

A Model of Love to Christ

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

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Introduction:

Last week, we began a new sermon series in Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians.

- It is included in the Bible for us because it is given to us by the Lord to reveal His truth to us without error or compromise.
- It is truly His infallible Word, and therefore it is something that He has given to us to speak powerfully into our lives so that we are brought nearer to the Lord and His ways.

In the opening of this letter, we saw how right from the get-go the Apostle Paul and his companions described how they thanked God for the church at Thessalonica!

- Here were Thessalonians, many of them former idol worshippers, who had come to salvation.
- I asked you if you thank God whenever you learn of a church in this place or that place? or whenever you think of other believers and pray for them?
 - Just think what it means that there are sinful lost condemned people who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and brought to Him to be His worshippers!
 - Don't just feel thankful, but speak words of thanksgiving to God for them!

Paul was especially thankful for the Thessalonians because, in this church in particular, he saw *their work of faith, their labour of love, and their endurance of hope*.

- In other words,
 - their faith brought forth work in them—they turned from idols to worship God and they put away their immoral lifestyles and their bitterness to serve others;
 - and their love produced labour—even toilsome labour that caused them to sacrifice and pour out their lives for others;
 - and their hope was seen in their endurance—that they kept going through affliction because they knew that God was going to deliver them.

Paul says that he knew that they were elected by God because of the way they received the gospel.

- He gave thanks to God because he knew that the change in them was not of their own doing, but that it was the work of God who had chosen them to believe.
 - Whenever you see people repenting and believing, that shows that God has chosen them and has granted them faith and repentance.
 - It is something to thank Him for.

Last week, I touched on how the gospel came to the Thessalonians as verse 5 describes...

- How the gospel had come to them **in power and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance**—that was in verse 5...
 - But I told you that we would be picking up more on this in the coming week.

And so today, we are going to look at this very important subject for us as Christians.

- We are going to look at how the gospel spreads from one believer to another.
- It is a wonderful thing that God does not save us in isolation from each other.
 - No, He has chosen to spread the true faith from one person to another.
 - He makes us examples or models to one another.
 - That is why it is stupid to try to go to church on line—it is not just a matter of learning the facts, it is a matter of imitation.
 - Yes, the gospel is essential, but it comes to us not only in words, but also as something that is lived out for others to see.

Please listen now as I read to you the portion that we will be looking at today.

- It is 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10.
- This comes right after how he is thankful, “knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God:”

1 Thess 1:5-10: For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in

Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and 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, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

What a grand thing it is to see how the gospel spreads from one group of believers to random persons who then become another group of believers, and then this new group spreads the gospel to even more random persons.

- I want you see first how it all begins.

I. It begins when the Lord brings people who love Him into your life.

A. You can see how this happened at Thessalonica.

1. One day Paul, Silas, and Timothy showed up in this bustling port city that was the capital of Macedonia.
 - They were not announced.
 - They were a couple of middle-aged men of Jewish descent and they had a younger man with them—Timothy—who was a Greek.
 - Nobody would have thought much about them as people were going in and out of Thessalonica all the time.
2. But they had come to town with a message to proclaim—and they made their way to the synagogue on the Sabbath to get started.

- It was a message that had to do with the hope of the Jews—the gospel that the Jews were waiting for...Paul was proclaiming that the Messiah who had been promised to come at about that time had indeed come—
 - The odd thing was that He was not seated on a throne in Jerusalem as the illustrious Son of David, conquering all the other nations...
 - but Paul preached that He was Jesus of Nazareth, One who had worked miracles among the people and then been crucified.
 - The highest court of the Jewish church had condemned Him as a blasphemer and delivered Him up to the Romans to be crucified.
 - But Paul was telling them that God had raised Him from the dead and had exalted Him to sit at His right hand.
 - He declared that God had made Him to be Lord and Christ, and that by faith in His name, there was forgiveness of sin and the promised cleansing baptism that God had promised by the Holy Spirit.
 - Paul was pleading with them to repent of their sin and look to Christ for the forgiveness of sin and for eternal life in His kingdom.
 - He proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God who was going to return to judge the world, but to deliver from the coming wrath all who had trusted Him and to bring them everlasting to glory.
3. The gospel message came to them in a most compelling way.
- As Paul says in verse 5,
 - **For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.**
 - a. The focus here in verse 5 is not yet on how the Thessalonians *received* the gospel, but on how it was *delivered* to them.
 - God's power and His Holy Spirit were working so that Paul and his friends did not preach as the philosophers and Jewish teachers did...
 - They were more like heralds of God—proclaiming a message that had authority from heaven behind it.
 - b. And not only that, but they also lived as if this message was true.
 - They had been imprisoned and beaten in Philippi, and still they had come to preach the same message in Thessalonica.
 - And when opposition came here at Thessalonica—very severe opposition—they did not back down but continued to patiently declare that Jesus was the Messiah and that all needed to repent and believe.
 - c. Their message combined with their example was something that brought a strong reaction—in one way or another.
 - 1) We are told in Acts 17 where the historical account of Paul's visit is summarised that there were some who reacted very negatively.
 - They did not like this message about a crucified Messiah!
 - The Messiah was to give them the deliverance they wanted from their enemies, not to die on a cross for their sins.

- These men made it sound as if Jews were sinners just like the Gentiles.
 - Imagine that! Didn't he know that they were God's chosen people?
 - The Sanhedrin (the highest court of the Jews) had spoken against this Jesus that Paul preached—and no wonder!
 - The message was very offensive to them and they stirred up the whole city to a violent opposition.
 - They pursued Paul and his companions all the way to Berea and would have destroyed them if they had not been taken away.
 - 2) But then there was also the response of the Thessalonians who were now in the church—the church that Paul thanked God for!
 - Paul says of them in verse 6 that they **became followers of us and of the Lord having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.**
 - The same Holy Spirit who helped Paul to deliver the message and live the message out worked in these particular Thessalonians to receive the message.
 - Isn't that marvellous!
 - Many of them had been idol worshippers—as we saw last week—and now they were in God the Father and in Christ Jesus the Lord—their sins forgiven and their lives changed!
 - I'll have more to say about them in a moment...
- B. But do you see that this is how God still works to bring His salvation to people?
- He uses people who know Him to lead other people who don't to Him.
1. Many of you can relate to this from your days as an unbeliever.
 - You were like these Thessalonians—minding your own business—and God brought some Christians into your life.
 - You took notice of them—maybe they were in your school or somebody that moved into your neighbourhood.
 - For me, it was a group of Christians I met on campus.
 - Danielle told me how Tracy was like that in her high school—she was this girl that stood out because she loved Jesus—and everybody knew it.
 2. And these Christians had a message that they wanted you to believe.
 - They talked about the gospel that Paul preached—that Jesus Christ the Son of God had come, and that He had been crucified on the cross to pay for sin...
 - And that whoever believes in Him will be not perish but have everlasting life.
 - And these people—I remember how it was for me—they really believed this and it had captured them so that they were living for Him.
 - I remember how my friends who did not yet believe and I would evaluate which ones of them really believed it and which ones were there for other reasons.
 - But I remember being convinced that most of them really did believe.

- There were some people that really opposed them, and their opposition seemed irrational because they were kind people that seemed sincere...
 - They didn't even seem to mind when people rejected them and teased them.
 - And the more I was around them, the more I realised that what they were saying about God and about Jesus was true.
- 3. The next thing I knew, I was believing what they believed and trying to live the way they lived.
 - a. Many of you were brought to Christ in a similar way.
 - God brought Christians into your life who told you about Jesus and who lived for Jesus—and you became followers of them and of the Lord.
 - b. Now some of you will say, but I grew up in a Christian home, so I can't remember a time when someone came into my life like that.
 - No, dear child of God, but you actually did have someone come into your life who loved the Lord and led you to Him...
 - It was just that God brought them into your life from the very start!
 - How thankful you should be that you were born into a home where Jesus was loved, and that you had the gospel and a Christian example from the very beginning!
 - c. Yes indeed—that is how God works.
 - He puts us together because we need each other as examples.
 - Elders are to be examples of those who hear the message preached and who respond to it.
 - They are to be examples of how to live for Christ.
 - It is one thing to be told, it is another thing to be shown—to have an example we can imitate.
 - Take something like family worship—it is one thing to be told to do it, it is another thing to watch and learn from someone else who is already doing it faithfully.

TRANS> So this is how it all began—someone who loves Jesus was brought into our lives and then we started following their example of faith and obedience.

- But do you know what happened after that?
 - This is the second think I want to look at this morning...

II. Then you became a model to others of what it is to believe!

A. The Thessalonians certainly did!

1. In verse 6, Paul says to them that **“And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.”**
 - What was so special about their example was the fact that they came to Christ when Paul and his companions were being so strongly opposed.
 - It did not stop them—it did not even slow them down.
 - They came with a whole-hearted commitment into the heat of the storm—even as Paul and the others were being carried away to safety.

- Instead of drawing back when they saw this, they came forward—they received the Word in much affliction...
 - Just like so many people do in countries where persecution is strong.
 - It is actually a help to the gospel because everyone sees that these people love Jesus enough to suffer for Him—they realise that He is worth suffering for right from the start!
 - They come to Him in great affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit!
 - The Holy Spirit has shown them how precious Jesus is—that He is the fairest of ten thousand.
 - That He is their Maker who has become their Redeemer—when nobody else could redeem them.
 - He has loved them and suffered for them, so they are well pleased to suffer for Him...
 - Besides, who can really harm them now that they belong to Christ?
 - The most anyone can do is kill them, and they will still have Christ.
 - Yes, this joy was not joy because they had been delivered from affliction, but joy in their precious Lord in the midst of the affliction!
 - Their joy did not depend on what others did to them, but it was rooted in what the Lord had done for them and what He had promised to them.
 - What an example they were of Holy Spirit wrought love for Jesus!
2. In our passage we read about how their example went very far!
- a. In verse 7, Paul describes how they became examples to all who were in Macedonia and Achaia (Achaia is the province to the south where Corinth and Athens were).
 - They now became *those people who loved Jesus that God brought into the lives of others* who then became His followers as well.
 - b. In verse 8, Paul explains that the gospel went out from them in all directions.
 - He says that it **sounded forth**—the word used here is of a ringing out like a trumpet blast or like a bell that is heard across the land...
 - Paul was amazed because he did not have to tell people about what had happened at Thessalonica—people from all over the place were coming and telling him about it!
 - He may even be saying that he did not have to preach the gospel in many places because it had already come to places before he got there through the Thessalonians!
 - **For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.**
 - It was not just their example, but the word of the Lord—the gospel itself—that sounded forth from them.
3. And notice—it did not take a long time for their example to influence others.
- a. It was the way they *received* the word that everybody was talking about.

- Verse 9 and 10 speaks about this and so does verse 6 which we already looked at.
 - We will look at the details in verses 9 & 10 later—but for now I just want you to notice that their example rang out right away.
- b. As Jay Adams says, “young Christians don’t have to wait to become an example as long as they receive the word with joy!”
- That is what people will see.
 - Matthew Henry explains that when this is done, new believers can easily outstrip the example of those that have been believers for a long time.

TRANS> The example of these Thessalonians stood out as a remarkable example!

B. But it is not always this way with us, is it?

1. Too often our example does not sound forth.
 - Not many people even notice that we are following Jesus.
 - It might not even be clear to others that we are elect—Paul said that he knew the Thessalonians were elect because of the way they had received the gospel.
2. What are you like at work? in your neighbourhood? before your children? at your school?
 - Do you stand out as someone who loves Jesus Christ?
 - Do you stand out as someone who has joy in affliction, and even when you are opposed for following Christ?
 - Or are you the cranky one—the one who is easily offended when people don’t do you right...
 - Are you the one who is always complaining about things—about politics, or immorality in our society, feeling that you are being a witness that way?
 - Or maybe you are the one who is inconsiderate and unhelpful to others...
 - Or the one who is focused on success, on getting a promotion, on excelling at the expense of others.
 - Or perhaps you are the one who is struggling with lust—you are so focused on your own fleshly desires that you can’t love other people.
 - And you children in the home...
 - You have an opportunity to be a powerful example for Christ—but maybe you are more concerned about being cool, or maybe you are always quarrelling with your siblings...or just entertaining yourself...
 - I remember as a new believer seeing a Christian family where the children in the home actually seemed to love each other.
 - A family like that will have big impact in the community!
 - And the same with marriage—there are so many married couples that have poison between them...
 - But if we love Christ with our spouses, the fragrance of Christ will stand out in our marriage—in world where that is rare.
3. But I don’t want to beat you down!

- Some of you are better examples than you know.
 - You would be pleasantly surprised if you knew what other people were saying about you.
 - You love the Lord Jesus, and it shows.
 - Some of you have told me about being surprised when you found out that others were struck by your example!
- I don't want to beat you down, but I do want to challenge you to be all that you can be for Christ.
 - Because you know and I know that just as the example of the Thessalonians was rare in the first century,
 - so also it is rare in our day.

III. So I want to urge you to pray that we would be a model church both to believers and unbelievers all around.

A. It is not in you to be such an example—it is the Lord's work in you.

1. Remember that Paul gives thanks *to God* for what he saw in the Thessalonians.
 - He was excited to see in them what the Lord does when He takes hold of a church!
 - They were chosen *by God* for salvation, and their lives were the fruits of *God's* work in them.
 - He says that both his own ministry to them as well as their response and the example that resulted was the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. I say this to remind you that you will never be an example apart from the working of God in your life.
 - If you think it is all up to you, you will not be pray.
 - If you think it is all up to you, you will boast about whatever good you do.
 - If you think it is all up to you, you will be beaten down with discouragement.
3. Let me illustrate what I mean: You can go to your kids and tell them to stop quarrelling.
 - Or you can fight against your lusts and try to beat them down.
 - But there won't be a change until the Holy Spirit reveals the excellence and the glory of Christ to you!

B. It is a warm embrace of Jesus Christ as revealed in the gospel that will make you an example—it is love for Him!

- In a word, love for Christ was the thing that stood out about the Thessalonians.
 - They had received the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit's job is to reveal the excellence of Christ to us!
 - Look at verse 9-10 and see what it was that stood out about them.
- 1. First of all, they turned from worthless idols to serve the living God.
 - a. That is what we are told in verse 9:
 - This is what Paul says people said about them when they saw their example, **For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry**

we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

- b. Let me tell you, before the gospel comes to us, we run away from the living God.
 - We say, give me Buddha or Allah or Judaism or some form of Christianity that has a god that isn't so powerful or so holy...
 - A god which it is at least possible for me to please by my own works.
 - Not the God who made me and the God against whom I have sinned and before whom I am eternally condemned—not Him.
 - And if not some idolatrous religion, give me toys or give me success or give me escape through drugs or the bottle or entertainment...
 - or give me romance, give me diversion, give me anything but the true and living God against whom I have sinned and before whom I am eternally condemned.
- c. When Christ is revealed to you, it is then that you turn from these worthless idols to the living God.
 - God the Father is revealed to us only through Christ because it is only through Christ that we can be reconciled to God.
 - We will avoid Him constantly until we see that He is a God with whom we can be reconciled.
 - Not a God whose standard we could ever meet in our fallen condition, but a God whose standard Christ has met for us.
 - I am more and more convinced that is a failure to grasp the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ that keeps us living at such a low level.
 - We simply do not see the value of our redemption and we are unable to rise above our lusts and desires to serve God.
 - We do not see how holy and wise and pure and powerful He is—we do not see how glorious He is—
 - so our service is small—there is not enough in Him to captivate us.
 - We feel put upon instead of eternally in debt to His goodness and love.
 - It is a very sad state of affairs.
2. You see that Paul goes on to speak of how the Thessalonians were full of yearning for Jesus Christ—that is what made them such a fine example.
 - In verse 10, after saying that they turned from idols to serve the living and true God, he says, **“and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**
- a. They realised that He was God's Son!
 - Their redeemer was their Maker! Their Maker is their husband!
 - He was no ordinary man that came to be a guide to them.
 - He was the eternal God of heaven who became flesh so that He might represent us and atone for our sins.
 - Here was the one who had infinite resources from which to draw!

- Here was the One who said that if they drank from the water that He would give them, they would never thirst.
 - Let all the world come and drink of one of His promises—all at the same time—and they will find that there is still as much to draw from as there was to start with.
 - He is the inexhaustible God and He is our Saviour.
 - He is the one whose loveliness and beauty can never be sounded out.
 - We can gaze upon Him for a million years and never be bored of Him.
 - He is the fairest of ten thousand, the lily of the valley.
 - He is the only one who can take away your heart forever and never leave you disappointed.
- b. And here He is as raised from the dead...for them, for us, for you.
- The eternal God made flesh crucified and raised again for our sake.
 - Yes, here is an atonement for sin of infinite worth.
 - Here is the one who went to the cross with all our sins laid on Him,
 - the infinite crushing weight of all of our sins pressing Him down to hell...
 - And because He is the infinite eternal God, He was able to bear them for us and be raised again for our justification.
 - His resurrection is God's acceptance of His offering for our sins.
 - And now He is alive forevermore, and He is coming for us at the end of the age.
 - He is coming to take us to live with Him forever.
 - He is coming to judge the world and to cast into the fire all of those who have refused to be reconciled to God through Him because of their deep, deep, hatred for God.
 - He will cast away Satan and all his minions into the darkness of hell.
 - But we will be with Him forever—to live in His house with the Father.
 - We will be delivered, as it says, **from the wrath to come...**
 - that infinite wrath that fell upon Him for our sake—that wrath that only He could take away.
 - We wait for Him to come and deliver us,
 - And then we shall behold the glory that He had with the Father from before the foundation of the world—as the only begotten of the Father.
 - That is what we are waiting for—for Him—and it makes all of our troubles in the world seem very small...
 - We can have joy in affliction, not because of the affliction, but because of the hope that we have in Jesus our blessed Redeemer.
 - How magnificent He truly is!

Conclusion: Yes brothers and sisters, we will become a model church when we come to love Him the way the Thessalonians did.

- That is what will turn our hearts from our worthless idols and our petty ways.

- That is what will make our witness strong in the world.
- I plead with you to plead with Him that it may be so.