Grace Fellowship Church Fort Worth, TX Rick Griffith

2 Nov 1986 Message 4 of 10

NIV 30 Minutes

**Following & Leading**

***1 Thessalonians 2:13-20***

**Topic:** Encouragement

**Subject:** There are three qualities of excellent followers and three qualities of good leaders

**Complement:** that should cause us to encourage others.

**Purpose:** The listeners will ***affirm love towards someone else today, whether that person be one who leads us or follows us***

# Introduction

### Interest: "General Eisenhower used to demonstrate the art of leadership with a piece of string. He'd put it on the table and say: pull it and it'll follow you wherever you wish. Push it and it will go nowhere at all. It's just that way when it comes to leading people. They need to follow a person who is leading by example" (LEADERSHIP example important).

### Need: When you think about it, the proof of the pudding in leadership is in the followers.

#### What would you think of a coach without a team following him?

#### How about an army where everyone does his own thing?

#### Surely a store manager with no satisfied employees or customers isn't leading.

#### Spiritual leaders who don't see changes in those to whom they minister often are more babysitters than leaders.

### Or as one older, wiser man said,

 "He that thinketh he leadeth

 and turneth around to find no one following

 is merely taking a walk" (LEADERSHIP demonstrated in followers).

### Background: The past three weeks we've been looking into Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, and we've seen that Paul didn't have this problem. The church followed Paul's leadership in a manner which you might call "aggressive following." I like that term! But what does it look like?

### Subject: Some of us are leaders in this congregation. How do we know what kind of leaders we are? Are we string pushers or string pullers?

#### Some of us here today fall more into the follower category. How do we know whether we're effective followers?

#### What are the characteristics of good followers and good leaders, anyway?

### Preview: This passage reveals three qualities of excellent followers and three qualities of good leaders.

### Text: Today we'll take a closer look at how the Thessalonians followed and how Paul led. This is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20.

(Let’s first look at the church—the Thessalonians themselves...)

# I. The Thessalonians were excellent followers (2:13-16).

[They knew how to walk in the steps of a great leader like Paul.]

(Let's take a look at three ways in which the church followed…)

## They willingly responded to the gospel by accepting it as God's Word (2:13).

### The church accepted the gospel message as God's word, not man's (2:13a).

#### What does it mean to accept the Word of God as **man's** word?

##### It means "here's another philosophy of life which might help…"

##### It means that men have sat around and come up with another ingenious idea (ILL: Paul with the Athenians in Acts 17).

#### What does it mean to accept the Word of God as **God's** word?

##### This means that the gospel is not just "another good idea from Ford," it's the only completely true message since its source is the one, true God.

##### Many sophisticated philosophies circulate nowadays regarding how man can come to know God.

 \* Mormons claim to have a strategy to become gods themselves.

 \* Jehovah's Witnesses work their way to be one of the 144,000 saved.

 \* The Church of Christ says if you believe and get baptized you're in.

##### Accepting the gospel as the Word of God simply means trusting in this simple fact: God showed his love for you by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty of sin which you deserved. Accept that He did this for you and turn from your sins.

##### It's that simple! Please don't get it complicated with all kinds of teaching about baptism, communion, good works, etc.

##### In fact, the gospel is so simple that someone has said, "The gospel is not the kind of message that man would invent if he could, nor is it a message he could invent if he would."

(Now when we receive the gospel as the Word of God, what will happen in our lives?)

### Genuine acceptance of the gospel produces a changed life (2:13b).

#### The word translated "at work [in you]" is the same word from which we derive our English word "energy." Paul says that reception of the gospel will energize believers to live a brand new kind of life (cf. Phil 2:13).

#### When this gospel is at work in us, what does it do? Let's see among those who are in this room:

##### How many of you experience a peace in life which you sought before knowing Christ?

##### How many have seen God control their anger since salvation?

##### Who has been able to conquer some difficult habits since coming to Christ- habit patterns which you could never lick before? (ILL: Sara now can quit smoking)

##### Those who now know meaning in life which they never had before?

##### What does it mean to have the Word of God "at work in you?" It means, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17).

### Here's a few questions for us:

#### First, have you received this simple gift by faith?

#### Is the Word of God, the gospel, bearing fruit in your life? If not then you probably received a false gospel. Make sure you've received the real thing.

(It's a reasonable question to ask just how the gospel bore fruit in the lives of the Thessalonians. We've already seen that they willingly responded to the gospel by accepting it as God's Word . Now let's see in the next phrase how, as followers of the Lord, this response was observable to others…)

## They imitated a Godly lifestyle (2:14a).

### The Thessalonian Christians, without ever meeting the believers in Judea, began to live a very similar lifestyle!

#### The word here is *mimetai*, the word mimic, the same word we saw in 1:6 where it says that the church imitated the apostles and the Lord.

#### You might ask, "Well, which did the Thessalonians imitate: the apostles, the Lord or the church in Judea?" The text says they used all as models.

### As a follower of Christ, whom are you imitating? No doubt you're imitating someone! Are your examples worth imitating? Make sure those whom you imitate are people who themselves seek to imitate Christ.

(How the Thessalonians imitated the churches in Palestine is revealed in the next few verses where we can observe a third characteristic of the church's type of following…)

## They endured through intense sufferings (2:14b-16).

### It's interesting to note that Christians in both places experienced suffering from their own countrymen (2:14b-15c).

#### The Gentile believers in Thessalonica were objects of abuse and attack by fellow Gentiles (2:14b).

#### Earlier the Jewish believers in Judea suffered at the hands of their fellow Jews (2:14c).

#### Still earlier Christ, a Jew, was killed by fellow Jews (2:15a).

#### Even before this, the Old Testament prophets were murdered by their own people (2:15b).

#### Paul could identify with the suffering Thessalonians since he himself had been thrown out of their city (2:15c).

#### Looks like a regular pattern of receiving the greatest abuse from those who are closest to us, doesn't it? Oftentimes as believers we experience the most persecution from those who are the most like us.

##### It's often not those from another social status or another race or another occupation or even another family that give us the hardest time.

##### It's our own type of people, those whom we mix with, look like, work with, and even live with that heap on the toughest times. It seems that the ones who are supposedly the closest to us often give us the most painful hurts.

##### I'm not from what you might call "the typical American family." There have been twelve divorces between my parents and those to whom they have been married. In fact, the first wedding I ever attended was my Mom's third wedding! Being from a non-Christian family provided its trying moments. I remember being belittled by those closest to me for believing in creation rather than evolution and teaching that Christ is the only way to God. I remember once being punished by not being able to go to church because I neglected one of my chores.

##### Maybe because of your faith in Christ you're experiencing opposition from someone who is one of "your own countrymen" -- from your wife, your husband, your children or your best friends. Let's be like the Thessalonians who endured opposition with a steadfast spirit, even if we may not be able to pinpoint the reasons for the opposition.

(Speaking of reasons, why is it that some people persecute believers? The next phrase gives the answer…)

### Those who set themselves against God's people have first opposed God (2:15d-16a).

#### They **don't** please God and therefore oppose those who **do** please Him (2:15d).

##### Here's a real understatement. Not only are they not pleasing Him, they're actively opposing Him.

##### When going through persecution for your faith it's really helpful to realize who the unbeliever is persecuting. The scorners are never opposing you-- they're opposing Jesus Christ.

##### Remember when Jesus Christ met Saul, the persecutor of the church, on the Damascus road? What did he say to Saul? Did he say, "Why are you persecuting My church?" No, the Lord said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute **Me**?" This same Saul became Paul, the man who penned the words we find right here in 1 Thessalonians! He knew firsthand that mistreatment of believers is really mistreatment of the Savior.

##### When I finally realized that the opposition from my parents was not directed at me but the Lord I was able to handle it. I was able to say, "Lord, thank you for allowing me to experience, even to a small degree, some suffering as a Christian. But please help my parents understand what you did for them on the cross and accept it on their own behalf." You see, realizing that they weren't set against me but against the Lord helped me to not be bitter, but prayerful.

(The passage also says regarding the persecutors that…)

#### They ultimately persecute not just Christians but those who would hear the gospel from Christians (2:15e-16a).

##### Notice that the passage says they are hostile towards **all** men.

##### "The worst thing about unbelief is not that it damns the unbeliever, but that it hinders the salvation of others" (*BKC*, p. 696).

(So God does not take lightly those who suppress the furtherance of the gospel. This is supported by the end of verse 16 which says that…)

### While God may allow persecution of His children, terrible results await those who hinder the progress of the gospel (2:16b-c).

#### I was a bit puzzled by this phrase, "they always heap up their sins to the limit" until I did some further study in Genesis 15:16 where the text says that God would wait until the sin of the Amorites had reached its full measure. It took 400 years for the Amorites to fill up their allotment of sins.

#### Still as clear as mud? I believe it has the idea of God allowing people to sin only so much before God will judge them. Only God knows how much that is, but apparently the enemies of the Thessalonians were coming close.

#### Do you ever feel that the persecution towards you is just too great to be able to bear? God is telling you that He has set limits to the sins that can be committed towards any of us. This should give us a sense of peace knowing that "there is no temptation which is too great to bear."

#### Charles Ryrie adds another interesting perspective, "Paul is saying that God allows His people to be persecuted sometimes in order to prove the evil nature of man and show the righteous character of His judgment when it comes…" (p. 42).

#### The next phrase, "The wrath of God has come upon them at last," may refer to any number of things. I think it refers to the Great Tribulation for two reasons:

##### The term "wrath" is used in reference to Christ's Second Coming in 1:10 where it has reference here to the Great Tribulation.

##### The tense used here indicates the wrath as reaching the Jews in the past, but it doesn't say that this wrath had reached its peak. I think this means that the Jews mentioned in verse 14 had filled up their measure of sins but not yet experienced God's ultimate punishment. (No one has yet.)

### You may be wondering, "How does all this apply to me?" Well, I hope it doesn't! It does to those who oppose us, though. It applies in at least two ways:

#### God will allow suffering in your life and mine, but never too much suffering so that it's unbearable (cf. 1 Co 10:13).

#### When you question whether it's fair for the Lord to allow you to suffer, just remember that God hasn't settled all His accounts yet. Hang in there. Rewards come to those who honor Him, but judgment falls on those who oppose those who honor Him.

(So far in our passage for today we've observed how Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians for three positive characteristics they showed as followers:

 1) They willingly responded to the gospel by accepting it as God's Word,

 2) They imitated a Godly lifestyle, and

 3) They endured through intense sufferings.

In the remaining verses of this chapter we see Paul changing the subject from talking about the followers to the leaders. He switches from commenting about the church to speaking about himself and his companions as leaders.

Everyone here today is a follower, but not everyone is a leader. If you fall into the latter category this is a word for you. I think there's some significant principles about leadership here because verses 17-20 show that… )

# II. The Apostle Paul was an excellent leader (2:17-20).

[Paul demonstrated three vital qualities required of good leaders.]

## Paul led through a pastoral concern despite separation (2:17).

### For the Apostle it wasn't "out of sight, out of mind!" He deeply missed the Thessalonians even though he'd only had less than a month with them initially and then been separated from them for less than a year when he wrote this letter.

#### If you have an NASB you see that Paul says he was "bereft" of them for a short time. The KJV is a bit better with "taken away from you," but I like the NIV the best. It says, "…we were torn away from you."

#### You see, the original word here is that word from which we get our word for "orphaned." It's the kind of distress that a mother would feel to have her children forcefully ripped from her arms.

#### Paul, their spiritual father, hoped the separation would be brief, but it broke his heart to leave them as infant babes in Christ. He couldn't forget them and made every effort to return to them as quickly as possible.

#### I'll never forget the day that Susan and I left the Philippines to return to the states for seminary. We had ministered there for two and a half years and developed some very close relationships. At the Manila airport to say good-bye were Jun and Teng, two Christian men that I had poured my life into (who now serve as pastors). As their spiritual father I felt like I was being ripped away from them when we had to leave. For the first time in years, the tears welled up in my eyes and fell down my face.

### I don't know about you, but for me even though separation from dear people is tough it's easy to get caught into the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality.

#### I wonder, is there someone whom you used to lead spiritually but for some reason now have little or no contact? A younger brother or sister in Christ? Someone from another church? Someone you lead to Christ before?

#### It's important to recognize that the Lord sometimes brings people into our lives for a period of time and then discontinues these ministries. But maybe the Holy Spirit is nudging you today to make that phone call or visit, to write that letter, to demonstrate a pastoral concern which Paul had for the Thessalonians.

#### If you don't know what to say or write, how about using 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 for starters?

(Paul not only lead through a pastoral concern despite separation, but secondly…)

## Paul lead in a constant pursuit despite Satanic opposition (2:18).

### You and I have seen it again and again - Satan seeks to isolate new believers. Paul knew the devil's strategy and so, even though he couldn't make it himself, he sent Timothy to encourage them in their new faith. We take a closer look at this next week in chapter 3.

### We need to recognize that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare.

#### Ephesians 6:11-12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [human beings], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

#### It's obvious from this passage in Ephesians that Satan has different levels of evil, demonic forces that seek to thwart the work of God. Paul recognized this in His relationship with the church. That's why he was so committed to follow-up.

#### Please let me ask the question again, "Is there anyone whom Satan is seeking to isolate from your spiritual leadership?" Do you need to write a letter like Paul did? or send someone else like Paul did?

#### Anyone who abandons babies is inhumane. Yet I know of too many times in my own ministry that I have abandoned spiritual babes.

(All this Satanic attack gave Paul and his companions plenty of opportunities to get discouraged, depressed and lose their joy. They didn't though. The last two verses in this chapter show that…)

## Paul lead with a joyful hope despite problems (2:19-20).

### Paul's affection for his disciples at Thessalonica moved him to refer to them as his hope, his joy, his crown, and his glory.

### One commentator notes,

"He voiced a rhetorical question to heighten the intensity of his fervor. In effect he asked what would be the greatest blessing he could possibly receive at the judgment seat of Christ. They were! They were everything that was worth anything to Paul. They were his **hope**; their development was what he lived for as a parent lives to see his children grow up to maturity, to produce and reproduce. They were his **joy**, they filled his life with sunshine as he thought of what they used to be, what they had become, and what they would be by the grace of God. They were his **crown**; they themselves were the symbol of God's blessing on his life and ministry. They were his **glory and joy**, and not only his but also the glory and joy of his companions in labor" (Constable, *BKC*, p. 697).

### In verse 20 the word "you" is emphatic: "**You** are the reason we glory in the Lord and have such joy!"

### Note also in verse 19 that he fully expected his ministry to end not by death, but by the imminent return of Christ - a pretribulational return with nothing needing to occur before Christ came back.

(So I noted earlier that we would see three qualities of excellent followers and three qualities of good leaders. )

# Conclusion

### Main Points: I've covered several points today: 3 points concerning how to be a good follower and 3 points on how to be a good leader.

#### To be a good follower we must:

##### Willingly respond to the gospel by accepting it as God's Word,

##### Imitate godly lifestyles,

##### Endure through difficult times.

#### To be a good leader we must:

##### Evidence a pastoral concern during times of separation,

##### Constantly pursue others' spiritual growth despite Satanic opposition,

##### Lead with a joyful hope despite problems.

### I think there's far too many applications in this passage for me to touch upon them all, so allow me to hit just one. We've observed in this Scripture that Paul affirmed those he loved. He thanked God for them, he commended them, he expressed his intense longing for them, he referred to them as his hope, his joy, his reward, and his cause for giving God glory.

### How's your affirmation quota towards those **you** love? When's the last time you verbally expressed it? Susan and I have that need to affirm our love for one another at least a few dozen times each day.

### ***Let's affirm our love towards someone else today, whether that person be one who leads us or follows us*** (Main Idea).

### "Lord God, we need affirmation, both from You and from one another. We have no question about whether we've received affirmation from You since You demonstrated it completely on the cross and every day in our lives. But help us to affirm one another too, as Paul did towards the Thessalonian believers. Keep us from the pride that prevents us from saying to one another ,'I love you,' and deliver us from the selfishness that prevents us from demonstrating our love through tangible, creative means. In the loving name of Christ, Amen."

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

# Questions

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

Text

# Possible Illustrations

### Text

# Possible Applications

### Text

**Title**

***Passage***

**Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)**

# *Exegetical Idea*:

# I.

# II.

# III.

**Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)**

The listeners will

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest:

### Need:

### Subject:

### Background:

### Preview:

### Text:

(Transition into MPI here.)

# I.

[Restate MP here.]

(Transition into MPII here.)

# II.

[Restate MP here.]

(Transition into MPIII here.)

# III.

[Restate MP here.]

(Transition into the MI here.)

# Conclusion

###  (MI).

### Main Points

### Exhortation/Application



**Rick Griffith**

1986

Message of 10

**Title**

***Passage***

# Introduction

Subject with a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ blank answer in hidden text

# I. MP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

## SP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

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# II. MP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

## SP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

## SP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

## SP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

# Conclusion

### Main Idea has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

### Application question

**Thought Questions**

1. Read the passage aloud. Contrast:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issue** | **Contrast** |
| Text | Text |
| Text | Text |
| Text | Text |
| Text | Text |
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| Text | Text |
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| Text | Text |

1. Text-based question

Text

Text

Text

Text

1. Application to your own Christian experience

Text

Text

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