

The “Simple” Gospel Part 1 Richard L. Smith

In the United States today you can purchase books called *Computers for Dummies* and *Investing for Dummies*. I have a book called *Philosophy Made Simple* (which is an oxymoron if I ever heard one). You can buy, for example, *The Historical Jesus For Dummies* and the *Idiot’s Guide to the Gnostic Gospels*. Indeed, sometimes it is helpful to present difficult concepts following the K.I.S.S.S. principle: "Keep it short and simple, stupid!"

So, this blog and the four to follow concern the “simple” gospel. I guess we can call this short series *The Gospel For Dummies*. For, on the one hand, the message of salvation is quite simple. Based on 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, you just need to know three little words, plus their context. If so, you have a good start in understanding and communicating the gospel. On the other hand, from the broader perspective of the biblical worldview the gospel is not at all simplistic, but profound and comprehensive.

Beginning with the second half of verse 9, this passage consists of a subject, three main verbs, and five explanatory clauses. Structurally, the text may be illustrated by the following:

You:	turned	to God	from idols
	(to) serve	the living and true God	
	(to) wait	for His Son from heaven	
		whom He raised from the dead	
		who delivers us from the wrath to come.	

You

The first and very important question is: Who is Paul referring to? The subject of the sentence, "you" (third person plural), refers primarily to formerly pagan Thessalonians. Within the context of the verse we may identify the subjects as former idolaters, upon whom the wrath of God abode.

Further, testimony from the two Thessalonian letters reveals the mindset and lifestyle of these former idolaters: persecutors of Christians (1Thes 2:14), sexually immoral (4:3), lustful (4:5), impurity (4:7), spiritual darkness (5:5-6), “do not know God and do not obey the gospel” (2Thes 1:8), and “evil and wicked men” lacking faith (3:2). This report is verified by Paul’s depiction of the hostile environment the new believers faced as repentant idolaters: “you received the word in much affliction” (1Thess 1:6; 3:3; 2Thess 1:6), “much conflict” (2:2), “suffered the same things from your own countrymen” (2:14; 2Thes 1:5), and “all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring” (2Thes 1:4).

Third, it is useful to note the values and practices associated with idolaters in the broader New Testament: "the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters" (1Cor 10:5), "sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers" (6:9), "idolaters...sexual immorality... grumble" (10:6-10), "participants with demons" (10:20), "lawlessness" (2Cor 6:14), "accord... with Belial" (Satan, 6:15), "works of the flesh...sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies" (Gal 5:19-21), "what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5), "doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry" (1Pet 4:3), and "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death" (Rev 21:8).

Does this describe you in your former life of idolatry and disobedience?