

# Characteristics of a Great Church

## I Thess 1:1-10

### PT 4

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup> remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, <sup>4</sup> knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup> so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

## Introduction

Why do evangelicals try so desperately to court the world's favor? Churches plan their worship services to cater to the "unchurched." Christian performers ape every worldly fad in music and entertainment. Preachers are terrified that the offense of the gospel might turn someone against them, so they deliberately omit the parts of the message the world might not approve of.

Evangelicalism seems to have been hijacked by legions of carnal spin-doctors, who are trying their best to convince the world that the church can be just as inclusive, pluralistic, and broad-minded as the most politically-correct worldling.

The quest for the world's approval is nothing less than spiritual harlotry. In fact, that is precisely the imagery the apostle James used to describe it. He wrote: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

There is and always has been a fundamental, irreconcilable incompatibility between the church and the world. Christian thought is out of harmony with all the world's philosophies. Genuine faith in Christ entails a denial of every worldly value. Biblical truth contradicts all the world's religions. Christianity itself is therefore antithetical to virtually everything this world admires.

Jesus told His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

Notice that our Lord considered it a given that the world would despise the church. Far from teaching His disciples to try to win

the world's favor by reinventing the gospel to suit worldly preferences, Jesus expressly warned that the quest for worldly accolades is a characteristic of false prophets: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

He further explained: "The world . . . hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil" (John 7:7). In other words, the world's contempt for Christianity stems from moral, not intellectual, motives: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). That is why no matter how dramatically worldly opinion might vary, Christian truth will never be popular with the world.

Yet in virtually every era of church history there have been people in the church who are convinced that the best way to win the world is by catering to worldly tastes. Such an approach has always been to the detriment of the gospel message. The only times the church has made any significant impact on the world are when the people of God have stood firm, refused to compromise, and boldly proclaimed the truth despite the world's hostility. When Christians have shrunk away from the task of confronting popular worldly delusions with unpopular biblical truths, the church has invariably lost influence and impotently blended into the world. Both Scripture and history attest to that fact.

And the Christian message simply *cannot* be twisted to conform to the vicissitudes of worldly opinion. Biblical truth is fixed and constant, not subject to change or adaptation. Worldly opinion, on the other hand, is in constant flux. The various fads and philosophies that dominate the world change radically and regularly from generation to generation. The only thing that remains constant is the world's hatred of Christ and His gospel.

In all likelihood, the world will not long embrace whatever ideology is in vogue this year. If the pattern of history is any indicator, by the time our great grandchildren become adults, worldly opinion will be dominated by a completely new system of belief and a whole different set of values. Tomorrow's generation will renounce all of today's fads and philosophies. But one thing will remain unchanged: until the Lord Himself returns and establishes His kingdom on earth, whatever ideology gains popularity in the world will be as hostile to biblical truth as all its predecessors have been.

Adapted from John MacArthur's book, *Why One Way?*

## **Outline**

**1. It was a saved church,**

**2. It was a Surrendered Church**

### **3. It was a Suffering Church**

### **4. It was a Soul Winning Church**

### **5. It was a Second Coming Church**

## **Review**

### **1. It was a Saved Church**

<sup>3</sup> remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, <sup>4</sup> knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

## **Lesson**

### **2. It was a Surrendered Church**

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> And you became followers of us and of the Lord,

**For** (because) (**hoti**)

**For** (**gar**) is a subordinating conjunction expressing cause or explanation and thus introduces an explanation. In simple terms **for** is a **term of explanation** and its occurrence should always prompt one to pause and ponder the text and context,

**W A Criswell** comments on this "**for**" - The word "**for**" introduces a clause that explains the way in which election works. However one understands this mysterious doctrine, the text makes clear its intimate relationship to the gospel of Christ, the preached word, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

2 Tim 2:8

<sup>8</sup> Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, *even* to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Paul introduces us to the reality that although God is sovereign in His election, He has chosen and indispensable means to the elect obtaining salvation

In other words, he ordains the end and the means to get there.

It is a sad but often sad conclusion that some make that if God has elected, then we can just sit this one out and let him do what He will.

This is Hypercalvinism and is as unbiblical as Arminianism or any other false interpretation of scripture.

“History teaches us that hyper-Calvinism is as much a threat to true Calvinism as Arminianism is. Virtually every revival of true Calvinism since the Puritan era has been hijacked, crippled, or

ultimately killed by hyper-Calvinist influences. Modern Calvinists would do well to be on guard against the influence of these deadly trends.”

Phil Johnson

## **The errors of hyper-Calvinism**

### **Charles Haddon Spurgeon pointed out four fundamental errors in hyper-Calvinism.**

**1. The hyper-Calvinist denies that gospel invitations are to be delivered to all people without exception.** He limits the purpose of gospel preaching to bringing in the elect, and so only the elect are to be addressed with the commands, invitations and offers of the Word. There is to be no pleading with, exhorting and beseeching of an entire congregation of sinners. That attitude was totally rejected by Spurgeon, who on many occasions addressed every single hearer thus: "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Look to him, blind eyes; look to him, dead souls; look to him. Say not that you cannot; he in whose power I speak will work a miracle while yet you hear the command, and blind eyes shall see, and dead hearts shall spring into eternal life by his Spirit's effectual working' (MTP, 40, 1894, p.502).

**2. The hyper-Calvinist declares that the warrant a sinner has to come to Jesus Christ is found in his own experience of conviction and assurance.** That warrant, the hyper says, cannot be obtained until we are inwardly spiritually exercised. But Spurgeon preached that all mankind has a warrant to believe extended to them, giving them the right to place their trust in the Lord Jesus. That warrant is the universal command found in the Word of God that all men should repent of their sins and should believe on the Lord Jesus. 'Do not wait for your feelings to convince you that you can venture on Christ,' urged Spurgeon, 'you have the right to come just as you are today because God is sincerely beseeching you to come to his Son for pardon.' In his 1863 sermon on the 'Warrant of Faith' Spurgeon tells people that if the warrant were not in the Word of God but in the sinner's own condition the result has to be that people would be driven to look within themselves and ask, 'Have I sufficiently broken my heart?' rather than looking to a welcoming Saviour (MTP, Vol.9, p.529ff). And that exactly is the case today. Spurgeon pointed out pertinently that those whose hearts are most broken feel most the obdurate hardness of their hearts.

### **3. The hyper-Calvinist declares that human inability means man cannot be urged to come at that moment to Christ.**

A universal command must presuppose a modicum of ability, he says. Spurgeon replied that he would not tone down man's depravity and helplessness one whit. The gospel is one of grace and therefore rests upon despair of human resources and potency. It is only on the presupposition of total depravity and complete human impotence that the full glory and power of the gospel can be declared. Spurgeon then would exalt God's power to save. There are two lines found in Scripture, one that declares man's helplessness through being dead in sin and yet that he is responsible to turn to God, and the other, that the Lord is sovereign to save. As John Duncan said, the idea that God did half and man did half is utterly false. God doing all and man also doing all is the teaching of the Bible.

### **4. The hyper-Calvinist denies the universal love of God He has a fearful caricature of the real nature of God which would present him as fierce, and not easily induced to love.**

If we fellowshipped more with Christ, said Iain Murray, we would know and love him more. Then there would be no uncertainty that God desired the salvation of sinners. 'How oft would I have gathered you,' says the Saviour to recalcitrant Jerusalem.

## **So Paul tells us of 6 things that God uses when he calls the elect to Himself**

- 1. The Content**
- 2. The Capacity**
- 3. The Comforter**
- 4. The Conviction**
- 5. The Character**
- 6. The Continuation**

*In addition to the outward general call to salvation (which is made to everyone who hears the Gospel), the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all*

*without distinction) can be -- and often is -- rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call, the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. He is not limited in His work of applying salvation by man's will, nor is He dependent upon man's cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended. This describes in a nutshell the doctrine of Irresistible Grace, or the Efficacious Call.*

**John 6:63** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. **64** “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. **65** And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.” (NASB)

The Spirit gives life.

**Ezekiel 36:25** “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. **26** “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** “And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (NASB)

The Spirit changes the heart.

**Ephesians 2:1** And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, **2** in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is

now working in the sons of disobedience. **3** Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), (NASB)

God makes you alive, you are not able on your own; the Holy Spirit changes your heart and makes you alive.

**John 1:12** But as many as received Him, to them **He gave the right to become children of God**, even to those who believe in His name, **13** who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, **but of God.** (NASB)

You were born of God, not of your own will. It says NOT of the will of man, but of God. God changes your heart.

**Titus 3:5** He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of **regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**, (NASB)

**1 Peter 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His **great mercy has caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (NASB)

**Romans 8:29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; **30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.** (NASB)

All people whom God foreknew will be glorified.

**John 6:37** **“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me,** and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. **38** “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. **39** “And this is the will of Him who sent Me,

that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (NASB)

**Galatians 1:15** But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, **and called me through His grace,** was pleased **16** to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, **2**

**Timothy 1:9** who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, (NASB)

**Revelation 17:14** "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." (NASB)

**1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (NASB)

**2 Peter 1:3** seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (NASB)

## **1. The Content**

\_\_\_\_ This is the Gospel Facts the information,

**Word only** - This signifies these words were not merely a declaration of men and not empty rhetoric. Such speech, however eloquent and moving, would be ineffective in evoking faith from the hearers. As Paul emphasized to the Corinthians

Paul adds later in the same epistle that the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. (1Co 4:20)

## 2.The Capacity

\_\_\_ This is the Power of God to bring to life

**Power**(1411) (**dunamis**) (Click in depth study of **dunamis**) refers to inherent power or power residing in something (in this case the spoken message) by virtue of its nature. **Dunamis** signifies that the words that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy spoke were not merely human words but were divinely energized. Paul reminded the Romans of this same truth writing that he was not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power (**dunamis**) of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Ro 1:16-

## 3. The Comforter

AND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

### **I Cor 2:1**

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the

testimony of God. <sup>2</sup> For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

## 4. The Conviction

**AND WITH FULL CONVICTION: kai (en) plerophoria polle:**  
 ([Col 2:2](#); [Heb 2:3](#); [6:11,18,19](#); [10:22](#); [2Pe 1:10,19](#))

**Other translations** - and in much certainty and assurance (Wuest), with great conviction and absolute certainty [on our part]. (Amp)

**Full conviction** - Two Greek words **pleophoria** + **pollus** = much. **Conviction** (4136) (assurance) (**plerophoria** from **pleres** = full+ **phero** = bear or carry) is literally "complete carrying" and here indicates entire confidence or full assurance, indicating that one has a stronger assurance than the sense conveyed by the word "certainty" by itself. There is not a consensus as to who the "full conviction" refers to.

**Plerophoria** - 4x in 4v in **NAS** - (not found in the Septuagint). [Colossians 2:2](#) that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the **full assurance** of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](#) for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with **full conviction**; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

[Hebrews 6:11](#) And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the **full assurance** of hope until the end, [Hebrews 10:22](#) let us draw near with a sincere heart in **full assurance** of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The excellent expositor **Hiebert** favors this as a reference to the **conviction** (full assurance) of the speakers, stating that Some interpreters insist the mentioned **assurance** must be taken to refer to the experience of the Thessalonians rather than the missionaries... No one questions that the Thessalonians had assurance concerning the Gospel they accepted; yet the **context** seems clearly to indicate that the primary reference is to the missionaries.

Now if **full conviction** refers to the missionaries, what were Paul, Silvanus and Timothy absolutely certain of? I agree with **Marvin Vincent** who says that there was an assured persuasion of the preacher that the message was divine.

**F F Bruce** on the other hand favors that the "**full conviction**" is that which the Holy Spirit produces in the receptive hearer and adds that specifically The reference is to the Thessalonians' deep inward persuasion of the truth of the gospel, a token of the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts,

## The CONVICTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### John 16:7

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. <sup>8</sup> And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: <sup>9</sup> of sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see

Me no more; <sup>11</sup> of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

## 5. The Character

### v. 5

as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

**You know** (1492) (**oida**) is in the **perfect tense** signifying the permanence of the Thessalonians' knowledge of the character and conduct of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. As noted earlier the verb **oida** intimates that this knowledge came not by revelation, nor by intuition, but from observation. Paul gives more detail on his character and conduct in the next chapter (1Th 2:3-12)

**Constable** notes that...

Persons in both the religious and philosophical communities of the first century felt that the only teachers worth a moment's attention were those who taught with their lives as well as with their words. (**Notes**)

When the gospel was brought to the Thessalonians who had never heard it before, it was vital that they see Christianity in action. Where better to witness it, then in the conduct of those who brought it? Does the conduct of your life match the testimony of your lips to those around you who need to not only hear the good news but also to see it lived out in real life?

As Auberlen remarks, "**The whole man preached.**", The messengers' characters provided no occasion to cast doubt on the message they delivered

You are writing a Gospel,  
 A chapter each day,  
 By the deeds that you do  
 And the words that you say.

Men read what you write,  
 Whether faithful or true:  
 Just what is the Gospel  
 According to you?

--- Author unknown

**MacArthur** sums this verse up nicely commenting that...

The quality of the message was confirmed by the character of the lives of the preachers. Paul's exemplary life served as an open book for all men to read, establishing the credibility of the power and grace of God essential to making the message of redemption believable to sinners. (MacArthur, J. J. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. Nashville: Word Pub)

## 6. The Continuation

<sup>6</sup> And you became followers of us and of the Lord,

followers

**Imitators** (3402) (**mimetes**) means one who follows. **Mimetes** basically means to copy or imitate someone's behavior and has many related words in English - "*mime*" (one who acts out an imitation of another person

or animal), "pantomime" (a theater production which originally was without words), "mimeograph" (a machine which makes many copies from one stencil).

**Webster** says that to imitate means to follow as a pattern, model, or example; to be or appear like. The **1828 Websters** even says in the definition of imitate that...

We should seek the best models to imitate, and in morals and piety, it is our duty to imitate the example of our Savior.

Writing to the saints at **Corinth** Paul said...

I exhort you therefore, be **imitators** of me. ([1Cor 4:16](#))

**Be** (present imperative) **imitators** of me, just as I also am of Christ. ([1Cor 11:1](#))

Similarly Paul commanded the predominantly Gentile believers in **Ephesus** to...

**Be** (present imperative) **imitators** of God, as beloved children ([Ephesians 5:1-note](#))

The writer of **Hebrews** exhorted his predominantly Jewish audience...

that you may not be sluggish, but **imitators** of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises

### **Phil 3:17**

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern

2 Thess 3:6

<sup>6</sup> But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received

from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, <sup>9</sup> not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

.As an African chief once said:

A good example is the tallest kind of preaching.

**Jonathan Edwards** was so concerned about the **example** which he set which others might imitate, that he framed the resolve to never to do anything which I would be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

Here is a secular quote that has more truth in it than we would like to believe (think of "spiritual children")...

Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them. They must, they have no other models. (James Baldwin)

**Charles Spurgeon** once said that...

A Christian should be a striking likeness of Jesus Christ...We should be pictures of Christ....Oh! My brethren, there is nothing that can so advantage you, nothing can so prosper you, so assist you, so make you walk towards heaven rapidly, so keep your head upwards towards the sky, and your eyes radiant with glory, like the **imitation** of Jesus Christ.

The Thessalonians became imitators **of us and of the Lord**

**Hiebert** explains that

The order may at first strike us as startling, but it is the logical order. It is the natural order in the experience of converts on a new mission field. Even before the message of a missionary is fully understood or personally accepted, the hearers will observe the outworking of that message in the life of the missionary. And when the Spirit leads them to a personal acceptance of the message, the new converts naturally look to the missionary to learn how to live the Christian life. To reflect their message in their own lives is part of the work of missionaries." (Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians)

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to

Be imitators of me (pattern yourselves after me), just as I also am of Christ." (1Cor 11:1)