

## Some Changed, Some Didn't

In the Bible, some people changed dramatically, some did not. During Israel's time in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb were faithful throughout. In the time of the nation of Israel, dedication to God was sporadic, generally tied to terrible misfortune. In the New Testament, millions heard the message and saw the evidence, but few changed dramatically. What was the difference?

### Thessalonian Christians

- Acts 17:1 – 10 In three weeks' time, a significant number of those who frequented the synagogue, both Jews and Gentiles, responded to the message. Other synagogue members were jealous and turned to violence. Although the first Christians in Thessalonica could not have learned very much of the gospel (since everyone still had to work), they did have a significant background in the Law and the Prophets.
- 1 Thessalonians. Paul had been away from Thessalonica perhaps a few months, having spent time in Berea and Athens. When Paul had to leave Berea due to being tracked by unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica, Timothy and Silas were to join him in Athens (Acts 17:15). From Athens Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (3:1) to inquire of their progress and to encourage them. Timothy returned with a good report (3:6), perhaps arriving with Silas to join Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5).
  - (1:8 – 10). Paul commented that, even after such a short time, the Christians from Thessalonica were spreading the gospel to other places, so that Paul was encountering the fruits of their labor as he reached into what he thought were untouched regions.
  - (2:13) He characterized them as those in whom the Word of God was effective.
  - (3:12) May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another.
- 2 Thessalonians. Some time later, Paul wrote again, primarily to refute some sensationalistic and self-centered teachings that were infecting their faith. Paul guides them back to the power of the Spirit.
  - (1:11 – 12) Fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you.
  - (2:10) Paul characterizes those who follow diversionary teachings as those who do not have a love of the truth.
  - (2:14) The objective: the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - (3:5) Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.
- The difference:
  - Love of truth
  - Allowing God to accomplish the humanly impossible
  - Allowing God to fill them with love and patience
  - Their goal was to have the essence (name) and character (glory) of Jesus by the power that God put in them
- Source of failure:
  - My past beliefs must be right
  - Not expecting results from the promised indwelling Spirit
  - My faith is about me

## **Nicodemus**

(John 3:1 – 15, 7:50, 19:39). He knew that Jesus was from God (3:2). He did the best he could within the reach of a good person. In politically correct fashion, he reminded the leaders about due process (7:50). He risked his reputation to do the right thing and help with the burial of a man executed unjustly (19:39). But he did not go beyond the best he could do.

- (3:4) I can't change
- (3:9) I can't fit this in with what I already know

## **Galatian Christians**

(3:2) Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

- Most church-goers are not taught to expect a tangible result from the indwelling Spirit promised to believers.
- Few church-goers are taught how to make themselves available to the power of God, to not thwart the work of the Spirit.
- Results become reasons: Good behavior, glorifying God, heaven, forgiveness.
- The objective (transformation into the image of Jesus' faith and character, partaking of the divine nature) is forgotten or never taught. Without the power, the only result is legalism.