

When I was in seminary, during summers Dr. Ronald Allen, a professor specializing in the Old Testament, would give short intensive courses. There was so much information packed into so little time that it felt like drinking out of a firehose. Paul likewise had to teach the Thessalonians as much as he could in the short time that he was with them. However, we also see from 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12 that Paul had a strong connection to this church, despite being there for a short time. It was closer and tenderer than the relationship he had with the Corinthians. When Paul left, he was so concerned for them that he sent Timothy to check up on them (3:6-10). And upon hearing of the Thessalonian's spiritual growth, Paul was overjoyed. He was not there just to convert or impart knowledge, but to share life and make disciples. This closeness is extremely valuable in church. We should desire this kind of closeness here. Church is not only for gaining theological information; you can do that yourself by reading and researching. Church is about sharing life together. Dr. Allen's intensive classes were very much about information dumping, but in church we should also be concerned with sharing and modeling Christian life in order to make disciples.

What does it mean to be a disciple? From how Paul taught the Thessalonians, we know it's more than conveying information. It must involve teaching doctrine, but also demonstrating how to live in order to please God (4:1). When early churches were just starting out they had poor theology, but also an incorrect worldview and wrong behaviors. Paul addresses all three when he teaches them. At this church we tend to focus more on teaching doctrine and less on addressing bad behavior. Sometimes we pastors feel inadequate to preach against bad behavior because we ourselves struggle with our own faults. There are some sermons that are hard to preach about, such as those about giving to the church, the rights of church elders, and praying for leaders. But as we see in today's passage, Paul doesn't shy away from exhorting believers to live to please God. In our church we tend to focus our attention on having correct doctrine, but we let ourselves off so easily when it comes to our own behavior. We take sin so lightly, which is why sometimes we don't appreciate the weight of Good Friday as much as we should. We tend to judge the character of others based on the mistakes they make, but when we make mistakes we

rationalize for ourselves that it was just our circumstances. When someone cuts us off on the road, they are doing because they are jerks. But when we do it, we are just in a hurry.

Paul's letters always begin with teaching theology, followed by the proper moral response in light of the theology. God wants us to believe and to act on those beliefs. Only having the right theology is not enough. But only having the right behaviors is also not enough. The Mormons are exemplary when it comes to good behavior, but they don't have the right doctrine. We must have right behavior sourced from right theology. And when Paul sees that the Thessalonians are doing this, it warms his heart. Our church often draws educated people, which leads to a focus on accurate doctrine. But we must also focus together on correct behavior. We each need to have those people in our lives that can correct our behaviors without offending us. We need to be open and humble to receive rebuke, and at the same time we need to develop close enough relationships and be bold enough where we can correct others if needed, out of love instead of pride. Evaluate yourself to determine where you need to change in order to do what pleases God, and be open to hear the answer. We all have areas where we need to grow. We must guard against stagnancy and always have a growing edge. In terms of learning the Bible, this means for me that I choose to preach on books I'm unfamiliar with rather than recycling sermons. In terms of our behaviors, it means recognizing our weaknesses and not letting ourselves off so easily. For me that means striving not to be as easily offended or irritated. Continuously growing means actually struggling with our sins and trying to have self-control rather than ignoring or dismissing them. And it means submitting our weaknesses before God asking Him for help in changing our behaviors. Let us exhort each other to excel more and more at living a life transformed by Jesus, a life that pleases God.