

TITLE: WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF A NEW CONGREGATION

TEXT: 1 THESS 1

INTRO: As a new congregation, we not only need to be committed to doing things exactly as God has commanded, but we need to be encouraged in our work. Thessalonica is a great example of a new congregation that was successful, even in the midst of persecution. Paul wrote to them specifically regarding their concerns about the resurrection, but spent much of the letter encouraging this young, yet strong congregation.

I. BACKGROUND (ACTS 17:1-9):

- A. (v. 1) There was only a synagogue (i.e., no church yet). Think of the great challenges in starting a congregation from scratch.
- B. (v. 2-3) Three Sabbaths (less than four weeks was all the time he had). He *reasoned* (logic – conclusions based on evidence) from the Scriptures (where else?). He didn't discuss feelings. What would Paul's response be to those who "just feel saved?"
- C. (v. 4) Many believed (but not all), and consorted (to associate, be in common) with Paul & Silas. This is fellowship.
- D. (v. 5-9) Persecution
 - 1. (v. 5-6a) Physical persecution: Jews, unbelieving and jealous, gathered a company (crowd, mob) of lewd (evil) men, set the city in uproar (notice this is done by the Jews, not Paul), and assaulted the house of Jason.
 - 2. (v. 6b-7) Verbal persecution: These Christians have turned the world upside down – this is a matter of perspective! Christianity turns the world right side up! **Either way, it's impossible for TRUE Christianity to go unnoticed!**
 - a. Jesus was *not* a threat to Caesar! People have always lied about Christians, and always will!
 - b. They'd heard about Christianity from other cities, and tried to stop it. Sometimes our reputation precedes us!
 - 3. (v. 8-9) Jason and the other Christians were allowed to leave *after* posting bail! Life isn't always fair. At least they lived!
- E. This is the rough beginning of the church in Thessalonica. Paul had to leave long before he wanted to, so he & Silas sent Timothy to check on them, then wrote to them from Corinth, encouraging them in the faith.

II. CHARACTERISTICS WE SHOULD EMULATE (1 THESS 1:3-10):

- A. This congregation is being praised by Paul. Why?
- B. Characteristics to emulate in *becoming* Christians (v. 5-6)
 - 1. (v. 5) Know the manner of persons that are among you. Paul taught with words *and* actions/example (**Phil 4:9**).
 - a. Those who teach – Don't just believe anyone who steps up to the pulpit. Like Paul, it needs to be preached *and* lived! One who says all the right words, but doesn't live it, is no better than the false teacher who is a "good guy."
 - b. All members – We should recognize that people lead by example, and that example can be good or bad!
 - 2. (v. 6) Be followers of the Lord.
 - a. The apostles were (**1 Cor 11:1**). The apostles are not here today, but their words are.
 - b. How? By receiving the word with joy of the Holy Spirit – they did this, in much affliction (**Acts 17**).
2:13 – Though you heard the word from us, you received it as from God and not from men. So many today receive it as from men. That way, if they don't like it, they can go to another "man" and hear something else!
- C. Characteristics to emulate in *living* as Christians (v. 3-4; 7-10)
 - 1. (v. 3) **Work of faith** – this is an example of **James 2:14-26** (faith w/out works is dead). Faith *is* "work," because it's impossible to have faith *without* work (works are the result and evidence of faith). **True faith can't sit still.** True faith in God will cause one to study His word, to love & encourage the brethren, and to seek & save the lost!
 - 2. **Labor of love** – labor (pain) of love (agape- seeking God's & others' best interests). Notice that "work" & "labor" are synonymous, and that "faith" & "love" are the sources for these good works. Your faith & love bring about good works.
 - 3. **Patience (endurance, steadfastness) of hope** – this is not a picture of just sitting and putting up with abuse. It's a picture of steadfast continuance in God's word, and in the Christian life, regardless of what Satan throws at us. We're able to do this because of our **hope** (our focus on the finish line and expectation of the prize of Heaven)!
 - 4. (v. 4) Recognize our election by God - A *type* of people is elected. Our obedience makes us part of that election.
 - 5. (v. 7-8) Be examples – they were examples to all the believers in Macedonia *and* Achaia by:
 - a. Their young faith – new Christians have such a great impact of encouragement on other Christians.
 - b. Their evangelism – We're encouraged when we hear that a congregation is baptizing people. Word gets around!
 - c. Their giving (**2 Cor 8:1-5**).
Their example went beyond even Macedonia & Achaia (**v. 8**)! The more people you reach locally, the more opportunity the word will spread beyond even your own community. People you meet have contacts, friends, etc. with whom we can study.
 - d. (v. 9-10) Their true repentance – turning from idols to God. Repentance is a change of mind about sin, which results in a change of action. This was a great encouragement to the brethren, just as it is today (preachers share success stories at preachers meetings).

CONCLUSION: Paul established many congregations. Just like a missionary today who might do this, there were some congregations for whom he had stronger personal feelings. Certainly Paul loved the Corinthians, but they also required much of his time in rebuking, reproving, and correcting. There was obviously a close relationship with the Philippians, and we see the positive feelings he had for the Thessalonians also. If Paul were writing to congregations today, which congregation would we be most like?