

1 and 2 Thessalonians

The Apostolic Example (1 Thess. 2:1-12)

Lesson #5 for August 4, 2012

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Acts 16; Deuteronomy 10:16; Psalms 51:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Luke 11:11-13.

1. In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul was focusing on the work of the church and its implications. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, he focused on the experience that he and his friends had after being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi and then going to Thessalonica. He discussed the fact that he (and Silas, Timothy, Luke, and maybe others) had become a role model for the Thessalonians and was so effective that they had become role models for others.
2. What does it take to be a role model for Christians? If you were given the task of setting up the criteria for admission to the 144,000, what would you pick? To be like Jesus? Or, Paul? What do we who are living at the end of time need to be focusing on to finish the gospel? Will it be easy to be one of the 144,000? Or, very challenging for selfish human beings? After 6000 years and many times of starting over, will we manage to do what God really wants?
3. What seems to be the main emphasis in your church? Baptizing more and more members? Getting the church members to give more offerings? Or, spiritual growth? How could we measure spiritual growth? Could we measure "the fruit of the spirit"? (Galatians 5:22,23)
4. People function at different levels of intellectual maturity. Consider three possible reasons for what we do:
 - 1) I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward or destroy.
 - 2) I do what I do because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him. (And you know what happens if you do not please Him!) This is not much different from #1.
 - 3) I do what I do because everything God has asked me to do has proven to be not only the right thing to do, but also, it is for my best good. In the case where God asks me to do something that I do not yet understand, I will do it anyway because I believe that when I come to understand it, it will make good sense as well.
5. Which is more important to you? To please God as you understand Him? Or, to do what is right because it is right? (Does that please Him?) How does God treat those who do not please Him? (Hosea 11:8,9) Does that scare you? How would you like to have 30 minutes a week to have a personal talk with Jesus to ask Him questions? But then, the Devil would demand equal time! How would you survive having to spend 30 minutes with him each week?
6. The book we call 1 Thessalonians was a personal letter from Paul to his friends. He was not afraid to open his heart to them. He was hoping that the spiritual hopes and dreams that he had for them would be their dreams also.
7. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1,2, *Message*:

So, friends, it's obvious that our visit to you was no waste of time. We had just been given rough treatment in Philippi, as you know, but that didn't slow us down. We were sure of ourselves in God, and went right ahead and said our piece, presenting God's Message to you, defiant of the opposition.
8. After commending the Thessalonians for the way in which they had become examples to others in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul discussed the conditions and the circumstances surrounding his journey to Thessalonica in the beginning. Those personal details would remind the Thessalonians about their personal experiences together and hopefully remind them of their commitment to Paul and his message. Many of us would probably have given

up after the experience in Philippi. Paul used that as a kind of springboard to introduce himself to the people of Thessalonica. Was Paul bruised and bandaged when he arrived?

9. If you had been beaten, put in prison, and threatened with death, would you still be witnessing? Might such things happen to us in the future? What did Paul say about his wounds? Are Christians being “persecuted” today? Physically? Psychologically?
10. No doubt, Paul and Silas were still covered with bruises and, perhaps, even open wounds from their previous experiences. Did they try to hide those wounds? How would you convince those to whom you were speaking that those wounds were not because of some previous criminal activity or having done something wrong? What evidence did Paul and Silas provide that they were really doing the work of God?
11. Other “street preachers” were looking for money, fame, or even to take advantage of their followers in other ways. But, Paul and his friends had proven in Philippi—and had the wounds to prove it—that their motives were only of the highest order. Would you be more likely to trust someone who was so obviously willing even to die for what he believed? Would a “huckster” do that?
12. In the Mediterranean world of Paul’s day, people fancied themselves as being experts in oratory, logic, and persuasion. It was thought that there were three criteria that made a person’s arguments persuasive: 1) The character of the speaker (*ethos*); 2) The quality or logic of his arguments (*logos*); and 3) The power of the speakers appeal to move listeners’ emotions or self-interest (*pathos*). In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6, which of these elements do you think Paul was emphasizing? Or, all three?
13. Which of those persuasion factors is most important to you—the emotional appeal of the speaker, his charisma, or the logic of his arguments? What about his assumptions?
14. Then, Paul set about in 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6 to contrast his work with the “hucksters” that were going around in those days. Paul wanted it to be very clear that they were: 1) Not teaching error; 2) Not operating from impurity or sexual motivation; and 3) Not into any trickery or deception.
15. Many people in history have died seeking fame, fortune (money), or adventure. What really motivates us? Are we sure that our understanding of the gospel is correct in every detail? When we go out to witness, do we have any hidden agendas? Are we just trying to impress others in the church?
16. Paul was seeking to authenticate his message based on a recollection of his recent personal history.
17. Clearly, in a very short period of time, Paul had an incredible effect on the Thessalonians. They trusted that he was telling them the truth. His motives were pure. His arguments were logical and persuasive. When speaking to non-Adventist friends, how do your motives measure up? (See Deuteronomy 10:16; Philippians 4:13; Psalms 51:1-10)
18. Human beings—and even other created beings in the universe—have an incredible capacity at deceiving themselves. We gradually convince ourselves of the most ridiculous things! Incredible as it may seem, Satan will still be trying to organize an attack on the New Jerusalem at the third coming, telling the wicked that they can win the great controversy against God even while God will clearly be inside the city itself!
19. Do we live lives that are powerful arguments in favor of the gospel? If every other Christian were just like us, how soon would the gospel be finished? Christians can be motivated by fear, desire to please God, or belief that what they are doing in following God’s plans for their lives is the right thing to do. Which is the most motivating factor for you? How does it make you feel to know that Christ would have died for you alone?

In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one. (*Christ's Object Lessons* 187.2)

One soul is of infinite value; for Calvary speaks its worth. (*Gospel Workers*-[1892] 337.1)

20. So, what motivated Paul? What should motivate us?

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness [98] is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God. (*Christ's Object Lessons* 97.3-98.0)

21. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:6-8. In effect, Paul and his friends “adopted” the Thessalonians as if they were their own children. They cared deeply about what would happen to them in the future. That kind of selfless love moves people. The apostles were not motivated by greed, immorality, deception, or flattery. Only selfless love was manifested in their lives.

22. Paul did not try to impress them with his “credentials.” He supported himself so they could not accuse him of being like the preacher “hucksters.” (1 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Corinthians 11:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:6) Did Paul truly work all night so that he could preach all day?

23. Paul considered himself a slave of Jesus Christ. He was so motivated by the gospel—the truth was burning in his heart so powerfully—that he could not keep silent. He gave his entire self to the work of spreading the gospel. Have we ever seen that kind of motivation?

24. When someone goes way out of his way to help you and has no obvious possibility of reward for what he has done, how does that move you?

25. Does it seem like a contradiction to you if someone was trying to be authentic and genuine and yet, “being all things to all people”? How much investigating did the Thessalonians do to determine whether Paul was telling them the truth? (Compare Acts 17:11)

No matter how high the profession, he whose heart is not filled with love for God and his fellow men is not a true disciple of Christ. . . . He might display great liberality; but should he, from some other motive than genuine love, bestow all his goods to feed the poor, the act would not commend him to the favor of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 318,319.

26. What was Paul’s secret effectiveness tool? Was it that he was only trying to please God? Was it his love for the Thessalonians? What is our secret weapon in trying to win others?

27. What makes someone a role model? Should we strive to be role models? Would we dare to say, “Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ”? (1 Corinthians 11:1, *GNB*)

28. Read Micah 6:8. If we followed this instruction, would our witness be more impressive? How often do we do things just because we think we have to?

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. *MS 20*, 1897 (*MR # 970*); *Signs of the Times*,

July 22, 1897, par. 11 (3ST 400:2:1) - section in [. . .] omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120.4; 12MR 236.1

29. How difficult is it for naturally selfish human beings to put the needs of others before their own wants and needs? It is not easy!
30. It is painfully obvious to those who regularly follow the national and international news that many problems have developed within the larger context of the Christian church. How do we feel about those church scandals? How often do so-called church leaders get exposed because of their desire for money, power, or sex? What is this doing to the moral authority of the church?
31. During the Dark Ages, the nominal Christian church had incredible political and military authority. Did it have a moral authority at that time?
32. To get another idea about the background context of Paul's ministry, consider the following:

We get a fascinating picture of the type of religious con artists present in Paul's day when we look at the life of a man named Alexander of Abonoteichus. According to Lucian of Samosata, Alexander was a charlatan par excellence. During the second century, Alexander founded a widely popular cult centered around a snake god called Glycon, who supposedly had a human head with blond hair. People from far and wide, including the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, came to hear (and pay for) the oracles of Glycon as interpreted by Alexander. In one year alone, Alexander received 80,000 drachma (a drachma was roughly the equivalent of a day's pay). It was quite the racket. Lucian's account and images of Glycon can be found by searching the Internet for the phrase "Lucian of Samosata: Alexander the False Prophet." (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 62.)

33. When one starts talking about a blonde-haired human head on a snake's body, you know that there is some deceit going on! And yet, some deceivers are so successful that they become incredibly rich at it. Paul did everything possible to make sure that his ministry was not based on error, (1 Thessalonians 2:3) impure motives, trickery, or greed which, no doubt, were the main motivations in the Glycon cult.
34. Anyone can make claims. Satan claimed that God was a liar! (Genesis 3:1-5) So, how do we go about proving any claims we might make? How do we authenticate ourselves before those with whom we are speaking or people to whom we are attempting to witness?
35. The Bible is full of examples of almost everything you can think. Balaam in the Old Testament (Numbers 22) and Simon the magician in the New Testament (Acts 8) were obviously motivated by money. Fortunately, there were others like Joseph, Moses, and Daniel in the Old Testament who were motivated only by love for God and convictions of the truth. Which of these individuals most closely represents us? How big a factor is money in motivating us? Are we in a rat race to keep up with the Joneses?
36. Those of us who believe in the larger-view, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation firmly believe that we must not only be motivated by a desire to please God, but also we must learn to do right because it is right. This, of course, is pleasing to God. It is God's desire to ultimately give us back our self-control. (Galatians 5:22,23) It is only safe to do that for eternity if the people you are dealing with are determined to do right because it is right.

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