

REMEMBERING WHEN OTHERS HELPED YOU

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Objective: For each of us to realize that we have been taught truths that we can teach to others and to identify opportunities to share the truths of the gospel with others.

I think that all of us recognize that people have influenced us and that we have influence on others. Our actions tell a lot about us and people form opinions based on what they can observe. Actions give evidence of what our attitudes and motives are; however, since attitudes and motives cannot be seen, we find that it is sometimes necessary to verbalize what is behind what we do. For example, we might help someone who is having a hard time financially out of a sense of guilt. We might give the same kind of help from a sense of thinking it is our duty. That same help could also come from an attitude of love. The observer cannot know the true motive from just observing our actions. Teaching or sharing with others helps to give clarity to the influence we have on others.

There are lessons to be learned that provide some practical way we can “teach” from the writing of Paul in the first 16 verses of Chapter 2 his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. These lessons relate to boldness, caring, being devoted, and the responsibility of the learners in the process.

Bold Teachers

¹For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, ²but 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. ³For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴but 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. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4 (NASB95)

In order to read this passage in context, we should note that all of chapter two is thought to be directly related to the statement made in 1 Thess 1:9

⁹For they (Christians in other cities) 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,

Here we have agreement from those outside of Thessalonica along with those in the local church where Paul, Silas and Timothy were ministering as to the effectiveness of the ministry of Paul, Silas and Timothy. The word structure of using double negatives sounds as if Paul was refuting claims by others. Likely critics had claimed that what Paul had accomplished there was not effective and did not amount to much. In this letter Paul is boldly asserting that those who knew what was happen affirmed that much good had been accomplished. When people turn from false religions to a saving relationship with God through the completed work of the cross, it **is** significant. Paul experienced opposition during his time in Thessalonica and that opposition was apparently still around.

How does that apply to us today? When false claims are made, it is appropriate to boldly speak the truth to refute the lies that are being told. We have opportunities to correct false information many times in the culture in which we find ourselves. Godless, secular humanism is open in its denial of the existence of God. It is shameless in promoting its “religion” as the only acceptable view point.

Paul showed his boldness even in the face of physical abuse. It is becoming more likely that Christians today will be subjected to physical abuse with the militant pro-abortion and homosexual crowds. Most of us have problems enduring ridicule or verbal put downs and it makes us less likely to speak up in the face of false claims. If physical abuse and or legal action is threatened, are we

going to be bold or timid? What would you do?

What enables a person to be bold in arguing or discussing a topic? Let's look at verses 3 and 4. Paul was bold because he was convinced he was right! His arguments were free of error, free of impurity, and his motivation was without deceit. Do we have this advantage when we share the gospel with others or when we attempt to "teach" by refuting false ideas? Let's rephrase the question: Are you convinced of the inerrancy of the Bible? Do you believe that God has the best interest of every person in His plans for all mankind? Is there anything you think you would need to keep from someone regarding God's plan of salvation? If you can answer "yes" to these questions, then you can be bold also.

Another important fact that emboldened Paul was his belief that he had been commissioned by God to do what he was doing. Additionally, Paul put more priority on what God thought about him and what he did than what anyone else thought of him. So, if these are good things to have to be a bold teacher, then where does that leave you and me? Have we been commissioned to share the gospel? (See Matthew 28:18-20) Are there any priority questions in our minds as to who we ought to be trying to please? (Hebrews 4:13 refers to Jesus as the One with Whom we have to do - or the One with Whom we must give an account.)

Caring Teachers

⁵For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—⁶nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸Having 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. 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8 (NASB95)

Consider this: If a person flatters you he is likely not be someone who really cares about you. Flattery is frequently used to manipulate another person - it may be even be greed motivated. The opposite of flattering speech could be called "straight talk." Most of us say that we appreciate people being straightforward with us. Do we have problems in being straightforward with others? For men, the answer is "Probably not." The problem comes when we fail to be tactful in our efforts to be straightforward. This is where we need a good dose of God's grace to go along with the words we say.

I don't know about you, but I have problems receiving teaching from a person who is trying to impress me (seek glory) with how great he is or how many degrees he has. Most of us are also turned off by someone who pulls rank (asserts authority) on us in a less than tactful way. Paul was able to avoid these errors in his interactions with the church at Thessalonica. I doubt that he ever told them "I'm the apostle, and we will do it my way." I doubt that he bragged about having studied with Gamaliel when he was teaching them.

So if you are not going to boisterous and bombastic in your teaching, what is the model you should use? The correct model is that of a caring parent - specifically, a mother who tenderly cares for her children. The result is that when you take such an approach, you do more than just pass on information, you also share a part of yourself with those with whom you are interacting.

How can we develop relationships with people so that we have genuine concern and care about them? It takes an investment of time and effort to get to know a person well enough so that the relationships are more than just superficial. If you were going to share the truths of the word of God with another person, would you be more comfortable in doing so with a complete stranger or with a close friend? What are the positives and the down sides with each of these options?

Devout Teachers

⁹For 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. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, ¹²so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (NASB95)

All of us can probably think of a teacher we had when we were in school who saw teaching as more than just a job. They were really devoted to what they were doing and we could characterize them as being “called” to being a teacher. Some of the characteristics that stand out as being part of “what it takes to be devoted” regarding such persons are seen in Paul’s description of how he, Silas, and Timothy conducted themselves when they were in Thessalonica.

Labor and Hardship: It seems that many people have no concept that success in *whatever you do* takes hard work. The attitude seems to be that if you try once and it doesn’t work out, then you just give up. Most inventions do not work on the first attempt. Thomas Edison tried literally hundreds of ideas when he was working on the electric light bulb. Most of them did not work, but he did not give up. He is quoted as saying that “genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” Paul had already mentioned the opposition they had encountered when they were in Philippi and in Thessalonica. However, they stuck to what they knew they were called to do. How does this idea (sticking to what you know you are called to do) impact what we do with regard to sharing the truth of the gospel with those people we are around?

Oblivious to the Clock: The difference in a “professional” and a “non-professional” can be discerned by observing how devoted to the clock versus being devoted to the mission a person is. If you are devoted to something, then you are either working on it or thinking about it regardless of when it is. The difference in a “job” and a “calling” is related to the ability to walk away from a job, but the calling goes with you where ever and when ever.

Not a Burden on Others: I am constantly amazed at the attitude of people who volunteer to do a job in a church setting and then do not take the steps to learn how to do the work without having to have a lot of other people to actually do the nitty gritty part of the work. Some who think they have a servant heart can’t operate without an army of slaves to do what they can’t or won’t do. What can we do to **not** be a burden on others? Develop or acquire the needed skills to actually do the job or task.

Upright and Blameless: Lack of integrity is an influence killer. You may be the most knowledgeable person on earth, but if people can not trust you, then it is a waste. If you want to have a positive influence on others and to be able to “teach” effectively, then you must be able to operate from a position of the moral high ground.

Positive Encouragement: The best example Paul could find to compare the teaching style they used with the believers in Thessalonica was that of a father who trains his children because he loves them and wants them to do well in life. Most people will respond to instruction that is encouraging rather than berating. Those who are familiar with athletic coaching styles know see evidence that many coaches use criticism and ridicule to inspire their players. That may work for some, but many people are completely turned off by such an approach. We need to be careful to avoid criticism and use correction as we attempt to help others learn the truths of the gospel.

Focused Approach: Paul, Silas and Timothy had an objective in mind and they never lost the vision of what they wanted to see accomplished in the lives of these new believers. That objective was this: “To have these Christians live their lives in a manner that was worthy of God who had chosen them to be part of His family.” If we forget the objective of why we are here, then we miss the point and

life is lived randomly and without purpose.

Receptive Learners

¹³For 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. ¹⁴For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, ¹⁵ who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, ¹⁶hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 (NASB95)

Just as communication takes a sender and a receiver, learning take a teacher and a learner. The teacher's role is very important; however, the role of the learner is equally important. Unless the learner is in "receiving" mode, then all the teaching in the world will not be effective.

In Deut 5:1 Moses gave a prescription for effective learning:

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them.

Notice the four key words Hear, Learn, Keep, and Do. We can see elements of this prescription in the response of the believers in Thessalonica. They heard the word and received it. Some times we hear things that we do NOT receive simply because we cannot agree with it. If you don't receive a teaching, then you have not learned. If you do not receive and learn how it applies to your life, then you cannot keep or retain the teaching. If you do not retain what you learned, then the principles will not have any lasting influence on your life. This is why so many people attend church every Sunday and sit under the teaching of the word and it makes little or no difference in the way they live. The ultimate evidence that a teaching has been received and learned and had an impact is seen in the "doing" of what was taught.

Paul saw evidence in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica - their behavior had changed from what it used to be (like that of the world) and they then behaved as other believers in other churches (showing the character of Christ). The word "imitators" used in most of the newer translations is not intended to have a negative connotation of implying that they were just "acting out a part." The behavior was genuine and was a result of the changes produced in their lives as a result of the work God was doing in their lives because they had received and embraced the truth.

If we are going to be effective in teaching others, then we must first learn effectively. This is not a one time event, but is ongoing. We should be constantly learning new truths and constantly sharing what we have learned with others.