

Leadership: Vision and Priorities

1 Thess. 5:1-11

Introduction:

1. I have been asked to speak on the subject "Leadership: Vision and Priorities."
2. I believe the passage that we have just read is reflective of the vision and the priorities that characterize the people of God.
3. I believe the passage identifies the lack of vision characteristic of the people of the world and contrasts it with those who have been enlightened.
4. And I believe this passage reveals what our priorities are that result from our vision.
5. What we are going to do is analyze this text: contrast those without vision and those with vision; identify what our priorities are; discuss what we need to do given this vision and these priorities.

Discussion:

- I. Like the Thessalonians, "You know full well" **what** the vision is (5:1-2).
 - A. "As to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you."
 1. Conversion gives us our vision (1 Thess. 1:9-10b).
 2. Conversion defines our leadership (1 Thess. 1:6-8).
 - B. The vision is defined by God and communicated to us through His revelation.
 1. The vision is not available through naturalistic means (cf. 1 Cor. 1:21).
 2. The vision is founded upon God's eternal nature. He gives us insight into the times and epochs (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10ff). He is a living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9). He is there and He is not silent!
 - C. Our vision is that of the coming day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2), but this only marks our greater vision of "always being with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Cf. the images of Jewish wedding traditions in Matt. 22:1ff; 25:1ff; Isa. 25:6ff.
 1. The people of the world are unaware.
 - a. It comes like a thief in the night for them.
 - b. It comes suddenly like labor pains on a woman. It is coming, but they are unaware.
 - c. They are in darkness.
 2. We are not like them. Cf. 1 Pet. 4:1ff.
 - a. We are sons of light and sons of day.
 - b. We are not asleep.
 - c. Let us be alert and sober.
 3. Once we have grasped the vision our whole direction changes.
 - a. "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:22-23).
 - b. Note the context relative to where your treasure is, serving two masters,

worrying about food and clothing (Matt. 6:19ff). Worrying about what people think about you rather than practicing your righteousness in the presence of God (Matt. 6:1ff). “This world is not my home I just a passing through my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.” 230 Hymns for Worship.

D. There are distractions.

1. The nation of Israel would be distracted from the vision of their relationship with God. Moses identified two major things that would cloud their vision.
 - a. Wealth (Deut. 6:10ff).
 - b. Inter-marriage with unbelievers (Deut. 7:3-4).
2. We are a holy people to the Lord our God. He has chosen us to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth (Deut. 7:6; 1 Pet. 2:9—notice: “He has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.”).
3. “Until and unless Christians recover a sense of the incredible privilege of being a holy people belonging to God, the objects of his gracious election, his treasured people, and targets of his affection, and until they recover the missional significance of this calling, the Western church will remain pathetic and powerless in the face of the challenges of our age.” --Daniel I. Block commenting on 2 Cor. 6:14-16 in NIV Application Commentary on Deut., p. 222.
4. We are distracted by attention to our selves and so blur the vision.
 - a. The disciples (Matt. 20:20ff).
 - b. In teaching (1 Tim. 1:3-7).
 - c. In use of our liberty (1 Cor. 9:19ff).

II. The vision determines and defines our priorities (1 Thess. 5:12-22).

A. This is just one passage that evidences this. Consider Rom. 12:2ff; Gal. 5:16ff; Eph. 4:1ff; Col. 3:1ff; 1 Pet. 2:1ff; et. al.

B. The things mentioned are representative of our changed priorities.

1. Appreciate those who labor and give instruction (1 Thess. 3:12-13a).
2. Live in peace (1 Thess. 3:13b).
3. Admonish unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help weak, be patient with everyone (1 Thess. 5:14).
4. No evil for evil, but good for one another and all people (16).
5. Pray without ceasing (17).
6. Giving thanks (18).
7. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances, examine everything, hold fast, abstain from every form of evil (19-21).

C. This list does not identify all our priorities but clearly identifies the direction of them.

III. Specific considerations.

A. Relationship with the Lord is the top priority.

1. It is life, blessing, our good and our survival (Deut. 5:33; 6:3, 24). No wonder then that the Shema begins, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

- your might” (Deut. 6:4). And the ten commandments: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3).
2. Anything, ANYTHING, preempting this is idolatry/adultery (James 4:1ff). Ex. wealth (Deut. 6:10ff), marriage (Deut. 7:3-4), family (Matt. 10:37-39), etc.
 3. Not work, not wife, not family, not Kentucky Basketball, not pleasure, not sex, not entertainment . . .
- B. Communicating this inter-generationally to our family is our second most top priority (Deut. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:4).
1. This defines who we marry (Deut. 7:3-4). Cf. Gen. 24; 27:46-28:9.
 2. What are you doing to accomplish this objective? How deliberate are you? It requires teaching diligently (7:7). Outsourcing results in shoddy workmanship. Outsourcing to church, baby-sitter, wife?
 3. Grief, pain, heartache, death result if we fail.
- C. Keeping God as top priority within the family of God is a top priority.
1. The church at Corinth had blurred vision (1 Cor. 3:1-4, 16; 10:14-22).
 2. Distortion was a problem in the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:7).
 3. Distortions come as a result of worldly influences—cultural distortions. Ex. In most instances denominations are little more than social/community organizations.
 4. Leaders must keep the family on target by articulating the priority and keeping people on task (Eph. 4:11ff).
 - a. Training in personal Christian living (Eph. 4:25ff)
 - b. Training to function in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8).
 - c. Training to function in the world (Rom. 13; Eph. 6:5ff).
- D. As these priorities are enhanced we become more effective in our priority of reaching the lost.
1. The vision is not just about me getting home safely. It is not just about me getting my family home safely. It is not just about me getting “this congregation” home safely. It is about the Lord being the top priority in the lives of all men.
 2. It is about helping others to see the vision.
- E. It is self-sacrificial (Matt. 20:28). It is not convenient!
1. It requires your money. Your time. Your commitment. Cf. Heb. 11:13-26.
 2. The Lord wants your heart.
 3. Are you serving His purpose in your generation (Acts 13:36)?
 4. Quote from atheist’s commitment.

Conclusion:

1. God defines the vision and thus the priorities.
2. Jesus defined it: Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.
3. Relationship with the Lord comes first; communicating this to family is the second priority; communicating this in the family of God is the third priority; communicating this to the world is the fourth priority.
4. The details flesh themselves out accordingly.
5. Self-sacrificial commitment is demanded.

