

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

What Every Church Should Be 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 Part 3

We have begun a new study in First Thessalonians. Paul wrote this epistle after receiving a glowing report from Timothy about how the church was doing. Paul was so filled with thanksgiving he could not restrain himself and felt compelled to write to them sharing his various thoughts and feelings.

This epistle from Paul to the Thessalonians gives to us an insight into a very exceptional church. It gives us an insight into a church that was making a difference in the world and being used by the Lord to challenge and encourage Christians and Christian churches not only in Macedonia but Achaia and around the world.

This is what the elders at Valley want for this fellowship. We do not want to be necessarily “successful” in the way the world defines successful. We want to be successful in the way the Lord would define successful. And certainly the Thessalonian church was that.

We hope that the study of this epistle will stretch us to become more and more what God would have us to be as a church. This is what chapter one is all about. It is about, “What every church should be.”

First of all, we have discovered that every church should be an elect church. In this age, the tendency will be for churches such as ours to be composed of the elect and the non-elect. In this age, the tendency will be for churches such as ours to be composed of the saved and the unsaved. We learned that from the parables of Matt. 13. But though this is true, this is not the way it should be. Nor is it the way it has to be, and the Thessalonian church is an example of this.

Let us read **1 Thess. 1:1-4** “**Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. (2) We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; (3) constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, (4) knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.**” Or as the KJV says “**Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.**” When Paul looked at the Thessalonian church he saw a pure church composed of only truly born again believers. He came to this conviction by being able to observe three different characteristics that identify a saved person.

Let us look at **verse 3** “**constantly bearing in mind your work of faith.**” When he looked at the Thessalonian church and when he looked at the individuals that made up that fellowship he saw a faith that worked. Paul agreed with the Apostle James when he said in **James 2:17** “**faith without works is dead.**” But this was not true of the Thessalonian church. They had a faith that worked.

Not only did he see a faith that worked, but he also saw a love that labored. Let us look at the verse one more time, “**constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love.**”

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Paul agreed with the Apostle John in **1 John 3:7** “**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**” We cannot say with any kind of credibility that we love God if we are not manifesting a visible love for the brethren. And certainly when he looked at the Thessalonian Assembly he saw that.

And finally he saw a hope that endured or persevered, “**constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.**” Paul agreed with the Apostle Peter who said in **1 Pet. 1:3** that we were “**born again unto a living hope.**” Not a dead hope, but a living hope. A hope that perseveres is a mark of the believer. And when Paul looked at the Thessalonian church he saw this hope manifested in their perseverance.

Though Satan is continually in the business of sowing tares amongst the wheat in this present age, if we would be vigilant and alert it is possible, like the church of Thessalonica, to be a pure church, to be an elect church. And this is what our church should be striving to be. **WHAT ELSE DO WE SEE IN THIS PASSAGE. NOT ONLY SHOULD A CHURCH BE AN ELECT CHURCH BUT AN EXEMPLARY CHURCH.**

AN EXEMPLARY CHURCH

From the very inception of this church, Paul looked to them with joy and gratitude as Christians worthy of the name. They were examples in several areas of their lives.

THEY RECEIVED THE WORD (V. 5)

Let us read **V. 5** “**For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction**” Sometimes we share truth with people and it seems like we are just beating our heads against a wall. It seems that no matter what is said that it makes no difference. This certainly was not the case with the Thessalonians. They responded!! They were eager to hear. They were wanting to hear. And they took the word of God into their lives. This is why Paul says that “**the gospel did not come to them in word only, but also in power.**”

Paul had just stated in **V. 4** that he was confident that they were truly the elect of God. This was not only because of a faith that worked, a love that labored, and a hope that endured, but it was also testified to by the fact that they received the Word of God. No preaching can be effective without the infusion of divine power. I cannot make a person listen, I cannot make a person understand, I cannot make a person accept. A person will only have ears to hear, and a mind to understand, and a heart to accept if God has willed it so and supernaturally opens that person’s mind and heart.

Does this mean that if we preach or proclaim the gospel and people do not respond that we have somehow failed to proclaim or preach the message in power? No, not at all. Look at **2 Cor. 2:14-16** “**But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. (15) For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; (16) to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.**”

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We certainly can be Spirit filled and have the Spirit of God powerfully working in us and through us. But this is not a guarantee that the person we are speaking to will necessarily respond to our message. But if they do accept that message it is a clear testimony to what? That the Spirit has chosen to work in power in the life of the one to whom we have spoken to. And this is an evidence that they are in fact a chosen one of God.

God empowered the Thessalonians to respond to the gospel message, and their response to the gospel message becomes an example of what each of us would hopefully do. The Thessalonian church shows us the way. Hopefully we would be eager to listen to the word of God. Hopefully we would be eager to hear the word of God. Hopefully we would be eager to understand the Word of God. Hopefully we would be eager to appropriate the word of God. In this way they are an exemplary church.

The message that Paul and his companions proclaimed was not only proclaimed and received in power and in the Holy Spirit which was testified to by its reception but it was proclaimed **“with full conviction.”** When Paul and his companions proclaimed the Word of God they were personally convinced of its power to convict and to change the lives of people. And then Paul goes on to make very clear to them that what they preached to them they lived. Look at the last phrase of **V. 5 “just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”** They were not peddling snake oil. They were proclaiming a life changing message. HOW ELSE WERE THEY EXEMPLARY? NOT ONLY DID THE THESSALONIANS RECEIVE THE WORD OF GOD. BUT

THEY FOLLOWED THEIR LEADERS (V. 6A)

Let us read **V. 6 “You also became imitators of us and of the Lord....”** These new believers at Thessalonica not only accepted the message and the messengers, but they also imitated their lives.

It is much easier to learn by seeing than by hearing. Is there anyone here that doubts this? If there is a doubter, let me ask you a question. Would it be easier for you to learn how to rebuild an engine by reading about it or by seeing someone else do it? Hopefully each of us have surrounded ourselves with people that we can learn from spiritually. These Thessalonians for a very brief period of time were able to observe the lives of Paul and his companions. These Thessalonians for a very brief period of time were able to observe the lives of these spiritual leaders and they did not squander that opportunity. They became “mimics.”

The Thessalonian believers were exemplary. We should not assume that just because there is an example for people to follow that people will necessarily choose to follow that example. I would think that there are some parents here this morning who might say, “Amen!” to what I have just shared.

But even though this is true! It did not prove to be the case with the Thessalonians. They had an excellent spiritual example set before them and they followed.

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Let me ask you a question, “Who provided the spiritual example in this case for the Thessalonians?” It was Paul and his companions Timothy and Silas. These men were the spiritual leaders of this church for the time period they were there and this church chose to follow them.

As I was preparing this message I could not help but identify myself along with the remaining elders and deacons of this fellowship with Paul and his companions. We need to give to you the opportunity that Paul and his companions gave to the Thessalonian Church. There cannot be any complacency on the part of the leaders of this fellowship in terms of our own walk.

Are we limited to following the example of those that God has placed in positions of leadership over us? All around you in this fellowship there are people who are living exemplary lives. It might be in respect to their love for the word, the devotion to prayer, their zealously in outreach, their love for their husband or wife, their care of their children or their service to the saints. Are we like the Thessalonians who were obviously eager to learn, not only listening to a message preached, but also by following an example that was lived out for them?.....

What specifically did Paul have in mind when he spoke of them following, imitating or mimicking their example? Let us continue to read **V. 6 “... having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”**

These new believers in Thessalonica were not in a very good situation. This is very clear from the account of Paul’s initial visit to the Thessalonians in **Acts 17:1-9**. Let us read this particular account **“Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. (2) And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, (3) explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ. (4) And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. (5) But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. (6) And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; (7) And Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. (9) And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them.”** The pledge most likely was that Paul and his companions would leave the city. But consider what happened to Jason and to these believers. Has anything like this ever happened to you? This hostile crowd was certainly capable of some horrible things. And even though this particular incident passed apparently with an agreement that Paul and Silas would leave the city, the hostility toward Christ and His message remained.

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In the midst of this hostility, the Thessalonians never lost their joy. This was not human joy but it was a joy that came from being filled with the Holy Spirit. which is clear from the last phrase of **V. 6** “... **having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.**”

The Thessalonian church was an exemplary church not only because they received the Word, not only because they followed their spiritual leaders, but finally because they encouraged other churches.

THEY ENCOURAGED OTHER CHURCHES (V. 7)

Let us look at **V. 7** “**so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.**” Christians either encourage or discourage each other in terms of righteousness. We either stimulate one another to good works or we don't. It is a very sad thing for professing believers to spend time together and not challenge one another. When we are with brother's and sister's in Christ our prayer should be Lord help us to be a spiritual encouragement to them.

This principle applies also to churches. Certainly we see this being true in respect to the Thessalonian church. That particular church became an example for other Christian fellowships throughout Macedonia and Achaia. They became an example to the Philippian church, to the Berean Church, and to the Church at Corinth.

In what way were they an example to these churches? From the immediate context, we see that they were examples to these churches in respect to joyful steadfastness in the midst of persecution. It is not an easy thing to rejoice in the midst of suffering for the sake of truth but the Thessalonians were exemplary in regard to this matter.

And the Thessalonian church was not only exemplary in this area, but in others as well. Hopefully some of you remember that Paul used the churches of Macedonia as a stimulus for the Corinthian Church to give the missionary offering for the poor saints of Judea in **2 Cor. 8:1-8**. In that passage we see how the Apostle Paul pointed to the churches of Macedonia when sharing with the Corinthian Church, and said that the churches gave not only according to their ability but beyond their ability.

Isn't this a noble goal for ourselves. May the Lord give us grace so that we might be this for the churches of the Antelope Valley and the world. Not that we would be an example so much in the area of church growth, but in the areas of personal holiness, love for the brethren, and our fervency in reaching the lost.

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CONCLUSION

The Thessalonian Church was a very special church. It was a church that can challenge us and stretch us. It is what hopefully every church would become. And what would that be?

The Thessalonian Church was an elect church. The Thessalonian Church was an exemplary Church

They received the word.

They followed their spiritual leaders.

They encouraged other churches.