

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 8, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## CATCHING CHRISTIAN: A Study of 1 Thessalonians “Creating Catching Christians Through Effective Discipleship” 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

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:

### **Review of Some Key Facts About 1 Thessalonians:**

- (1) 1 Thessalonians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul and was the first letter ever written by Paul
- (2) The church of Thessalonica was established during Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey \*show map
- (3) The Thessalonian church was very important/strategic because Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia
- (4) 1 Thessalonians was written after hearing good news of their church from Timothy, and is the only of Paul's letter that was not written with a problem in the church but rather for the sole purpose of commending the church
- (5) Paul only stayed in Thessalonica for a month, and that is all it took for this church to become an active, strong and vital church for the spread of the gospel.

With that brief back ground let's look let's get back into Paul's letter to the believer/Christians in 1 Thessalonians. Remember in the first chapter Paul marks those things that made their faith so catching, and now in the first part of chapter 2 he is going to talk about propagating those things... in other words, he is going to talk about some keys to **"Creating Catching Christians through Effective Discipleship."** I want you to pay particular attention to what Paul writes in **1 Thessalonian 2:1-8.**

### **READ: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

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### **I want to begin by asking two questions:**

- (1) **"Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?"** - Hopefully, that one was easy. If you answered, "Yes," the second, more intimidating, question is...
- (2) **"Are you discipling others?"**

Let me give you a couple of important definition then. To define my terms...

**DISCIPLE** = **"A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ"** - No one follows Him perfectly, of course. But as a disciple, the direction and aim of your life is to be obedient to Jesus Christ and His teachings as revealed in the Bible.

**DISCIPLING** = **"To disciple others is to help them follow Jesus."** Mark Dever defines it (*Discipling* [Crossway], p. 13), **"Discipling is deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ."**

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded His followers (Matt. 28:19-20), *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; ...”* The command to make disciples applies to all who follow Jesus, not just to pastors and missionaries. Every Christian has received a spiritual gift which he or she is to use in serving Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-31; Eph. 4:7-12; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Part of the command to love one another involves helping others be what God wants them to be. That’s discipleship.

So if you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, God wants you to use your gifts to help others become more like Christ.

Discipleship should not be so much a program in the local church that some sign up for, but rather the *culture* of the church, where every member aims at helping others become more like Christ. It begins in our homes, with parents evangelizing and discipling their children. It should ripple out through the entire church, where we all are helping one another grow in godliness. In our text (1 Thessalonians 2:1-8), Paul reveals three crucial ingredients for effective discipleship:

### **EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP IS BUILT ON A GODLY MESSAGE, A GODLY MANNER, AND A GODLY MOTIVE.**

- (1) The godly message is the gospel
- (2) The godly manner is evident love for others
- (3) The godly motive is to please God from the heart

If you’re clear on the gospel, evident in your love for others, and doing everything to please God who examines your heart, God will use you to help others grow to be more like Christ... He will use to effectively disciple other believers so that they, themselves, become catching Christians.

### **Three Crucial Ingredients for Effective Discipleship that Creates Catching Christians:**

1. **Effective discipleship is built on a godly message: the gospel of God** - I’ll say more about this, but for now let me point out that in 1 Thessalonians 2 & 3, Paul is defending himself against vicious opponents, perhaps the Jews who drove him out of Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:14-16). They were trying to discredit Paul so that his gospel would be discredited.
  - Paul mentions the gospel in verses 2, 4, 8, and 9 (as well as in 1:5 & 3:2). In verses 2, 8, & 9 he refers to it as “the gospel of God.”
  - Paul didn’t make up the gospel. Rather, it came directly from God, who revealed it to Paul.
  - To reject the gospel is to reject the living and true God who gave it to us.
  - The gospel stands against every other system of religion in the world, including some religions that go under the banner of Christianity.
  - All these false “gospels” teach that the way you go to heaven is by some program of good works. Sometimes, as in the Roman Catholic Church, faith in Christ and good works are combined, just as the Judaizers in Paul’s day combined faith in Christ with keeping the Jewish law. By doing penance for your sins, going to church, moral behavior, helping the

poor, and giving to the church, you accumulate merits to qualify for heaven. ***What is wrong with this thinking or understanding of salvation?***

- But the gospel is that we are saved from God's judgment by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, *resulting in good works.*
- Remember Paul's won words (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) Ephesians 2:8-10 states it clearly, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* ***Why is the gospel such good news?***
- The gospel is good news for sinners because it promises freely to forgive all the sins of those who believe.
- As Paul states in Romans 4:5, *"But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."*
- Jesus illustrated the same truth in His parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. The proud Pharisee thought that he was right with God through his religious practices, whereas the tax collector could only cry out in Luke 18:13, *"God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"* Jesus said that the tax collector went to his house justified, whereas the Pharisee did not.
- **The best news in the world is that if you come to Jesus with all of your sin and cry out to Him for mercy through Jesus' shed blood, He freely gives it!**
- ***So why does the gospel result in opposition?*** Why would anyone have a problem with such good news?
  - The Bible is clear that self-righteous people hate the gospel because it confronts their pride. It takes away all grounds for boasting in our good deeds.
  - The gospel requires that we acknowledge that we are sinners without any claim for heaven.
  - The gospel reveals that my heart is as desperately wicked as that of the worst of sinners. So proud people oppose the humbling message of the gospel.
  - Also, unbelievers don't like to hear about God's wrath and judgment against all sinners. As a result they often oppose the messengers of the gospel. But even if they oppose us, we shouldn't back off or apologize for the message.
- Paul was mistreated in Philippi for preaching the gospel, but when he came to Thessalonica, he preached the same message boldly in spite of the opposition (1 Thess. 2:2).
- **We can't compromise the message to win converts.** Effective discipleship rests on the foundation of the gospel revealed to us in God's Word.
- False teachers don't tell people about sin and the judgment to come.
- Rather, they build people's self-esteem and tell them how Jesus can help them have their best life now.

- To build godly disciples we must build on the foundation of the gospel that comes from God.

**2. Effective discipleship is built on a godly manner: evident love for people-** Notice 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, *"But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."* When people feel the love of Christ through us, they will more likely listen to the gospel that we present.

- There is a difficult textual variant in verse 7. Some early manuscripts read *"we became babes,"* whereas a number of others read, *"we became gentle."* The difference is either the presence or absence of a single Greek letter (nu, or "n"). *"Babes"* is the better attested and more difficult reading, in that it doesn't seem to fit with the metaphor of the nursing mother in the last half of the verse. Paul usually uses "babes" in a negative way, to refer to those who are spiritually immature (1 Cor. 3:1). He uses "gentle" with reference to how the Lord's bond-servants must relate to others. For example in 2 Tim. 2:24-25 Paul writes, *"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind ["gentle"] to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth ...."*
- So it's difficult to decide. If the original reading was "babes," it probably has the sense of being gentle or defenseless, as a little baby is.
- But the image of a nursing mother tenderly holding her baby next to her, protecting the child from all harm, pictures the love that we are to have for others.
- But may I point out the obvious (to any mother, at least)... Babies are needy, often difficult, inconvenient, and time-consuming! They dirty their diapers, they scream when they're hungry or don't feel good, they throw up on you, they wake you up in the middle of the night, and they require a lot of attention. So do new believers!
- This means that you can't love others unless you're willing to sacrifice yourself and your time and be inconvenienced.
- But it's through your love that they will grow.
- Note, also, that these are emotional terms. The same emotional language permeates the rest of chapters 2 & 3.
- It's obvious that Paul had deep feelings for these new converts and he let them know it verbally. Not only did he tell them of his affection for them, but also they had seen it when he was with them.
- He repeats *"you know,"* *"you recall,"* and *"you are witnesses"* (2:1, 2, 5, 9, 10 & 11).
- Paul's love for them was evident. He says that they had not only imparted the gospel, *"but also our own lives"* [lit., "souls"].
- Part of sharing your own soul is being vulnerable and open. You don't try to present an image that isn't who you really are. You live openly and truthfully before God and before others.

- When I became a pastor 39 years ago, I resolved never to project through my preaching or in my private dealings with anyone that I've got it together if that's not true. If I'm preaching on prayer and I struggle with my prayer life (as I do), I'll let you know that I'm struggling. You can't effectively disciple others if you're not truthful about your own failures and struggles.
  - **So, effective discipleship is built on a godly message: the gospel of God; and, on a godly manner: evident love for people.**
3. **Effective discipleship is built on a godly motive: pleasing God from the heart** - We could also label this integrity before God. Paul reveals six ways he pleased God from the heart...

#### **Six Ways We Please God From the Heart:**

(1) **We please God when we seek His glory, not our own** - Paul says in 1 Thess. 2:4, "*but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.*" He adds in verse 6, (1 Thess. 2:6), "*nor did we seek glory from men.*" Paul lived with a Godward focus... that's key. He wanted to please and glorify God on the heart level.

- When he says that he didn't please men, he doesn't mean that he was insensitive toward people.
- He was careful not needlessly to offend others (see 1 Cor. 9:20-22; 10:33).
- He spoke graciously to people (Eph. 4:29).
- But behind his actions toward people was a primary focus to please and glorify God.
- **Pleasing and glorifying God must begin on the heart or thought level, since God examines our hearts.**
- We can fool people by putting on a good front when we're in public, but God looks on our hearts.
- When Paul says that he had been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, he's referring to his heart before God.
- Paul's heart was right with God and so God entrusted Paul with the treasure of the gospel.
- A man can be a powerful, captivating preacher, but in private he looks at, watches, reads inappropriate things and fills his mind and heart with what ought not to be there. Or he may posture himself as a man of God at church, but at home he's angry and abusive.

How do we do this? How do we gain and maintain a heart that pleases God for His glory and not our own? Let me give you a couple of helpful ways to accomplish this...

#### **2 Ways To Have A Heart that Pleases God for His Glory:**

To begin at this...

- (1) **Gain and maintain a clear conscience before God** - As Paul told the Roman governor Felix in Acts 24:16... Paul said, "*I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.*" This means confessing all



sins, including sinful thoughts. It means asking forgiveness of those against whom we have sinned.

(2) **Aim to please God in all respects, not so that we look good to others, but so that God looks good through us** -

When you walk with that kind of reality and integrity before the Lord, He will use you to disciple others effectively.

(2) **We please God by enduring trials with steadfast joy** - Paul mentions how he and Silas had suffered and been mistreated in Philippi just before they came to Thessalonica. Acts 16 (READ: Acts 16:16ff) tells of how they were unjustly beaten without a trial and put in the stocks in jail. But at midnight, they were singing praises to God. He wrote Philippians from prison in Rome, where he didn't deserve to be. Other preachers in Rome were unfairly attacking him. And yet Philippians overflows with joy in the Lord.

- In Philippians 4:4, Paul writes, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"*
- And when Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica, guess what? He encountered much opposition (1 Thess. 2:2). But, rather than complaining to God about how unfair it was or threatening to quit preaching unless he got better treatment in the future, Paul kept on joyfully preaching the gospel.
- Over the years, I've watched many people who begin to serve the Lord in some ministry, but when they get criticized or their feelings get hurt, they quit. Often, they get angry with God or with the Christians who mistreated them. They drop out of church or at least keep their distance by just attending, but never serving again.
- Listen, I'm going to tell you, that serving the Lord is not a Sunday school picnic! It's spiritual warfare! The enemy will attack, often from unexpected angles.
- When I first began as a pastor, I naively thought that the opposition would come from the world. But I've rarely gotten flak from the world. Unbelievers don't care about what goes on in the church. The attacks come from within.
- So if you're attempting to disciple others, expect to be criticized.
- Sometimes those you've spent a lot of time with will turn against you. Remember... Jesus was betrayed by Judas. Demas deserted Paul. It happens!
- But if we endure trials and hardship with steadfast joy, it pleases God and He will use it to help others grow in Christ.

(3) **We please God through pure doctrine (or solid, sound Biblical truth)** - Paul says in 1 Thess. 2:3, *"For our exhortation does not come from error ...."* The truth of the gospel is foundational, but then it extends to all major biblical truth.

- God is the God of truth (Ps. 31:5; Isa. 65:16) whose Word is truth (John 17:17). I
- In Paul's pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, he repeatedly emphasizes sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6; 6:3; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 7, 9, 10).

- The word “sound” comes from the Greek word from which we get our word “hygienic.” Sound doctrine leads to spiritual health. Bad doctrine, like junk food, leads to spiritual sickness or disease.
- **To disciple others effectively, feed them sound doctrine and teach them as they grow to feed themselves.**



- It's amazing how much Paul had taught these new believers, many of whom were from a pagan background, in the short time he had been with them. He assumes that they knew about the doctrine of election (1:4) and the trinity (1:1, 5, 6). He had taught them about suffering (1:6; 3:3-4); the second coming (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23); moral purity (4:1-8); and many other truths.
- Of course, we need to distinguish between the essential truths of the faith, which every true believer must affirm, and other doctrines, which may be important, but where godly people may differ.
- The gospel and all truths necessary for the gospel are essential. Some other matters, such as prophecy, spiritual gifts, church government and ordinances, or methods for ministry, are important, but not essential for the gospel.
- **But in our postmodern era, when the whole notion of truth is challenged, we need to hold graciously but firmly to the truth of God's Word.**
- But when you teach the truth, expect to catch flak!
- After exhorting Timothy to preach the Word, which includes reproofing, rebuking, and exhorting, Paul warned him in 2 Tim. 4:3-5, *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*
- The reason Paul added *“endure hardship”* was that when you preach the Word faithfully, you will be criticized and attacked.

**(4) We please God through moral integrity** - Paul says in 1 Thess. 2:3, that his exhortation did not come from *“impurity.”*

- In that day, as in the present, there were many false teachers who were motivated by sexual impurity.
- They purported to preach the gospel and teach God's Word, but they used their status as public figures to prey on unsuspecting women.
- Peter warned (2 Pet. 2:14) of false teachers who had *“eyes full of adultery,”* who enticed unstable souls.
- He added (2 Pet. 2:18-19), *“For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; ...”*
- To effectively disciple others, we must be morally pure. Again, this begins on the thought level.



(5) **We please God by financial integrity** - Paul states in **1 Thess. 2:5** that he did not come *“with a pretext for greed,”* and then adds, *“God is witness.”*

- Greed and sexual lust are often linked in Scripture (Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5).
- Jesus mentions both in a list of sins that He says come from the heart (Mark 7:21-23).
- We can sometimes observe outward behavior and conclude that a man is motivated by greed or lust.
- But if we want to overcome these sins in ourselves to please God and to disciple others, we have to deal with them on the heart level.
- Financial integrity requires being honest in all our financial dealings, including not cheating when we pay our taxes.
- If you’re paid cash for a job, you need to report it. If a clerk gives you too much change or doesn’t charge what you owe, you need to make it right.
- Greed is also the motivation for gambling and get rich quick schemes, both of which Christians should avoid.
- Greed keeps us from giving generously to the Lord’s work.
- To please God and to disciple others effectively, kill your greed.

(6) **We please God by avoiding all deception and manipulation** – Paul says in **1 Thess. 2:3** that his exhortation did not come *“by way of deceit,”* and then adds (1 Thess. 2:5-6), *“For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.”*

- *“Deceit”* was used for the bait that a fisherman uses. He puts a juicy worm on his hook so that the fish thinks he’s getting a delicious meal, but the fish ends up becoming the meal.
- **A deceitful person who is pleasing men tells people what they want to hear so that they will like him, even if he knows it isn’t the truth.**
- He dodges the hard truths of Scripture because he doesn’t want to scare people away, but in so doing, he gets them to believe Satan’s lies about God.
- Flattering speech means pleasing people to gain an advantage. It’s always manipulative.
- Paul could have wrongly used his apostolic authority to lord it over people, but he didn’t do that. When he used his authority, it was to build up others, not to lord it over them (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10).
- To please God and disciple others, we need to be truthful and to avoid all manipulation.

## CONCLUSION

Years ago, an agnostic was contemplating suicide, but he decided that if he could find a minister who lived his faith, he would listen to him. So he hired a private investigator to watch Will

Houghton, a preacher who had become the president of Moody Bible Institute. When the report came back, it revealed that Houghton's life was above reproach. He was for real. The agnostic went to Houghton's church, trusted in Christ, and later sent his daughter to Moody Bible Institute. ("Our Daily Bread," 11/83)

- What would a private investigator dig up on you?
- Would you pass the test?
- God is the ultimate private investigator! He examines your heart!
- To disciple others effectively, you need a godly message—the gospel of God; a godly manner—evident love for others; and a godly motive—pleasing God from the heart. I pray that in our church we will develop a climate of discipleship—of deliberately helping one another become more like Christ.

### **Application Questions**

1. Discuss: Does the Great Commission (making disciples) apply to all Christians or only to those specially gifted for it?
2. Why is it important to get the gospel right? How is Satan attacking the gospel in our day?
3. How can a person who is inclined to be a people-pleaser become a God-pleaser? What steps should he or she take?
4. What can you do to help this church move toward a culture of discipleship? What would you need to change to do this?