**EBC: Young Adults Bible Study 2017**

**Contagious Christianity: Gaining a Proper Perspective of Our Salvation**

**Sunday – Introduction and Transformation**

**Introduction**

The word ***contagious*** has a dual connotation – one negative, and one positive. This applies to Christianity. Negatively:

…because of the true nature of Christianity. Its author and originator met with rejection and so His followers receive the same. (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13)

…due to poor representation by professing Christians – hypocrisy. Those of Israel who “knew” God also caused Gentiles to blaspheme Him due to their lifestyle (Romans 2:24; Isaiah 52:5)

But positively, Christianity can be contagious and attractive, just as Jesus Christ was even though He was ultimately despised and rejected was “positively contagious”

…His gracious words, Luke 4:23

…they came to Him from every quarter, Mark 1:45

…He did all things well, Mark 7:37

We want to be contagious Christians in that attractive sense! Five factors are: Transformation; Growth; Perseverance; Sanctification; and Peace and Community.

Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians will provide the starting point for these themes.

**Transformation**

the wholesale change of outlook that comes with new birth, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 6-10.

The Thessalonians were well-known in Macedonia and Achaia

 - testimony was effective, shown in work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Understanding the gospel of God—the great salvation—had produced this change.

**New Birth – 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 6**

 -God brings new birth – begets believers by the power of the word of God and the Holy Spirit

 -A divine work that God does – using the word of God and the Holy Spirit to awaken to the truth and receive the gospel. (John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23)

 -The Thessalonians received gospel not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit

**Reconciliation – 1 Thessalonians 1:9**

 -Reconciliation means to make a change in order to remove differences. We were enemies (at enmity with God). We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son… Romans 5:11

 -Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve the living God. They were reconciled to God…

**Justification – 1 Thessalonians 1:10**

 -Justification means to be accounted righteous, to be absolved of guilt. God is holy and demands justice. We are all guilty and subject to wrath! Yet we are justified by the blood of Christ, we will be saved by him from wrath (Romans 5:9)

 -The Thessalonians responded to the fact that they were delivered from the wrath to come

**Election - 1 Thessalonians 1:4**

 -It’s God’s sovereign act to choose a people for his praise and glory – especially for Jesus Christ… Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2

 -This is a family secret – one that humbles and causes a joyous response

The power of the Gospel, the great salvation, transformed the Thessalonians:

 -from a group of idol worshipers into servants of the living God;

 -a model of group of believers (v 2)

 -influenced by the coming of the Lord (v 10)

Other observations that produce contagious believers:

1. Loved of/by God – v 4
2. Elect (chosen) by God – v 4
3. Faith in God – v 8
4. Turned to God from idols – v 9
5. Served God – v 9
6. Waiting for the Son of God – v 10

**Tuesday – Growth**

Mark 4:26-29 illustrates the growth of the kingdom of God but also shows two points about growth in general. First, it is mysterious. It just happens, and the farmer does not know how. But second, it is obvious. If no growth is seen, then there is no growth! Are we content to simply remain spiritual children?

Growing Christians will be contagious Christians. Two questions can be asked about spiritual growth. 1) What are the conditions that promote growth?

 2) What areas of a Christian’s life will reveal growth?

**Conditions for Growth**

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, the conditions for spiritual growth

 -How did Paul, Silas, and Timothy behave in order to help growth occur?

 .honest motivation, not deceit, v. 3

 .desire to please God, not men, v. 4

 .did not desire to enrich themselves, vv. 5-6

 .endured trouble, vv. 1-2 (compare v. 14; also Acts 16, had just come from Philippi)

 -Their message was the gospel, not themselves, vv. 2, 4, 8, 9

 -Their manner and approach were gentle and yet also direct

 .as a nursing mother, v. 7; as an exhorting father, v. 11

 .real joy when the Thessalonians were indeed growing, vv. 19-20

If we want to grow, respond to spiritual influences of this sort. Don’t isolate ourselves.

If we want to help others grow, keep the right motivation, the right message, and the right manner.

In the parable of the seeds and the soil (Matthew 13, Mark 4), what changes? It’s not the seed but the soil. Various influences choke or hinder the desired results for growth and fruitfulness.

We must always desire the word of God the way a baby desires milk, 1 Pet. 2:1-3. No growth occurs without it. The Thessalonians welcomed it and treated it as the word of God indeed, vv. 13-14

They received it (the ears), welcomed it (the heart), applied it (the will)

 Two things to pray about every day: a love for the word of God

 a love for the people of God

**Evidence of Growth**

The Thessalonians suffered, v. 14. This proved that growth was real.

James 1:21, receive with meekness the implanted word

 -meekness is a characteristic of spiritual growth and maturity

1 Timothy 4:15, profiting appear to all

 -we might not know we are growing, but others will

 -don’t make growth our personal object; don’t focus on it

Acts 9, Paul’s first act in Damascus was to pray

 -prayer is our oxygen; it’s like proof of breathing, as when a baby first cries after being born

There should be changes in desire and priority, as the Thessalonians has displayed (1:10).

Psalm 1, we will not be influenced by scoffers.

2 Peter 1, some traits of growth; these show that we are not unfruitful

 -“unfruitful” notes: Mt. 13:22,choked by the cares of the world; Titus 3:14, good works

 -2 Peter 1:8 emphasizes diligence; the Spirit produces fruit (Gal. 5), but we desire it, too

1 Corinthians 3:18, staying focused on Christ produces a change

1 Thessalonians 2:12, the goal was that they would walk worthily of God

 -who should enjoy the fruit? Not us; it’s for God. That is our motive.

**Wednesday – Perseverance**

The Thessalonians had Paul with them for only about three weeks, Acts 17:1-6. The conditions were not favorable for Christians, as the following verses show.

.In Acts 14 there is similar persistence from Paul, who is chased from city to city and even stoned; but he simply acknowledged that much persecution was to be expected.

1 Thess. 3:1-5, Paul’s interest was to **establish** them so they would not be shaken.

 .Daniel 3, the young men were not shaken

 .James 1, not doubting

 .2 Thess 1:1-4, faith and love proved their perseverance

The coming of the Lord is a key foundation that establishes the believer, especially in the face of difficulty.

 .2 Corinthians 4:16, the inward self is renewed even though the outward self weakens

 .1 Corinthians 15:58, death will be overcome with the victory of resurrection; so serve

 .Romans 8:18, the coming glory though now we groan

The Rapture is an accurate teaching of Scripture when we consider that the 1st century believers were waiting for Christ’s return day by day; 1 Thess. 1:10, Philippians 3:21. This is the hope of the Christian.

Other aspects of persevering Christians:

 -Join hands with those who are suffering, Heb. 13:1, 3

 …and rejoice if we ourselves suffer, 1 Peter 4:12-13

 -Realize that other things beside persecution can shake our faith, such as adversity in a fallen world or influences that create doubt. Ishmael persecuted Isaac by laughter, Galatians 4.

 -Take advantage of relative freedom by spiritual activity. Behave consistently. Don’t walk disorderly, 2 Thessalonians 3:5-12.

 -Realize that grace under pressure encourages others, 1 Thess. 3:6-7

 -Titus 2:13, denying ungodliness

 -1 Peter 1:3-9 in trials, look at what God has already done for us

 .in verse 12, the face of the Lord is against evil

.in verse 15, we can give a reason for our hope

 Overcoming adversity will make us contagious Christians.

**Thursday – Sanctification**

What is sanctification? The word means *separate* or *set apart*. It’s precisely the same as the words holy, holiness, sanctuary, saint.

It’s a grand Bible theme with many references. Here are just a few chapters

**Exodus 19**, the people were sanctified; **Numbers 28**, Aaron and his sons; **Genesis 2**, the Sabbath day; **Exodus 30**, the tabernacle; **2 Chronicles 7**, the temple; **John 10**, Christ sanctified Himself; **1 Timothy 4:5**, all things sanctified by the word of God and prayer

There is **positional sanctification**.

 -God has done this permanently when He saved and justified us.

 -Romans 6, we are buried and risen with Christ, so we reckon that to be true, presenting ourselves to God ***as*** holy

 -1 Corinthians 1:1-2, sanctified and called saints (not “called to be” saints)

 -Hebrews 10:10, 14, those who ***are***sanctified

There is also **perfect sanctification** when we will be completely like Christ, 1 Jn. 3:2, Phil. 3:21.

 .1 Thessalonians 5:23, prayer agreeing with God’s plan to do this

But in between positional and perfect sanctification there is **practical sanctification.**

 -It can be called *progressive* sanctification—not because we will ultimately attain perfection in this life, but because we should be progressing in practice and display of this truth.

 -1 Thessalonians 3:13, established blameless in holiness—in view of Christ’s appearing

 -1 Thessalonians 4:7, called not to uncleanness but holiness

Other references:

 1 Peter 1:13-17; we can only become what we already are

 Psalm 119:11, cleansing by the word of God

 1 Corinthians 1:30, Christ Jesus is made sanctification for us

 Galatians 3, not by the flesh but by the Spirit; Galatians 5, the power for sanctification

 1 Corinthians 6:19, the **Holy** Spirit in us

 2 Tim. 1:9, a holy calling

 John 17:13-19

 .verse 11, Holy Father

 .then, we are not of this world; the Word of God is the truth that sanctifies us

 . our object is the Lord, who sanctified Himself and prayed for our sanctification

 .the work of the entire Trinity

Notice that holy is not the same as righteous or perfect. The opposite of holy is “common.” In Exodus 3, the ground where Moses stood was holy. Why? Because God was there at that moment—that’s what made it uncommon and holy. Holy is something that is *supremely unique*, or *a cut above the rest*. Our holy calling imparts a supremely unique dignity that then impacts our daily behavior.

Observe the specific area of sanctification in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. It tells us how to walk and please God (v. 3), and in particular this is in sexual purity. If sanctification can be illustrated as though we are God’s good china—staying clean, stored and kept in a place of honor, not used for ordinary, common purposes, not used for digging in the dirt.

The emphasis on sexual sanctification is very relevant. We are taught here to possess our own bodies; this is God’s will.

There are consequences of a lack of sanctification. There is discipline for it too.

 .But remember that forgiveness is also plentiful.

 .Covenant Eyes is a program that assists with accountability for Internet use.

 .1 Corinthians 15:33, bad company will corrupt us

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; the one who calls is us faithful, and He will also do it

 .Everybody has their own ulterior motive for behavior. The sanctified Christian is different, and this is contagious Christianity.

**Friday – Peace, Relationships, and Community**

**Peace**

Peace is a key aspect of the Christian life.

-starts with declaration that we ***have*** peace with God, Romans 5:1. Imagine the relief and confidence from those who first heard this assurance of such peace!

The peace of God should rule in our hearts, Col. 3:15.

But Thessalonica was a hostile place for Christians, and the assembled saints were of very disparate types of people internally, Acts 17:4. So, they are told…

 - 1 Thess. 5:12-13, be at peace among yourselves

 - 1 Thess. 5:23, the God of peace will sanctify them

 - 2 Thess. 3:17, may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means

The **God of peace** is a foundation to stand upon. See Rom. 15:33, 16:20; Phil. 4:9. In Hebrews 13:20-21 this is also clear; it’s the God of peace who makes us ready to do every good work.

 - But we are also instructed to ***be*** at peace with one another. This is a command, an intentional purpose for us to live out.

What are the factors that contribute to this life of peace?

 -1 Thess. 5:12-13, submission to those with responsibility among us; this helps us keep peace

 -Eph. 2, the hostility between Jews and Gentiles has been broken down; why do we rebuild them by thinking in groups, families, “tribes”? Galatians 3:28—don’t emphasize those things.

.When we realize that our struggle is with external forces, we are united internally.

.And when we join together in gospel work, our differences are overcome.

 -Romans 12:18, live peaceably as much as it depends on you

 This is the instruction for us even when it involves unbelievers in the world.

 But when it comes to our behavior with each other, we are told to “have salt in ourselves and ***have peace*** with one another,” Mark 9:50. Peace is ***expected***. Salt in ourselves would preserve us from self-centered living so that we can have that kind of peace.

 -We are told to live in peace, 2 Cor. 13:11.

 If there is not peace, we are told to be peacemakers, James 3:18.

Then we should persist in it so we will be found in peace at Christ’s coming, 2 Peter 3:14.

 -Col. 3:15, ***let*** the peace of God rule in our hearts, even if we can’t find peace ourselves

 -Rom. 14:19, pursue the things that ***make*** for peace

 -Heb. 12:14, peace and sanctification are connected

 -Romans 12:10, devoted to one another; the kingdom of God is not external things… why destroy each other for the sake of them? Romans 14:17-20

 -Romans 16:17, avoid divisive people

**Relationships and community**

If peace is established, how will relationships and Christian community grow?

The passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:11-28 provides many examples of those relationships. Some are these:

 .edify one another, v. 11 –we are not going to be complacent but active and attentive

 .receive exhortation, v. 12 –but are we willing to accept firm, direct guidance from others?

 .prayer, vv. 17, 25 –what does it mean when we know we are prayed for? …a common vision, “us”

 .a holy kiss, v. 26

 The idea of greeting one another is very prominent in the New Testament.

 For example, Romans 16 is overflowing with greetings to and from many people.

 Do we always greet some people and never greet others? If so, why is that? It may not be a kiss, but let it be a holy handshake or a holy hug. We must affirm the reality of Christian community.

1 Thess. 5:8, be sober and alert; prepare together for the difficulties that will surely come

 We rally together in difficulties. Why not in daily life?

That verse also describes the **breastplate of faith and love**.

 -The aspect of ***faith*** will help us withstand external attacks with confidence.

 -But the aspect of ***love*** is essential for our lives with each other. Our gatherings together will be contagious if this characterizes us.

If we want to see our assemblies grow, why would the Lord entrust us with visitors if we can’t even get peace and relationships right ourselves?

Externally, the life of the Christian is difficult and filled with opposition. Our gatherings should feel like an oasis in the desert; we should feel at rest and at peace.

Hebrews 13:1, let brotherly love continue. What God has already created should be nurtured. Contagious Christians individually and collectively will make an impact for Him in this world.