

The Call to Encourage One Another

Scripture Reading: I Thessalonians 1:1-6

There is much in this Scripture text that I would like to preach, but I must keep myself focused on verses 4-6. Letters reveal the heart of the writer. Think of letters we keep, that were written by friends – by those we love. We may read them many times. As that person shared their heart, we cherish those letters and want to remember the person and the moment when they were written. So many messages today are just texts, on the phone, that we delete. Today, we want to look into the heart of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, when they wrote to the Thessalonian church. Look ahead at I Thessalonians 2:3-4 and we see the pure motive of these men. They wrote with passion and concern. They were very aware that God was witnessing their hearts and their actions. We are going to examine two things from our text (I Thessalonians 1:4-6).

Description of the Recipients of this Letter

This letter was written to brothers and sisters in the Lord. I notice that, in America, people like to **Define** things. In Africa, we love to **Describe** things. What is the difference?

- To **Define** something is to use words to give it a name, a title, a label.
- To **Describe** something is to reveal qualities about it – what does that thing do.

Let's go back to I Thessalonians 1:4 and ask, "What is a brother and a sister?"

- Someone who shares the same source – God is their father
- Someone who is loved by God, elected by God, touched by God
- Someone who belongs to God's Family, who works with other family members to serve our Father – They protect the relationship with their other brothers and sisters
- Someone who is chosen by God – Love is a selection. Love is focused. In romantic love, there is usually a response involving the emotions. What does it mean to you that God loves you and has chosen you to be His?

How did the brothers and sisters live?

In I Thessalonians 1:5, we learn that they received the Word of God with eagerness. It was a powerful response to God's Spirit. They had full assurance. Think of the choices you have made to love someone. Marriage is an example, in the Bible, of our relationship with Christ. Think of how a man chooses to propose marriage to a woman. He must express and show love. Think of the response of the woman. In our culture (Zambia) women are taught to not say "yes" the first time. Act like you don't like him. Make him ask again, later. When the proposal is accepted, there is much joy and emotion. That works in Zambia, with men and women. But, with God, you should accept His proposal (The Gospel) the first time. Don't waste time. There may not be a second time. The Thessalonians responded immediately when they heard the Gospel. What does it mean to you, when the Lord confesses His love for you and proposes that you join Him and become His bride?

In I Thessalonians 1:6, we learn that they wanted to live differently. They became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. They followed their example. Think of the example of a young boy who wants to grow up and be like his father. When you lead people to faith in Christ, then live a life that can be an example for them to follow.

In the world, many people follow / imitate the lives of celebrities. But celebrities don't reveal their real life. They show a "stage-life." They put on a mask that is not real. They are not a good example. Real Christians should not put on a mask. We need a real-life example that is good for others to follow. God wants to be able to say, "There is my son... there is my daughter, look at them." – just like God said of Job.

The American churches wear a lot of masks. You may not be giving us (In Africa) a good example, from what we see on television. May we have a church that loves the Lord Jesus Christ – that is making a difference in our time. May that church be our church.

Why is the description of a brother or sister important? Why does it make a difference how we live? Who is watching us, to imitate us? What needs to be done in our time? If there is a time when we need to live as brothers and sisters in our world, it is now! If there is a time that God is looking for His children to live as examples to the world, it is now! We don't seem to have good examples around us. Several problems are dividing the church. May the brothers come together, to care for one another, to demonstrate the life of how the church should be.