

1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

When I was a senior in high school, I bought a '67 Mustang Fastback. Beautiful car. Bright red but pretty stock. But I put a 351 Windsor in it with a Edelbrock intake, Holley carb, headers, Mickey Thompson valve covers, chrome air cleaner; all the usual hot rod stuff and, man, did it look good! It looked fast even when it was standing still. Almost every time I pulled up to a red light, some guy next to me would rev his engine and challenge me. And my car sounded good, too. Dual exhaust with glass packs. Yeah, buddy!

The problem was it broke down a lot. And when I say "a lot" I mean every single time I drove it, something went wrong. This beautiful car that I loved and babied and bought all the best parts for and washed and waxed...hated me. It left me stranded in some of the worst parts of town. It embarrassed me in front of my friends time after time. And I grew to hate that beautiful car and finally, after ten years, I sold it. And I've never regretted it. Just looking at that car, you would think that it ran good. You would think it was fast. You would think it brought me great joy and lots of smiles. But you would be wrong; very wrong. It was beautiful to look at and even to hear but it didn't do the main things a car is supposed to do.

It reminds me of a church I visited for a while. It was a big, beautiful building. The landscaping was nice and well-taken care of. The auditorium was newly remodeled and well-lit. Some lovely stained-glass windows added some beautiful color. The padding on the pews matched the color of the carpet. They sang a few songs every Sunday morning. The preacher preached a message. And everybody went home. Everything about it made it look like it was a good church. Except it was dead. It was broken down. It didn't work. It didn't do the things a church is really supposed to do. It had the appearance of a church and by worldly measures, it was a church. But it was the kind of church that Jesus said in **Revelation 3**, *"I will spit you out of my mouth."*

I don't ever want to be a part of that kind of church and I am glad that we are not like that but I don't ever want to become complacent. When you see a dead church and you compare your church to it, there is sometimes a tendency to think that since we are not like that, we never will be. And besides, there is always room for improvement. There is always more life to be had. So, turn once again to **1 Thessalonians chapter 1** and let's look at a church that Paul said was anything but dead. Paul was not one to give a lot of compliments. He could be very blunt and rough with his letters to some churches. He basically told the church in Corinth, *"Don't make me come over there because I may come back with a whip!"*

But to the church in Thessalonica, he has some praise. And it's not just sweet words to make them feel good. He tells them how he knows that they are a real church doing what God has called them to do, with the right attitudes and the right doctrine and the right kinds of works. They are hitting on all eight cylinders and he says they are running good, looking good and sounding good. Let's see what makes a church run good, look good and sound good. We started our look at **1 Thessalonians** last week and we saw that they had proven their work was produced by faith. Their labor was prompted by love and their endurance was inspired by hope. That was found in **verse 3**. Let's go to **verses 4-10** to see how well this car runs. If you have ever seen a car race on TV, they interview the winning driver afterward and he always says, *"Well, the car ran great. The suspension was dialed in and the tires were sticky. The pit crew tightened up the valves and adjusted the suspension and it made all the difference. I'm part of a great team."* Right? Something like that.

That's kind of what Paul sounds like here (without the southern drawl). Let's read **1 Thessalonians 1:4-10**. *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your*

sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 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, 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, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

If you are a NASCAR fan, the way Paul described this church is like how you would describe your favorite car coming around the back straight. All eight cylinders sucking huge amounts of gas and air and exploding with power with every rpm. You can see it, feel it, hear it and even smell it. And I want that for our church. Let's look closer at what Paul says. Paul gives a bunch of reasons in this passage that prove that the church in Thessalonica was a real church doing what a real church is supposed to do. We are only going to look at the top six and we are going to go through them pretty quick, like a race car. 😊

Paul starts out telling about his own experience preaching there. See it in verse 5? *"our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction."* Paul is saying that when he preached there, he knew God was working because Paul felt it. His words had power, not because he was a good speaker but because the Holy Spirit gave him the power and the conviction.

The very first time I ever preached was at a nursing home and one of the residents there kept hollering out, *"That's a lie!"* as I preached. Two other residents were having a crash-up derby with their wheelchairs and one old guy in the back mumbled the whole time. Then a phone started ringing and ringing and ringing and nobody would answer it. I have to admit I was not feeling the power that day.

But Paul had power when he preached at Thessalonica and it was one of the ways he knew God was enabling this real church to do what He called them to do. The next way Paul says he knew they were real is found in **verse 6**. Yes, keep your Bibles open. I want you to see this and not just take my word for it. **Verse 6** says, *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord."* That word translated "imitators" is "mimetes" in the Greek and it is where we get "mimic". It means to act like, sound like, smell, taste, whatever it takes to be like somebody else. Paul was being like Jesus and the people in this church were being like him and Jesus and so Paul knew they were a real church when they acted like Christians act. The word "Christian" means to be a little Christ; to be Christ-like. But get the rest of the sentence Paul wrote here, *"in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."*

Dr. Robert Thomas wrote *"The notion of imitating Jesus applies especially to three things: Holiness, love and suffering."* Those are the three ways in which we are like Christ. Jesus suffered and suffered with joy. So, we too can expect to suffer and we have the ability, through the power of the Spirit of God, to suffer with joy. I bet you we talk more about that later this evening when we meet again. That's good stuff. But let's move on to the next way Paul says he knew they were a real church full of real Christians.

In **verse 7**, Paul tells them they became a model. The word "model" or "example" here is "tupos". It means exact reproduction. You became a model Christian for others to follow. So, the imitators became worth imitating. Their behavior was so distinctly Christian, their behavior was so distinctly God-honoring and Christ-exalting, they were not only naming the name of Christ, (1 John 2:6) but they were walking as He walked and they became models. And this is amazing because they didn't have any shepherds, they didn't have any mature leadership, they were a tiny, baby church in a sea of paganism and yet the Spirit of God was working a work

there. Christ was being formed in them. They weren't perfect. In fact, Paul says in this letter to them, *"I want to complete what is lacking in your faith."* So, he knew that they hadn't arrived in perfection. But they were sure on the right track. And he says, *"I want you to increase more and more in the same way you're going."* But they had become "illustrations." They had become living illustrations of how to live. The evidence of saving faith is seen because their lives were an illustration, an example. (John MacArthur)

The fourth way Paul says he knows this church is a real church is in **verse 8** and it says because *"the Lord's message rang out from you."* Now, what is the Lord's message? It's the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus. He was born and lived and then died but He rose again after three days and He is alive today and wants to have a relationship with us! That's Good News! And that message was ringing out of this little baby church. The Thessalonians weren't subtle. They learned well from Paul. They weren't hesitant. They weren't apologetic for their message. They didn't try to sugarcoat the gospel. They just blared it out. They just trumpeted it out. The perfect tense in that verb indicates a continual trumpeting, continual trumpeting, continual trumpeting. Now, remember, this church didn't have a full-time pastor. Paul is writing this to the whole church, not just the leader. The whole church was blasting out the Gospel all the time.

The announcement was made this morning that we are having a business meeting right after church. I heard the story of a pastor who finished preaching and announced there would be a meeting of the board directly after the service. And afterward a visitor walked up ready for the meeting. The pastor said, *"I'm sorry. You misunderstood. This meeting is for the board."* The visitor replied, *"Well, if there's anybody any more bored than me, I'd like to meet him."* When you are proclaiming the Gospel, don't be boring. It is the most important, most vital piece of information you can give to anybody. It ought to be life-changing. It ought to be exciting. So, let your message ring out continuously and with great excitement like they did in Thessalonica.

Still in **verse 8**, note that Paul tells them there and in **verse 7** something about Macedonia and Achaia. That means from the north to the south. The whole country was hearing about this little church and they were even telling Paul good things about it. And in **verse 8** Paul says your faith in God is known all over the country so we don't even need to say anything about it...yet he did. He couldn't help it. I love that.

In **verse 9** Paul says he knows how they have turned from idols to serve the living and true God. To turn from an idol means to repent. It means to be going in one direction and stop and go in another, right direction. That is what happens at the point of salvation. Paul says I know you are true believers in a real church because I saw how you were before and now I see how you have turned from that lifestyle and you don't live that way anymore. Paul doesn't have to describe that old lifestyle. They knew what he was talking about. It's that blah, blah, blah in your testimony. Right Billy? I used to live like blah, blah, blah but then Jesus saved me and now I have peace and joy in this life. I'm not perfect by a long shot but every day I look a little more like Jesus. Thank you, Lord!

Paul said they had turned – repented – from that old lifestyle and were now **serv**ing God. That word "serve" is "douleuō" in the Greek and it means to be the lowliest slave. You turned from being a slave to a false dead idol and you became a slave of the living and true God. Now, Christ Fellowship, if this applies to you; if this applies to us at this church, what do you have to brag about? What makes you feel like you need to let folks know how important you are? The only thing you have to brag about is being a slave and if you brag about that, you aren't being a good slave.

It's like that old movie where Tom Hanks tells that woman, *"There's no crying in baseball. There's no crying."* Well, there's no bragging in Christianity. Hey slave, why are you trying to make yourself look good to people? Do your job of making God look good and you will have all the fulfillment you need.

Leon Morris writes, *"The act of conversion involves a change of direction of the will. There is a decisive happening, a reorientation of the whole of life. This is so in every age. The most characteristic thing about salvation is not the continuity of life but **the decisive break.**"* He's right. You turn from idols to God, from the dead to the living, from the false gods and yourself to start serving the true God. And that happens at the moment of salvation and other people can see it just like Paul saw it in that church.

There is one more characteristic that Paul brings out in verse 10 and it's a doozy. Do you remember in Acts chapter 1 when Jesus gives the disciples a few last words and then ascends back into Heaven? And the apostles are left standing there looking up and two angels appear and ask them why they are looking up in the sky. Then the angels say, *"This same Jesus who has been taken from you into Heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go."* Well, I'm looking forward to that! I'm ready! Come, Lord Jesus, come! And Paul says in verse 10 that is another reason he knows this church is a real church. They look forward to the return of Jesus.

Look at **2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 8**. Just briefly listen to what Paul says, *"In the future there's laid up for me the crown of righteousness,"* that means the crown, which is righteousness, eternal righteousness, *"which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day."* Listen to this, *"Not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."* Heaven and eternal righteousness is for those who love the return of Jesus. In other words, that's the definition of a Christian. We're looking for Christ to come back. If you're not looking for Jesus, then you're not squaring up with what marks a true believer. We believe He's coming and we hope in that coming.

Listen to **Titus chapter 2 verse 11**, *"For the grace of God has appeared and it appeared bringing salvation to all men."* And what did that salvation do? *"Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, **looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.**"* (John MacArthur)

Prayer Lord, we come to you today looking so forward to that day! Father, we are ready. But we know there are friends and family that are not ready so, God, would you please give us the ability to be like this church in Thessalonica? Lord, please give us everything we need to be like Jesus. Help us to model Him to the city of Chico and everywhere we go. We pray that it is your words in our mouths that rings out when we tell the Good News and we just want to be your slaves, doing what you want us to do, going where you want us to go and saying what you want us to say. But we can only do that with your help and your power. Thank you, God, for hearing me. Amen.

If today, you don't have that Father / child relationship with God through His Son Jesus, let's make today the day of salvation. Today is the day you ask Him to forgive all of your sins and then you repent of those sins and that lifestyle. Ask God to come into your life and change you and make you more like Him. You will never regret it. Do it right now as the music plays.