

1st THESSALONIANS BIBLE STUDY

1 Thessalonians 2:3-12

Lesson #4

Introduction

Last week we covered the first two verses of chapter two, which dealt with the visible results of the gospel on the lives and attitudes of those who believe it, and on those who don't. On those who believe, it's the power of God unto salvation, through repentance and sanctification, and on those who don't believe, it's utter foolishness and very irritating, because it condemns the sinful lifestyles of a Godless society. And this almost always generates persecutions. This week we'll move into verses 3-12 which I've titled:

The Confidence of Authenticity

Verses 3-12:

3 For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. 4 Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but rather God, who examines our hearts. 5 For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives—God is our witness— 6 and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others. 7 Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children. 8 We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. 11 As you know, like a father with his own children, 12 we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 1 Thess 2:3-12 (HCSB)

Verse 3:

3 For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive.

This simple statement in verse three goes to the very heart of the gospel and the Scriptures themselves. We understand don't we, that no matter what the Scriptures say, no matter how promising they might be, no matter how comforting they might be to us in our daily lives, unless they're true, and authentic all of our confidence and comfort will have been simply an illusion. And this is exactly what the unbelieving masses believe. That all of us foolish Christians are clinging to a false hope, a fairy tale if you will, that gives us temporary comfort for today but will fail us in the end. So, if they're right, and if the Scriptures are not true and authentic, then we are indeed to be pitied for our foolish and naïve faith.

Therefore, it's incumbent upon us to exercise discernment concerning what we believe. Everybody is free to believe whatever they want to believe, and draw whatever comfort they get from doing so, but ultimately, in the end, some things will be true and some things will be false, so knowing and discerning the difference could be our greatest challenge in life. Eternity will be filled with those who earnestly believed what was false and disbelieved what was true, and their fate for eternity will be decided on this seemingly simple mistake.

You see, when it comes to the gospel, which is the good news of God's salvation plan through repentance and faith in his Son Jesus, the slightest mistake here has the gravest and grandest consequences that men can ever perceive. There is no mistake in the whole universe that even compares to this one. If a person were allowed to get only one thing right in his entire life on this earth, and be wrong about everything else, then that single thing would need to be rightly discerning and believing the gospel message of Jesus Christ. There is an endless number of situations in life where we can be a little bit wrong, or even completely wrong and suffer the consequences. In fact this is how we learn, by getting things right and by getting things wrong and discerning the difference.

But when it comes to the gospel we cannot afford to learn by being wrong. Oh yes, those who are wrong will learn, but the problem is, there's no second chance to make corrections, there's only the eternal consequences. Have I sufficiently made my point here? I trust that I have.

So then, acknowledging the supreme importance of discerning the authentic from the false, how do we go about doing this? How do we make ourselves as certain as humanly possible that what we believe is really true, and we haven't been sold a bill of goods by a fancy smooth talking salesman?

First let me say that everybody is susceptible to being fooled. There are people in this world who are simply gifted in the art of deception. They have the looks and the words and all the right moves and manners to convince people that they're authentic. There's no shortage of these kinds of people in the world today, all plying their skills to make a living and accumulate a following. You can turn on the television channels and find these literally by the dozens. They work different markets. Some work the prosperity market, teaching you how to get wealthy with very little effort. Some work the self-esteem market, teaching you to assert yourself and stand up for your rights. Some work the spiritual market, teaching various types of enlightenment and self fulfillment. And some work the religious market, promising heaven to all who will follow after them, and send them their money. The perplexing thing is, every one of these is very skillful at their art, and makes a compelling argument for their case. So what does one do, how are some of the ways that we can unmask these deceivers, and see through their deceptive schemes?

Well the good news is that about 90% of these have telltale characteristics that we can recognize. If the person you're listening to just flew in on his personal jet, with his two carat diamond ring on his finger, and his \$2000 suit on his back, and then ends up asking you to send him some more of your money, then maybe this means something.

Or, even if this person is preaching to you from the Bible, and asking you to support his ministry, but it comes to light that he's got a mistress on the side, and/or maybe a little cocaine problem, then maybe this means something.

Or, maybe this person is a little bit more subtle, and he doesn't exhibit excessive means, and he hasn't been caught at any improprieties as yet, but, he's teaching you things that contradict the holy Scriptures so that you'll follow him away onto a different path than that which is prescribed in the Scriptures, then maybe this means something.

Now this doesn't describe all of the possibilities, but it does identify the most frequent. And every one of these described, does what they do with a perfectly straight face, and a convincing tone of authenticity, and a likable and charismatic personality, so as to deceive great multitudes. Some are pretty easy to spot, but some are more difficult. Some I've had to listen to more than once, and some even many times before I could decide whether to align myself with them or not. But in the final analysis, conformity to Scriptures, all the Scriptures, properly interpreted and applied to daily life, is the most valuable information available for discerning the authenticity of a preacher or teacher. Paul expands on this thought in verses 5, 6, and 7, but first let's look at verse four:

Verse 4: (In contrast to error, impurity, deceit)

4 Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but rather God, who examines our hearts.

After assuring them in verse three that his intentions were pure and honorable, Paul now goes on to assure them of the authenticity of the gospel itself, inasmuch as it has been entrusted to him by God, who commissioned Paul to preach it on His behalf. Paul assures them that his message wasn't something he made up in his own mind, but was truly entrusted to him directly by God.

And Paul goes on to say that he was entrusted to speak this gospel not in a manner that pleases men, but rather in a manner that pleases God. And from this sentence we can see clearly that there is a distinction. What pleases men doesn't seem to please God, and what pleases God doesn't seem to please men. Why would this be, if we were made by God, then shouldn't we be pleased with the same things God is pleased with? Well of course we should, and some day we will, but for now there's a reason for this. God is holy and we are sinful, so, that which pleases God isn't going to be what men want to hear. And all the things men want to hear and do, aren't going to please a holy God. And here's the crux of the problem isn't it? Where is the common ground between a perfectly holy God and a thoroughly sinful humanity? Where can the two meet in common accord?

Is there any such common ground? Is it even possible for common ground to exist? It's the gospel that provides the answers to these questions. An understanding of the difference between God and man is essential to grasping the gospel message. Good news is only good news if you understand what it means, so the first step is in perceiving the problem. This was what John the Baptist was sent to do before Jesus announced His ministry. John was sent to identify the problem **for which** Jesus would be the one and only answer. The solution wasn't even offered until after the problem was clearly identified. And just like John the Baptist, some listened and some refuted. (Condemns Seeker Friendly)

I doubt that there's anyone who would argue that the Ministry of John the Baptist was one that pleased men. John had a way of getting under the skin of those who didn't want to hear his message of confession and repentance from sin. The Ministry that John was sent to fulfill could not possibly please men. Because, **there is no message** that's pleasing to God, and at the same time, pleasing to unregenerate man. God's message convicts men of their sin and calls them to repentance, which is what makes it pleasing to God. And, simultaneously makes it most offensive to fallen man.

Anyone who believes that they can preach a truly Godly gospel that is unoffensive and pleasing to unregenerate man demonstrates their own ignorance of the nature of God and the nature of man. Paul thoroughly understood that faithfully carrying out his ministry could not make him a man pleaser. The nature of the message **to confess and repent**, combined with the nature of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, makes it clearly an either/or situation.

Therefore, knowing that he couldn't be a man pleaser, Paul was more than satisfied to be pleasing to God, who examines our hearts, not just our words, and knows our every thought and intent. (Heb 4:12) Now lets go into verses 5, 6, and 7:

Verses 5-7:

5 For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives—God is our witness— 6 and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others. 7 Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children.

Returning now to our earlier theme of discerning the authenticity of a preacher or teacher, these verses offer us considerable help in weeding out the true from the false. Paul starts out by saying that he never used flattering speech to gain a following. Flattery is a very effective tool to win favor of people. After all it's human nature to want to be recognized and appreciated, so a little flattery can go a long way in getting someone on your side. But the discerning person will pause and ask themself just exactly why they're being flattered, and if there's an ulterior motive behind it. Obviously not all flattery is intended for this purpose, but a good deal of it is, so the discerning person is careful not to be deceived by it.

Then after flattering speech he says, "or greedy motives." Now I don't want to be cynical, but in all honesty I have to say that an awful lot of what presents itself as gospel preaching on television today has to fall squarely into this category. And, different people can be greedy for different things. One might be greedy for money, another for power, and another for attention, or, any combination of these. But there's one thing that these people can't conceal, they will eventually want you to send them your money. But this too creates a dilemma, because the authentic preachers and teachers are going to accept contributions as well. So, how do you tell the difference.

I don't have a perfect formula, but I can usually recognize the difference when I hear it. If I'm told to sow a seed, for which, I'll get a grand return on my investment, or for which I'll be healed from some disease, or be released from some demon spirit impeding my life, or I'll make some great spiritual breakthrough, then I know exactly what to do with these appeals. These are some of the typical terms used by the hucksters to fleece the ignorant. When you hear them, change the channel immediately, before you subject yourself to any more erroneous nonsense. Yes, Jesus and his disciples certainly did accept donations from their followers, but, neither Jesus nor his disciples ever healed any sick, or cast out any demons, or granted any spiritual favors, in return for a donation. I hope you can clearly discern this distinction, because, if you can, it will be very difficult for these people to deceive you, and at the same time, you can be confident when you do support the ones who are authentic.

The authentic preacher will not seek his own glory. He will not make himself a burden upon those to whom he's preaching. He won't be a bully or tyrant, lording himself over his followers and demanding their unquestioned loyalty. He won't allow himself to be looked at as holier and godlier than other men. He will admit his own frailties and sins and never take personal credit for anything except that which God has graciously accomplished within him. He will not sing his own praises nor tout his own accomplishments, but rather give all the glory to God through the works of Jesus Christ.

These are the common characteristics that accompany the true preacher and teacher. Some people try to fake them, and some do for a while, but most false preachers usually show their true colors if you watch them long enough. You just have to be able to recognize the indicators and then be willing to act upon them when you do see them. The false teachers are usually going to be good looking and great speakers. That's their stock in trade, and they can do it well. Sometimes they might be so likable that we don't want to see the truth even when it's evident, but continuing to listen to false teachings is extremely destructive. It can weaken our faith and shake our confidence in the truth, so the scriptures tell us to turn away from false teachers and their destructive teachings, and gives us these means we're studying now to help identify them.

Paul said he and his other companions were gentle among the Thessalonian believers, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children. Don't follow a tyrant or a self-righteous imposter, but keep your eyes and ears wide open, and carefully discern both the heart and the behaviors of those who preach and teach you the scriptures. Then you can be confident and certain of the glorious truths that the scriptures reveal. In verses 8-10 Paul goes on to say:

Verses 8-10:

8 We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers.

In these verses Paul speaks of the affection and heart attitude of himself and his companions towards the Thessalonian believers. Paul didn't think of his relationship as a business relationship, or even a stewardship relationship, but rather as a family relationship. He said he was pleased not only to preach to them the gospel of God, but to also share his own life with them, because they had become so dear to him. This is the relationship of a preacher and teacher to those whom he teaches. They become much more than simply a student body, they become family members, and a loving relationship blossoms. The Lord Jesus gave us a very specific command just before His departure, he commanded us to love one another, and told us that this would be an authenticating sign of true disciples. (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12, 17)

Paul reminded them that he had been willing to work in a secular job all day so that he could earn his own keep and not be a burden to the believers. It's quite likely that Paul did this because there were those who had accused him of being an opportunist, so to prevent any possibility of doubt on anyone's part, Paul worked with his own hands to earn his living, and took nothing from the Thessalonians while he preached and taught there. Then he calls the Thessalonians themselves, as well as God, as witnesses to how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly he and his companions had conducted themselves while they were there with the Thessalonian believers. Then, in the next two verses, he continues his progression when he says:

Verses 11-12:

11 As you know, like a father with his own children, 12 we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

In verse seven Paul used the example of a nursing mother caring for her children, now to cover both bases, he uses the example of a father and his own son. He says we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you. Paul is continuing to stay on a very personal and individual level with all the believers. First he says we encouraged. Encouragement is hope, and stimulus toward a certain end. Then he says comforted, which is a type of moral or emotional consolation, a feeling of relief from worry, or disappointment, or danger, as they faced escalating persecutions from their fellow countrymen. And finally he says implored, which is to literally beg, earnestly and desperately.

So then, what was it that Paul was so desperately encouraging and imploring these new believers to do? He answers that question himself with just four words; what he wants them to do is “walk worthy of God.” The sum total of his affections, his preaching, his teaching, his sacrificing on their behalf working day and night with his own hands, is his hope that they would end up walking worthy of God. In the midst of hardships, in the midst of persecutions, in the midst of uncertainties of life, that the gospel would do its sanctifying and transforming work in the lives of the believers.

After all, what is the point of the gospel? What is the fruit of the new spirit? What is the purpose of regeneration and transformation, is it not that the recipients of the grace of God would become progressively conformed to the image of his Son Jesus, and demonstrate this openly and visibly to all humanity, as a testimony to the mercy, and power, and glory of God. Couldn't it be said that a people who openly walk in a manner worthy of God, and offer Him acceptable worship, is a very large part of the whole purpose of God for creating humanity in the first place?

I know I've said this many times before, but the whole aspect of repentance and sanctification seems to have been either dropped entirely, or at least pushed onto the back burner, in the large majority of churches of today. But here in these verses that we're studying, Paul's telling the Thessalonians that their walk, that is their behaviors and attitudes, is essentially the whole point of the gospel message that he's preached to them.

In other words, if it doesn't issue in this end result, then the whole thing has been for naught. It's like a tree that bears no fruit, it's like salt that's lost its flavor, it's like a lighted lamp that's been put under a basket, it serves no useful purpose. It wouldn't matter if everybody in the whole town of Thessalonica joined the church, if none of them repented and walked worthy of the gospel of God. In fact, it would be far better to have only one person in the town repent and walk worthy of God, than to have the whole town join the church, and yet have none of them living Godly lives.

Nowhere in this epistle does Paul address the numeric quantity of believers in Thessalonica, because he knows that's entirely in the hands of God, but what he addresses is the walk, the godly behavior of those who believe. There's not one word from Paul on how to increase the church membership, or how to reach more unbelievers, but everything that he teaches pertains to the attitudes and actions of the believers, regardless of how many or how few there might be.

In fact, there is nowhere in any of his epistles where Paul offers any advice whatsoever on how to tweak the gospel for maximum response. Quite the contrary, he repeatedly warns against any kind of distortions of the gospel, and even pronounces a curse in Galatians on anyone who changes it. But in every epistle, without exception, the thrust of Paul's teaching is concerning bringing the Saints into conformity to the image of Christ Jesus, in both their actions and beliefs. So, I can't help but wonder, why isn't that what we're doing today? Why do we think that our job is to maximize the yield rather than to transform the chosen? We sure don't get this notion from the Scriptures. The Scriptures are a cover to cover call for mankind to walk in a manner worthy of God. From the 10 Commandments of Exodus, to the sermon on the mountain by Jesus, the Scriptures are calling mankind into obedience to God.

This verse then goes on to give us some of the reasons for walking worthy of God, not the least of which is, that He has called us into his own kingdom and his own glory. The first of these is his kingdom, which is a little easier to understand. We understand that God has a kingdom and he's chosen to bring us there. We know a little bit about it and its glory from the prophetic passages of Scripture, but we also know that there's a great deal more that we haven't been told and can't yet even imagine. (1Cor 2:9)

This is a physical, tangible place, created by God to be inhabited by His tangible creatures and by Himself as an eternal Spirit. We will live there together for eternity, and there will be no more sin or unrighteousness, but only perfect holiness. Sin will be gone, both in practice as well as desire, and temptations will all be ended. Our transformation into the likeness of Christ will be complete or we couldn't even enter there. (Phi 1:6)

Our Father has specifically designed us to live in this place. He has created a universe filled with obstacles with which to train us and prepare us for this ultimate destination. For those who are His, everything that happens to them in their entire earthly lives will work out to their ultimate good in their preparation and learning process. (Rom 8:28)

But, this isn't all there is. We haven't just been called into his kingdom, it says we've also been called into his glory. Now I have to tell you, that almost makes me shudder. I can't even imagine being called into a state of sharing God's glory. Now immediately let me say that I don't for one second think that this means that man will be as glorious as God. An analogy I might make is were a beggar is adopted by a king and brought into the king's house. He sits at the king's table and shares the Kings Palace, but his glory is one of proximity and not one of nature. However, the relationship of God to his children goes a step beyond this, in so much as He has transformed them, and indwells them with his own Spirit, and as such, to a lesser degree, made them to share in His glory. The apostle Peter said that we are partakers of the divine nature, and to the extent that we partake of that nature, to that extent we also share in His glory.

Jesus told his disciples that if they had seen him then they had seen the Father, because the Father was in him and he was in the Father. By this the Son shares in the glory of the Father, because each are in the other. But here's the kicker, then Jesus said that he would be in his disciples, and his disciples would be in him, and together they would all be in the Father, and the Father would be in all of them, so that eventually God the Father would be all, in all. The glory of the Father divinely infused into His children is the final step of preparation for kingdom membership. Everyone in the kingdom will be divinely infused with the holiness, righteousness, and glory of God the Father. Now again for clarity, it doesn't say we will become gods, it says we will be somehow spiritually, organically connected to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in such a manner that we may even share in that glory that is God's alone. For example, we don't fully understand just exactly how our human spirit is attached to our flesh bodies while here on earth, but perhaps that's a preview of how we're all going to be eventually connected with God, by some kind of inseparable bonding process known only to Him.

Conclusion:

We discussed from verse three that it's absolutely imperative for one to have total confidence in the authenticity of the gospel itself. Regardless of the person who preaches it, or how we evaluate them, the message has to be true and authentic, or our hopes are in vain. So we have to be familiar enough with the Scriptures ourselves to make this determination.

Then, in the subsequent verses, we discussed the characteristics of true preachers versus the characteristics of false ones. The Scriptures give us a very good description of a genuine teacher and a genuine believer. According to the Scriptures, actions really do speak louder than words. The false teachers have lots of pretty words, but it's their actions and their attitudes that give them away. The true preacher demonstrates humility and self-sacrifice towards his followers. He's gentle and loving like a nursing mother, or a father with his only son. He's not a bully or a tyrant, and he doesn't present himself as being greater or holier than his followers. He doesn't seek his own gain but the gain of those he teaches.

Those teachers who demonstrate these characteristics consistently show themselves to be trustworthy stewards of the gospel of God, and can usually be trusted to accurately teach the Scriptures. It is the responsibility of every believer to be familiar enough with the Scriptures to be able to discern for themselves whether the one they're listening to is teaching the truth and accurately handling the word of God. False teachers will eventually have to pay for their sins, but all of those who have followed them will still suffer the loss of having followed a deceiver. Therefore, everyone is charged with the responsibility of evaluating the trustworthiness and the character of the teachers they're listening to, as well as the accuracy of what they teach.

Then finally, in the last two verses, we were told that the point of the gospel, the end result that's expected, is that those who believe it will walk in a manner that's worthy of God. That's the point and that's the fruit. Nothing less will do. At the end of the day the purpose of the gospel is that God would be glorified through His Son Jesus, by the visible demonstration of his merciful work of repentance and sanctification in the lives of those whom He's redeemed. This is the will of God, our sanctification, visibly demonstrated to the glory of God. And, it's the preparation process by which redeemed man may be transformed into the image of Jesus, and thus, made suitable not only to enter into His kingdom, but even to share in His glory, forever and ever. Amen.

