

1THESSALONIANS 1:7-10 "Does The Word Of The Lord Sound Forth From You?"

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 ⁶ You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

There were few churches in the known world at this time in history where the individuals who made up that church had such an impact on their world.

It's not as though they woke up one morning and had a meeting and decided to make a difference for Christ. In fact, I suspect it wasn't much they thought about at all as much as it was a natural expression of their thanks and gratitude for the salvation they had been given in Christ.

And I'm sure there were no "How-to" books that were being circulated in Macedonia and Achaia which outlined how to be an imitator of Paul and of the Lord, as though someone could actually imitate true Agape love in and of himself.

I will admit that there are many in the church today who have valiantly tried to impress others by parroting what they believe someone else wants them to hear or see.

But in Paul's case, the Thessalonians were not around him for very long before he was driven out of Thessalonica. So, in what way were they imitating Paul and his companions if they didn't have a sufficient time to scrutinize his life and pattern their lives after him?

Well, we saw last week in verse 6 that Paul qualifies his life as he followed after his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And that life in the Spirit begins to become more and more like Christ primarily because God is doing a work in the life of a person as that person submits to and follows the Lord by faith.

The Thessalonians were not simply going through the motions of being Christians, they were laying their lives down for Christ. They were not making an impact on their communities simply because they attended church and talked about religious things.

They were making an impact because Christ had made an impact on them. And they would not let an opportunity flee before they gave glory to God and extended the love of Christ to all people. And keep in mind that this area of the world was Pagan to the max, but they didn't let that get in the way of their love for people. And neither should we.

If we have opportunity to reach out to someone we should do it, but we should do it in accord with God's word and with God's love. We should be encouraging people who are seeking to come into this fellowship to taste what the truth is all about and to experience the love that only Christ can offer.

If you believe that God has brought this church together to further His Kingdom here in Port Charlotte and S.W. Fla. then don't be shy about being excited that Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte has something unique to offer. It's not religiosity. There are plenty of other places people can go for that. It's a desire to be true imitators of Christ in word, deed and thought.

That kind of imitating will not confine itself to four walls. It will take itself out to the world even as these Thessalonians did who served Christ even under much tribulation. But, they endured, they persevered, and even made great strides for God because they did it, not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Spirit.

To do it any other way is to do it in the flesh and that will only have short term effects. It will not last and it will not accomplish the will of God as He desires. The Thessalonian Christian's power did not come from themselves. Their motivation did not come from themselves as though they could psyche themselves into a religious frenzy to take the world for Christ.

They were ordinary people with an extraordinary gift of eternal life in Christ and they had an awesome God who gave them the joy of the Holy Spirit that they might accomplish what God wanted them to accomplish; not what they deemed necessary for God's agenda.

This is the way we need to go out into our community; with the Word and with power and with the Holy Spirit who gives us the joy of our salvation; where that joy is transferred into thanksgiving

and then into action. This is what we need to be praying for so that all that we do would imitate what God has shown us in His Son who is revealed in His word and in our very spirits.

And look what happened to the Thessalonians who went out with this attitude.

1TH 1:7 "And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."

Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia. But, from there in that one city these believers effected the entire regions of Macedonia and Achaia, which today would be Greece and Southern Europe.

The different churches looked to the Thessalonian Christians, who were modeling their lives after Christ, and these other believers now begin to model the Thessalonian believers. Again, not as though they wanted to be clones of them, but they wanted to demonstrate that they too came from the same mold as the Thessalonians who are new creatures in Christ.

This word "model" that we have in the NIV is translated "example" in the NAS. It comes from the Greek word *Tupos*. George Milligan in his commentary on 1Thessalonians says that the word *Tupos* meant originally the mark of a blow, (similar to what we read in Joh.20:25, "So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail MARKS in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.")

The marks referred to in John is the same Greek word *Tupos*. It was that which was left from the nails in our Lord's hands. Robertson in his Word Pictures of the N.T. goes on to explain that this word *Tupos* also came to mean the figure formed by the blow, like an image which might be formed from a die.

And so, if you were to take a die formed from metal with your picture on it and then strike it with a hammer into a soft material like leather, your image would be left in the leather.

This is the idea here in our text. And of course the die we must ultimately go back to is Christ Himself whose image is placed on the hearts of His people, and as we submit to Him and thankfully humble ourselves before God we will see that image conveyed to others.

That's what was going on in Macedonia and Achaia. They weren't imitating a group of Christians in Thessalonica whose faith only showed itself in the good times, their faith was alive and active and working even in great times of tribulation.

Those other churches said, 'These people are not playing games with Jesus. They mean business with the Lord. And even in their tribulation they continue to serve in power and in the Holy Spirit and in the joy He provides. That's the kind of faith we must seek after and imitate.'

That's genuine faith, because nothing short of that will persevere. Now Paul encourages the Thessalonians and tells them they have encouraged others.

1TH 1:8 "The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,"

The KJV and the NAS have a similar interpretation of this passage. The NAS reads, "The word of the Lord has sounded forth from you."

This phrase, "sound forth" is from the Greek word *execheomai*. As Robertson says, "It's a compound verb made up of *ex* and *echo*, which is our English word *echo*. And so the idea here is to sound out of a trumpet or of thunder, to reverberate like our echo."

What were they sounding out that reverberated through the land? The Lord's message of the gospel which was the word of the Lord. It was a word, but not any ordinary word. It was a divine word from the Creator of the universe who has made His special will known through this living word of God.

And His special will found its ultimate expression in His Son Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of what the law and the prophets spoke of. That will or plan of God is the salvation that Jesus Christ came to purchase for us by dying for the penalty of our sin. This was the word reverberating in the lives of these Thessalonian Christians and reverberating from their lips as they came in contact with the world.

Now before we get the idea that all of these Christians in Thessalonica became foreign missionaries we need to understand

what Paul was saying. Paul writes, "The Lord's message rang out from you."

Milligan suggests that the Greek words have the meaning of ringing "from you as a center." In other words, as Thessalonica was the city or center from which their faith sprang, others who came into contact with them took this message of hope in Christ and spread it abroad.

That doesn't mean the Thessalonians themselves didn't travel abroad, it just means that the whole church was not on the road taking the gospel throughout Macedonia and Achaia, which shows us how their faith was having an impact on others they came in contact with.

You and I now have an opportunity, like the Thessalonians, to effect many more people here in our own community and the world over if that's God's will, as I believe it is.

I don't know all that He has in store for us, but I do know this; today we have an opportunity to reach people we come into contact with and to sound forth the word of the Lord as we are faithful to be His servants wherever we are.

If Paul had a desire to commend the Thessalonians, as I'm sure he did, it wasn't necessary to whip them up and use motivational speeches because their love and their faith and their actions spoke for themselves and Paul says, "we didn't have to say anything."

In fact, we read in verse 9, "for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,"

Here Paul essentially says to the Thessalonians, 'when we had an opportunity to say something kind about you, we weren't even able to open our mouths before these Macedonians and Achaians were already speaking highly of you.'

There's nothing that lifts a Pastor's heart more than to know that the flock loves and supports him and trusts that God is using him in their lives. And in the case of the Thessalonians the lives of these people bore witness to Paul's instruction and love for them as they bore fruit.

The Greek word for *report* here in the text is what Robertson says is, "linear present active indicative." All that technical explanation of the language means is that the word *report* actually means keep

on reporting. It wasn't a one time report but it was a continual reporting about their faith and works of love over a span of time.

But notice what impressed the people in the other areas of Macedonia and Achaia about the Thessalonians. "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,"

This is an interesting statement because it shows how these Christians were not simply interested in turning "to" God but in the process they turned "from" their idols to serve the living and true God.

They put everything of the world that they believed and embraced that kept them from God, and they put it away from them by the grace and strength of God as they turned to Him. And yet unfortunately, today, many people seem to be turning "to" God, but are not willing to turn "from" their idols which consist of past practices and desires that are out of accord with the word of God.

And because of a lax attitude, which I believe is the result of some in the "Church" not wanting to "make waves" and possibly jeopardize losing a segment of their congregations, we have professing Christians thinking they have the option to call Jesus Christ their Savior but not their Lord.

There is no such option. And there is no lip service that God recognizes that will substitute for a life which actually demonstrates that He is Lord.

You'll remember a group of people that Jesus speaks of who call Him Lord. It's found in MAT 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

These are those who spoke a Christian walk and associated with other Christians and who may have even participated in certain acts of kindness, but whose overall lives proved quite clearly that they neither knew God nor were known by God.

Let me caution you however, that only God is the one who is capable of knowing for certain who are His and who are not and so

we need to be careful not to make judgments about people that have to do with their eternal life or lack thereof.

You will know them by their fruit and if the fruit doesn't seem to exist then we need to be in the mode of telling them the truth of the Savior Jesus Christ who forgives the penalty of sin of all who would repent and believe.

But if a person has professed faith in Christ and has very limited fruit we should not write them off as unbelievers, but should love them and encourage them to turn from their idols and to the living and true God who empowers His people to seek after Him.

The Thessalonians were busy putting off the old man and putting on the new as Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:22 "... in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

To call yourself a Christian and live like the world is a contradiction in terms. The Thessalonians would have none of that and neither should we, because we, like them, should appreciate the eternal life that has been freely given to us in Christ.

1TH 1:10 "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

They were excited about their salvation. And they were excited to know that this same Jesus who rose from the dead is the same one who will come back and claim us and rescue us from the wrath which the rest of the unbelieving world will experience.

This wrath to come is very real and it is eternal. The reason for His wrath is the result of sin. God has set the standard and He is just and must punish sin. Someone may say, 'how loving is that?' My answer is how much more loving could God be than to humble Himself and become a man and receive our wrath on the cross and die in our place?

Only a rejection of God's love in His Son will produce the wrath of God in that person's life who through his rejecting has chosen that wrath. God is not a vengeful ogre waiting to pounce on someone. He grieves that any would perish as they reject Him. But He must

punish sin or else He is not just and holy. And if is He is not just then His love means nothing.

These Thessalonian Christians were eagerly waiting for the return of their Savior. Paul had taught them that Jesus would come back from heaven. And he taught them that His return was imminent or that it could happen at any moment.

There are lots of people predicting the return of Jesus Christ. Just recently there was a supposed prophecy which told of the exact date of Christ's return being the 18th of October, 1992. The day I received this newsletter describing this was Oct.23 and the article said in effect that if you're reading this article then this prophecy obviously was bogus.

The return of Christ is no joke. He will come back as He promised in the word of God. The study of His return is known as eschatology and as we get further into this letter we'll study the Lord's return in some detail.

But the bottom line is this. If Christ comes back today, how will He find you? For the Thessalonians, despite the fact that they expected Him in their lifetime, they never quit doing works of faith, or labors of love because their steadfastness of hope was in our Lord Jesus Christ and they wanted to be found faithful at His return.

He will come like a thief in the night without warning, but we're also told that He will descend from heaven with a shout and His coming will separate the wheat from the chaff, the goats from the lambs.

If we have been delivered from the wrath to come then let's live as those who have been forgiven, and with grateful hearts live lives of thankfulness which produces reports that we have turned from our idols and sin to the living and true God as we wait for His Son from heaven.