

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 3, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CATCHING CHRISTIAN: A Study of 1 Thessalonians

“Germs That Make Us Contagious”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“¹² And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies. ²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil. ²³ Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. ²⁵ Brethren, pray for us. ²⁶ Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren. ²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” -1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 (NKJV)

The most magnetic people on earth ought to be those of us who are in the family of God. As Christians, we have reason to be infectiously enthusiastic... we are at peace with the Lord, have our destiny securely in place, know the difference between essential priorities and unimportant involvements, and possess all the power needed to live life to its fullest. Deep within, there should be such an authentic exuberance that we couldn’t contain it even if we tried. Perhaps a major reason so many of us lack this winsome zest for life is that we have become far too preoccupied with the struggles, the battles, and the demands of life. We need to hear a positive and uplifting word. We need to know how we can enjoy life rather than merely endure it. If that speaks to your situation... and in some ways I think it speaks to all of ours... if that speaks to your situation then perk up your ears! Embedded in this closing passage of Paul letter to the church at Thessalonica (in Thessalonians 5:12-28) is the counsel we need to live this kind of infectiously enthusiastic life in the Lord that is contagious and catching for those around us, attracting other to our Lord.

For encouragement sake, some things are... (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15)

We have a choice to make: we can either spread poison or encouragement, dissension or peace, despair or hope. God has told us what choice He desires us to make through these words of Paul

in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, ^{“11} *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.*” The NIV says it, ^{“11} *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*” We might reword it this way... **“Make edifying others a regular habit of your life. Be a contagious encourager!”** Paul mentions some gifts we could give to one another that would spread the germs of encouragement. Two of them are urged in verses 12-13 and at least five of them are exhorted in verses 14-15.

Let’s consider, first the two that are “urged” in verses 12-13. Paul write, ^{“12} *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,* ¹³ *and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.*” Paul “urged” these Thessalonian believers to show respect to their spiritual leaders and promote peace among peace among believers (among one another). The Greek word translated here as “urged” literally means *“to call alongside to help.”* To “urge” is a strong encouragement, but is more of an urging... a pushing toward... than a strong command. It should be noted that when the word it appears in Scripture it carries the full weight and authority of God’s inspired word, and therefore is binding on a believer to practice these things.

2 Thing We are URGED To Do to Spread the Germs of Encouragement:

1. **Show respect for ministers and/or those in Christian leadership** – ^{“12} *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,* ¹³ *and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake...*” The word “recognize” there does not mean simple face recognition... “Yeah! I know my pastor when I see him! I recognize him!” Dr. John MacArthur says, “This does not mean simple face recognition, but that the people are to literally know their pastors well enough to have an intimate appreciation for them and to respect them because of their value... congregations are to think rightly and lovingly of their pastors, not because of their charm or personality, but because of the fact that they work of the Chief Shepherd as His special servants.”
2. **Live in peace with each other in the body of Christ (other Christians)** – Verse 13 says, *“...be at peace among yourselves.”*

These two simple things are imperative for us as believes, if we desire for our faith to be a contagious one... or one that those outside the faith, those in the world would want. Perhaps nothing damages the church and the cause of Christ as much or more than when the world look on to view a bitterly divided, divisive, fighting and combative church, believers who can’t get along, who are constantly airing out their dirty laundry before the world, attacking one another, attacking other ministers, competitively putting others down in the faith to build us and ours up. It has been tragic to watch for the past few years as ministers and Christians have attacked and maligned one another on social medial, airing out our dirty laundry for the world to see, to laugh at, to mock and to say “See! I told you so! Those Christians are nothing but a fighting, bitter and bickering bunch who can’t even get along with each other!”

- ***In your opinion, why is this so damaging to the church and the churches witness?***
- ***Why is it so damaging when we attack and besmirch the reputation of other ministers and leaders in the church?*** (Note: we are not talking about hiding misconduct and the clear moral failing and sexual scandals of some high profile ministers and church... these should be thoroughly dealt with in a biblical way, but often we defame and attack those who we disagree with doctrinally and/or theologically... i.e. Dr. John MacArthur, Beth Moore)

- *What do you think is the idea behind the urging to “live at peace with” each other?*
- *How does this draw others, perhaps outside the faith, in to the faith?*
- *What are some ways we can exhibit these two “urged” behaviors for believers?*

In verses 14-15 Paul “*exhorted*” (more of an urgent request). ¹⁴Now we *exhort* you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.” There are occasions when we all need to confront the undisciplined, put courage into the discouraged, strengthen the weak, exercise patience with all people, and replace retaliation with acts of kindness. The focus in these verses is one of strong exhortation, whereas in the receding section (vv.12-13), the words are couched in terms of a request. The word “exhort” carries a stronger emphasis. The Greek translated here as “*exhort*” means “to call for, to summon, admonish.” In other words as believers/Christians we are called to do this... Paul give us five gifts as directives for believers which call for our urgent applications.

5 Thing We are EXHORTED To Do to Spread the Germs of Encouragement:

1. **Admonish the unruly (v.14)** – Even though it may hurt, there are occasions when Christians should be confronted and corrected with the truth. These times of admonition are needed when a fellow believer is “unruly” – that is, when he or she is undisciplined, disorderly and irresponsible in carryout out his or her Christian duty. As members of Christ’s family, we are expected to behave ourselves by being where we ought to be and doing what we ought to do. When we become derelict in our Christian responsibilities, God calls on other members of His family to confront us with this fact and to exhort us to resume fulfilling our Christian duty.
2. **Encourage the fainthearted (v.14)** – Those brethren who are overly worried, deeply discouraged or physically and/or emotionally debilitated urgently need other Christians to lift them up and to encourage them onward. This may involve giving them words of comfort, lending them a listening ear, or just showing them in some other concrete way that someone cares. Whatever that means, the hands-on act of encouragement is a wonderful way to make a lasting investment in the life of God’s people.
3. **Help the weak (v.14)** – At one time or another and to varying degrees, all Christian experience weakness, exhaustion, or burnout. When that occurs, they need another believer to stand beside them as long as it takes to see them through. On the other hand, there are some in Christ’s family who consistently lack the sufficient strength to handle life on their own. These weaker brethren require the constant, close support of the stronger believers (see Romans 15:1). IF you are a helper of the weak, keep it up! The gift you are giving is sorely needed in the family of God.
4. **Be patient with everyone (v.14)** – Notice that this gift encompasses both Christians and non-Christians... it’s a family gift that is also to be offered to those who are outside God’s family. The Greek term for “patience” means “long-tempered.” It conveys the idea of being tough and durable in the face of intense pressure, of manifesting quiet and steady strength that can handle disappointment, hardship, and pain. Put negatively, God does not want His people to operate with short fuses. Anger, irritability, negativity, and an unforgiving spirit are not to characterize members of God’s family. Instead, Christians are called to exercise patience with one another and with unbelievers as well.

5. **Refuse to retaliate... do good (v.15)** – This verse states it quite clearly, ¹⁵“See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.” Rather than return caustic comments with more caustic comments, scowls with more scowls, fists with more fists, and backstabbing with more backstabbing, Christians are exhorted by the Lord to always seek that which is in the best interest of both believers and unbelievers. In other words, we are to return...

- Evil with good
- Ugly remarks with kind words
- Frowns with smiles
- Fists with attempts at reconciliation
- Backstabbing with genuine forgiveness

**In our day of such division and divisiveness, of vitriolic hate and disagreement what effect might this kind of response and reaction from believers/Christians have on the lives of others? Why might this more encouraging and loving reaction to what we see today be like a germ that could spread and be contagious to others? In what way(s)?*

If we would honestly obey this command, historians would be unable to sufficiently record the revival that would sweep Christ's Church and the vast numbers of people who would convert to Christianity.

While other things are... (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies. ²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, Paul continues to reveal the traits that will make us infectious encouragers. In so doing, he also unearths the keys for experiencing a life permeated with joy and rest...

2 Things To Keep In Mind That Will Make us Infectious Encouragers:

1. There are things that are **continually appropriate** for Christians that will keep their life catching (contagious, infectious encouragers) (vv.16-20) – ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies. In these verses we discover some specifics that, when practiced, will cause us to bear the fruits of a contagiously exuberant life...

Continually appropriate practices for Christians: *that will make their life contagious

- (1) **Rejoice always (v.16)** – **Nothing is more infectious and obvious than genuine joy. An individual who is truly joyful cannot help but manifest it.** Such people display a well-developed sense of humor, an optimistic outlook on life, and a lighthearted spirit. Does joy permeate your life? Does laughter ring through your home? If not, then perhaps you have allowed circumstances to dictate the way you live. Rise above your situation. Look beyond petty differences and faults. Don't allow your circumstances or the grim response of others to rob you of a joyful life. *What are some things that can (or that we allow) to steal our joy? How can we fight this and at the same time remain joyful? Why is a joyful spirit so infectious and attractive to others? How might his draw other to Christ?*

- (2) **Pray unceasingly (v.17)** – Unceasing prayer will result in a joyful heart. The only way we can have a heart full of joy is to have one free of burdens. And the only way to ride ourselves of burdens is to release them. *How can we best do that?* Through prayer! *How often are we to do this... pray?* The text says “without ceasing.” The idea here is not non-stop, 24-hour praying, but the regular releasing through the day of one’s load to God. Another way to put it is that we are to pray with the frequency of a hacking cough. When we pray in this way, we will find the discipline to be a source of tremendous therapy and the means to genuine wisdom. Prayer transfers our burdens not only from our shoulders to God’s, but it also puts in in contact with God, the supreme Source of all wisdom. No wonder the regular practice of prayer can free us from the anchors life that drag us down and drain our joy. *In what ways might a consistent and persistent prayer life make our life as a believer more contagious and infectious to the lives of others, drawing them to Christ?*
- (3) **Give thanks in everything (v.18)** – Please observe that the text does not say “for” everything give thanks. If it did, then God would be making an absurd request, because it would mean that we would have to be thankful for such things as sin and tragic calamities. Instead, we are exhorted to give thanks “in” everything. That is, we should develop and express a grateful spirit as we are molded toward maturity in God’s sovereign plan. We may not always understand why certain events occur in our lives. And we may not seek without the aid of hindsight, the good that God is bringing about in our circumstances. But we do have God’s infallible assurance that He will cause “all things to work together for good” to those of us who are a part of His forever family (Roman 8:28). That should be enough to prompt us to be grateful in everything. *Let me give you an example of this... I don’t know about you but I’m not “thankful” for pandemics, COVID, and all the tragic outcomes from it. We’ve seen some terrible things come about because of it, and I’m not thankful “for” that. But we can be thankful for any number of things “in” the midst of it...or “despite” it! What might be able to give thanks “in” in the midst of what we have experienced through the COVID pandemic? (when tragedy comes people turn to and become more open to God, God’s Word more prolific online now, we aren’t taking things for granted, made us more thankful for church and worship and times together, made our prayer life more intense and more regular, got us back into God’s Word, etc.)*
- (4) **Don’t quench the Spirit (v.19)** – This does not mean that a believer can lose the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It does mean that a Christian can diminish or even snuff out the ministry that the Holy Spirit has in his or her life. A Christian can hinder the Spirit’s work by constantly opposing His prodding, conviction, and persuading work. God’s Spirit will not force a believer through the process of becoming holy. Indeed, when He encounters a sinfully stubborn will, He will eventually step away, fold His arms, and wait for a change of heart. What a barren, lonely feeling to be left alone by God! The nation of Israel experience that when she continually refused to give up her self-serving lifestyle. The result? God quit treating Israel as if she were a lamb. Instead, He handled her as a stubborn heifer would be handled... He left her alone (Hos. 4:1-3, 11-17). The same can happen to us. But we can prevent this by giving the Holy Spirit full sway in our lives. Among other consequences, we will experience a softened heart toward God, a deeper concern for the lost and hurting, and spiritual power to live a godly lifestyle. These things will definitely help make us contagious! *Why and how might*

“quenching Spirit” in our life as believers affect our ability to be contagious Christians? In what way’s are “Spirit-filled” believers/ Christians infectious? Why?

- (5) **Don’t despise prophetic utterances (v.20)** – Apparently, some of the Thessalonian believers had been downgrading the prophetic revelations that were being presented in their midst. Perhaps this response was a reaction to false prophets who had misinformed the Thessalonians about certain future event (1 Thess. 4:13). Whatever the exact reason was for giving this command, the force of it is twofold: (1) don’t disparage a true revelation from God, but (2) remain sensitive to God’s voice. The same applies to us today. We need to be quick to hear and obey God’s written Word. We also need to be sensitive to pick up His counsel to us as given through the timely words of others. *Why should we be careful not to completely disregard prophecy and end times (second coming) talk? What does this have to do with us being infectious/catching Christians? (urgency)*

2. There are things that are occasionally uncertain for Christians that could potentially keep their life from being catching (contagious, infectious encouragers) (vv.21-22) – ²¹*Test all things; hold fast what is good.* ²²*Abstain from every form of evil.* The whole issue of not despising prophetic utterances raises an important question.. *“How can we be certain when it is really the Lord who is speaking to us through extra-biblical sources... like fellow Christians, close family, or friends?”* We can never be as certain about those “prophetic words” as we can about those inerrantly recorded in God’s Word, the Bible (Scripture). Therefore, with things that are “uncertain,” we need to “examine everything carefully” (v.21). In short, we must be “discerning.” Just because someone comes to us claiming to have a word from the Lord does not mean we must believe him or her. God want us to be spiritually discerning... no gullible nor naïve. What criteria should we use in our judgements? Paul specifies two things?

2 Helpful Criteria for Discerning Right from Wrong: **please note, that while these may seem rather simplistic on the surface, they are actually much deeper and meaningful (helpful) than they appear on the surface... if put to full use and practically applied they can actually aid in discerning many things*

- (1) **Receive what is good** – ²¹*Test all things; hold fast what is good.*
 (2) **Reject (abstain from) what is evil** - ²²*Abstain from every form of evil.*

Anyone who tries to draw us away from the good and leads us toward that which is evil is not acting on the Lord’s behalf. Indeed, whatever is genuinely from God will be marked by these things...

3 Things That Will Mark What is From God:

- (1) It will be consistent with God’s written Word –
 (2) It will be in line with the Lordship of Christ –
 (3) It will be in agreement with the Spirit in us –

Whatever fails to pass these tests is not from God!

Therefore, if you want to be a contagious encourager, then...

There are three things you... indeed, all of us... need to do...

3 Things You Need to Do:

1. **Remember the goal...** to build others up in the Lord –
2. **Resist cheap imitations** of genuine joy, regular prayer, a grateful spirit, a Spirit-empowered life, and biblical discernment –
3. **Release the fear** of what others may say or think –