

I THESSALONIANS 2:9-16
LEADERSHIP – CONCERNED

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 2 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. And in this chapter we are looking at how this church in Thessalonica grew.

Keep in mind that this was a young church. Paul was only able to spend three Sabbaths there teaching them, somewhere around twenty-one days. And keep in mind that it was not a fifteen-minute teaching or even an hour. He probably spent several hours a day teaching them the things of God! Not fluff, but the deep things of God!

We opened up this chapter and saw that leadership is being faithful, in I Thessalonians 2:1-6. We tend to put so much pressure on ourselves to accomplish this and accomplish that and all the Lord wants from us is that we are faithful in what He has entrusted to us.

I realize that may seem strange because we are always goal oriented. But keep in mind that it is God who will bring forth the fruit from what we are doing. If we accomplish it on our own, then it is human efforts. I am not saying we are not to work, serve the Lord, but let's leave the outcome to Him because what we think this will accomplish and what the Lord desires may be different. And, of course, we always desire His will to be done, not ours!

And we looked at several points in regard to faithfulness. We saw that there were disappointments, suffering, truthfulness in the work we do and the words we say, we are not to bend to the pressure of man but submit to the will of God, and we are not to teach in such a way that we tickle the ears of the people but God's Word convicts their hearts! In other words, we don't water down God's Word to make people comfortable in the way that they are living! That is just faithfulness in leadership!

Last time, in I Thessalonians 2:7-8 Paul likened himself to a mother watching over her children. He was strong with them and yet gentle with them, helping them to grow, to mature in the Lord! Thus, we saw how leadership is also gentle!

This morning, as we look at I Thessalonians 2:9-16, we are going to see that leadership is also concerned. And the picture here is that of a father watching over his children. His concern for them to grow and how he is admonishing them to walk worthy of the high calling by which they have been called.

It is not easy. You see, many times children don't want to listen to what they are being told and the end result could be devastating. Let me show you what I mean with this true story.

Reginald Lewis, I bet there are very few of you if any who remember Reginald Lewis or as he was known, Reggie Lewis. This man stood 6 feet, 7 inches tall weighing 195 pounds and you guessed it, he played basketball!

In college, he was a starter at Northeastern University in Boston, and his average was 22.2 points per game. Not bad at all! He was quickly chosen in the first round of the 1987 NBA draft by the Boston Celtics, not a bad team to be drafted to.

But things started out slow for Reggie as he missed a good part of his rookie season with an injury. The next two seasons he found himself as a backup player but still played on average over 30 minutes per game. Reggie was quick and he could drive to the basket and he also had a good outside shot.

In the 1990-91 season Larry Bird, not Big Bird, was injured and was unable to play most of the season, which allowed Reggie to start most of the season. When Larry Bird retired in 1992 Reggie Lewis was named the team captain and now, as a starter in the NBA, he averaged 20.8 points per game in both the 1991-92 and 1992-93 seasons.

Then, in the first game of the 1993 playoffs, Reggie Lewis collapsed and had to be taken to the hospital. There the doctors who were working on Reggie, as they examined him they determined that he could no longer play basketball, it was too dangerous for him, he had a heart condition. This team of doctors who came to this conclusion were not trying to prevent Reggie from doing what he loved, playing basketball, but they were trying to save his life!

To put it mildly, Reggie was displeased with what these doctors told him and so he not only changed doctors but also left the hospital where he was being treated for this condition. He was able to find a doctor who told him what he wanted to hear, that his heart was healthy and that he could begin training once again, under medical supervision of course. Reggie was 27 years old and while involved in an unsupervised workout, his heart stopped and Reggie Lewis died! Reggie found a doctor to tell him what he wanted to hear, but it cost him his life because it was not based in truth, it just tickled his ears, made him happy, but it was deadly!

What a sad and tragic story. He did not have to lose his life, and if he had listened to his doctors, did what they told him, he might still be alive! But he chose to ignore what the doctors said, and he found doctors who told him what he wanted to hear. And in the end, it was deadly for him!

I hope you see where I am going with this because there is a parallel to that story. It is called Christianity! You see, in the world of Christianity today, we see people who are having their ears tickled with false doctrine and instead of the leaders in the church warning them, instead of the pastor being a spiritual father to them, they are teaching these things to them.

That is not leadership folks. Leadership is concerned for the people that God has entrusted to them, be they their spouse, their child or children, their friends or people within the church. That is what we are going to be looking at this morning as Paul sees himself as a spiritual father who is concerned with the well-being, the spiritual growth of these believers in Thessalonica!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 2, beginning in verse 9 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

I THESSALONIANS 2:9-16

VERSES 9-10

Keep in mind that Paul is saying that he is like a father to them and specifically here, in these verses we see Paul saying that he is not a burden to them. That is how it should be. A father does not depend on his children to pay the bills, get a job, make the decisions in the house. No, the father does that!

And here, Paul is speaking of how he did not look to them, these believers in Thessalonica to support him, to support his ministry. It was not that Paul did not have the right to be supported by them. We see that in I Timothy 5:17-18, where Paul said, **“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”**

So why did he not receive wages here in Thessalonica for the work he was doing? We don’t know for sure, but his point is that he did not want to be a burden to them. It might mean that they were pretty poor and couldn’t afford to support the work. Whatever the reason, Paul wanted them to see his example to them. A father who is concerned for their well-being and is doing everything to help them to grow!

Paul, Silas and Timothy worked hard. We are told that they labored and toiled for these believers. In fact, Paul tells us that their **“laboring [was] night and day.”**

And I think the idea here was not only supporting themselves but teaching them with the rest of the time. One writer put it like this, “Paul means by the phrase, *night and day*, that he started work before dawn; the usage is regular and frequent. He no doubt began so early in order to be able to devote some part of the day to preaching.” (Moffatt quoting Ramsay)

And that makes sense, because they worked during the day, the people as well as Paul, Silas and Timothy, and then long into the night Paul taught them.

I don’t know about you, but these verses are very convicting to me. Paul is saying that He, Silas, and Timothy gave whatever they had, put their lives on the line to see the Thessalonian believers grow, to minister to the body of Christ. They labored, they agonized, they were even in pain day and night because they loved these new believers so much they were willing to sacrifice their own lives for them.

And Paul says in I Thessalonians 2:10, **“You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe.”**

Paul is saying, “Look at our lives. Look how we lived among you, worked among you, served you. You have nothing against us!” Was Paul boasting here? Absolutely not! Paul was showing these believers how they were to live.

We are servants of God and thus, as we follow our Lord’s example of being a servant to all, we should do no less! People should not be able to accuse us of doing wrong. We should live above reproach. Not that we are perfect, but when we blow it, and we will, we admit it, we seek forgiveness, we repent and we move on!

Keep in mind that Thessalonica was not a good, moral city. It had much wickedness there and thus, the way that they were brought up was contrary to the Christian life. And Paul is giving them an example to follow just as a father does with his child!

Make no mistake about it, children will mimic you and it may be good or that could be bad, it could be embarrassing. I remember when my kids were young, and they would get their little lawnmower out and as I was cutting the grass they were following me around pretending to cut the grass!

Now, as cute and adorable as that was, understand that they are watching us all the time and mimicking what we do and what we say. The same is true of young Christians, they are watching us and learning from us. May we be able to say that we are blameless in our conduct before them and not just blameless but an example to them in how they should live out their faith!

Let me show you what I mean about the example that some are leaving and it has to do with greed. We are told,

The Huffington Post's Jaweed Kaleem ran an interesting article on the salaries of MegaChurch pastors. . . . I gathered the evidence here so you can see it at a glance. It's so sad to see how these towers of the church have suffered for the gospel. . . .

Kenneth Copeland – Copeland Ministries

Flies around in a \$17.5 Jet, lives in a \$6 million lakefront mansion with a 1,500-acre campus and a private airstrip. He and his wife make over \$655,000 a year in salary alone. It's not clear whether this includes speaking fees, book royalties, and "love offerings."

Creflo Dollar – World Changers Church International

Drives a Rolls-Royce and lives in a Million-dollar home in Atlanta, and a 2.5 million-dollar apartment in Manhattan. Dollar will not release his salary information.

John Hagee – Cornerstone Church

His last released salary was nearly \$1 million per year (2004). Hagee does not release his earnings anymore.

Charles Blake – West Angeles Church of God in Christ

Owens a 10,000-square foot mansion in Beverly Hills (btw his congregation hails mostly from impoverished South Central LA) His year salary is \$900,000 per year.

Benny Hinn – Miracle Worker

In 1997 he admitted to making between \$500k & \$1 million dollars per year

Joel Osteen – Lakewood Church

Stopped taking his \$200,000 salary several years ago. Makes tens of millions off of his numerous books. Joel & family live in a \$10.5 million – get this – 17,000 square foot mansion. Treasures in heaven people.

Bishop Eddie Long – New Birth Missionary Baptist Church

Long made over \$3 million in a three-year period from 1997 to 2000. He drives a Bentley, and lives in a 1.4-million-dollar home on 20 acres. An investigation into his nonprofit showed he made more than \$1 million dollars from them on top of his church income. No doubt some of that went toward his legal fees in 2011.

Franklin Graham – Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

In 2008 he reportedly made 1.2 million dollars.

- <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/paperbacktheology/2012/01/fleecing-the-flock-a-snapshot-of-americas-richest-pastors.html>

Let me say this, like it or not, people are looking at how we live out our faith. And that goes for Christians and non-Christians, they are watching us a learning from us, learning about the God we serve.

And please understand that these are just a few examples of how bad our witness is out there, from leaders who should know better but instead, they are fleecing the flock of God instead of feeding them or as Paul put it, “**preached to [them] the gospel of God.**” And, by their actions they are not blameless but poor examples of what leaders are all about!

And because Paul, Silas and Timothy lived this way, they were able to tell these believers to walk worthy of the high calling by which they have been called. That is our next point and let’s read on staring in verse 11 of I Thessalonians chapter 2.

VERSES 11-12

Notice this role of a father, “Children, I want you to do what is right. When you go to your friend’s house, the things you do and say reflect upon me!” And how true that is of us as Christians!

As we go out in the world the things that we do, the things that we say not only reflect upon us, but they also reflect upon God the Father because we are his representatives! Thus, Paul tells these young Christians to walk worthy of the high calling by which they have been called!

We see this theme of the Christian walk frequently in Paul’s letters. Let me show you what I mean. Remember in our study in Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus. He spent three chapters telling us all that we have in Christ, all the blessings that God has given to us.

And then, beginning in Ephesians chapter 4 we see Paul tell them, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”** Ephesians 4:1-6.

In other words, because of all that God has given to you, all the blessings He has bestowed upon you, walk worthy of that high calling by which you have been called! Live out your faith in such a way that you glorify God!

And for the next 3 chapters Paul speaks of walking in unity with other believers. He speaks of putting off that old man and putting on the new man, put on Christ. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit by being bitter, angry and-so-on. Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving others just as Christ has forgiven you!

He speaks of walking as children of light and not children of darkness. He calls for us submitting to one another in the fear of God. And he speaks of relationships between a husband and wife, parents and children, employers and employees. And he concludes showing us that there is a battle going on and thus, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the scheming's of the devil who wants to destroy relationships and our lives!

It is living out what you say you believe. It is not just information but application and that is really where the rubber meets the road.

We also see this in Paul's letter to the Romans. He spent 11 chapters telling them all that they have in Christ, doctrine, which is very important. And if Paul concluded there, it would be just information.

But then, beginning in Romans chapter 12 and on through the end of the letter Paul speaks of application or walking worthy of that high calling by which you have been called. He said, **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** Romans 12:1-2.

I know, you are probably thinking, “Hey, it doesn’t say anything about walking!” But it does! First, our life is a complete sacrifice unto God, given to Him to be used by Him. And then, we are not to be conformed to this world or we are not to walk according to the things of this world, the philosophies of this world, but we are to be transformed by God as we renew our minds in the Word of God and thus, we then walk accordingly!

And Paul goes on to speak how we are to live in society, that the liberty we have we are not to use to hurt others. But we are to be kind, affectionate towards others, building them up in the faith or leading them into the faith! We are not to pour out our wrath upon others but let God deal with them.

Those who are in authority over us, be it at work, government or whatever, we are to respect them and obey them as long as they don’t force us to do something contrary to the Scriptures. In other words, we are to pay taxes or give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s and to God that which is God’s, which is our life!

We are to love our neighbors, be kind to them. And Paul goes on speaking of our Christian liberty and to use it to help others, not hurt them! And then in Romans chapter 15 he puts that Christian liberty into play or how we are to put this Christian liberty into practice!

Again, I am not saying we are going to be perfect, we are not! But that does not justify us walking in darkness! We are to walk in the light as He is in the light. We are to walk according to the high calling by which we have been called!

And we see that here in I Thessalonians chapter 2. And again, the picture is of the watchful eye of a father, how he watches out for his children just as Paul was watching out for them!

Paul starts out in verse 11 by saying a father is to “**exhort**” or PARAKALEO in the Greek. It is a Greek word that is used of the Holy Spirit and it means, “to call alongside.” A father is to come alongside a child to guide them as they grow.

We have a problem in our society today where fathers have no problem producing children but then they are not there to help them to grow! Let me share this with you and you will see how serious this problem is in America, fatherless homes. We are told,

More than 20 million children live in a home without the physical presence of a father. Millions more have dads who are physically present, but emotionally absent. If it were classified as a disease, fatherlessness would be an epidemic worthy of attention as a national emergency.

An estimated 24.7 million children (33%) live absent their biological father.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, “Living Arrangements of Children under 18 Years/1 and Marital Status of Parents by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin/2 and Selected Characteristics of the Child for all Children 2010.” Table C3. Internet Release Date November, 2010.

Of students in grades 1 through 12, 39 percent (17.7 million) live in homes absent their biological fathers.

Source: Nord, Christine Winquist, and Jerry West. *Fathers’ and Mothers’ Involvement in their Children’s Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. Table 1. (NCES 2001-032). Washington, DC: U.S. Dept of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2001.

57.6% of black children, 31.2% of Hispanic children, and 20.7% of white children are living absent their biological fathers.

Source: *Family Structure and Children’s Living Arrangements 2012*. Current Population Report. U.S. Census Bureau July 1, 2012.

According to 72.2 % of the U.S. population, fatherlessness is the most significant family or social problem facing America.

Source: National Center for Fathering, Fathering in America Poll, January, 1999.

Among children who were part of the “post-war generation,” 87.7% grew up with two biological parents who were married to each other. Today only 68.1% will spend their entire childhood in an intact family.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. “Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present”. U.S. Census Bureau July 1, 2012.
<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch5.xls>

With the increasing number of premarital births and a continuing high divorce rate, the proportion of children living with just one parent rose from 9.1% in 1960 to 20.7% in 2012. Currently, 55.1% of all black children, 31.1% of all Hispanic children, and 20.7% of all white children are living in single-parent homes.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. “Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present”. U.S. Census Bureau July 1, 2012.
<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch5.xls>

- <http://www.fathers.com/statistics-and-research/the-extent-of-fatherlessness/>

And as much as we see this in the world, we see this in the church. We see pastors who get up and teach and then, after the “Amen!” they are gone! Nowhere to be found. They don’t minister to people, talk with people, they just are not there. That is wrong. And it is not just pastors, all of us should be there, meeting people, sharing with people, praying with people.

As a pastor, I love it when people stick around and fellowship after church. That is what we are about, coming alongside each other, helping each other grow in the Lord, mature in the Lord!

And when we negate that we are not only hurting ourselves, we are hurting others. Paul took the time to come alongside these believers and help them to grow!

But that is not all that he did! Again, in verse 11 Paul tells us that he, like a father **comforted** them or encouraged his children.

Now think about this one, because many times, in the church, we fail and we fail miserably in this area. When you blow it, when you stumble and sin, when you do something that is wrong, when difficult times come your way, when you have an illness that is serious, when you have marriage problems or problems with your children, do you really want to hear, “I told you so!”? Of course not!

And yet, instead of comforting, instead of encouraging people who are struggling, who are hurting, we condemn and put them down. “But they deserve it!” As true as that may be, does God give to you everything you deserve or is He gracious and merciful to you!

Think about your child playing baseball. It is the bottom of the ninth inning, with 2 outs for the other team and you are leading by two runs. They have the bases loaded and the count on the batter is 3 balls and 2 strikes. The next pitch is either going to walk in a run or a strike out or he will hit the ball.

Here comes the pitch, and he hits the ball to the outfield, where your son is playing. It is a routine catch and the ball is getting closer to him. It hits his mitt and falls out, dropping to the ground. The other team scores three runs to win the game.

Now, as a father, what do you do? “I told you to keep your eye on the ball! You lost the game for the team! What is wrong with you? I am so embarrassed by you!” Is that what you really say?

I hope not! No, you go up to him and you hug him and you encourage him and try to teach him some lessons through this. And you give him examples of professionals who have had this happen to them and they continued on, they may have even improved through this lesson. You see, you encourage them and that is what Paul is going to do with these believers.

Yes, there are times when a father has to be firm, but it is always done to teach them and encourage them to go on, to grow, to mature, to make the right decisions!

And let's face it, our children face many obstacles in life and they need to be encouraged even in their failures, to learn lessons of faith. And so do we as Christians. May we learn from this example of Paul and encourage each other in the faith!

And lastly, we see that Paul, as a father, is to **"charge everyone"** or to single them out personally if they were not walking correctly. In other words, there would be consequences to their actions and a father was not to let them get away with evil.

Now please understand that we are not to play the Holy Spirit and point out every little thing a person does that you don't like. But if there is some sin that continues on, you need to talk with that person. And in doing so you always have in mind restoration and not condemnation. We tend to reverse that thinking that they need to be condemned but they don't. They need to be restored!

You see, the example here is that Paul warned the Thessalonians that any deviation from the divinely prescribed course of conduct had serious consequences. The warning was an admonishment that if they did not follow the course laid out for them, they, as disobedient children would receive from a father, could expect to receive spiritual discipline from the apostle.

Thus, as Paul “**exhorted**” them or came alongside of them to help them grow, mature in the faith; as Paul “**comforted**” them or encouraged them to continue on in the faith; as Paul “**charged them**” or corrected them in their error so that they may be restored, there is an outcome and Paul speaks of that in verse 12, “**that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.**” The Living Bible puts this verse like this, “**that your daily lives should not embarrass God but bring joy to him who invited you into his Kingdom to share his glory.**”

Remember, Paul saw himself as a spiritual father and thus, his behavior toward them was accordingly. Just like any father wanting to see their children walk worthy of God, that was Paul’s desire for the Thessalonians.

Now what was this exhorting and comforting and charging all based upon? It was not some program. It was not some book. And I realize that I might step on some toes here, but so be it. If I am, maybe they need to be stepped on if your Christian faith is based upon some program, some book, some this or that. Listen to what these believers heard that transformed their lives!

VERSE 13

Here is what made this group of believers strong, healthy, they not only ***RECEIVED*** or ***HEARD*** the Word of God but they ***BELIEVED*** or ***WELCOMED*** the Word of God! The Word of God was not just received into their mind but it sank deep into their heart and became part of their lives!

For almost 22 years now my prayer as I have taught the Word of God is that it would not only be information for you to grow by but life transformation as you apply the things of God to your life and walk accordingly! That by the illumination of the Holy Spirit the Word of God would be opened up to you and you would respond accordingly, you would grow!

Now we look at our nation, we look at people today, and it seems that they are not interested. People like information, new ideas but when it comes to the things of God, applying the things of God to their lives, not too much.

With the computer age in full swing, there is a wealth of information out there for us to partake of but we tend to take it very lightly, we look for things that we agree with and ignore the rest; we don't apply what is true to our lives.

That is why there are so many programs out there, they want *“Christianity for Dummies”* because there must be an easy way to do it!

Let me say this, there is not an easy way. God is going to test your faith, Satan is going to tempt you to sin, and that is how we grow. We learn lessons of faith. And if we obey God, there are those blessings. If we obey Satan and do what we want, not so much!

And in Paul's day, it was not much different. They loved knowledge, information. They loved to hear new things although they didn't necessarily agree with it, they didn't apply it to their lives, it was just information. And like I have said, today we are not much different.

Now when it comes to truth, did you know that about 75% of Americans say there is no such thing as absolute truth, that different people can define truth in conflicting ways and still be correct.

And folks, they are absolutely sure that there is no such thing as absolute truth but how can that be if there is no absolute truth? Go figure! Some may wonder if this is such a big deal, folks, it is!

A student from Southern Illinois University was asked if Hitler was wrong, if he was evil in what he did, killing over six million Jews besides many other people! Her response is scary because many today feel the same way she does.

She said, “Actually, Hitler acted on his inner most beliefs. He was true to himself. And in that sense, I think you can say Hitler was a better person than most of us are.”

You have to be kidding me? He was a better person in killing millions of people because he felt he was doing the right thing? Insanity! And even worse, many other students refused to say that Hitler was good or bad; they could not make that judgment. Again, you have to be kidding, we can’t discern between good and evil now?

You see, what might be right for you may be wrong for me, but I can’t judge you if it is good or evil. In fact, as long as you are acting on your own beliefs, as long as you are true to yourself, then you are a good person.

How twisted is that kind of thinking? With that rational, there are no bad people! If there is not absolute truth, we can do whatever we want and no one can tell us it is wrong because it is our truth! How warped is that!

Thus, when it comes to our religious beliefs, we take that same bizarre mentality and apply it, and what happens is we come up with our own religious ideas that satisfy us. We bring programs into the church that are secular, such as TREK, and then we add some Scripture to make it Christian. Go figure! It is not Christian.

I have a better solution, why add a few Scriptures to something, why not just read the Bible which is the Word of God, all of it from Genesis to Revelation!

We need to understand that the church in Thessalonica was strong because it did believe in ***ABSOLUTE TRUTH!*** The absolute truth of God's Word. Jesus said in John 17:17, "**Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.**"

You can believe that or reject that but it will not change the fact of the matter that the Word of God is truth. Not some of it. Not part of it. All of it.

Look at this church here in Thessalonica and what I Thessalonians tells us of them. First of all, how did they come to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul tells us that they **RECEIVED THE WORD** – *I Thessalonians 2:13a*; and Paul also tells us that they **BELIEVED OR WELCOMED THE WORD** – *I Thessalonians 2:13b*.

Let's look at this for a minute. First, they received the Word of God. In other words, they were open to what God was saying to them as the Word of God was shared, and specifically the Gospel message to begin with. How many people today come to church but they are just filling a seat. Their ears are closed to what God is saying to them. They refuse to receive what is being said.

But there are those who do receive what God is saying to them, both the unsaved as they are open to the Gospel and the saved who are open to what God is saying to them about their faith. You see, as Paul said in Romans 10:17, "**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**"

You see, as the Gospel is spoken it truly is the power of God to salvation to all who believe! Faith begins here as they hear the Word of God, repent of their sins and ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of their lives.

Then, after they are saved it is the Word of God that helps them to grow. Our faith will grow as we take God's Word and apply it to our lives. Faith needs to have legs to walk or it needs to be applied to our lives or it is empty faith! I hope that makes sense.

Remember, as Paul, Silas and Timothy shared with the people of Thessalonica the Words of God, they received them into their lives. They heard the Word of God and instead of being hard to it, they were open and in Acts 17:4 we see the results, "**And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.**" They were saved; they received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior!

You see, this was not just their ideas of God but literally, the phrase "**the word of God which you heard from us**" can read, "**a word heard from us out from God.**" You see, not the wisdom of man but the Words of God.

They not only received the Word of God but they believed or welcomed the Word of God! And the word "**welcomed**" is the Greek word DECHOMAI, (dekh'-om-ahee) and it speaks of an inward welcome of the message.

The Thessalonians "**welcomed**" the Word of God into their lives. In other words, what they received into their minds, the Word of God, sunk deep down into their hearts! You see, there are many people who know of Jesus, all that He did, but they don't believe in Him, what He has said and thus, they are still lost.

Spurgeon claimed that 98 percent of the people he met - including the criminals he visited in England's prisons – told him that they believed the Bible to be true. But the vast majority had never made a personal, life-changing commitment to Jesus Christ. For them, “believe” was not an active verb. He also tells us, “I would recommend you either believe God up to the hilt, or else not to believe at all. Believe this book of God, every letter of it, or else reject it. There is no logical standing place between the two. Be satisfied with nothing less than a faith that swims in the deeps of divine revelation; a faith that paddles about the edge of the water is poor faith at best. It is little better than a dry-land faith, and is not good for much.”

For the Thessalonians, what they believed was manifested in their lives, the things they did, the things they said. If the Word of God doesn't affect our lives, like I said, then it shows that we truly don't believe it!

Tragically, what we see today is that many churches, many pastors are not teaching the Word of God but some program or the Word of God is just watered down so much there is no power in it and the people are receiving and believing or welcoming this into their lives. Thus, what is manifested in their lives is fleshly because they have removed the power of God from their lives, the Word of God opened up to them by the Spirit of God!

And as we read on we will see more about the Word of God and how it affected the lives of these believers and how they were imitators of other believers, even in their sufferings! How can they do that? They were such young believers! Let's read on and see.

VERSES 14-16

Notice, when they received Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior the unbelievers came against them and just as the church in Judea was suffering persecution, so were they. How in the world can they endure this persecution, they were so young in the faith?

Because they received and believed the Word of God! And because of that this new life was manifested in the way they lived! What God was doing on the inside of them was overflowing and people noticed this change and how they endured this persecution.

Make no mistake about it, persecution is just part of the Christian life! Paul warned Timothy of this very thing as he said, **“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”** II Timothy 3:12.

Why do we think we can live in peace in this world that is hostile, is against what we believe? Folks, if the world is at enmity with God, if they hate the true and living God, then as His servants they are at enmity with us! And they can't fight against God so they try to silence His people.

Jesus warned us in John 15:18-20, **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”** Don't be surprised when it happens, it will!

And this persecution came, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles! First of all, why were the Jews so upset about Gentiles getting saved? The reason the Jews had a problem with this salvation by grace through faith in Jesus is simple.

They felt that they needed to become Jews and when salvation was offered apart from that, they fought hard against it! Hiebert tells us, “The Jews’ opposition to the work of the missionaries among the Gentiles was not due to the fact that they were seeking to win Gentiles. The Jews themselves were vigorously engaged in this period of their history in actively proselyting Gentiles. Their fierce opposition was due to the fact that Christian missionaries offered salvation to Gentiles without demanding that they first become Jews.”

What about the Gentiles. Well, in Acts 17:5-8, after many Thessalonians were saved, we are told about the Jews first and then the Gentiles being upset about what was going on. We are told, **“But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus.’ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.”** Both the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles came against the Thessalonian believers!

This was a new church, new believers and their faith was already being tested with persecution, big time persecution and they stood strong upon the Word of God, they trusted in the promises of God, their faith was real! And Paul wants them to know, to kind of encourage them, that their faith was being tested like the churches in Judea, they were imitating them!

Now is Paul being anti-Semitic when he says that the Jews not only killed their own prophets, but the Lord Jesus Christ? Not at all, he is just stating a fact. Paul loved his people.

And keep in mind that this is not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well. You see, the end result for not only the Jews who reject Jesus but also for Gentiles, all who reject Him, is that they will face the wrath of God! That is the reality.

So Paul, as a spiritual father to these new believers is helping them to grow, to mature in the faith. He was not a burden to them but worked hard to support his ministry and to share with these believers. Keep in mind that Paul didn't say, "Do as I say not as I do" but said "follow me as I follow Christ", he was able to admonish them to walk worthy of the high calling by which they were called. To live what they said they believed. And they not only received the Word of God but they believed the Word of God and it was manifested in their lives. And because of the witness they saw, because of the truths of God's Word, they could endure persecution just like the rest of the believers were doing! Their faith was real! As a leader, Paul had a real concern for this church, a concern to see them grow and they did!

As I begin to close this morning, keep in mind that we are living in a day when people want to have their ears tickled with fancy words instead of hearing the truths of God from the Word of God. Don't let that discourage you from speaking forth the truth because God's Word is living and it is powerful and it can change lives, it changed yours!

Some of you may remember one of the great films of 1999, ***The Matrix***, starring Keanu Reeves. It's a futuristic sci-fi movie, where the world has been taken over by computers.

The computers need the energy that comes from human bodies, so they keep a supply of genetically engineered humans in a permanently anaesthetized state. They then create an imaginary world for these comatose humans, ***The Matrix***, in which people think themselves alive and conscious, going to work, living normal everyday lives.

The Matrix is the world that has been literally over everyone's eyes to blind them from the truth, a world that keeps them in bondage to acceptance of the way things are.

But there is a group of rebels who have broken free of the Matrix. Led by Morpheus they lead a shadow life committed to an alternate reality and hunted by cybercops. Then they discover Keanu Reeves character, Neo, the prophesied One who will break people free from the Matrix.

Early in the film we find Neo awakening to the truth. Part of the Matrix, the computer created illusion, he experiences, unexplainable doubts about the way things are, doubts which act like a splinter in his mind, making him feel uncomfortable.

Then he is introduced to the rebels, led by Morpheus. Morpheus offers Neo a chance to see the truth. He holds out two pills. The blue pill is a pleasant analgesic which will blur over the pain his honest enquiry is creating. Swallow the blue pill and he'll be comfortably back in the Matrix. Or he can take the red pill, which will open his eyes to see new possibilities, to carve out a place in the alternate reality.

At the heart of the gospel is the idea that we are all caught in The Matrix, in a false view of reality. We fail to see the world as it truly is, fail to see it as God sees it.

The analgesic of Western consumerism blind us to the realities and values of God's kingdom. Jesus calls us to a new way of seeing reality, to swallow his red pill rather than society's blue pill, and to forever be changed.

- Then Matrix

Don't live in a fantasy world, but receive the Word of God into your life so that you will be saved. Believe in the Word of God, trust in what God has to say for He is the source of all truth. Manifest the Word of God in your life, what you do and what you say. And stand strong in the Word of God no matter what may come your way as Jesus said in John 16:33, **"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."**

Yes there is absolute truth, as Jesus said in John 14:6, **"... 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"** Don't be like Reggie Lewis who was told the truth but refused to believe it and found someone who would tell him what he wanted to hear, a lie, and it cost him his life! May we receive, believe, manifest and stand strong upon Him and His Word!