

1st Thessalonians Ch 1 Vs 4-10

The Fruits of Effective Examples

Vs2-10

Just getting out of the driveway was a major feat during that year's snow and ice storms. One co-worker was relating how he used his seven-year-old son's baseball bat to smash the slick coat of ice on his driveway. Upon getting cold he went inside for a cup of coffee before attempting to clear the car. Several minutes later, his son, who had been outside with him, came in. "Dad," he said, "I got the ice off the car." "How did you do that?" his father asked. "Same way you did," the boy shrugged, "with the baseball bat."

Every man is an example, and it's critical the type of example that we're setting, the type of standards that we leave in such impressionable lives. Which in reality is every life that we come into contact with, that's why it's so important that we be clear in what we approve of, what we don't approve of, the things that we condone, and the things that we condemn. The wrong impression, an unclear example, a blurred and uncertain example can wind up bringing more damage in the long run than good. Just ask the dad that owned that car.

We need to be clear concerning our position, and not just in word, but in deed, Charles Spurgeon once said, "A man's life is always more forcible than his speech. When men take stock of him they reckon his deeds as dollars and his words as pennies. If his life and doctrine disagree the mass of onlookers accept his practice and reject his preaching." That's true, actions speak louder than words, but if our *practice* corresponds with our *preaching*, then our words will have a lasting impact on those to whom we're speaking. and Such was the case with the Thessalonian believers, they became models of their examples, and having received a good example themselves, they in turn became good examples to the people around them, and so this ch really reveals the fruits of effective examples.

In less than a month, the apostle Paul, Silas, and Timothy, established doctrine, and a way of life for these believers that had such an impact, that it resounded, and rippled throughout the entire region even proceeding Paul and the missionary team to the places they would go. Everyone knew of their work of faith, their labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the things that we rounded off last weeks study speaking about, the 3 qualities (the trinity of graces) that are to typify the believer, faith, hope, and love.

These 3 things cover the full spectrum of the Christian experience. Past, present and future are all wrapped up and dealt with through these 3 virtues. The work of faith looking back, dealing with the past as I by faith look back to the cross and believe upon Jesus Christ (and we spoke last week about how the evidence of the work of faith spill out into our everyday as demonstrated by how we live our lives.) The labor of love dealing with the present, and our serving the Lord in the day to day practical matters, out of the overflow of love that we have for Him, and again when the motive is love then it's really not labor, it's a joy. and When its labor with out love, then profits you nothing, love is the only motive that God will accept in our labors, our service for and towards Him.

Then finally the patience of hope looking to the future, the anticipation and assured expectation of the Lord's return, keeping the eternal perspective as we occupy here until His return. Paul is giving thanks (the Thessalonian believers evoking *gratitude* in the apostle rather than *grief*) for these evidences, these qualities that typify their lives. His gratitude *didn't* come because all the Christians in Thessalonica thought so highly of him. In Ch 2 we see Paul will use that whole chapter to defend himself, and his ministry against slander and false accusations. Paul's gratitude didn't come because the Thessalonian Christians were morally impeccable. Again we'll see later in the letter, how Paul will exhort and warn them strongly regarding their slipping into sexual impurity. Nor did Paul's gratitude come because the Thessalonian Christians were completely accurate in all their doctrine. There's a few quirks and bugs to work out there to, but Paul saw the fingerprints of Jesus Christ in their lives, he saw the faith, the hope, and the love that exuded from these believers in the sight (he says in vs 3) of our God and Father.

Vs4

Wait a minute Paul, these are baby Christians, you don't bring up the mind-bending doctrine of election to these guys. They don't have the competency yet to absorb such an intellectual and challenging doctrine. You'll spin them out with an input over load. But notice Paul uses the word "knowing." Here in vs 4 he just states their election as fact, they already know it, in the 3-4 weeks Paul was with them, he'd already informed them and established them regarding this doctrine. Here he just reminds them of it, why do we let this doctrine of election plague us so intensely, I suppose it's because we're uncomfortable with their being a concept that we have to deal with that we're unable to reconcile in our minds. Free will, and sovereign election, how do the 2 reconcile to one another, no man can know, the bible teaches both, but in the end "the just shall live by faith." If you can figure it all out you don't need faith, but without faith it's impossible to please God, and as high as the heavens are above the earth so God's ways are above our own, so how can we hope to grasp the fullness of the ways and the workings of the heart and mind of God? The bible teaches emphatically that God elects unto salvation, Jesus said, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit,*" John 15:16. In John 15:19 Jesus said very clearly, "*I chose you out of the world.*" But I also believe that living in the society and culture that we do, that we have a bit of a struggle really grasping the concept of God's election. Because our political system has no doubt stained it a bit, when we think of election we think of various candidates, each one of them jockeying for position, each of them seeking to persuade your opinion as to why they're the man for the job. and If they are articulate, and eloquent enough to persuade your thoughts then you cast your vote their direction and they're the "elected" official, and so we have this tendency to cast that same shade of thought on the Lord. So that we think He's up there saying, "Well, this one has potential, good moral character, high ethical standards, smooth talker, leadership skills, I'll cast My vote for him, he's now one whom I've elected, she's one whom I've elected."

But the bible doesn't teach that at all, as a matter of fact God's election has nothing to do with our personal character, what we've done, haven't done, or have the potential *to do*. The bible teaches that God's election took place before the foundations of the earth, and that He chose those whom He's elected before they were ever born, before they had the opportunity to do good *or* evil. In the book of Romans Paul is talking about Jacob and Esau being yet still in Rebecca's womb when God said, "*The older shall serve the younger.*" Rom 9:12 and He said, "*for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, (notice) not of works but of Him who calls.*"

As Spurgeon said, I'm glad that God chose me before I was ever born because He probably wouldn't have after I'd done some living. But you say, "Well that don't seem fair, does it?" Romans asks the same question, Rom 9:14 "*What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!*" No way, God is just and righteous in His every decision. But we as a people have a tendency to want to strip God of the very capacity that we so appreciate; it's called free will. I'm glad that I had a choice in whom I wanted to spend the rest of my natural life with on this earth. My wife had the same choice, she wasn't just thrown at me with a word of advice, "there you go, now deal with it." I for one appreciate that, now if I have the right to exercise free will in whom I want to spend this temporal time on earth with. How much more should God have the right to choose whom He wants to spend the rest of eternity with? and Yet we have the audacity to want to strip Him of the very rights that He gave to us, but the news flash is this is *His* universe, not ours, and we play by *His* rules, He don't play by ours.

"Well, it still doesn't seem fair" you say. Why not, because I guess I'm not elect (and if you are elect you needn't complain, you need to rejoice) but if you're sitting there thinking I guess I'm not elect. Well, here's the kicker, God never excuses your capacity to exercise free will. Jesus said, "*The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.*" John 6:37 He said, "*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.*" John 7:37 In Matt 11:28 He said, "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" and We read in Rev 22:17 "*And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*" So the invitation goes out to all, God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, so if you're thirsting for more, if you're weary in soul, if you qualify as a "whoever" then if you desire, you can take of the water of life freely. There's no excuse, the door is wide open, come to Christ, you'll find out He elected you. It's mind boggling, but it's true, but why do we think God has to explain everything to us anyway?

Ok Job, God was basically saying, you've been questioning Me for some 36 or so Ch's now, "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. "*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone*" Job 38:3-6 "

God said, "*Have you commanded the morning since your days began, And caused the dawn to know its place.*" Job 38:12 "*Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths? Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death? Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this.*" Job 38:16-18. God just goes on and on pummeling Job with all these questions that are impossible for him to know, and if God *were* to explain them all, your brain would just explode. The point being that there are certain things that your and my finite brain are never going to comprehend this side of eternity and we dare not have the audacity to question the righteousness and judgments of God.

We're so limited in understanding even when it comes to the basic fundamentals of creation, how do we expect to get a grasp on the deep things of God? It can't be done, all this to say, if you want to come to Christ, you come, election is a reality, free will can't be ignored, don't rack your brain trying to figure it all out, because you can't. But it's rightly been said, "If God were small enough for me to understand, then He wouldn't be big enough for me to worship."

Vs5

I love the way the scriptures tie together, Paul mentions 3 things in this vs that are the 3 key ingredients to effective evangelism, and the 3 virtues of vs 3 are the results of the 3 ingredients of vs 5.

Paul says that he didn't bring the gospel to them in word only, it wasn't just meaningless babble or some vain philosophy, but the gospel came packed with #1 Power, #2 in the Holy Spirit, and #3 much assurance. The power of the gospel brings about the work of faith, the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives will produce the labor of love, and our much assurance of the reality of the gospel produces a patience of hope until the return of Jesus Christ. But we need to understand that the gospel isn't just some sit-com type entertainment, just words to amuse us, or entertain us for an hour and then we turn it off and go on about our lives. The bible is very clear that the gospel has innate, or intrinsic with in it the power to change lives, every word that God has ever breathed has with in it the power to penetrate the human heart and change a life.

Paul wrote in Rom 1:16 "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.*" Now it's not the power of man, it's the power of God, and the necessary ingredient that infuses power into the word of God is the person of the Holy Spirit. That's why John said you don't need anyone to teach you; in fact I would go as far as to say that no man ever really *does* teach you. It might come out of my mouth, but if the Holy Spirit doesn't open your heart and your understanding you'll never learn a thing. So in reality it's the Holy Spirit that teaches the heart of man the things of God. Jesus said, in John 14:26 "*The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things.*"

That's why there are so many dead churches today, because so many men are so carnal that the Holy Spirit isn't honoring their lives and the work that they're doing, or because they've chosen the ministry as a career choice, and God hasn't called them to proclaim the gospel, and *many* people who take the pulpit today in America don't even know the Lord. and So the right words are coming out, but there's no power, there's no anointing, there's no lives that are changing, because the Holy Spirit isn't there, in the sense of honoring what's happening. The anointing isn't on their lives.

But Paul is saying here that when *we* came to you and shared the gospel, the Holy Spirit bore witness on your hearts, and the power of the gospel changed your life as we simply rightly divided the word of truth for you to reason through. Can you present the gospel with much assurance, if God were to grant to you the opportunity to share the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to a lost soul, could you share with confidence, and boldness? Or would you be uncertain and unsure of what to say, or if you were right about what you said? Paul says, you know what kind of men we were around you, not arrogant, but confident, we had Christ confidence, and you responded. I love that, the power of the Holy Spirit can work miracles, raise the dead, heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, and cause the lame to leap for joy. But the real evidence of the power of the gospel and the witness of the Holy Spirit's work in a people is the transformation of their lives. That's what Paul is pointing out; "You guys went from heathenistic idolaters to God loving, full of faith, brethren."

Vs6

and This is sort of the pivot point of our study today regarding the fruits of effective examples. Paul says, "*You became followers of us*" or to understand it another way, "*You began to imitate us.*" Now listen guys this is so important, Paul was always availing himself to scrutiny, he was always saying, "Hey, examine my life, in fact do what I do, follow after my example, imitate me as I imitate Christ."

Think about it, how do infants learn (initially) primarily through mimicking or parroting those who are over them, their examples in the home. They begin to imitate mom and dad, or big brother, or big sister. and Then eventually as they grow older, and begin to mature more and more, they begin to look less and less to mom and dad in the sense of parroting them or imitating them per say. and As newborn babes in Christ it's so important that they have the examples in the church, those who are in positions of authority to look to and follow after. The question is, what type of examples are we setting, because mark my words, they'll imitate you. If you place your ok on something, then as far as they're concerned, that's ok. I was feeling a bit weird about that movie, but the pastor seen it, the leadership was hanging out there, I guess it's ok.

Now, never are we to disrespect those in authority over us, or be non submissive to those whom God has placed over us. But at the same time as they begin to mature in Christ a bit, they start standing more on their own, they don't allow your convictions to impact theirs in an area they might consider compromise.

They become followers of the Lord, but they also are followers of you. Now in Paul's case that was good thing, I'm often not so sure in our case, but that doesn't justify our lack of practical holiness. We need to be mindful of the example that we set to those around us, because all are impressionable to various degrees and if we're not careful, we've got people taking ice off our cars with baseball bats and we've promoted more damage than good.

The Thessalonian believers didn't just float down the streams of peer pressure and the worldly standards around them anymore. They followed after Paul, and after the Lord, even though it wasn't the easy way. Paul mentions that he was clear regarding afflictions, and even as he presented the gospel to them, he was still bearing the marks of the beatings that he'd received in Philippi. and Yet they still (having counted the cost, and catching eternal vision knowing that the present sufferings of this world aren't worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us) received the word with joy, the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Vs7

This is effective discipleship, it's the fruits of effective examples, they followed Paul's example, and in turn they became examples themselves. Notice, to "all" of Macedonia, and Achaia, everywhere around that region people could see the work of Christ in these people. and It encouraged them to press on and to fight the good fight of faith. and When you look in your maps in the back of you bibles you realize this was some massive square footage that Paul's talking about here, and yet the message about them was spreading like wild fire with out the radio, with out television or the internet. Everywhere the word was getting out, and people need examples today, not just people that will tell them about Christianity, there are plenty of people that can display lip service, but they need someone who will show them Christianity. Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* Matt 5:16 Notice

Vs 8

Their light in shining, Paul is saying you guys are putting us out of business, and we love it. Sadly today most churches are content with allowing church staff to do the witnessing, or the soul winning. But you don't find that example in the NT church, the entire body was involved, do you guys realize that all the crusades, all the television programs, all the radio programs evangelistic outreaches, and visitations only account for approximately 20% of church growth. 80% of all church growth happens just this way, by friends grabbing friends, and relatives grabbing relatives and saying hey, come check this place out, it'll blow your mind. Or just personal one on one sharing the gospel with people at work on your breaks or whatever, it's personal contact that brings in the harvest. You show me a church that's growing (in a balance fashion) in other words apart from carnal manipulation and little tricks for getting a big crowd with out any commitment to Jesus Christ You show me a balanced growing church, and I'll show you a congregation that's not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ A people sharing the reality of what Jesus Christ has done in their lives, that's what was happening here. These guys didn't have doctorates in theology, they weren't masters of eschatology, they just shared their testimony, what God had done for them in the person of Jesus Christ

Vs9-10

So their work of faith shows them as an elect people, their labor of love made them an exemplary and enthusiastic people, and the patience of hope made them an expectant people. Now last week we looked at how vs 9-10 correlate with vs 3, so vs 9-10 are an evidence of vs 3 which is an evidence of vs 5. All of it being the fruits of effective examples, but I want to consider for just a moment here (before we close) these vs from just a slightly different view. The work of faith demonstrated itself in how they turned to God from idols. Notice it doesn't say to from idols to God, you say, "Jeff isn't that sort of splitting hairs" well, yes but believe me they're hairs that need split. Because their turning from idols was the overflow, or the natural result of their turning to God, turning from idols didn't precede their turning to God, it followed it, that's repentance.

Their turning *to* God caused them naturally to turn *from* idols. Remember that action impacting faith we talked about last week. Take your hand and hold it so that the palm of your hand is facing you, (you represent your own idol, and maybe that's not too far off) now turn your hand around. Now the backside of your hand faces towards you and the palm of your hand automatically turned away from you. Now listen, it's impossible that you should turn towards Jesus Christ with out simultaneously turning away from something else. We can cry and feel guilty about our sin all day long, but until we turn *to* Jesus Christ and *away* from our sin it won't make a bit of difference. That's repentance, J. Vernon McGee said, "If a man doesn't turn from his sin, it is because he hasn't turned to Christ."

In whatever matter or situation it might be, Christ came to set us free from the bondage of sin, but the sad fact is, so often we won't turn to Christ in our situation of sin, because even though it makes us feel horrible, somewhere deep inside in the secret place we don't like to talk about we like it. Because if we had the heart of God towards our sin, if we realized the price that He paid to free us from it, if we knew how it broke His heart, and cost Him the life of His very Son, we would surely repent.

Have you turned to God from idols, the idol of pornography, the idol of greed and covetousness, or are you still bowing down to the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye and the pride of life? God help us to turn to Him today, that we might serve Him, that we would no longer be slaves of sin leading to unrighteousness, but rather slaves of God leading to righteousness as we wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead. As we occupy, eagerly awaiting our resurrected Savior. The doctrine of the resurrection and the deliverance from the wrath to come by the coming again of Jesus Christ at the end of each ch Paul inserts a little word of comfort about the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ

Now the wrath that He delivers us from is at least 2-fold. It's the eternal wrath of God that's reserved for Satan and the fallen angels and now all who've rejected Jesus Christ, the lake of fire. and Then also we'll be spared from the wrath to come in the Great tribulation when God's wrath will be being poured out on the earth in such a manner that the world's never seen nor will ever see again.

Let me just say that in either case, you don't want to drink of the wine cup of the wrath of God. You want to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and ever be with Him. So shall you be delivered from the wrath to come.

But if you don't know Jesus Christ you'll be forced to be a participant in the pouring out of God's wrath, but God loves you so much that He gave His only begotten Son for you upon the cross. and He's not willing that you should perish, but rather that you would believe in Jesus Christ and be delivered from the wrath to come. Will you believe on Christ today?