There is a danger when you become a thing-oriented society instead of people-oriented.

--Bernice King

Although it's been over 2,000 years since Paul wrote his letters to the people of Thessalonica, some of the events of that day are similar to events in our day. Like Thessalonica, we have pagan worship, poor working class citizens, street preachers, and home churches. Consider our similarities:

1. Economic stresses on the poor and working class: The *New York Times* published an article last fall about Americans who were “near-poor” or “down, but not quite out.” Last November, the Census Bureau released a new measure of poverty. Data showed that 51 million Americans had incomes less than 50 percent above the poverty line.¹

2. Cults: The Cult Hotline and Clinic has determined that five to seven million Americans have been involved in cults or cult-like groups. And although it’s hard to get an accurate total number of cult groups, the hotline believes there are somewhere between 3,000 to 5,000 groups—with approximately 180,000 new recruits each year. According to the hotline, “Cults no longer focus solely on the young and searching. They have expanded their recruitment efforts to include adults and senior citizens.”²

3. Street preachers: Pastor Daniel Carmona of the Praise Fellowship SDA Church in South Bend, Indiana feels called to street preaching. Here’s how the church’s website describes him: “He is a passionate speaker who frequently ministers at youth federations, education days, graduations & men’s ministry events across the United States. His speaking interests include street preaching in urban neighborhoods, and delivering hope-filled messages to persons in maximum security...
4. Home churches: *Time Magazine* published an article a few years ago titled, “Why Home Churches are Filling Up.” It states that previous estimates calculated approximately 50,000 house churches in America. The article says: “…the flexibility of simple churches is a huge plus. They can accommodate the demands of a multi-job worker, convene around the bedside of an ailing member and undertake big initiatives with dispatch, as in the case of a group in the Northwest that reportedly yearned to do social outreach but found that every member had heavy credit-card debt. An austerity campaign yielded a balance with which to help the true poor.”

Since our modern-day world has much in common with the Thessalonians, we can certainly learn from Paul’s ministry approach. First, he offered Thessalonians something they were ready for. The people were tired of a government they felt harmed them economically. And they were weary of a pagan god who could do nothing for them. When Paul brought his message to this church, they were ready to accept it. It met a real need. Second, Paul sacrificed in order to minister to the Thessalonians. He said in this week’s memory text: “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (1 Corinthians 9:19).

To meet people’s needs. To be willing to be a slave in order to spread the Gospel. That’s what Paul’s approach teaches us.

~ nc

1. NY Times
2. Cult Clinic
3. Pastor's Corner
4. Time

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