

**Subject: *Gratitude for a Faithful Church***

**Scripture: *1 Thessalonians 1:1-10***

After a brief word of greeting and introduction, Paul gives thanks to God for this church being what it ought to be. This wasn't a perfect church, but it was a faithful church and a worthy example of a church that pleases God and honors Him. In many ways the church at Thessalonica was a model church. For that reason Paul was grateful and we should be grateful because God has given us an example of a faithful church. It's an example to follow. For the next several weeks we will take a careful look at Paul's first letter to this church so we can be faithful in our day just like it was in the first century.

The church is extremely important in God's redemptive plan. Nine books in the NT were written to local churches (Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 and 2 Thessalonians). Three more books were written to pastors of local churches. The book of Acts describes the planting and development of churches after Christ ascended to the Father in heaven. This was Christ's work on earth continuing through the church, His spiritual body. *Acts 1:1* *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.*

Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation were written to the seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It should come as no surprise how important and valuable the church is to Christ. Paul wrote in *Ephesians 5:25* *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*

Look how Paul describes this church in the text. He refers to their faith, love, and hope (vs. 3). He mentions their election of God (vs. 4). He refers to the gospel coming to them in power (vs. 5) and how they received the word in much affliction (vs. 6). He writes about their good example (vs. 7), their reputation (vs. 8), the evidence of their conversion (vs. 9). Then he closes the chapter by mentioning their patient waiting for Christ's return (vs. 10).

Notice what Paul did *not* say about this church. There is no mention of the size of the church, nothing about their style of worship, nothing about their singing or preaching or programs. But he does mention their faithfulness and testimony and perseverance. The simple outline of this first chapter falls under three headings: 1) Paul's greeting to the church (vs. 1); 2) Paul's gratitude to God for the church (vs. 2); 3) the reasons why Paul was grateful for the church (vs. 3-10). Paul was thankful for this church for several reasons.

**1. They had a firm connection with the Lord (vs. 1)**

From the start this church was "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." This speaks of their spiritual union with the Father and Christ. Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" over and over in his letters. This was their spiritual location. Their physical location was in Thessalonica, but their spiritual location was in Christ. And because of their union with the Father and the Son, they had grace and peace from the Father and the Son. How did this come about? See *Acts 17:1-13* – the founding of the church

**2. They had clear evidence of spiritual life (vs. 3)**

A. Their work of faith – Their work was evidence of faith. Faith without works is dead.

- B. Their labor of love – Their labor was proof of their love.
  - C. Their patience of hope – Their hope caused them to be patient (have endurance)
- You can't actually see faith, love, and hope, but you can see the evidence of all three.

### **3. They showed proof of their election (vs. 4-5)**

Paul refers to them as beloved brethren (vs. 4). The words “brother” and “brethren” are found 19 times in this letter.

Their election by God – God had chosen them for salvation. How could Paul know they were chosen by God? Did they look different? Did they have some kind of mark on them? Did Paul receive some kind of inside information from God as their election? No. He knew they were chosen by God because of the way they responded to the gospel. See *1 Thess. 2:13*. The truth of the gospel changed their lives. It came in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance.

### **4. They were faithful followers of Paul and the Lord (vs. 6)**

Do you remember the game “follow the leader?” That’s a good way to think of the Christian life, but it’s not a game. It’s serious and it’s real. The word for “followers” is *mimetes*, from which we get the English words “mimic” and “imitate.”

*1 Corinthians 4:16 Be followers of me.*

*1 Corinthians 11:1 Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

The Christian life is to be like Christ. If the leaders of a church follow Christ, then the members can follow the leaders and follow Christ at the same time. That’s the way it is supposed to be.

Paul mentions one specific thing about their faithful following. They received the word in much affliction, and yet with joy from the Holy Spirit. Both Paul and Christ suffered affliction but they did so with joy.

### **5. They were faithful examples and evangelists to others (vs. 7-8)**

The word “examples” was used for a seal that made its imprint in hot wax. The same word was used for a stamp that minted coins. These believers had “left their mark” on others. Their faith had “sounded forth” (reverberated). These believers were like amplifiers for the Gospel. The most powerful impact was through the personal testimonies of people who had been saved. People everywhere heard about the believers in Thessalonica. Their testimonies had a local impact in their city, an impact on the rest of Greece, and even an impact on the rest of the world.

### **6. They had a testimony of real conversion (vs. 9)**

They turned to God from idols (repentance) to serve the living and true God (good works). Thessalonica was only 50 miles from Mt. Olympus and thought to be the headquarters of the Greek gods and goddesses. These people had been raised from children to worship all these gods. But when they were saved they turned from that false worship to the one true God. That was big news! In Eastern Europe, believers are called “repenters.”

The platform of our testimony is a changed life. If we don't have a changed life, we don't have anything to talk about. One man said, "Show me your redeemed life and I might believe in your Redeemer." That's fair, isn't it? That's what salvation is all about: changed lives, witnessing, and seeing others come to Christ.

John Newton described the right attitude for all Christian service: "If two angels were to receive a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's greatest empire, and the other to go and sweep the streets of its humblest village, it would not make any difference to either one which service fell to his lot, for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will."

### **7. They were faithful in waiting for Christ's return (vs. 10)**

They were serving the Lord and waiting for His return. They were enduring with perseverance (staying power).

*Hebrews 10:36-37* <sup>36</sup> For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. <sup>37</sup> For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.