

## Imitators not Pretenders

1 Thessalonians 2: 10-13

As I studied this passage I was reminded of the need for sincerity and genuineness among the church. We live in a day plagued with hypocrisy. One of the most offered arguments against attending church in our generation is the presence of hypocrites within the church. Many on the outside believe no one is real or sincere in the church. Our younger generation especially is looking for something real.

It appears Paul also dealt with this tragic issue as well. These verses are an exhortation to live a godly life before men. He wanted them to stand firm in their faith, follow the Lord, and provide a good example for others who had not yet come to Christ.

The lack of sincerity and genuineness has been a problem as long as men have lived upon the earth. Christ dealt with hypocrisy as He ministered upon the earth. Many times, our Lord confronted their hypocrisy. A hypocrite was viewed as one who was “*an actor, a stage player, one who hid behind a mask, or a pretender.*” We, as believers of the Lord Jesus, have not been called to a life of hypocrisy. We have not been called to be pretenders, but rather imitators of our Lord, revealing our faith in Him. [1 Pet.2:21 – For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:](#) [1 John 2:6 – He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.](#) ([1 Thes.1:6 – followers](#))

Let’s consider the [challenges](#) Paul presents as we think on: [Imitators not Pretenders](#).

**I. The Example Displayed** ([10](#)) – [Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.](#) Paul declared they were all witnesses to his behavior among them. Paul didn’t hold to the philosophy of “do as I say; not as I do.” He faithfully modeled Christian behavior before them. He lived:

**A. A Life of Holiness** – Paul lived a pious and holy life before men. This was not something he developed while at Thessalonica; it was a way of life for him. Each day Paul lived, he sought to live holy before God. He lived a separated life from the world, and a life totally set apart to God. His life was not dictated by the pleasures of sin; he sought to walk with God each day.

- You would have to agree that we are in need of those who will live holy before the Lord. Holiness cannot be pretended. We either live for God or we don’t. Many see folks who claim to love the Lord on Sunday, but their lives don’t reflect that love throughout the week. We need to be separated, set apart unto the Lord.

**B. A Life of Righteousness** – He also lived **justly**. That literally means “*righteously, properly, upright;*” dealing righteously with both God and man. Paul was just and right in all his dealings. He always treated men fairly and compassionately. He sought to treat them as he wanted to be treated, and as God would treat them. He saw them as God saw them.

- We could certainly learn a lesson in that regard. We are quick to pass judgment and condemn. We only see the faults in people. We need to see them as God sees them, a soul in need of salvation!

**C. A Life of Blamelessness** – Paul also sought to live **unblameably**. He desired to live “*blameless, without cause for censure, above reproach.*” Phil.1:10 – **That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.** Sincere has the idea of “*judged by sunlight; without wax.*” Phil.2:15 – **That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.** We often think of these characteristics concerning deacons and pastors, but in reality, all Christians have an obligation of living blameless before men. We are to live in such a way that even if charges are brought against us, they will have no chance of “sticking.”

**II. The Exhortation Declared (11-12)** – After reminding them of his example before them, Paul exhorted them to follow his example. They were to imitate the life he lived and the life of Christ. We need imitators not pretenders! Consider Paul’s exhortation. First, we see:

**A. The Call (11)** – **As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.** He **exhorted** them. This means to “*call to one’s side, appeal to, or summons.*” He knew of their difficulties and the burdens they carried. He sought to exhort them, encourage them, and even instruct them. He didn’t want them to wander aimlessly, seeking to serve the Lord. He wanted to equip them for service.

- Clearly, we need imitators in that regard as well. We need those who will come alongside new believers and encourage them in their faith. We need those who will share the great truths of Christ and seek to instill them in the hearts of people. Paul is teaching discipleship. I fear this is one of the areas we are failing most. We rejoice over their salvation and yet many times we never seek to encourage them in the faith. We fail to instruct them in the great doctrines of Scripture.

**B. The Comfort** – Paul also sought to **comfort** them. He sought to “*calm and console them.*” Many of these new believers faced adversity that is foreign to our understanding. Many of them were

persecuted for their faith physically and emotionally. Many were ostracized by their family and loved ones. Paul sought to comfort those who faced such opposition.

- We need to develop a heart for comfort. We seem to get so wrapped up in our own lives that we fail to see the needs and hurt of others. We need to take the time to listen sympathetically and comfort the hurting.

**C. The Charge** (11) – *As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.* Paul also **charged** them. This is an interesting aspect of ministry that is little used in our day. If it is, it is often handled in the wrong way. The word **charged** means “*to witness or testify; it carries the idea of admonishing.*” Paul was loving and compassionate, but he was also bold. He sought to lead them in the right path. He clearly defined the gospel and the expectations for all who follow Christ. He warned of the dangers in straying from fellowship with the Lord. The Thessalonians knew that Paul would confront error among them.

- We need those who will admonish from a heart of love. Many have developed the mindset of “anything goes.” They certainly wouldn’t want to offend anyone. I don’t like to offend folks either, but we need to stand for truth and be willing to confront error. Much of the trouble we are experiencing today is a result of churches being unwilling to confront issues that are contrary to the Word of God.

**D. The Challenge** (12) – *That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.* Paul encouraged and challenged them to walk in a way pleasing to the Lord. They have been called out of sin and darkness into the glorious light. They now have an obligation to bear witness to their relationship with Christ. They are no longer their own to live as they please!

- We need to heed that challenge as well. It will set apart pretenders from imitators. If we are to imitate the example Christ left us, we must walk worthy of our calling. *Eph.4:1 – I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*

**III. The Examination Disclosed** (13) – Paul now revealed what he had discovered as he looked at the church in Thessalonica. Notice:

**A. A Continual Gratitude** – *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.* For this cause, Paul was thankful

for them without ceasing. What was the cause? We will deal with that in a moment, but clearly Paul is thankful unto the Lord for the church. We have already dealt with that in the opening verses, but here again Paul reveals his continual gratitude for the church.

- We too need to be reminded and challenged in regard to our thanksgiving for the church. We are not here by accident. God saw fit to save us and place us within this fellowship of believers. We need to be thankful unto the Lord for allowing us to be a part of His family among the local church! Thank the Lord for the help, encouragement, and support we receive from being a part of a local body of believers!

**B. A Conscious Grasp** (13) – For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. Paul was thankful that the church had received the Word of God. Not only had they received it, but they had embraced it as truth. There was no question or debate when it came to the Word of God. Their hearts were settled. They had heard, believed, and understood. They were growing in grace with God.

- As I consider the church in which we attend I am thankful for the growth we see. I sense a love and appreciation for the Word. I sense a hunger to learn more of Jesus and our relationship with Him. I see those who are comforted, challenged, and changed by the Word. That is something in which to rejoice. May we never depart from making the teaching and preaching of the Word the priority!

**C. A Consistent Growth** (13b) – Paul witnessed a glorious thing in Thessalonica. God's Word was effectually working within their hearts. They were growing in their faith. They were learning more and more of the Word. Paul was beginning to see them live out their faith before others. The church was steadily growing in the Lord.

- A church will never prosper without spiritual growth. Immature believers will have a hard time reaching the lost. Spiritual growth must come before numerical growth. We will never reach our community until we have matured in our faith. I have seen spiritual growth and I rejoice in that. To me, that just confirms that the numerical growth is on the way. We are getting to a point that we can be effective in our Christian ministry.

**Conclusion:** The church in Thessalonica was not made up of empty pretenders. It was filled with enthusiastic imitators. They sought to live their lives according to the example of Christ. They

followed the teachings of Paul and the Word of God. These imitators made a difference in the world around them.

I have to ask where we are with the Lord. What are our desires and commitments? Are we sincerely seeking to imitate the life that Christ lived or are we casually going through life pretending in the faith? We need to imitate Christ in all that we do. I must say, one cannot imitate something in which they are unfamiliar. You can't imitate Christ if you have never met Him.