

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 9, 2011 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANS “A Christianity That’s Catching – A Study of 1 Thessalonians”

Behaving Properly Toward Outsiders *1 Thessalonians 4:9-12*

What is the Christian’s responsibility toward non-Christians? Are the saved to conduct their affairs as if unbelievers didn’t exist? Or are they to treat outsiders as though they had some kind of contagious plague and thus are in need of being kept at a safe distance? Should Christians try to avoid offending non-Christians by adopting their lifestyle? How should believers behave toward unbelievers? What does God’s Word say about this?

In this study, we are going to find out the answers to these questions. As we do, let’s bear in mind certain categories of outsiders who usually cross our paths, such as immediate family members, relatives, neighbors, work associates, fellow classmates, friends, and even casual acquaintances. The answers we discover in Scripture will affect not only our lives but theirs as well.

I. A NECESSARY WARNING AND CHALLENGE TO ALL CHRISTIANS

All of us who are Christians are engaged in an intense conflict – the war of extremes. This war is waged on a variety of fronts. Let’s briefly look at four of them.

1. Four Wars of Extreme:

- (1) **The war between faithful evangelism and personal edification** – The first occurs between faithful evangelism and personal edification. Either we are zealous for the lost and inclined toward evangelism, almost to the exclusion of personal discipleship and development through Bible study and prayer, or we are so committed to our spiritual growth and a life of devotion that we show little or no concern for those who are without Christ... not that we don’t care about lost, but our lives consist of our concern for our own growth rather than the lost.
- (2) **The war between enthusiastic faith and healthy trust in God** – A second battle of extremes occurs between enthusiastic faith and a healthy trust in God. On the one hand, we can act with such self-confidence and determination that we run ahead of God and His help and make a mess of things. On the other hand, we can be so afraid

of taking a risk and stepping out on faith that we excuse ourselves from really seeing God do things and as a result we become dull and visionless.

- (3) **The war between vertical and the horizontal** – Another conflict arises between the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical side of the life of a Christian is often characterized by a preoccupation with prophecy, identifying signs of the end times, and focusing on Christ’s imminent return. You’ve have perhaps heard it said about this one, “He (or she) is so heavenly minded that he (she) is not earthly good!” Or sometimes this occurs to such a degree that some live recklessly and irresponsibly, expecting His return to bail them out of a mess we have created for themselves. The horizontal side involves ignoring the truths of the vertical so completely that we despair of Christ’s return. Consequently, we set about building our own materialistic empire and utopia.
- (4) **The war between maintaining relationships with Christians and maintaining relationships with non-Christians** – A fourth fight between extremes occurs as the result of our need to maintain relationships with both Christians and non-Christians. We can become so exclusive and inbred with our spiritual family that our whole world revolved around other Christians. This leads to becoming spiritual fat Christians whose faith is only about themselves and them being fed. It also leads, more importantly, to our losing touch with lost and the impact we ought to be having on a lost world. Or we can slip into the other extreme, where we choose to avoid contact so thoroughly with fellow Christians and Biblical teaching that we end up as “Secret Service Saint” or “Undercover Christians” who behave little differently than the non-Christian world.

2. Warnings and Challenges Concerning these Extremes:

- (1) **A Caution... *Guard against extremes!*** – Each of these extremes is wrong. God want us to be balanced in our Christian lives. So, what’s the caution? Guard against extremes! But beware! Satan will try to break down your defenses against extremism because he is the expert of the unbalanced life. He was satisfied to be the highest-ranking angelic servant of God. EH wanted to rule as God (Isaiah 14:12-14). Then, when the Lord judged him for his sin, he became the most corrupt and devious rebel in God’s entire kingdom. Such a sinful extremist will do all he can to get and keep us off balance. So watch out for him and his tricks.
- (2) **Some Clarification... *We can only be salt and light to a dying world when we involve ourselves in it without becoming like it (the world)!*** – In John 17, Jesus prayed to His Heavenly Father and asked Him to keep His children from extremism – specifically, from the extremes of 1) losing touch with unbeliever because of Christian exclusivism and 2) becoming so worldly that no noticeable Christian distinctive exist. Listen carefully to Jesus’ words in John 17:15-18,

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the

truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”(Jn. 17:15-18)

The Lord does not save us so that He can remove us from the world. Rather, He rescues us from the path of destruction, then calls us to present the only path to life to those traveling who are still going the wrong way. Jesus prayed for our insulation from Satan, not our isolation from the world. We can only be salt and light (contagious) to a dying world when we involved ourselves in it without becoming like it.

- (3) A Challenge...** *We need to quit expecting non-Christians to behave as Christians should and stop excusing Christians for behaving as non-Christians usually do!* – In 1 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul applied the essence of Christ’s prayer to a situation that had arisen in the Corinthian church. The Corinthian believers had gone to an extreme. They had become so worldly that they condoned and incestuous relationship in their midst – one that would have shocked even the non-Christian world (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul strongly rebuked these believers for not disciplining a Christian who had become sexually intimate with his father’s wife (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Then he backed up his rebuke with these words of clarification in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11,

“I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.” (1 Cor. 5:9-11)

2 Challenges Expressed: The challenge is clear here...

- 1) **Remain distinctive yet attractive** – First, Christians need to remain distinctive in and attractive to the world without living like the world.
- 2) **Be tough on our own yet easy on those not our own** – Second, Christians need to be tough on their own and, in comparison, easy on non-Christians.

**We need to quite expecting non-Christians to behave as Christians should and stop excusing Christians for behaving as non-Christians do.*

II. SOME BALANCED COUNSEL FROM EARLY CHRISTIANS

Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1) provide the counsel all Christians should heed for behaving properly toward the unsaved. Their instruction in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 is basically twofold:

2 Fold Instruction from Paul and His Associates:

1. **When it comes to fellow Christians (vv.9-10)** – Their first piece of counsel is basic yet foundational to the unity of the church and its witness to a watching world. It’s pretty

simple, really! What is it? That Christians love one another. Look at what these verses say,

“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.” (1 Thess. 4:9-10)

4 Things about Their Love:

- (1) **Practice of Love** – The Thessalonians Christians not only knew that they were supposed to love fellow believers, but they made their knowledge come alive in their relationship with other Christians. They were not simply hearers of the truth but were doers as well.
- (2) **Growth of Love** – And yet, Paul and his associates (Silas and Timothy) exhorted them to excel more and more at loving others. The Thessalonians were called to do that which was best for fellow believer to the highest degree attainable.
- (3) **Example of Love** – Their love was to be modeled after the sacrificial love of Christ manifested toward them when He willingly died on the cross on man’s behalf (see Jn. 3:15, Jn. 13:1, Jn. 15:13, Rom. 5:6-8).
- (4) **Result of Love** – When Christians display this kind of love toward one another, it attracts the attention of the unsaved.

- Why? _____

- When non-Christians (the unsaved, the lost) are confronted with unconditional love... a love that accepts others regardless of who they are or what they have done rather than for what they have to offer or what they can achieve – they see something that they want.
- That desire generally opens a natural door for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with that person.
- The Lord was well aware that the exercise of genuine Christian love among His people would have this effect That’s why He instructed His disciples with these words in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have love you... By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

2. **When it comes to Non-Christians (vv.11-12)** – A more direct way in which we may behave properly toward unbelievers is laid before us in these verses from 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. Basically, what is set forth is lifestyle evangelism. Let’s consider the three key elements listed that comprise this witnessing method as well as its usual result.

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” (1 Thess. 4:11-12)

3 Key Elements of Lifestyle Evangelism and It’s Result:

- (1) **Lead a quiet life** – There is good reason to believe that many in the Thessalonians church had gone overboard on prophecy – specifically, the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Remember... balance, balance, balance! Some among them had quit their jobs and begun spending their time in idle conversations and speculations about this supernatural event and the rest of the city... more particularly the lost were tired of hearing it and wanted nothing to do with it. So Paul exhorted them to stop spending an inordinate amount of time living in tomorrow and to start living with a calm, responsible eye on today. Have you ever heard of “Quiet Evangelism”? What do you think it is? I have known believers who lived life so well that other took note and began to want to be just like them and sought out what made them the way they were... they actually came to Christ this way.
- (2) **Attend to your own business** – The idea in this command is one of personal diligence – working steadily and faithfully with consistency at one’s own assignment in life (Jn. 21:20-22). The Thessalonians were not to be busybodies, obnoxious, or wearisome about their Christian beliefs. They were to do their sharing in an ongoing maintenance and development of Thessalonica by attending to their own work. You know in a church there is often such this networking of gossip and talebearing, of nitpicking and tearing things apart and down that the world looks on in disgust and wants not part of it. We need to stay out of the business of having an opinion on such trivial matters and be content to just be all that we can be for Christ... to build up rather than tear down.
- (3) **Work with your hands** – The Thessalonian Christians were to earn their own way in the community. They were not to freeload off of one another or non-Christians. Apparently, some of these early believers thought that there was nothing wrong with leading a lazy life and reaping the benefits of other people’s hard work. So, in another letter to them, Paul had to reiterate this exhortation to work in much stronger terms (2 Thess. 3:10-15). Few things damage the effective spreading of the gospel more than a Christian who does a job poorly or hardly at all. We who are Christians need to work hard at what our had finds to do and with all of our might to God’s glory. As we do, respect for our labor will eventually create ample opportunity for us to share our faith.
- (4) **This lifestyle will win you the right to be heard and make you less dependent on others** – Of course, there are exception to this general consequence, but the main point it this... *“A loving, responsible lifestyle of a believer will not only benefit other Christians and yourself, but it will also bring to the watching eye of the lost a magnetic view of the life that could be theirs through Jesus Christ”* A contagious Christian faith!

III.SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE REGARDING NON-CHRISTIANS

Keeping in mind the wise counsel we have just considered, let’s turn our attention to one more Biblical text and draw our final piece of advice from it. The passage is **Colossian 4:5-6** and it says, *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation (speech) be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”* The instruction presented here regarding Christians’ behavior before non-Christians is clear. Let’s personalize it for your benefit and mine.

3 Practical Reminders for Behaving Toward Outsiders : (Colossians 4:5-6)

- 1. Non-Christians are watching and wondering, so conduct yourselves with wisdom** – Don't let your actions contradict your witness. Be an example of what you believe even before you share it verbally.
- 2. Non-Christians are listening and learning, so speak your words with grace** – No rebukes, put-downs, insults or suggestions of superiority are needed or wanted when you convey your faith to unbelievers. Let your speech (conversation) be bathed in God's supernatural grace. When it is, forgiveness and unconditional love, not condemnation and haughty pride, will be its hallmarks.
- 3. Non-Christians are individuals and important, so respond to them with dignity and sensitivity** – Every Christian has a different background. Hence, each has varying expectations, abilities, needs, and struggles. The same is true of every non-Christian. As servants of the One who gave His life for every human being, we need to treat each person as a distinct individual who is greatly loved by God, because they are.