this teaching and it has become their god and they become radical which is void of compassion or all compassion over time because it takes over Godly principles, which it rejects. I've read some books by Christians who used to be communists and it's amazing how they are all in for Jesus. They saw first hand the emptiness of the idol worship of an ideology. They know that you can't serve both because you'll start to embrace the ideology over God in a period time. They became all in on Jesus because when Jesus forgave them of their sin, they finally felt true love for the first time in their lives and nothing else can love us like Jesus can. A mother's love comes close, but it's still not compared to the love of Jesus. They then discover the coldness of human ideologies. Ideologies is a systematic, often rigid body of concepts, beliefs, and values – political, economic, or cultural – that shapes how individuals and groups interpret the world, make decisions, and organize society (Merriam – Webster). These ideologies take the place of the working of the Holy Spirit which means ideologies can become an idol to us. We must be careful. If we are a follower of Jesus, we must value Him above all else. Some may say this is going too far on Jesus. Well, Jesus tells us very plainly and direct in Mark 12: 29, "The most important commandment is this, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' (NLT)" The Lord is the One and only Lord of our life. There is no room for anything else. When we follow this command out of love for Him, everything else will start to fall into place in our life. We will live out our life as God has attended it to be lived. We will live in harmony with Him. So, we must value Him above all else. I'll close with St. Augustine's statement again: "Jesus Christ is not valued at all until He is valued above all". Does that describe you?

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996

Wesley Bible Curriculum March – May 2026. Wesleyan Publishing House: Fishers

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.