

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 13, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CATCHING CHRISTIAN: A Study of 1 Thessalonians

“Behaving Properly Toward Outsiders”
1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

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 contagious plague and thus 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?*

CASE STUDY 1: James and Missy, are solid Christians. Some would even say, they are deeply committed Christians and sold out in their faith in many ways. They are very committed to their family and raising them with strong Christian values. They faithfully attend their church, and all of their friends are Christians. They don’t have any friends that are not Christian, and they don’t allow their children to play with or be around other non-Christian children. They are very careful about their children’s play-mates and friends. They don’t want their children to be influenced or hear anything that might be offensive or be considered un-Christian. They are very protective of their children as believers, and who could blame them in this world we live in. James and Missy have even made a commitment to home-school their kids, to keep them from what they perceive as a very secular and increasing anti-Christian public education system. They don’t allow their kids on any type of social media, and they won’t allow a TV in their home. James and Missy feel that they have very wisely built a strong wall of protection and refuge from this lost world we live in. They feel that this is their call as Christians, and especially as Christian parents, trying to raise their kids in this crazy, lost, sin-saturated world we live in. ***Is this an extreme to be avoided? What extreme do you see here? What is the counter and how you do it?***

CASE STUDY 2: Robert is a Christian and has very recently become very burdened for some of his friends who are not Christians. The problem is he runs with a pretty rough crowd who are not Christians, and in fact, live pretty hard lives, with heavy drinking and partying, some casual drug use, as well as pretty loose morals sexually. At times Robert has even been known to participate with them in some of their “lesser sins” as he says. He justifies his questionable behaviors as “trying to fit in and maintain a relationship with them so that I can lead them to Christ.” He usually feels guilty afterward and is convicted about it, but he always asks for God’s forgiveness

and moves on knowing that its for a higher purpose... to try to reach them for Christ. He's seen too many other Christians just condemn his friends for the things they do, and refuse to have anything to do with them. He considered that to be a terrible witness. So, he justifies doing somethings that other Christians, he knows wouldn't approve of, so that he can be accepted by his friends and not lose the opportunity to make a difference in their lives. ***Is this an extreme to be avoided? What extreme do you see here? What is the counter and how you do it?***

CASE STUDY 3: Brandon and Janet are middle-aged Christians, very committed to their faith and living the Christian life. They have recently moved into a new neighborhood, and have met most of their neighbors, who seem very nice, but right off the bat they discovered without question that their neighbors do not share their faith or convictions as believers. The neighbors visit regularly across the yards in the evening. There is a lot of profanity and course jokes from the men. The women always seem to be sipping their wine and gossip about who is doing what in the neighborhood. The neighbors very regularly hold block parties, where they all get together and there is a lot of drinking and partying, loud music... it all seems rowdy and wild to Brandon and Janet, who tend to hide behind their locked door and avoid the neighbors. They are always invited to join in, but Brandon and Janet always find an convenient excuse when they can't participate. The neighbors continue to be friendly and try to speak to Brandon or Janet when they seem them, but they often avoid eye contact and pretend they don't see them. They just don't feel they can be associated with these kind of people. ***Is this an extreme to be avoided? What extreme do you see here? What is the counter and how you do it?***

⁹ But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰ and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; ¹¹ that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, ¹² that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing." -1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 (NKJV)

What is the Christian's responsibility toward non-Christians? Let's ask these questions again...

- ***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 contagious plague and thus 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 lesson, we are going to find out the answers to these questions. And 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.

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...

War of Extremes – 4 Extremes Christians Must Learn to Balance:

1. **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 development through Bible study and prayer, or we are so committed to our spiritual growth that we exercise little to no concern for those who are without Christ. This is a very real challenge for believers/Christians today. Many of us only think about how we can grow, how we can be fed, finding the right church that can meet my need and help me grow. Notice it all about my own personal edification, and we never think about the lost, and the “great commission” on our lives to reach them. We never give much thought to witnessing, sharing our faith, learning how to reach other for church personally. Many dismissed that thought from their minds, concluding that it is “someone else’s job!” It seem today that the church has often lost it’s burden for the lost... the unsaved, and no longer sees the fields that are ripe unto harvests. Statistics tell us that 95% of all Christians have never led a single person to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ in their lifetime.
2. **Enthusiastic faith and a 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 without God’s help and make a mess of things. On the other hand, we can be so afraid of risk and the walk of faith that we excuse ourselves from involvement and, as a result, become dull and visionless. I’ve seen so many Christians who allow this old world to shut them down and paralyze their faith... to the point that they are afraid to trust God and step out in faith and follow where God is leading their heart. *Why is this balance between enthusiastic faith and a healthy trust in God so important? How do we balance these two?* Remember Psalm 37:4-5... I believe what these verses say... *“Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass.”*
3. **The vertical and the horizontal** – Another conflict arises between the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical side is often characterized by a preoccupation with prophecy, identifying signs of the end times, and focusing on Christ’s imminent return. This occurs to such a degree that we live recklessly and irresponsible, expecting His return to bail us out of the mess we have created for ourselves. 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. I think that is some of what was behind the words of the angels to appeared to the disciples at Jesus’ ascension in Acts 1:11... the angel said to the disciples, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”* *What do you think that means? What happens when we focus on the vertical and become constantly obsessed with prophecy, and end times stuff, and the second coming? Now what is the balance? Is prophecy, and the end times, and the second coming important? What is the balance there and why is it important?*
4. **Maintaining relationships with Christians and 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 that our whole world revolves around other Christians. *What could possible be wrong with that?* This leads to our losing touch with the lost... the very ones we are called to reach and left here to impact. 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 saints” who behave little differently than the non-Christian world.

Some helps with these extremes:

1. **A word of caution... guard against extremes-** Each of these extremes is wrong. God wants us to be not extremist Christians but balanced ones. So, what’s the caution... “Guard against extremes!” But beware... Satan (the enemy) will try to break down your defenses against extremism because he is the expert of the unbalanced life. He was not satisfied to be the highest-ranking, angelic servant of God. He 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 trick.
2. **Some important clarification...Jesus prayed against our extremes – (READ: John 17:6-19, Jesus Prays for His Followers/Disciples)** In John 17, Jesus prayed to His Heavenly Father and asked Him to keep His children from extremism – specifically from the extremes of two things...

2 specific extremes Jesus prayed against in the lives of Christians:

- (1) **Losing touch with unbelievers because of Christian exclusivism -**
- (2) **Becoming so worldly that no noticeable Christian distinctives exist -**

Read carefully these words from Jesus’ prayer in John 17:15-18, *“¹⁵ I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify^[i] them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”*

3. **A worthy challenge... remain distinctive and attractive to the non-Christian -** In 1 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul applied the essence of Christ’s prayer to a situation that had arisen in the Corinthians church. The Corinthian believers had gone to an extreme. They had become so worldly that they condoned an 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 wife (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Then he backed up his rebuke with these words of clarification... in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, *“⁹ I wrote to you in my epistle not to ^[a]keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”* The challenge is clear...

2 parts in the challenge to from Paul for Christians in dealing with the extremes:

- (1) **Christians need to remain distinctive in and attractive to the world without living like the world**
- (2) **Christian need to be tough on their own and, in comparison, easy on non-Christians.**

We need to quite expecting non-Christians for behaving as non-Christians usually do.

SOME BALANCE COUNSEL FROM EARLY CHRISTIANS

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

2 Pieces of Wise Counsel for Behaving Wisely Toward Those Outside the Faith (Non-Christians):

1. **When it comes to fellow Christians... love one another (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. What is it? That Christians love one another. Look what these verses say... notice verses 9-10, *⁹But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.*” The Thessalonian Christians not only knew that they were supposed to love fellow believers, but they made their knowledge come alive in their relationships with other Christians. They were not simply hearers of the truth but were doers as well. And yet, Paul and his co-workers exhorted them to excel ever more at loving other Christians... each other. The Thessalonians were called to do that which was best for fellow believers to the highest degree attainable. Their love was to be modeled after the sacrificial love of Christ manifested toward them with He willingly died on the cross on man’s behalf (see John 3:16, John 13:1, John 15:13, Romans 5:6-8). When Christians display this kind of love toward one another, it attracts the attention of the unsaved. Why? Because non-Christians are used to a love that must be earned. So when they are confronted with unconditional love... a love that accepts others regardless of who they are rather than for what they can achieve... they see something that they want. That desire generally opens a natural door for sharing the good news about Jesus Christ. 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, *³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*”
2. **When it comes to non-Christians... live a life that draws and attracts others to Christ (vv.11-12)** - *¹¹that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, ¹²that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*” A more direct way in which we may behave properly toward unbelievers and those outside the faith is put before us in these verses in 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 unusual results.

Key Elements of Living a Catching Christian Life... A Life-style That Draws Other to Christ:

- (1) **Lead a quiet life** – There is good reason to believe that many in the Thessalonian church had gone overboard on prophecy – specifically, the imminent (soon/immediate) return of Jesus Christ. Some among them had quit their jobs and begun to spend their time in idle

conversations and speculation about this supernatural event. 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. The idea Paul mentions here of leading a *“quite life”* **This refers to one who does not present social problems or generate conflict among those people in his or her life, but whose soul rests easy even in the midst of difficulty.** *Do believers today ever contribute to social problems and generate conflict among those around them... in what ways might this be true (cite examples where you have seen this)? What does it mean to lead a quiet life in your thinking and how might this be helpful in drawing other to Christ?*

- (2) **Tend to our own business** – The idea in this command is one of personal diligence – working steadily and faithfully at one’s own assignment (**READ: John 21:15-19, 20-22... How might these verses apply to Paul’s words to the Thessalonians to mind their own business?**). The Thessalonians were not to be busybodies, obnoxious, or wearisome about their Christian beliefs. They were to do their share in the ongoing maintenance and development of Thessalonica by attending to their own work. Paul later deals with those who did not “mind their own business” at Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3:6-15). *What is our assignment as believers/Christians and how diligent to you think we really are to that assignment in your thinking? What happens when we are not diligent in our assignment? What does it mean to mind your own business in your thinking and how might this be helpful in drawing other to Christ?* Jesus said these words in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:33-34, ³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.* ³⁴ *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.* We might state a principle for our life from these verses this way... *“Don’t be worrying about someone else’s business, you focus on your own assigned tasks in this life. You have enough to worry in doing what your called to do?”*
- (3) **Work with your hands** – The Thessalonian Christian 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 (**READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:10-15... How might these verses apply to Paul’s words to the Thessalonians to work with their hands and be ?**). *Few things damage the effective spreading of the gospel more than a Christian who does a job poorly or hardly at all. How does this affect the witness and testimony of Christian?* We who are Christians need to work hard and do our job well. That is a powerful and effective testimony for our faith. As we do, respect for our labor will eventually create ample opportunities for us to share the faith.
- (4) **Win the respect of others** – Of course, there are exceptions to this general consequence of the kind of life Paul says we are to live (quite life, mind your business, be diligent and trustworthy in your work). But the main point is this... *“A loving, responsible lifestyle will not only benefit other Christians and yourself, but it will also bring to the watching eyes of the those outside the faith (the lost) a magnetic view of the life that could be their through Jesus Christ.”*

SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE REGARDING NON-CHRISTIAN (Colossians 4:5-6)

Keeping in mind the wise counsel we have just considered, let's turn our attention to one more biblical text and draw our final pieces of advice from it. Paul writes these words in Colossians 4:5-6, *⁵Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. ⁶Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*" Good advice! Right! The instruction presented here regarding Christians' behavior before non-Christians is clear. Let's personalize it for your benefit.

3 Practical Pieces of Advice for Our Relationship with Non-Christians:

- 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. Live out your faith by more than just your words... the profession of your lips. Let others see Jesus in you.
- 2. Non-Christians are listening and learning, so speak your words with grace –** No rebukes, no put-down, no insults, no suggestion of superiority are needed or wanted when you convey your faith to unbelievers. Let your speech be bathed in God's superabundant 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.