

1 Thessalonians – Lesson 4

The Faith of the Thessalonians – Part 2

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

1. (a) What is the *next* evidence Paul cites that the Thessalonians were “*chosen*” by God (v. 6a)?

The *first* evidence that Paul cites as to his belief that the Thessalonians were elect by God is that they received the word with *conviction*, which brought change to their lives. The *second* evidence, then, is that the Thessalonians had become *imitators* of Paul and his team. The conviction in them, which led them to trust in Christ and put their lives under his authority, now leads them to imitate the lifestyle and thinking-patterns of the missionaries who had given them that conviction.

- (b) List some ways that the Thessalonians might have become “*imitators*” of the missionary team?

The Thessalonians, in observing the missionary team, may have imitated them in the following ways: 1) they would begin to *think* like them; the believers in Thessalonica would probably start to ask probing questions of the Scriptures that would lead to greater understanding of the person and work of Jesus (especially Jewish believers); 2) they would begin to *act* like them; the church would put away idolatrous behaviors (common in the city) and begin to consider a lifestyle similar to how Paul and the others lived amongst pagan peoples; and 3) they would begin to *speak* like them; the Thessalonians believers would probably begin to articulate to others around them (or continue to try and convince others) of the veracity of the gospel they had embraced, in much the same way that Paul and his team had done in coming into the city.

- (c) Compare v. 6a to 1 Corinthians 4:6-20. Why would Paul commend the Thessalonians to imitate *him*? What makes Paul and his team *worthy* of being imitated by others?

Paul considers himself a *father-figure* to the Corinthians, and probably also does to the Thessalonians (a common trait in a Jewish student-teacher milieu); he wants them to emulate him because he showed himself to be a worthy figure to imitate while he was with them. Paul believes that his behavior was *exemplary*, meaning that it was of such a stature that it was worthy to be imitated. The team acted as *Christians* while in the city: they preached the gospel, they avoided idolatries and paganisms, and they reflected the nature of having been born-again by the Spirit to all who observed them, both converted and unconverted. Additionally, Paul appeals to his *apostolic calling*, the authority that he had *directly from Christ Jesus* to demonstrate what a true Christian looks and acts like. He expected the Thessalonians (like the Corinthians) to see what it means to be a true follower of Jesus *and to act like it* (see 2a below). In other words, Paul was expecting the Thessalonian believers to *act like regenerate men*, something the team had done in the city.

2. (a) What does it mean to be an imitator “*of the Lord*” (v. 6a)?

To be an imitator of the Lord is to conform one’s life around the thinking and actions of the very Son of God during his earthly ministry. This would include such things as 1) acting from a regenerate nature (i.e., from the nature of a born-again heart, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, *as he was*), 2) recognizing good and evil around oneself (i.e., as Christ did in his interactions with others, calling out sin where it was seen without hesitation), and 3) being willing to “lay down one’s life” for the gospel (i.e., in utter obedience to the call of God, just as the Son did under obedience to the Father).

(b) From Romans 8:28-30, what does it mean to be “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son?” Why is this *predestined* for those who are foreknown by God?

The regenerate man is born-again by the Spirit of God so that his new nature of justification before God becomes a state of *sanctification* throughout his entire life. God has predestined (i.e., purposed within his divine decree) that all who are foreknown in election are called to Christ by faith, and that faith then *permeates* every aspect of their existence, such that they are *changed* by the Holy Spirit more and more into the very nature of Christ, who lived a human life in perfect conformity to the law of God (i.e., without sin). Conformity to Christ is to be made more and more holy throughout life, through the discipline of the Spirit through the means of the Word and ordinances of the church. This is *predestined* because God has determined, *in advance*, that his people should be made holy before him; his *goal* in saving a people from their sin is not just to bring them to “heaven,” but to make them *perfect* in his sight through a life of discipline and molding, an action only completed upon their glorification.

3. (a) What “afflictions” did the Thessalonians endure to receive the gospel (see Acts 17:1-9)? Speculate on how they would have *continued* after the missionary team was expelled from the city.

The afflictions of the Thessalonians included 1) hearing the gospel through the eyes of men *unable* to receive it (something corrected by the power of the Spirit within them), 2) embracing Jesus as their Messiah in the face of opposition from family, religious, and community members (i.e., other Jews rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and shunning those who saw him as such), and 3) outright persecution from the civil authorities for having embraced the message of Paul and his team, even after the team was expelled from the city. It is highly likely that the persecution of the new believers would have continued in being shunned by family members and rejected from synagogue worship. This persecution would have led to *doubts* in their hearts and minds about the truth of what they had come to believe, so Paul writes to help them hold their faith in the face of such opposition.

(b) Contrast these afflictions with the “joy of the Holy Spirit.” Define the term *joy* (see James 1:2).

Joy is the long-term recognition of *true value* in any given situation that gives us a strong assurance, even when our emotional state runs contrary to that assurance due to the inherent difficulties in our circumstances. Joy is to *see value* in whatever we are facing *no matter how we feel about it now*. The Thessalonians had experienced many afflictions, but they kept a strong assurance of the *long-term* promises that God had made to them in the gospel; they believed in the word that had come to them about Christ, and they continued to believe it was true even though they were suffering *in the present*. The Spirit of God had given them a great sense of “calm” in the face of opposition, and that emotional triumph held within them because they knew that something *greater* was planned for them than what they were experiencing in the moment.

4. (a) Locate the Roman province of *Achaia* on a map. List the *churches* that the missionary team established in both Macedonia and Achaia (see Acts 16-18). Which was the most *influential*?

The ancient Roman province of Achaia covered the bottom 1/3 of Greece, S of the province of Macedonia (which covered most of the W half of inland Greece extending all the way to the northern border) including the area around Athens and S over the Peloponnesus. Officially, it was a small territory at the top of the Peloponnesian peninsula, but had come to represent the larger area in biblical and contemporary writings at the time of Paul. In these two territories would be churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (in Macedonia), and the church at Corinth (in Achaia). No church is recorded as being established in Athens, or any others in the N of Macedonia (such as Amphipolis and Apollonia). Clearly the most *influential* church would be the one at Corinth; Paul spends a significant amount of time there and writes to other churches from that location. We also sense from his letters to the church at Corinth that he considered that church to be very significant throughout Greece, to the churches in Asia Minor, and even to the churches back in Judea (i.e., through the collection he was making for them).

(b) List the ways the Thessalonians were an “*example*” to the believers in these provinces (vv. 8-10)?

Paul indicates that the Thessalonians were an example 1) as the word of God “*sounded forth*” from them, probably indicating that they had become missionaries themselves, going throughout the region with the message and proclaiming it to others, and 2) in the way their trust in Christ had been made known, probably indicating that their reputation was holding fast to the faith *even in the face of persecution* (see 5a below).

5. (a) From v. 9, what kind of *reputation* did the church at Thessalonica have throughout the world?

Paul says that the reputation of the Thessalonians was seen throughout the world in the way the church received Paul and his team when they first arrived, how they had turned from idols to serve the living God, and how they were waiting for the Son of God to return. That information had “*gotten out*” to other churches in the area, and Paul commends them that their actions are so clearly visible *because of their faith in Christ*. In other words, their reputation demonstrated a strong faith, and Paul commended them for it.

(b) What two *specific* things does Paul say the Thessalonians did that confirmed their reputation as true followers of Jesus (vv. 9-10)? How would this fit the *cultural* realities of the city and the times?

The Thessalonians had 1) turned from idols to serve the living God; they had abandoned the pagan lifestyles and worship forms that were prevalent in the city, and had turned to worshiping the True God instead, and 2) were waiting for Jesus to return, patiently holding their trust in the promises of God until the day that Christ would return (see 6 below). Given that Thessalonica was a highly pagan city, filled with every imaginable form of idolatry and pagan philosophy, the ability of the new believers to stand against that “*tide*” would be impressive. The cultural “*pull*” to either *abandon* a belief in Jesus as the Son of God, or to create a new “*syncretism*” between their faith and the local pagan practices would be quite strong, but Paul commends them on standing firm against both.

6. From v. 10, what *eschatological* reality was at the heart of the Thessalonian faith? What does this imply about how *we* are to live our lives as followers of Christ?

The eschatological reality at the heart of the Thessalonian faith was the *imminent return of Jesus* into the world; they were holding fast to their faith because they expected Jesus to return *at any moment*, thus they wanted to be prepared to meet him when he arrived. The *expectation* of the return of Christ should compel *all* followers of Jesus to “*be ready*”; to be faithfully doing the work of Christian evangelism, apologetics, and mercy ministry in anticipation of the Lord’s return, working to establish his kingdom through the means he has provided for us in the power of the Spirit. This becomes the *central point* of this letter: Paul writes to *confirm* this eschatological reality for them so that they will continue to wait patiently and faithfully.