
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 1:6

By: Brian A. Yeager

“And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (I Thessalonians 1:6). We know that there are instructions against being followers of men (Matthew 15:1-14, I Corinthians 1:10-13, I Corinthians 4:1-6, Galatians 1:6-12, etc.). Those instructions are two-fold. First, not to blindly follow any man. Secondly, not to follow the ways of man that are not in line with following the ways of the Lord.

What about when brethren are in line with the ways of the Lord? It is the will of the Lord that we follow the examples set forth by faithful brethren. Notice: *“Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church... Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample... Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation”* (I Corinthians 4:16-17, Philippians 3:17, and Hebrews 13:7).

Our Lord expects all of us to live our lives in such a manner that others can follow our faithful examples (Titus 2:2-8). If our lives are patterned after the will of our Lord (Ephesians 5:1-2, II Timothy 1:13, and I Peter 2:21-22), you being an example to others means that person is following the ways of the Lord. Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus were not saying the saints in Thessalonica followed them in some separate way from following the Lord. Following faithful teachers of the word of God is the same as following the Lord. Think about what Paul wrote to the saints in Corinth: *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”* (I Corinthians 11:1). The Thessalonians did not receive the Gospel as the words of men (I Thessalonians 2:13). When you stand in a straight line of people and head in a certain direction you are following the person in front of you. If everyone is following the person in front of them, the person leading the line is actually the one everyone is following. The same is true when we follow the faithful examples of brethren. The Lord is at the head of that line. With that in mind, think about how the Thessalonians were following the head of the line in how they received the word of God.

When you look at the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, you see a pattern of faithfulness including facing much affliction. Jesus said this to His disciples: *“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his*

own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me” (John 15:18-21). If you will recall, the first record we have of the Gospel being preached in Thessalonica shows us how the word of God was received with much affliction (Acts 17:1-14).

The next chapter of this epistle says this: *“For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews”* (I Thessalonians 2:14). In the second epistle to the saints in Thessalonica, this was written: *“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day”* (II Thessalonians 1:3-10). With persecution abounding, joy was not absent from the brethren in Thessalonica.

Before the Scriptures were completely revealed, Christians received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the Apostle’s hands (Acts 8:12-24 and Acts 19:1-7) and then spiritual gifts followed (I Corinthians 12:3-13:13). In the first century, we can see that joy and the Holy Ghost accompanied one another (John 14:16-18, Acts 13:52, Romans 14:17, and Romans 15:13). Today, we receive joy through the hope that is laid before us (I Peter 1:3-9). We know about that joy through the Scriptures (Romans 15:4).

In the first century Christians didn’t study the New Testament to receive hope. The Spirit worked directly to give them hope. Notice how that worked: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:14-18).