

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 1, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CATCHING CHRISTIAN: A Study of 1 Thessalonians “Evidence of a Catching Christian Faith” 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

We want to get back into our study of 1 Thessalonians this evening. We are calling this study, “Catching Christians.” Let me remind you of what we said last week, in the way of explanation and qualification of that title. As we said last time...

Clarification: *The Christian faith can't be “caught” like someone catches a cold (or COVID). Rather the Christian faith comes by placing your faith and trust in God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However, the faith of a believer, should be one that draws other to Christ and doesn't repel or push other away. Your faith, as a Christians, should be contagious. In other words, others ought to want what you have and you should be a “Catching Christians.” What will make us this way? The church at Thessalonica was full of “catching Christians” and Paul writes to them commending them for their contagious, catching on faith.*



As we said last time, emerging from ancient Macedonia was a dynamic body of people who lived in the busy, free, affluent metropolis of Thessalonica (show map). This town's citizens were influential, its economy was stable, and its location along the earliest known, “freeway” – Via Egnatia – was enviable. Goods from the east and the west poured into this city. In its heyday, when the population was around two hundred thousand, some consideration was given to making Thessalonica, rather than Constantinople, the “capital” of the world. In the first

century A.D., the evangelist and apostle Paul ventured into Thessalonica and, during a brief visit, formed a body of believers there who comprised the city's first Christian church. And what a dynamic group they were! With determination, zeal, confidence, and a Pauline style, they proclaimed the good news of Christ like thunder rolling through a canyon. As we shall see through our study of 1 Thessalonians, these first-century saints were models of authentic Christianity. They made Christianity contagious to many in their day. As a result, the example they left us is worthy of our attention and application to our lives.

Let me remind you of some of the background information for this important letter... some important facts about the book/letter of 1 Thessalonians:

Some Important Facts About 1 Thessalonians:

- (1) 1 Thessalonians is the **first letter** ever written by Paul
- (2) The church of Thessalonica was established during Paul's **2nd missionary journey**
*show map
- (3) Paul stayed in Thessalonica for **a month**
- (4) Paul commends the believers for **staying strong** in their faith through several tough situations
- (5) Paul encourages the believers at Thessalonica to **continually grow** more and more in their relationship with God
- (6) Paul provides **comfort** for those Christian brothers and sisters who have died
- (7) Paul encouraged the church of Thessalonica to increase brotherly **love**, to **pray**, to rejoice and to always give **thanks**
- (8) Paul deals heavily with the **second coming** of Christ in 1 Thessalonians
- (9) Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of **Macedonia**
- (10) 1 Thessalonians was written after hearing good news of their church from **Timothy**

With that brief back ground let's look again at Paul's words as he opens this wonderful letter on 1 Thessalonians. I want you to pay particular attention to what Paul note (commends) in the lives of these believers at Thessalonica that may be so catching... in other words that makes them "Catching Christians."

READ: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

➡ **Mahatma Gandhi**, Hindu Father of India and recognized world leader, once famously said of the Christian faith, ***"I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."***

- What is your take on that statement? What do you think about this statement? Do you agree or disagree with his statement?(*your initial reaction*)
- What do you think might motivate this kind of statement not only from a world leader like Gandhi, but from others outside the church and faith?
- What do you think might be some things believers/Christians can do to improve such an assessment?

Gandhi wasn't the only one to read the Gospel accounts of Jesus's life and find one of the most compelling and interesting figures in ancient literature. Imagine for a moment that everything you knew about Christ was taken from the Gospels, and that you had a reasonable level of trust in the historicity of these documents.

- You might conclude that Jesus was overwhelmingly merciful, kind, compassionate and gracious.
- You might notice that Jesus had a propensity to criticize people and institutions that were established to oppress and despotize.
- You might notice that injustice and the misuse of power angered Jesus.
- You might observe that Jesus regarded women and children with a counter-cultural level of dignity and respect.
- You might even decide that he was a miracle-working healer.
- You may or may not be able to take the leap to believing he was the very Son of God, but you would, at least, conclude he was a good man who lived a compelling life and died a heroic death.

However, the reality is, for most people, what we believe about Jesus, comes to us through the filter of people who say they know Christ — Christians. Gandhi's scathing assessment was that far too often Christians don't represent Christ. They are nothing like Christ. They don't do Christ justice. They actually repel people from Christ. Was Gandhi onto something?

Recently, McCrindle Research conducted a comprehensive survey of the spiritual landscape of Australia — a nation that typifies the post-Christian attitudes of the Western World. Over a thousand adults were quizzed on their perceptions of Jesus, the church and Christianity in general. In this survey, McCrindle asked the participants to identify both the **issues** that were most likely to prevent them from exploring Christianity, and the **behaviors** that they observed in Christians, that were most likely to prevent them from exploring Christianity. The results make for both interesting and troubling reading. If you were to summarize it, you would be forced to conclude that it is not Christ that repels people from belief, but supposedly Christian dogma, systems, behaviors and attitudes.

➡ I'm reading a massive biography right now of Frederick Douglas. It is both interesting reading, but very powerful, moving, inspiring, and challenging as well. Frederick Douglas made this statement and I think it is so powerful and indicting... he said, "Between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference — so wide that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of the one is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ; I therefore hate the corrupt, slave-holding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason but the most deceitful one for calling the religion of this land Christianity..." He sounds like a present day 21st century prophet! Doesn't he! Sound like he could be making commentary in some ways on our present day situation.

- What is your reaction... your take on that statement? Do you agree or disagree with his statement?(*your initial reaction*)

➡ “It’s not so much what you say about your faith! What do others say about your faith?” You may claim to be a Christian, but what do others say about your life... about your faith? How do others know it? If was re to be a “catching Christian”... well, first of all there must be something to catch. In other words, you must truly be one. But second how may other know that you are one, so that they may see it and want it, and thereby catch it?

I read recently that 50 percent of all born-again Christians don’t have the assurance of salvation. Maybe some just need to memorize some pertinent passages on the assurance of salvation, like 1 John 5:13 which says, “*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.*”... and realize that God's Word does indeed promise that salvation is the present possession of every true follower of Christ.

On the other hand, perhaps a lot of so-called Christians do not have the assurance of salvation because they are not really saved. Just because you attend church or engage in certain religious activities does not necessarily mean you are a Christian. The Apostle Paul instructed those in the early church to “*examine themselves*” to see if their faith was genuine (2 Corinthians 13:5).

So, how do I know if you are a Christian? How do you know if I'm one? There must be evidence. Jesus said, “*By their fruits you shall know them*” (Matthew 7:20). If someone examined your life, would they find any spiritual fruit—hard evidence to prove that you are a true follower of Jesus Christ?

Or, let me put it another way... If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? By “evidence,” I don’t mean how many Bibles you own, or how many bumper stickers you might have on your car with Christian sayings on them. I mean hard evidence. If your family members, neighbors, and coworkers were interviewed and asked the question, “Is (your name here), in your opinion, a real Christian?” we might not be happy with the response.

I. HOW TO DISTINGUISH A TRUE BELIEVER

There is a fine line between healthy admiration and unhealthy exaltation. It’s one thing to look upon a person or place with genuine respect and delight, but it’s another thing altogether to exaggerate the greatness of an individual or location. We want to honestly and fairly assess Thessalonica, the Christians who lived there, and the apostle who gave them their start. In so doing, we will strip away the veneer of idealism and discover the realistic heart of this ancient yet timeless letter. God has inspired and preserved it so that we can understand and apply it, not just be awestruck by it. So let’s begin to achieve a proper perspective by getting an overview of the founder of the Thessalonian church, the city in which it existed, and the situation that prompted the writing of 1 Thessalonians.

5 Signs of a True Believer:

1. **A true believer's heart is changed forever** - In Jeremiah 32:39 the Lord says, *"I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever."* Those who are not genuinely saved (not true believers) never have a changed nature. Hypocrites want Christ for the good that He might do them in the world. But a true believer's heart loves Christ as the all-satisfying treasure of this life and the next.
2. **A true believer's changed life comes from a heart of love to Christ** - Those who are simply religious, going through the motions but aren't truly saved can clean up their outward behavior to be seen by men, to ease their troubled consciences, or to keep themselves from the consequences of their sins. But true believers love Christ and keep His commandments for His sake, to serve Him, to know Him, and to bring glory to His name (Ps 119:6).
3. **A true believer seeks Christ and His kingdom above all else** - This is the one thing necessary... Christ's friendship and fellowship. But that is never the "one thing" and heart-satisfying choice of those who are not truly saved. True believers, on the other hand, desire that this "better part would never be taken from them" (Lk 10:42)
4. **A true believer submits to the righteousness of God.** -He abandons all hope in himself and his own righteousness, and rests wholly in the righteousness of Christ for his acceptance before God. A true believer rests in Christ and Him only as his Savior. Those who are not truly saved don't do this (Rom 10:3). They depend, in some degree, upon their own righteousness.
5. **A true believer has the three great essentials of genuine Christianity** - First, he is broken in heart and emptied of his own righteousness so as to loath himself (Lk 19:10). Second, he takes up Christ Jesus as the only treasure and jewel that can enrich and satisfy (Matt 13:44). Third, he sincerely closes with Christ's whole yoke without exception, judging all His "will just and good, holy and spiritual" (Rom 7:12). A person who may profess it, but is not genuinely saved really has does none of these things.

3 Great Essentials of Genuine Christianity:

- (1) **Brokenness over sin** - You must admit you are a sinner and cannot save yourself, be broken and truly repentant of your sin
- (2) **Full acceptance of Jesus Christ** – Confess Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation and accept his substitutionary death on the cross on your behalf. Place your full faith and trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- (3) **Surrender to Jesus as Lord** – Give Him your life... full control of your life. Not only must He be accepted as your Savior, but as your Lord as well.

II. EVIDENCE OF CATCHING CHRISTIANS

5 Things that Made The Faith of the Thessalonians So Catching:

1. They were **chosen by God** (v.4) – Notice verses 2-4, *"² We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, ³ remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God."* **What does it mean to be "chosen by God"?** At it's basic understanding it mean "saved," "genuinely saved," can't be revoked, can't be lost, you are His. Paul says, he knew they were God's, belonged to Him, were genuinely saved. The church is commonly called

“the elect.” In salvation, the initiating will is God’s not man’s. Man’s will participates in response to God’s promptings as Paul makes clear when He says the Thessalonians received the Word and turned from idols. These two responses describe faith and repentance, which God repeatedly calls sinner to do throughout Scripture. Importantly God chose them and had a purpose for them, and His purposes never fail. God’s purpose to make Himself known through them. **“What God chooses, He uses!”** *What does this statement mean to you personally? What does this statement say about our usefulness as believers before God? What does this say about our oft feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, inferiority?*

2. They imitated the faith of Paul and the Apostles (v.6) – Notice verses 5-6, **“⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.”** *Why would Paul make note of this... that they became “followers of us and of the Lord”?* In other words they lived out their faith and what they had been taught by Paul and the apostles. They were grounded. They were doctrinally grounded in the truth. They followed the teaching of Christ in the Word. They were not just professing it, they were living it, and preaching it, and teaching it, and proclaiming it. *Why did this make their faith so catching?* I believe the Holy Spirit speaks through His Word and through doctrinal, Biblical, truth. When we speak and live the truth the Holy Spirit will use it to impact the lives of others.
3. They endured suffering with joy and hope (v.6) – Look at verse 6-7 again... notice it says, **“⁶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.”** Notice that they became an example because of how they faced affliction. *How did they face affliction?* With joy! Wow! *Why is a faith that endured suffering with a certain joy and hope so appealing (catching)? Why is that evidence of a catching faith?* The world is watching to see if our faith works, if it makes a difference when the chips are down, in the midst of the hardships and difficulties. Can Jesus help when I’m hurting?
4. They witnessed to others of the gospel (v.7ff) – Look at verses 7-9, **“⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”** There are some interesting ideas and words that appear in Paul’s words here. One is the word **“examples”** in verse 7. The Greek word here was used to describe a seal that marked was or a stamp that minted coins. Paul commended these Thessalonian believers for being model believers leaving their mark on others. *Does your life leave a mark on others? How may we leave a mark on the lives of those around us?* It’s a good question. Another phrase/word that bears pointing out is Paul’s words **“sounded forth”** in verse 8, **“the word of the Lord has sounded forth”** through the lives of these believers. The word literally means to “reverberate”... cause a vibration, send shock waves, echo forth. In other words, wherever these Thessalonian believers went, the gospel given by the word of the Lord was heard. It resulted in a local outreach to Thessalonica, a national outreach to

Macedonia and Achaia, and an international outreach to regions beyond. It literally was spreading, reverberating, echoing forth. I love that! That is what we ought to be doing! Their lives and their words were sending reverberations throughout their world. ***How does a believers “reverberate” his or her faith? How do you and I? What does this say to us?***

- 5. They were anxiously awaiting the return of Christ (v.10)** – Notice verse 10, “*and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*” This is the recurring theme really in the Thessalonians letter. These pages indicate the imminency of the deliverance; is was something Paul felt could happen in their lifetime. ***What does it mean to live in expectancy of the soon return of Christ? What does this say to our need to be “catching Christian”?***

III. COMMITMENT: CHALLENGE FOR A GROWING CHRISTIAN

Can it be said of your life, as Paul said of these believers at Thessalonica in verse 7, “*... you became example to all...*” In other words are you and I “catching Christians?”

3 Things to Commit Yourself To Given the Thessalonians Example:

- 1. To have a catching faith we must have something to be caught** – It starts with salvation. We must be genuinely saved. Others can’t catch from us something we don’t have.
- 2. To have a catching faith we must have something worth catching** – Not only can others not catch from us something we don’t have, but if not visible and active other can’t see it if we have to, in order to want it. Our Christian faith ought to be grown, thriving, ever deepening faith. We ought to be drawing nearer and nearer to Jesus all the time, so that He may use us to draw other to Himself. Our faith should grow to the point that others want what we have.
- 3. To have a catching faith we must have something made catchable** - Have you made your life as a believers available to others? Are you living out your faith before a searching, seeking, hurting world? And you living an “example” of Christ before others? As the hymn writer said it, “*While passing through this world of sin, and others your life may view. Be clean and pure without, within, let others see Jesus in you.*”