

The Care and Feeding of New Christians

1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

INTRODUCTION:

A. Concerned About New Christians.

1. In a little over one year we have rejoiced with 8 baptisms (young and older).
2. The road ahead for the new Christian:
 - a. They have so much to learn about: the Bible, the church, the mind of Christ.
 - b. They have so much to unlearn.
 - i. Old habits and behavior patterns
 - ii. Old attitudes and prejudices
 - c. They have so far to grow.
3. The perils along the way:
 - a. Leaving by the back door.
 - i. The danger of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
 - ii. Many fail to live to "adulthood" in the church.
 - b. Missing the mark.
 - i. The danger of settling for something less.
 - ii. The danger of becoming lukewarm.

B. The Background of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

1. **Acts 17:1-4** - Establishing the Thessalonian church during early months of A.D. 50 on the second missionary journey.
2. The movements of Paul from this point (Acts 17 & 18):
 - a. From Thessalonica to Berea (17:10)
 - b. Jealous Jews chased Paul from Berea to Athens (17:14-15 – Timothy and Silas remained in Berea, joining Paul later in Athens)
 - c. Timothy sent to Thessalonica (1Th. 3:1-2)
 - d. Paul went to Corinth (18:1) in late summer of 50.
 - e. Timothy and Silas rejoin Paul in Corinth a few months later (Acts 18:5; 1Th. 3:6), the occasion for the writing of this book.
3. As little as 6 months had passed between Paul's preaching the gospel in Thessalonica and his first letter to this congregation.
 - a. The second letter was sent within 6 months of the first.
 - b. Thessalonian Christians were just babies in the faith, barely six months old.
 - c. They faced the opposition of their fellow citizens. There was ridicule and persecution.
 - d. Paul escaped to Berea, but these new Christians had to continue their old lives with a new faith.
4. What do you say to baby Christians in these circumstances? What do you feed them to keep them from falling away?
5. Paul knows they are in danger and writes these two letters to help these Christians grow up fast.

I. BABY CHRISTIANS NEED CAREFUL INSTRUCTION.

A. What Paul Taught the Thessalonians while in their Presence.

1. Paul taught them "the word of God," 1 Thess. 2:13.

- a. Paul, as always, began at the beginning - the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. *"This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ"* (Acts 17:2-3).
- b. They believed the word of God, the gospel of Jesus, as the foundation on their new lives.
- 2. Paul taught them to count the cost, 1 Thess. 3:4.
 - a. When you believe, you must expect to suffer.
 - b. Having founded their lives on Christ, they needed to know what to expect about where this new commitment would lead.
- 3. Paul taught them how to live, 1 Thess. 4:1-2.
 - a. Founded in Christ, expecting to suffer for their faith, these new Christians were encouraged to live noble and holy lives.

B. What Paul Taught the Thessalonians in his Letter to them.

- 1. Chapters 4 and 5 are full of practical teaching and admonitions. Teaching material makes up the bulk of these chapters.
- 2. Topics Paul teaches about:
 - a. Moral living as opposed to the immorality of the world (4:3-8).
 - b. Fellowship and loving each other (4:9-10).
 - c. Eschatology ("last things") (4:13-5:11).
 - d. Attitudes toward leaders [elders], (5:12-13).
 - e. General admonitions (5:14-22)

Transition:

New Christians need to be told many things: about Jesus, about morality, about living the Christian life. But sometimes, what we say is just not enough. New Christians need more than the theory of Christianity or our words about Christian living. They need something much more practical to fully understand what it means to be a Christian.

They need not just to hear but to see.

II. BABY CHRISTIANS NEED EXEMPLARY MODELS.

A. "... not simply with words, but also with power ...", 1 Thess. 1:4-7.

- 1. Paul contrasts mere "words" with his example
 - a. The gospel is not just a matter of what we say.
 - b. It is also a matter of power, Spirit and conviction; i.e., the manner in which Paul lived (vs. 5b).
 - c. Paul's example "gave flesh" to his words.
 - d. As Christ came to show us God, so we are to show Christ in our lives.
- 2. They became imitators of Paul and of the Lord.
 - a. The first skill necessary for becoming a Christian is listening. "Faith comes by hearing . . ."
 - b. But to grow as a Christian, we must develop the skill of watching. ("You know how we lived among you.")
 - c. Finally, true maturity comes when we learn the skill of imitating. Imitating both Christ and his followers.
- 4. In turn, the Thessalonians became a model for other new Christians (those in Macedonia and Achaia) to imitate (vs. 7).

B. "... not only the gospel ... but our lives as well ...", 1 Thess. 2:8-12.

- 1. The same contrast is present (vs. 8) - "words" and "life".

- a. It takes real love to share the gospel of God, the good news about Jesus, the message of salvation.
- b. It takes even greater love to share not only the gospel but your life as well.
- 2. Paul's sharing of his life:
 - a. He cared for them like a mother caring for her children (vs. 7).
 - b. He worked day and night, not to burden anyone (vs. 9).
 - c. He let them witness how holy, righteous and blameless he was (vs. 10).
 - d. He dealt with them as a father deals with his own children (vss. 11-12).

C. The Care and Feeding of New Christians According to Paul

- 1. From Paul's perspective:
 - a. First the words - preaching and teaching the gospel.
 - b. Then the actions - living and modeling the gospel.
 - c. Then a constant reminder of the words and actions – 1st & 2nd Thessalonians.
- 2. From the new Christian's perspective:
 - a. Listening to the words, which leads to faith
 - b. Watching the actions, which leads to imitation
 - c. Becoming what you hear and see, which leads to modeling the Christian life for others.

CLOSING:

A. Words to the New Christian:

- 1. Find someone who is older and wiser in the faith, someone whose life shows their commitment to Jesus and their commitment to walking in his footsteps.
- 2. Then be willing to:
 - a. Listen to them - learn from their teaching.
 - b. Watch them - learn from their behavior.
 - c. Imitate them - become what you see in them.

B. Words to those of us who are older:

- 1. Adopt a new Christian. Love them enough to treat them as a father would his children. Be delighted to share with them not only the gospel but your very lives as well.
- 2. Then:
 - a. Take the time to teach them by your words.
 - b. Share your lives with them - let them see your holiness, righteousness, and blamelessness.
 - c. Constantly encourage them to imitate you as you imitate the Lord.