

Effective Faith

1 Thessalonians 1:1 - 2:13

June 18-19, 2016

This is a letter written by Paul to the church in the city of Thessalonica. The first few chapters are very personal. He has great affection and admiration for the church there and encourages them over and over to excel even more in their faith.

In the last two chapters Paul addresses their questions regarding the return of Christ. From these chapters we get an important understanding of last days' events. Paul will give us insight in regards to the rapture of the church, the antichrist, the great tribulation that is coming upon the world, and how to prepare your life as the end of the age draws near.

Jesus wanted us to be on the alert spiritually and to be aware of the “signs of the times.” When we get to those chapters we’ll look at the events unfolding in the world today in light of biblical prophecy so we might also discern the signs of the times and be spiritually ready.

But first, some background on why Paul is writing this letter. This is the first letter that Paul wrote to any of the churches and therefore is the oldest book in the New Testament. It was written only about 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus.

The story of Paul planting this church is found in Acts chapter 17. Paul had just left Philippi where he

was terribly mistreated by the city officials. They had Paul and Silas stripped of their clothes, beaten with rods, and thrown into jail. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns when an earthquake shook the jail and the doors were opened. The jailer took out his sword to take his own life, but Paul and Silas stopped him. The jailer then fell down before them saying, “What shall I do to be saved?”

The jailer took them to his own home, washed their wounds and cared for them. He and his entire house received Christ as Lord and Savior and were baptized that very hour.

The next day the city officials came to Paul and humbly asked them to leave the city, concerned because they had mistreated a Roman citizen without trial.

From there, Paul and Silas travel through Amphipolis and Apollonia and arrive in Thessalonica. Let’s read the account of it in Acts 17:1-15.

Paul was only in the city of Thessalonica three or four weeks and a major revival broke out. He established the church, appointed elders and went on to Berea. At some point during the next year he sent Timothy to check on their progress and encourage their faith. Timothy came back with a good report, but also brought questions about the return of Christ.

This letter was written about one year after Paul started the church there and is filled with practical, spiritual encouragement to excel in the faith. Paul uses himself as an example and in the first a few verses writes, *“You became imitators of us and of the Lord.”*

That becomes the theme of this first section. Paul wrote, *“You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”* The Spirit has taken hold of Paul’s life in an authentic and powerful way and wants the Spirit to ignite our lives in authentic revival; seen in truly effective faith.

I. Have Faith with Full Conviction

- Verse 5 – our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction, Paul wrote.
- Paul didn’t come and simply relay the message of the gospel, he said the gospel came in power and in the Holy Spirit – with full conviction. Paul was completely convinced that the gospel was sent by God with the power to transform lives.

Romans 1:15-16, I am eager to preach the gospel to you... for I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...

Jeremiah 23:29, “Is not My word like fire?”

Declares the Lord, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock?”

- Why should I be ashamed? The gospel is God’s power to change lives.
- Some people are afraid of being mocked or ridiculed because of their faith. There are afraid of other people’s opinions. They want to be thought of as ‘cool’ by the world so they can ‘fit in.’

Illus - I was saying goodnight to our granddaughter and at some point I said, “That’s cool.” Aviah then responded, “Please don’t be one of those dads that tries to be ‘cool’ by using cool words.” Of course I had to play that up. “Okay,” I said, “that’s groovy. I’m hip with that. Solid, man. I can dig it.” I may not know modern slang, but the 60s I got.

- Using cool words is one thing, but who influences who? We weren’t called to fit in, we are called to stand out. The gospel changes lives; it strengthens the weary and gives hope to the hopeless.
- In fact, it’s the gospel that takes hold of those who are ashamed of their lives and gives them the dignity of being rebuilt by God Himself on the Rock of Christ. That’s why it came with full conviction.

A. Have faith, hope and love in real life

- Verse 3 – Paul gave thanks to God for them because of their *work of faith* and *labor of love* and *steadfastness of hope* in Jesus Christ.
- Faith, hope, and love are together in many verses of the Bible, but here Paul shows how they are to be lived in full conviction.
- *Work of faith* – in other words, faith that’s lived in full conviction is worked out in a person’s life.

James 2:17-18, Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

- After Jesus had fed the 5000 with five loaves and two fish, the crowd followed Jesus to Capernaum on the other side of the sea, but Jesus said to them, “*You seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.*” They responded, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”

John 6:29, Jesus said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

- *Labor of love* - it's spiritual maturity to labor because of love. In contrast to complaining about everything you have to do. When Martha was preparing the meal while Mary sat at Jesus's feet, she complained.

Illus - The Beaverton campus has teams of people setting up every Sunday and the attitude is joyful and loving. Unfortunately, I had to learn this lesson the hard way...

- *Steadfastness of hope* - that church started in tribulation and opposition. They learned that patient, steadfast hope endures and is even strengthened because of storms. In fact, there are some lessons that can only be learned in a storm.
- God gives truths and principles for life in the Word of God, **but when we actually live them**, we learn them in a completely different way.

B. Be an example

- Verse 7-8 - they became an example to believers and not just in that region, their faith was well known.

- The word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, Paul wrote. In other words, people took note of the authentic change that was happening.
- This is a challenge to all of us. We should all have the desire to live in such a way that people take note of what we do and how we live, our character and our countenance and want the same thing for themselves.
- If you make yourself known as a Christian, people will watch to see what a Christian does, people will listen to see what a Christian says.

Illus - When I was going to Bible college I worked as a server in restaurants. I always made it known who I was, but also knew that they would then watch my life. My first day at the Red Lion I was looking for an opportunity and it came unexpectedly...

1 Timothy 4:12, Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

II. Live Well While You Wait for the Lord
--

- Paul commends them because not only was the word of God sounding forth from them and their faith becoming well-known, he

commends them because they also had a ready expectation for the return of the Lord.

- In fact, this is what caused Paul to write this letter and answer their questions about the return of the Lord. They had a sense of urgency, it affected how they lived, they were watching and waiting.
- They got this from Paul himself; he was looking for the return of Christ with great expectation. That made him live with spiritual priority and Paul commends them because they follow his example.

A. Pleasing God in how you live

- Verse 2:4 - so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who examines our hearts, Paul wrote.
- That's an example to follow. Paul knows that it's ***God that examines our hearts*** so he came to them with boldness and confidence to speak the gospel even in the midst of opposition and he came with pure motives. He was sincere and genuine.
- The evidence of that, he said in verses 7-8, was that he didn't just give them the gospel, he gave them his own life; he cared for them like a nursing mother tenderly cares for her children.

- The perspective that God examines our hearts, changes everything; it makes you want to live to please Him in all you do.

2 Corinthians 5:7, 9, ... for we walk by faith, not by sight... Therefore, we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

- How we treat people around us matters to God. Paul wrote that he could have come and asserted authority over them, making demands of them, but he knew that it would please God much more to be gentle, tenderly caring for them like a nursing mother.
- A nursing mother sacrifices a lot for her baby. It's very inconvenient, you have little sleep, it's messy and often times smelly, but it's a labor of love.
- God is very pleased with that kind of attitude. When you're willing to sacrifice of yourself and be inconvenienced to help others, you're demonstrating a faith that's real.

B. Encouraging people around you

- Verse 11 – “You know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each of you as a father would his own

children... so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you..."

- Paul wants them to walk in a manner that's worthy of the Lord and so he is exhorting and encouraging and imploring each of them.
- It's pleasing to the Lord to have such an impact and influence on people around you that they walk more and more worthy of the Lord.
- Do that by exhorting and encouraging those that God puts in your life, not as self-appointed righteousness police, but like a father who loves his children.
- In the Greek, the word exhortation literally means to "call out alongside." It means to encourage someone to live well as you come alongside.

Illus - I did powerlifting when I was at OSU. When you're lifting weights with someone, you come alongside and encourage and exhort them, "You can do it!! You can do more, I'm with you." It's amazing how much more you can do with encouragement.

- There is a beautiful story of a father exhorting his son in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus tells this parable; a man had two sons. The younger of them asked his father

for his inheritance early. When he received it, the young man went on a journey and squandered everything on worldly living.

- When he had spent everything, a severe famine came and he became impoverished. Finally, he took a job feeding swine, but the pigs had food and he did not.
- He came to his senses and decided to go to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and ran to embrace him.
- But the story is also about the older brother who comes in from the field and upon hearing that the father is celebrating because the prodigal son had come home, he became angry.
- Not only does the father open his arms to the younger son, he gently exhorts the older one.

Luke 15:31-32, The father said to him, “Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live; he was lost and has been found.”