

Modeling Christ

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

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1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 – (NIV)

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters 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.

v5 – How is it the gospel did not come in word only?

The **gospel** is not a matter of mere words. In modern culture there is an overflow of information or entertainment that often only amounts to mere words. Yet the Gospel is more than words, it also has **power**.

What power does the message of Jesus Christ have?

It has **power** for miracles; **power** for wonderful signs from God; and best of all, it has the **power** to change minds, hearts, and lives.

Does “power” mean “miracles”?

Not to be confused with *dynameis*, the plural of *dynamis*, which means ‘miracles’ (1 Corinthians 12:10; Galatians 3:5), the singular does not specify supernatural manifestations but neither does it exclude them.

- The word applies to the spiritual power of doctrine... It is the living voice of God, inseparable from its effect, as compared with the empty and lifeless eloquence of men.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

He is God, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is a divine person, a being with a mind, emotions, and a will.

What misconceptions are there about the identity of the Holy Spirit?

Some view the Holy Spirit as a mystical force. Others see the Holy Spirit as an impersonal power that God makes available to followers of Christ.

How do we know the Holy Spirit is God?

This is clearly seen in many Scriptures, including Acts 5:3-4. In these verses Peter confronts Ananias as to why he lied to the Holy Spirit and tells him that he had “*not lied to men but to God.*”

Also, He possesses the characteristics of God. For example, His **omnipresence** is seen in Psalm 139:7-8, “*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*”

Then in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, we see the characteristic of **omniscience** in the Holy Spirit. “*These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*”

We know that the Holy Spirit is indeed a divine person because He possesses a mind, emotions, and a will...

- The Holy Spirit thinks and knows (1 Cor 2:10).
- The Holy Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30).
- The Spirit intercedes for us (Romans 8:26-27).
- He makes decisions according to His will (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).
- As God, the Holy Spirit can truly function as the Comforter and Counselor that Jesus promised He would be (John 14:16, 26; 15:26).

What role did the Holy Spirit have here?

The good news of Christ is a message by the **Holy Spirit**, a living Person, who works within the hearts of the hearers, to convict, to comfort, and to instruct.

- If the preacher only speaks, then it is a matter of **word only**, but when the **Holy Spirit** works through the Word, a great spiritual work is accomplished.

What is the “*deep conviction*” (NIV) or “*much assurance*” (NKJV) of the Holy Spirit?

This is something else the Holy Spirit does...

Romans 8:16 – *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

We have assurance of our salvation because the Holy Spirit lives in us and speaks to us through our human spirits. We have this assurance because He reminds us of the promises of God and His faithfulness to His Word.

v6 – Why was it important that the Thessalonians became followers of Paul and the Lord?

The Thessalonians stopped following other things but followed after Paul and the Lord. Paul says that it was a good thing for them to follow him, and he wasn't shy about saying “follow me” because he knew where he was going.

1 Cor 11:1 – *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

This shows that Paul's message included an element of *personal discipleship*. There was a sense in which Paul personally led these Thessalonian Christians in their spiritual life. They could see his life and were invited to learn from his example.

Philippians 3:17 – *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

Why was there much affliction associated with the Thessalonians having received the word?

The message they heard came with adversity; yet they received it, and Paul thanked God because of it.

- Cultural forces opposed the message of Christ yet the Thessalonians still embraced it despite the pressure.

What kind of cultural pressure might the Thessalonians have experienced?

They lived in a pagan culture so if your worship was outside this culture, you were a rebel; even an enemy of everything they held precious.

What helped the Thessalonians overcome the cultural pressure?

With joy of the Holy Spirit: When the Thessalonian Christians faced the **affliction** from receiving the Word, they didn't just face it with a resigned fatalism. They faced it **with joy of the Holy Spirit**.

- Not long before coming to Thessalonica, Paul and Silas personally experienced the principle of having the *joy of the Holy Spirit* even in much affliction — when they sang in the Philippian jail despite their chains and sufferings. They were examples of this same spirit to the Thessalonian Christians.

What kind of cultural pressures do Christians have to face today?

We live in a secular humanist culture so our worship of the Lord makes us a rebel; even an enemy of everything they hold precious. In addition to this, there are anti-Christian narratives about racism, sexism, hypocrisy, morally antiquated, superstitious, unscientific.

v7 – How is it the Thessalonians became a model to others?

First, Paul was an example to the Thessalonian Christians. Then *they became examples* to others. This is exactly how the work of God should happen.

- The Christians in **Macedonia and Achaia** needed examples, and the Thessalonians supplied that need. This was true even though they had only been followers of Jesus a short time.
- As Christians, we always need others who will *show us* how to follow Jesus Christ, beyond the need of *hearing* about how to follow Him.

v8 – How did the Thessalonians sound forth or ring out (NIV) the Word of the Lord?

This was part of the good example that the Thessalonian Christians provided. The good work the Lord did among the Thessalonians became known all over the region, and everyone talked about the changes.

- In a cosmopolitan trading city like Thessalonica, the good news could sound forth **in every place** to all the earth.

What did Paul mean that *we do not need to say anything about the faith*?

Paul effectively said, “You Thessalonian Christians are sounding forth the Word of the Lord so effectively that you are putting me out of business! **We do not need to say anything!**”

- The mere *preaching* of the Gospel had done much to convince and convert sinners; but the *lives* of the sincere followers of Christ, as *illustrative* of the truth of these doctrines, had done much more.

What changes did people see in the Thessalonians?

These people have broken their idols: they worship the one God; they trust in Jesus. They are no longer drunken, dishonest, impure, contentious.

- Our converts are our best advertisements and arguments.

v9 – What observations of the Thessalonians did people have?

How you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven: When the Thessalonians received the Word of God from Paul, they responded to it by leaving their **idols**, and they gave themselves to **serve the living and true God**.

- Their reception of the Word and their faith in God was shown as true because they *did* something with the Word of God.

Why was God referred to here as the living and true God?

Jesus rose from the dead and is thus living. He is the true God unlike the pagan deities which were really demons masquerading as God.

1 Timothy 4:1 – Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons

What doctrines of demons do we have today?

The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is being muddled by the influence of postmodernism.

- Purpose Driven Gospel – seeker sensitive watered down and compromised with world
- Puzzling Gospel – proclaiming to be a Christian with no growth
- Prosperity Gospel – spiritual condition is only apparent in health & wealth
- Pluralistic Gospel – aka universalism
- Performance Gospel – aka salvation-by-works

What is the significance of the Thessalonians serving the living and true God?

The verb *douleuo* (**to serve**) was apparently never used in a religious sense in pagan literature. No Greek or Roman could take in the idea of ‘serving’ a god... There was no room for it in their religion; their concept of the gods did not allow for it.

- If life was to be a moral service rendered to God, it must be to a God quite different from any to whom he was introduced by his ancestral worship.”

v10 – What does it mean to wait for His Son from heaven?

This is a high mark of grace, when the Christian expects his Lord to come and lives like one who expects him every moment.

- If we knew tonight that the Lord would come before this study was over, in what state of heart should we sit in these chairs?

What will Jesus do when He comes for us?

Paul pointed to the essence of salvation in saying Jesus **delivers us from the wrath to come**. We are saved from something, and that something is the righteous **wrath** of a holy God.

Is this wrath to come the Great Tribulation or the ultimate wrath of the lake of fire?

Certainly both, but given the context, it was more likely the Tribulation was in mind here. Later in this letter, Paul used the expression God did not appoint us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9) to refer to God’s deliverance of His people in the context of the wrath to come upon the world in the last days.

Revelation 3:10 – Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

The pre-Trib rapture is a true biblical doctrine. The 70th week of Daniel is for Israel, not the church.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- The Holy Spirit gives us assurance we are children of God (eternal security)
- Faithful Christians should be living examples of Jesus Christ.
- False gospels are doctrines of demons
- Jesus promises to save us from the wrath to come – pre-Trib rapture.