

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc dantrygg@msn.com Today's Date: November 2, 2008

Advertisers of the Gospel of God

by Dan Trygg

"For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. ³ For our exhortation does not *come* from deception or impurity or by way of treachery; 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. ⁵ For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed -- God is witness -- ⁶ 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. ⁷ Instead, we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸ 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. ⁹ For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹ just as you know how we were encouraging and comforting and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, ¹² so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. ¹³ For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it not as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

Tonight, as I came to prepare to write sermon notes, I had a brief conversation with some other folks who were sharing some of the struggles their churches were having in paying the bills for their buildings, or in attracting young people. One of them was commenting how unlikely it was that church people were going to attract people to join them, if we come off as dour, judgmental or complaining. That conversation sparked a thought. **I was prompted to survey the word "gospel" in the NT. It was interesting to note that this word occurs nearly 100 times.** I started reading each reference, and was impressed with the power of this word, "gospel" or "good news", "glad tidings". I noted that both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the "good news of the Kingdom of God" (Mk. 1:14; Matt. 4:23). **Good news! This was a positive message. This was a message that was exciting, wonderful, joyful, ...causing people to throng together in crowds to hear. It was dramatic and life-changing in its impact!** People devoted their entire life to telling other people about it. They travelled long and difficult journeys, crossing rivers and oceans to declare this news to complete strangers, ...it was so important and compelling. People quit jobs, left family and friends, made great sacrifices and endured incredible hardships to get this message out. **People were compelled by the sheer enormity of the significance of what God had done for humankind, that they had to go tell other people about it.**

How anemic and feeble is our perception of the Christian message compared to these men and women of those early days, ...and compared to so many others throughout history who have made great sacrifices, risking property, health, reputation and even life for the sake of getting this message out to others! These were not dull committee members trying to keep a sinking ship afloat. They were not just trying to "hold down the fort" or "occupy until Jesus returns". **These were men and women on fire with passion for God, ...people who were excited, motivated, charged up and driven enough by the radical nature of what God has done, and will do, for others, that they could not sit still and let folks remain ignorant of the best news ever declared on this planet.**

Doesn't that make you wonder what they perceived Christianity to be? Don't you wonder what the gospel meant to them, compared to what you understand it to be? This was no ho-hum, business-as-usual religious belief system we are talking about. This was a life-changing, radical reorientation of life! **It wasn't about "going to church" with these people, ...they were on a mission! God was not just a part of their lives, ...He was their life, and they lived to serve Him! They weren't just holding bake sales or rummage sales to raise a little money for the church, ...they were selling themselves out for Jesus!** They were making deep personal sacrifices for others, showing the love of Christ in practical, costly ways. They were giving of their time, money and resources in ways that stood out *dramatically* from what other people who did not know God were doing. There was *no* comparison. **Those who knew Jesus shone like lights in the midst of darkness. They were as refreshing as cool water to the thirsty hearts of the people of their day.** Their love and joy were *infectious!* People who met them could see the health, vitality and goodness of the Lord in them. They felt accepted and valued. These early Christians did not come off as religious phonies, or as slick marketers, or as legalistic hypocrites. **They expressed uncommon grace and hope toward broken people.** They had time for the lowest of the low, the worst of sinners. **Why? Because they knew the God of grace, and clearly understood that He could save, stabilize and transform others, as well. The good news was a message of hope.** It was especially directed to the poor, the oppressed, those in bondage and brokenness.

The good news was also a message of accountability. It was sandwiched between the command to repent and the warning of coming judgment. This was no watered-down, flowery, “it-doesn’t-matter” kind of message. It was *an exhortation to follow God*. It was the wonderful message of hope and promise that God will accept us where we are, erase our past failures and offenses, and enable us to live a life that will bring Him glory. He has a purpose for each of us, and is willing to come dwell within us to lead and empower us to live out His calling for us. **We will have to give Him an account someday concerning how we choose to live. The good news is that He has made available everything we need in order to do His will.** He is able and willing to do far more than we can ask or imagine. The early Christians understood this truth and *really* believed it. They *ran with it*, ...while most of us just *talk* about it. **Early believers heard the good news as proclamation of a fresh start and an opportunity to change, ...and they pursued change.** We tend to hear the good news as a *message of forgiveness*, which we interpret as a way to escape accountability and judgment. We say, “Thanks, God,” and tend to go on living our *self-directed* lives. **They heard the message of change and took risks.** We hear the message of forgiveness and take our *rest* in the grace of God. We accept the grace of God *in vain*, i.e., we do nothing with it. **They accepted the grace of God and put it to work.**

As I read the verses from I Thessalonians 2, recorded above, I am impressed with how Paul and his company of co-workers *exemplified* the message. **First, in spite of past suffering and present opposition, they shared the good news openly, boldly and unashamedly.** That was the first indicator that their listeners had that they were sincere. They were up front, clear and straightforward. They were not skulking around, trying to be sneaky, or afraid of possible rejection or retaliation. In spite of repercussions, they took the risk. **Secondly, it became apparent that Paul’s message was not based upon deception, errors or trickery.** He shared the *facts*, and let them speak for themselves. He did not resort to manipulative rhetoric, flattery or any techniques of communication that could be faulted. There was no playing with emotions or trying to inappropriately pressure a response. With a clear conscience, he could remind them that his method of preaching and teaching were clear, and void of anything that could be criticized as controlling or crooked. **Third, there was no evidence at any time that Paul or his men were trying to make money off of this people.** His preaching was not a pretext for greediness. Money was not his motive for preaching. Although as apostles of Christ, they had a right to expect to be supported (I Cor. 9:1-18), he never asked them for any money. **Fourth, he was not seeking to be exalted or honored by men.** He was not trying to get people to follow *him*, or expecting people to hold him in high regard. He was turning them toward *Jesus*. He was not trying to get people to honor or serve him; he showed them by his example that *he was there to serve them*. **Fifth, instead of being bossy or controlling, he was gentle and mild, tenderly caring for them.** The word picture he uses to describe his attitude and demeanor is that of a nursing mother caring for her own children. Can there be any clearer picture of his understanding of their need to be served and helped by him than to equate them with infants in need of care? **Sixth, out of genuine affection, he and his comrades poured themselves into serving their needs.** Notice the sandwich structure of this verse. It starts by recounting how they developed a “fond affection” for them (a term of endearment from the nursery). Then on the other side, the verse ends with a statement of how they had become “dear” (“beloved”, a term used of children and close friends) to Paul and his men. In the middle, the meat of the sandwich, as it were, is Paul’s statement that they “were well-pleased to give away to them not only the gospel, but also our own selves”. They invested themselves fully into serving these new believers, whom they had come to love and delight in. **Seventh, they worked long and hard so as to not become a burden to them.** We know that Paul was often a tent maker, supporting his preaching and teaching ministry by manufacturing tents. At other times, he accepted money from other churches so as to be freed up to preach the gospel without charge where he was (Acts 18:1-5; I Cor. 9:14-18; Phil. 4:15-18; II Cor. 11:7-9). Again, note the concern to avoid any thought that he was out to attempt to enrich himself from them. Also, the intensity of his effort, and its extensive duration, revealed again that he was sincere. He was working to the point of exhaustion in order to effectively preach the gospel. **Eighth, Paul reminds them that his behavior had always been holy toward God, just and fair, and without any fault in anyone’s eyes, while he was working among them.** He and his co-workers kept the highest standards of behavior while among them. **Ninth, he had appealed to them as a father encourages, consoles and directs his children.** Once again, a word picture steeped in love and warmth. **Finally, he always directed them toward following Christ.** Because of Paul’s purity of motive, behavior, devotion and service, his listeners clearly knew that he had been sent by God. No one could find fault with him, and his words were received with the highest moral authority. **Paul’s life and witness matched what he was claiming. We can learn from his example. Our lives either support or belie our claims to being servants of God. We either exemplify what we say, or our behavior detracts from our credibility. Our actions and attitudes are either good advertisement for the gospel, or our behavior contradicts what we say we believe.**