

- Good morning, everyone, and as always, welcome back. Today, we pick back up on our study of 1 Thessalonians, a letter Paul wrote to the church, to the assembly at Thessalonica.
 - And why did he write it?
 - Well, apparently, he was prompted to write this 5 Chapter letter because of the report he received from Timothy on the issues and or behavior of this church.
 - And so, essentially, Paul wrote this letter in response to what he had heard from Timothy. Which, by the way, is why Paul wrote most, if not all, of his letters.
 - Remember, Paul was an Apostle, he missioned from town to town setting up and establishing churches, and once he established those churches, he would then set their path and direction.
 - From there, he would move on and go to the next town and establish more churches, and of course, before he left, he would assign them a Pastor such as Timothy.
 - And then, generally speaking, overtime, once the dust settled and the newness wore off, Paul would begin to hear rumblings about issues or problems the fellowship was experiencing.
 - And sure enough, the church at Thessalonica was no different, as it followed suit just like the rest of the churches Paul helped establish.
 - And what were some of their issues?
- Well, I highlighted a few of the issues in our opening introduction of this letter, but just to jog our memories:
 - Apparently, some of the Thessalonians believed Jesus Christ was about to return soon, and so, consequently, they had given up their jobs and become disorderly (for some reason).
 - That was one of the issues! We also know through studying the letter that some of those in the fellowship were worried about what happened to their loved ones who had died before the Lord returned.
 - Persecution was also an issue, as it always was with any of these new churches, and their persecution came from both the Gentiles and the Jews, especially against those inside the fellowship who held fast to the truth and against those who were eager to see Paul return again.
 - And finally, it appears there were some misuses of spiritual gifts by the Thessalonian believers, as well as the unfortunate tendency of some of them as they began returning to their former habits, the least of which included sexual impurity.
 - And so, there is a quick synopsis as to why he wrote the letter.
- The story was always the same: Paul would establish the church, it would do well in his absence until their flesh began kicking in, and from there, of course, they would begin making mistakes, losing their way.
 - And those mistakes, problems, and issues are what precipitated Paul to write his epistles.
 - And through Paul's writings, you and I obtain an inside look into their lives and

problems, and from that inside look, we get direction for our lives through the application that Paul wrote to all believers in these churches.

- In other words, the Bible is a compilation of letters and books that give us Spiritual Instruction on how we are to conduct ourselves, along with direction and instruction on how we are to live out our Christian lives.
- Pretty simple concept to understand, isn't it?
- Which tells us something: It tells us that the last thing we need from the church is a bunch of opinions on who God is, how He operates, and what He expects.
 - Instead, all Christians should garner his or her understanding of who God is directly from the source, which also includes how He operates and what He expects from each and every one of us.
 - And let me say this, at the top of God's expectation list is a pursuit of Holy Living.
 - Which in church history past was always a given, in the sense that no one was confused about that requirement, and for the most part, most believers were striving for that very result!
 - What I mean is, speaking on the topic of Holiness was never an eye opener or shocker of any sorts.
 - On the contrary, everyone knew what God expected from each one of His children, because through God's Word, men like Paul wrote about it and made it a topic that was front and center of their ministry.
 - Which meant for 100's of years, when a Pastor expounded on this topic, it wasn't anything earth-shattering, it was nothing new or of great revelatory significance.
 - It was simply a given understanding!
- But not today. Speak on this topic – even on a “surface level,” and you'd better hold onto your hat, because living a Holy and Righteous and Sanctified life has become somewhat uncomfortable for many Pastors and Christians to talk about.
 - But why is that? It's due to the fallen state of the modern-day church.
 - Today, the church has spent so much of its time trying to reach the lost for Jesus (which is a good thing, by the way), but the problem is that it has caused the church to compromise when it comes to Holiness and Righteousness.
- Now, I am not going to elaborate too terribly much on this topic this morning, only to say this: in an effort to reach the world for Christ Jesus, the church has blurred the lines in many areas, simply because the end justifies the means.
 - And as I said, church growth is a call for each of us, but it must be done correctly, not forced or manmade, where the church tries to manifest or counterfeit the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - Preachers have shifted in their methodology of evangelism, and as such have abandoned the Biblical mechanisms for growth and outreach.
 - Matter of fact, if I asked 100 preachers and or believers, “How does the church grow?” most of them (if not all) will give some answer that has nothing to do with God's prescribed method of Growth.

- And so what that tells us is, when it comes to true and unadulterated church growth, the Church is lost – and clueless on how God grows His Church.
- And how does He truly grow it?
 - Through you, the believers of God, through Christian Men and Women.
- Think about it this way: If everyone in here had influence over just one person this past week and invited that person or persons to church, and if God saw fit to move on that individual's heart, this place would double in size in just one week.
 - But it's not that simple. It is, but it's not.
 - The key to all of this lies in your personal development as a Christian Man or Woman.
 - And here's the truth on how all this works, or let me say, here is the truth the church no longer speaks about:
- God uses you and me to draw men to Himself, but He does not always do that.
 - He does not use us unless we are pursuing a life of Holy Living.
 - I didn't say that if your life is Holy, God will use you.
 - I said if you are pure in the intent of your heart in trying to pursue Holiness, in trying to please God.
 - When we commit to this lifestyle, then God will use us. And of course, once again, it all boils down to a heart issue.
 - And it works like this: As I pursue God through prayer and through my studies, God will transform me, and this transformation begins on the inside and moves outward from there.
 - And the by-product of that pursuit is that God will use me to reach others, and it's a perpetual cycle that continues over and over again.
- Now, the interesting part is if I stop pursuing Holiness with God, then He can and many times will stop using me.
 - And it's at that point I often hear people say, "I just don't feel as close to God as I once did!"
 - But the issue isn't God.
 - The issue is us and our lack of discipline around the pursuit of righteous living.
- And what do I mean when I say the pursuit of Righteous and Holy Living?
 - Well, in a nutshell, it means being intentional about pursuing your relationship with our Lord, and I am not just talking about some casual relationship where we fit God into our schedule; that's not the kind of relationship I am speaking about.
 - I am talking about a deep and intimate relationship with God, and the primary methodology for accomplishing this comes by way of prayer coupled with the study of His Word. That's it.
 - And by the way, those actions are totally in your control, meaning you can choose to do them or not do it!
- Now, there are many philosophies and theories on how you can enter into a more

meaningful relationship with God, and those include intentionally staying away from the things this world has to offer.

- For example, the things we watch, the things we listen to, the things we are willing to subject ourselves to, and maybe, unintentionally the things we subject our children to.
- But if I can be honest with you, improving in those areas of your life are all by-product of a deeper walk with God.
- Which means the deeper I go with God in study and prayer, the more I begin loving what God loves and the more I begin hating and abhorring what God hates and abhors.
 - For years, preachers have preached to people in various forms, trying to convict people or scare people into conforming to the image of God.
 - I call it counterfeiting the work of the Holy Spirit.
- They often pick a topic like drinking or pornography and hammer down on telling people to stop doing these things.
- Unfortunately, this method of preaching and yelling at people has very little effect.
- I would tell you essentially the technique doesn't work.
 - It may work for a minute in the moment, but as my grandmother would say, it doesn't last until the water gets cold.
- You see, when you pursue a sanctified life, that is what will naturally cause you to put those things away, not the guilt or shame that comes from a preacher highlighting the sins in your life.
 - Let me say it differently, guilt and or shame will have an effect on you, but not a man-made guilt or shame.
 - It's only the guilt and shame – i.e., conviction of the Holy Spirit, which by the way is created by a mirror of your life, which comes by and through the Bible.
- It's that image of yourself that truly transforms and changes: When you see yourself the way God saw you, without the covering of Jesus' Blood.
 - And just in case you are wondering, the process of conviction administered by God's Holy Manuscript never ends, meaning you cannot achieve a certain level of Spiritual Maturity and then say "I'm Good."
 - No, as the writer of Hebrews so eloquently lays out, if you mature spiritually and then you stop putting in the work of Study and Prayer, you will begin to regress spiritually speaking.
 - Let me read it to you – give it to you straight from the horse's mouth, and to do that, we will read from:

[Heb. 5:11](#) Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

[Heb. 5:12](#) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and

you have come to need milk and not solid food.

[Heb. 5:13](#) For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

[Heb. 5:14](#) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

- Now, this set of verses may be some of the most powerful verses in all the scriptures when it comes to painting for us a picture of two groups of people.
 - First is the “spiritually regressed” group, and this group is called out in a very identifiable way.
 - Listen to it one more time:

[Heb. 5:11](#) Concerning him (who is Him) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

[Heb. 5:12](#) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

- The writer of Hebrews clearly identifies a person or group of people who should be by this time, which by the way is about 10 years, based on the age of this church.
 - The writer says by this time you should be teachers yourselves, but because something has happened, they are not!
 - And what is it that has happened?
 - The writer says they have become “dull of hearing.”
 - Paraphrasing here – the writer says, “Concerning Him – we have much to say, but it’s hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.”
- Now the question looming in my mind is: What does it mean to become “dull of hearing”?
 - Well, we can figure it out when we examine exactly what’s going on with these people.
 - First of all, the sense here in what the writer is conveying suggests that at one point, this group was in fact the opposite of dull, which means they were sharp in their hearing.
 - But now they have become dull.
- That statement in and of itself just leads to more questions for me, and that is: What does it mean to become dull of hearing?
 - Well, first and foremost, based on the way the writer crafted his words, it means this group was and is responsible for the state they find themselves in.
 - They are the ones who caused their hearing to become dull.
 - But once more, how did they do it?

- Well, we can know how they did it by backing into the math:
 - They did it by reversing what they should have been doing to become the opposite of dull, which is sharp!
 - Look at it one more time, verse 12:

Heb. 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

- So, there is a corollary going on here, where in verse 12, we are told that because they are not teachers themselves at this point in their church history and in their Christian walk, they are in fact the opposite of that.
 - And why is that the case?
 - Because now they are in need of being retaught the elementary principles of the Oracles of God.
 - Which means because they have not progressed in their studies of God's Word, they have instead gone backwards at this point, hence why they are now in need of being retaught.
- Let me say this before pressing on this morning. There are two schools of thought going on here.
 - First, these verses clearly tell us that "Spiritual Regression" is in fact a real thing.
 - And second, the only way to prevent it is by progressing in your studies.
 - Which then leads me to the second group in view here, which is the "Spiritually Immature."
 - And obviously, these two groups go hand in hand.
 - And this is a pretty easy concept to understand, folks: Study & Pray – and you mature.
 - Skip it – and you not only won't mature, but you will lose whatever maturity you once had!
- But here is the good news. Even though you may have lost it, you can regain it.
 - All you have to do is begin again.
 - Simply ask God to forgive you, repent, and begin your studies all over again, and "the process" of maturing will restart in your life.
 - And I am sure many of you in here can relate to what the writer of Hebrews is saying.
- I am sure you've probably personally felt more spiritually mature than others at varying times in your life, and I am sure you have also felt further away from God spiritually speaking.
 - Every believer is called and commanded to mature, and it's by and through that process that I become a useful instrument of God.

- And the same holds true when I encounter, say, filthy language or watch trashy movies or watch and listen to stuff God wouldn't approve of.
- It's by and through spiritual maturity that I am convicted, and want no part of it.
 - You see, when you pursue Godliness, and you encounter the perverse things this world has to offer, you and I will automatically become offended and ashamed.
 - Not because someone told me to feel offended and ashamed, but because it's a natural feeling based on the work I have done in relation to building up "The Spirit" that lives inside me.
- And so, the pursuit of Holiness is an issue with this church, just like it was with most churches.
- And Paul will be addressing this more in-depth later on in his writings.
- Now, last week, we finished our teaching by focusing on [1 Thessalonians 1:3-10](#) where Paul issues a commendation, a praise of sorts, for the things they have done well.
 - Here is what he said in verses 5-10:

[1 Thess. 1:5](#) for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

[1 Thess. 1:6](#) You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

[1 Thess. 1:7](#) so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

[1 Thess. 1:8](#) For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

[1 Thess. 1:9](#) For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, [1 Thess. 1:10](#) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

- In verse 5, Paul says:

[1 Thess. 1:5](#) for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

- I talked about this verse last week. And I just want to re-highlight it one more time.
 - What Paul said was, paraphrasing here, we didn't just talk (in word only), but our words were demonstrated by and through the lives we live, in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction.

- Paul's statement highlights something I have talked about over and over again – when God's Word becomes manifest in our lives, it will be evident to all those around us.
- Now, I want to clear something up about verse 5 real quick, and that shows up in the last half of the verse when Paul says, "but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."
 - I want to make a statement and then expound on the words "in power." Here's what I want to say –
 - Inside Paul's words, we have a sequence of events being identified, but I feel the sequence is a little bit out of order.
 - In the first half of verse 5, Paul says, "We did not come to you in word only."
 - So the first step in the sequence of events is: we have "the word" spoken.
 - This is critical because everything else emanates from there.
 - Next, as a result of the word, there came power, and the Holy Spirit accompanied by full conviction.
 - I would tell you it goes something like this:
 - First God's Word is spoken in truth.
 - Next comes "Full Conviction," which is produced by the Holy Spirit.
 - The result of which is a demonstration of God's Power.
- Now, let me hone in on this statement for just a second.
 - Any time the Charismatics see this word "Power" in scripture, they almost always relate it to some type of external supernatural display of God, and then they take that belief system and run with it!
 - They say, "We have Power," as it relates to healing, prophecy, speaking in Tongues, etc., so on and so forth.
 - Essentially, the outward manifestation of the Gifts of the Spirit.
 - But that is not what this verse is speaking about.
 - On the contrary, what it is speaking about is the same thing I have been talking about from the beginning of today's message.
 - When God's Word is ingested properly – in context – it will grab you, and when it does, it does something to you.
 - Honestly, it messes you up real good.
 - I say it's like the ultimate set of Ginsu Knives, it slices and dices, and that's exactly what [Hebrews 4:12](#) tells us. Listen to it:

[Heb. 4:12](#) For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- So what you have just heard is a descriptor of God's instrument, also known as the Word of God, and God uses that instrument to change us internally.
 - And the primary way that is accomplished is through what I call a "Spiritual Mirror" of sorts, meaning God's Word places a mirror in front of you, causing and or forcing you to take a real hard look at yourself, examine yourself.
 - And the proceeding verse after [Heb. 4:12](#) tells us exactly that, listen to verse 13:

[Heb. 4:13](#) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

- Once again, after God's Word does what it does to you, the writer of Hebrews says, "Nothing will be hidden from God. All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him."
 - Which means when you study God's Holy Manuscript, your life becomes illuminated in the Eyes of God.
 - Another way to say it is: you will be exposed.
 - And from that exposure, you become self-aware.
 - And the by-product of all that self-awareness is a Sanctified Life!
 - And then through your sanctified life, God's Power is on full display to the unbelieving world around you.
 - And yes, there could be healing.
 - And yes, someone might be delivered from an addiction of some sort.
- But having said that, that is not the power being spoken of here. This power is an internal power, a transformation from the inside, and once it takes hold, it moves from the inside out.
 - It's the type of power that transforms through the renewing of your mind, just as [Romans 12:2](#) speaks about.
 - And let me say, this process is not a quick one.
 - It's not instant; rather, it's more like a "crock pot," meaning it's a slower transformative process.
 - It's much like a high-level athlete who trains for months, but then, at some point when the training stops, he or she is ready, and it's game time.
 - And the result of all that hard work manifests itself in the most powerful of ways, in ways that you would never imagine.
 - Like what?
- Well, first and foremost, as previously stated, this transformative power causes you to become more self-aware, which is the key when trying to live out a Sanctified Life.
 - And once that begins to happen, you become a person who thinks before they speak.
 - You become a person who keeps their word.

- You become a person who once only cared about themselves but now cares for others above themselves.
- You begin to worry about your life becoming a living testimony.
 - Essentially, your level of conviction in all matters, but especially in matters of Holiness, becomes central in everything you do.
- And believe it or not, guys, that is the “True Power” of God, which is manifested in the lives of God’s children. I mean, think about it, what could be more powerful:
 - A Sanctified Life being lived out where once there was no Sanctified Life?
 - Or a person being healed?
 - Or someone speaking in tongues?
 - I assure you, the more impressive of the two is a Sanctified Life where once there was no Sanctified Life.
 - I will also tell you that a Sanctified Life does more work for the Kingdom than someone being healed or someone speaking tongues.
- So, the question is: Is the reality of a Sanctified Life evident in you?
 - Would others say that you are a person whose faith is being lived out, that your faith is evident by the way you live your life?
 - Or would they say, “I didn’t even know that person was a Christian, because if I can be honest with you, you really couldn’t tell it from the way they act!”
- Now you might be sitting here today and saying to yourself, “How do you know this is the type of power Paul is speaking about?”
 - It’s because of context. Context – stick with the context.
 - Listen to it again:

1 Thess. 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

- The last sentence in that verse clearly tells me what type of power Paul is speaking about.
 - It’s the Power Manifested by and through a Sanctified Life lived out!
 - Paul says, “We didn’t come to you in word only. No – No – No. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you!”
 - In other words, we aren’t just talking the talk, we are indeed walking the walk, and you guys know this to be the case!
- Pressing on, and we will close with this: You and I, all believers, are to become imitators, not counterfeiters, not Christian Men and Women who are faking it.
 - That’s not what this word means.
 - This word in the Greek means a follower.

- The description of this, through my word studies, says:
 - One who imitates, emulates properly, the positive imitation that arises by admiring the pattern set by someone worthy of emulation; the sense is a mentor setting a proper example.
 - This word by the way, is a positive word, and it's used 7 times in the New Testament, and it speaks to followers of Christ, emulating a God-approved example, the supreme model being God Himself!
- And let me say, the other sense of the word is that when you imitate God Himself through a Sanctified Life lived out, hopefully at some point, others will see how you conduct yourself, and they too will want to emulate you.
- And of course, once again it's all cyclical!
- So here is the final question of the day that I think we all should ask ourselves: Is there anyone in your life who would say, "I want to emulate you"?
 - Is there anyone who would say, "I want to be like you"?
 - Or are people saying, "Not only do I not want to be like them.
 - I don't even want to be around them.
 - Matter of fact, "I don't even like them."
 - Guys, this is just one example of the mirror that God's Word puts up to your face when you study.
 - By the way, just so you know that what I am saying is true:
 - When I studied this, I didn't think about all of you; I thought about me.
 - I asked myself that question: Would anyone say, "I want to be like Greg" as it relates to my Christian Walk?
- That's a tough pill to swallow, and it's a harsh reality to come to grips with, but that's what I mean when I say God's Word illuminates my life and places who I am front and center for me to examine!
 - Once again, it's all about Self-Awareness!
- So, my prayer this morning is that you learned something and that you reflect introspectively.
 - And my prayer is that we become not only hearers of God's Word but doers of His Word.
 - And last but not least, my prayer is that you heard something here today that might spurn you, compel you to dig more into God's Holy Manuscript and to seek out the power of God through the transformative process which leads to the pursuit of a Sanctified Life, causing you to dig and discover if what the writer of Hebrews and Paul is saying is in fact true!
 - Amen Amen!!!