

"THE CALL TO EXCELLENCE"

1 Thess. 4:1-18

INTRODUCTION: The book of First Thessalonians is the earliest of Paul's writings. Having spent just 3 weeks (Acts 17...3 Sabbath days) with these folks, he now writes back encouraging them in their walk with the Lord.

He Comforts, Confronts, and Charges them regarding their responsibility as believers in Christ...His Challenge is for them to be a "better brand of Christian" (vs. 1).....It is a CALL TO EXCELLENCE!! To be this they must aspire to be people of:

Much Potential - vs. 1-2

"more and more" "to walk" "to please God"

"received"....."beseech"....."exhort"....."command"

"What would you attempt for God if you knew you would not fail?"

Moral Purity - vs. 3-7....."this is the will of God"

The need for a moral compass....the Word of God & the People of God!

Measured Progress - vs. 8-12....."increase"

Measure your own progress by your:

Acceptance of Biblical Truth

Affection toward the Brethren

Activity in Behavior

Marvelous Promises - vs. 13-18

Return / Resurrection / Rapture / Reunion / Rest / Reward

"Hannah" / "Momma & Daddy" / "Granny"...etc.

Excellence Series:

1. The Call To Excellence
2. The Commitment To Excellence
3. The Choice of Excellence
4. The Cost of Excellence

"THE CALL TO EXCELLENCE"

Col. 3:17-23

Introduction: One definition of "**Excellence**" is "the possession chiefly of good qualities in an unusual degree; surpassing virtue, merit, worth, value". One definition of the word "excel" is "to be outstandingly good or proficient; to do well or better than previous personal achievement." From a Biblical standpoint what does excellence mean? The Greek word for excellence used in the New Testament comes from the word *perisseu* (*perisseu*) which means to have in abundance, to increase, to surpass. Biblical excellence is to do your best with what God has given you.

"Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way."

Booker T. Washington

God is looking for servants who are willing to give him their very best. God deserves our church to be the very best church we can build for him. That can only happen when we commit to giving God our very best; when we commit to excellence as a body.

What is your standard in your life? Is your standard to get along or to do your best? Mediocrity or Excellence? The church has lowered her standard to accommodate the carnal lifestyle of her members.

THE BIBLICAL CALL TO EXCELLENCE.

- (3:17) "whatever" means "everything whatever"
- "name of the Lord Jesus"-most powerful name
- "giving thanks"-I give my best due to the blessings given to me.
- (3:23) "do your work heartily"-work energetically, to work diligently.
- "for the Lord"-He is who you are working for in this world.

Note the text:

- The Motivation *"in the name of Jesus"*
- The Method *"all" "all in"*
- The Master *vs. 23..."as to the Lord"*

Excelling Still More

2 Cor. 8:1–13, 1 Thess. 4:1–2

One of the truly great intellects of American history was a New England Puritan pastor by the name of Jonathan Edwards. He was born in 1703 and died in 1758. He is perhaps best known for preaching a sermon entitled "*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*." Historians generally consider Edwards to be among the handful of superior intellectuals and writers in American history, whether in secular or ecclesiastical annals.

Edwards was also the leading evangelical theologian of his day and the most prominent pastor in the First Great Awakening. He was the faithful shepherd of the same church in Northampton, Massachusetts, for twenty-three years and had an unparalleled influence through preaching, writing, and evangelism that continues to this day. *The underlying drive and motive to Edwards' powerful and lasting impact was not mere personal devotion to his profession but was his insatiable thirst for God and the things that concern God purity, holiness, virtue, and truth.* He referred to them as religious affections. God saved him at age seventeen and the change was thorough.

Edwards' sentiments highlight an important element of the apostle Paul's exhortation in these two verses. He urges them—and all believers—to excel in Christian living more and more.

There is always a danger of Christians thinking they have no further need to progress in sanctification. That truth is attested to by the slim attendance of Sunday evening worship and mid-week services. But this side of eternity, no believer has even come close to what God desires for him spiritually. As a faithful shepherd and overseer, the Apostle Paul sought to motivate to pursue spiritual excellence. That is my goal for your lives as well.

Just as in the world of academia so in the Body of Christ there are some who think of themselves as "alumni" only. These folks believe they have graduated. They experience only slight growth in their faith. They return for an occasional reunion and give sporadically. They have stopped learning. But more than that, they have stopped growing. However, as Christians, we should be committed to *excelling more and more*.

I. THE PRIORITY OF EXCELLING

1 Thessalonians 4:1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, *so* ye would abound more and more.

Paul does not demand, he does not coerce, he does not browbeat the Thessalonian believers into growing in grace

he gently, humbly, kindly *requests* that they consider that importance of growing in their faith

he also volunteers to be their guide in the process

in many modern translations verse 1 uses the word *urge*—"*Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you ...* "

a better translation of the word is *exhort*

it's a word that means *to come along side and encourage*

Paul volunteers to come along side of them and help them in their spiritual growth

ILLUS. There are few people of more intrinsic worth to the local church than those individuals who year-in-and-year-out teach the Bible to others. These are the saints who regularly exhort other saints in their Christian living, and exhort the lost to faith in Christ.

the goal is to *excel more and more*

the word translated *excel* mean *to abound, or to be abundantly supplied to overflowing*

an overflowing spiritual life is part of the *abundant life* that Jesus promised to His disciples

Paul's priority for these Thessalonian believers was spiritual progress motivated by a desire to know God more fully and more intimately

"Psalms 42:1. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

A. EXCELLING IS ABOUT DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

in the gospels, Jesus on several occasions told his disciples that they were to be like *little children*

did you ever wonder why he told them that?

one of the characteristics of children is that they are always growing

ILLUS. Any parent who has ever tried keeping their children in shoes knows this!

in one way or another children are almost always growing

they are growing physically

they are growing emotionally

they are growing intellectually

they are growing spiritually

all these dimensions of growth build our children's character as they develop into a whole or complete person

the believer's life must also be characterized by growth as we mature into a whole and complete Christian

the apostle Paul speaks of this growth in Christ in his letter to the Ephesians

our goal, he says, is to ...

Ephesians 4:13-15 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

A. THE CURRICULUM OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

"2 Corinthians 8:7 Therefore, as ye abound in every *thing*, *in* faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and *in* all diligence, and *in* your love to us, *see* that ye abound in this grace also.

in the realm of secular education, if a student is going to excel in learning there is a core curriculum that them must take and master

the same is true for the believer who would excel in the School of Christ

1st, there is the FAITH CURRICULUM

our faith must be genuine, strong and operative

we must have the kind of faith that looks the devil in the face and says, "*Yea, I'm a Christian, what are you going to do about it?*"

the believers in an area called Macedonia had this kind of faith

2 Corinthians 8:1-2 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.)

even under *severe trial* their commitment was strong

their joy was genuine

their faith was operative

this simply means they put feet to their faith

how do we know their faith was operative?

"Out of . . . their extreme poverty welled up . . . rich generosity."

2nd, there is SPEECH CURRICULUM

this is not everyday conversation the apostle is referring to

it is speech which is permeated by conversation about God and His righteous decrees

1 Corinthians 1:4-7 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge; Even as the testimony of

Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:)

3rd, there is KNOWLEDGE CURRICULUM

God Himself gives us revelation of Himself so that we may know Him more fully

"2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.)

God gives us knowledge about His character and nature so that our hope may be all the more sure

"Ephesians 1:16-19 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,)

4th, there was CURRICULUM OF EARNESTNESS

"Hebrews 6:10-12 For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.)

there must be an *earnestness* in our lives in *love for* and *service to* fellow saints

5th, there is the CURRICULUM OF GIVING

"2 Corinthians 8:1-7 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the

ministering to the saints. And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every *thing, in* faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and *in* all diligence, and *in* your love to us, *see* that ye abound in this grace also.)

Paul encourages the Corinthians believer to excel in this attribute of Christian conduct

some families keep track of their children's growth by marking their height on a door frame or a the wall in their home

year after year they will measure their child's progress in growth by making a mark and writing the date

our growth as Christians is measured by our faithfulness to Christ

By our participation in witness

By our willingness to serve

By our growth in the grace of giving

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF EXCELLING

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, *so* ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.)

A. IT'S IN THE LORD JESUS

B. IT'S TO PLEASE GOD

ILLUS. Growth is not automatic; it is sometimes difficult. Exerting no effort to grow, we easily become selfish, unfaithful, and indifferent to the needs of others. The challenges of growth into Christlikeness...the struggles, the choices...are only possible as we become Jesus' disciples. It is a lifelong process. We need a passion for it like Jonathan Edwards.

