

Lesson 14: Making our calling and election sure

Memory Verse: Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. (2 Peter 1:10)

You are probably aware that it is possible to take Bible texts out of the meaning of the words around them and make them sound like they mean something they don't actually say. An extreme example would be: Cain killed his brother Abel, and Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:37)

The clear context of Jesus' instruction was to an expert in the law, and it was just after he told the parable of the good Samaritan. So whenever you see someone use a Bible verse, check it out to see what was really being said, because there are people out there who will intentionally misuse the Bible so they can make their own ideas sound right.

There are a lot of people who see the struggle against sin (Hebrews 12:4) as an internal battle in which we try to resist doing bad things and fight to make ourselves do good things. There is a place for resisting the evil tendencies of our bodies and minds, and God is willing to help us with that. But that's not the battle against sin. So what is?

Here are a few texts that often get misused:

[C]ontinue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.... (Philippians 2:12)
In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.
(Hebrews 12:4)
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

Now here's the context around these verses that clarify the meaning:

... for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.
(Philippians 2:13)
Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:2, 3)
Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. (James 4:7, 8)

Each of these verses, read in context, tell us where the struggle is. God does the "hard" part. He gives us the grace to do the things we should, and he gives us the power to choose (will) to do right. Our job is to fix our eyes on Jesus. When we draw close to God he draws close to us, and the nearer he is, the less desirable are the things that hinder the work of removing sin that God wants to do.

But there is a reality that makes people think salvation must be very difficult indeed.

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13:14)

If only a few find it, then the whole thing must be very difficult. How can I, a young person without a

lot of experience and with a limited knowledge of the Bible, have much of a chance to make it to salvation? To answer those questions we need to know what part is hard. As for how young you are, that could be an advantage:

“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18:3-5)

What is it about children that makes them close to the kingdom? What is it about the natural state of man that makes it so hard for him to admit he's wrong and that God knows better? Maybe that's the problem. Maybe it's so difficult because humans are so good at thinking they're right that it's hard to change their minds and admit that what they've believed for years has been wrong.

The heart [character] is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?
“I the LORD search the heart
and examine the mind,
to reward a man according to his conduct,
according to what his deeds deserve.” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10)

Our hearts, our characters, are born in sin. But worse than that, they keep telling us that everything is good and right with us. We don't need to change, it's the people around us that need to change. If they would only treat us like we deserve we wouldn't have all our problems. It all sounds good as long as we don't look at things from someone else's perspective.

You see, the other people that need to change in that view are thinking exactly the same things about themselves. They think if you would change they wouldn't have the problems they think you're causing. Salvation isn't hard because of all the work we have to do to get it. Salvation is hard because so many humans don't think they need it.

“You say, 'I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” Revelation 3:17, 18)

God promises to provide everything we need to be saved. The hard part is admitting that we've been wrong, something we will have to do every day of our earthly lives, and accepting the help he offers.

Possible thought papers:

1. Make a list of things in your life that you have let stand between you and God. What can you do to move these things out of the way?
2. Read Isaiah 55 and compare it to the passage in Revelation 3 quoted above. How are they similar? How are they different? What new ideas come from comparing the two?
3. Find a text you think people have misused. Look at its context and see how that helps you understand what the text is supposed to mean.