Grace Fellowship Church Series on 1 Thessalonians Dr. Rick Griffith

October 19, 1986 Message 2 of 10

NIV 30 Minutes

**A Church Worth Mimicking**

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

**Topic:** Church

**Subject:** What kind of church priorities are commendable to God?

**Complement:** faith, love, godly example, evangelistic (lays aside all encumbrances to share the gospel), endures in hope

**Purpose:** The listeners will commit themselves to pay a price for our church to succeed.

# Introduction

### Chuck Swindoll writes… (Read Swindoll's *Second Wind: A Fresh Run at Life*, 75-76). [Gimpers are really great, but very rare.]

### Knowing who these great gimpers are in the world of sports, politics, and the arts is nice, but it won't help us too much where we're at right now. We're a brand new spankin' baby church, just off the umbilical cord and out into the real world of ministry to real people with real needs. What we need to know how to be is a gimper church!

### The only problem is this: What does the gimper church look like? How can we know what kind of church priorities are commendable to God? One good way to discern what God wants in a body of believers is to see the reasons He commended certain churches in the New Testament.

### One of the churches which received a very positive report ministered in the city of Thessalonica. Let's take a look this morning at some admirable traits which the Apostle Paul commended in the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

# I. Paul greets the Thessalonian church (1:1).

**[He begins his letter with the customary salutation.]**

## Paul was the author (1:1a).

### The first century practice was a common sense way of addressing letters with the writer's name right up front. Here we see that the Apostle Paul wrote the letter.

#### It was a common practice in the first century among Jews in the first century to give their babies 2 names. If you think that's strange we give every baby in America 3 names (and Susan and I are still are working on this project now with only 12 more weeks to go!).

##### "Saul" was the apostle's Jewish name which he used until shortly after becoming a Christian. It means "asked for."

##### "Paul" was the apostle's Roman name which literally means "little." He began using this Gentile name after he started his ministry to the Gentiles.

#### What was this man Paul like? One (non-inspired) first century writer described Paul as "a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked."

### Paul founded the church at Thessalonica with Silas and Timothy.

#### Silas (whose Roman name was Silvanus) was Paul's primary associate on the second missionary journey and Timothy was a young man who had come to Christ along the way and joined the two men.

#### Silas and Timothy had been separated from the apostle for a short time following up on the churches in the province of Macedonia, then joined Paul in Corinth probably less than a year after the Thessalonian church had been established.

#### Ryrie states that Paul mentions Timothy and Silas not necessarily as co-authors but as a matter of courtesy since they were with Paul during the mission in Thessalonica.

(Let's take a quick look now at those who received the letter from these men…)

## The church of the Thessalonians were the recipients (1:1b).

### Thessalonica had a small but thriving church about 200 miles north of Corinth, where Paul was writing this letter. It was a large, commercial center at the crossroads of both land and sea trade routes.

### "Church" means "called out ones," a group of people called out of the mass of humanity to be separated for service to God.

(After identifying himself and the church, Paul gives his customary greeting…)

## Paul greets the church by requesting that God's grace lead to their peace (1:1c).

### Some manuscripts include the phrase "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," as is found in the NASB and KJV.

### However, I want to focus our attention on the two words "grace" and "peace."

#### "Grace" was the common Greek salutation meaning "greetings" or "rejoice."

#### "Peace" in Greek is a translation of the Hebrew word "shalom" and has the idea of favor, prosperity and well-being.

#### The words always appear in this order. Why? God's grace is the basis for and leads to man's peace.

(So Paul has given us a brief introduction in his letter and is ready to get to his first point. Remember that he had some deep concerns about the church and decided to write the church about these concerns. However, he didn't let negativism control him but started off with some very positive statements. I think for us it’s all too easy to start off negatively in our own letters, but not so with Paul. In the rest of the entire first chapter of his letter…)

# II. Paul commends the Thessalonian church for its witness for Christ (1:2-10).

**[The church founder applauds them for their outreach by persevering under persecution.]**

## Paul first thanks God for the church for three qualities which summarized their witness (1:2-3).

### Their **faith** produced obvious results (1:3a).

[Good works flowed from their faith in Christ.]

#### Nearly all religions teach that salvation comes from works, so we as Christians get very zealous about any hint that we're saved by our deeds. I think we should protect this simplicity of faith in Christ, but it's also easy to completely separate works from the picture -- even to the extent where we teach that although works are not necessary **for** salvation we don't even see any place for works **after** salvation.

#### The churches receiving the epistle of James had this problem of not seeing the importance that good works should play in their Christian lives. That's why James told them in James 2 that "faith without works is dead," in other words, if you're really a Christian then demonstrate it by what you do.

#### The Thessalonians didn't have this problem. According to verse 9 their belief in Christ resulted in turning from idols to the one, true God.

#### Think back in your own life to what you were like before you became a Christian. Is there an appreciable difference?

##### Do you respond to people at work kindlier?

##### Has your faith in Christ demonstrated itself at home where your family members now know they are your highest priorities next to God?

### Their **love** produced hard work (1:3b).

[Their unconditional commitment resulted in active toiling for Christ.]

#### It often gets convicting when we take serious inventory not only of **what** we do for God, but **why** we do it. The Thessalonian church worked diligently out of love for Christ.

#### The word used here for "labor" means work or toil to the point of intense hardship, trouble or difficulty. Paul uses the same word in chapter, verse 9, in reference to his own work while in Thessalonica where he says… [1 Thess 2:9.]

#### The point here, though, is not just that the church worked their hearts out, but that they did it out of the proper motive: love for Christ.

#### We all have heard of and seen people leave ministries in the church for the silliest reasons. "Oh, no-one appreciates me" or "They won't let me run the ship my way" or you name it.

#### When we are willing to bail out of service for Christ without legitimate reasons (and there are good reasons to step down sometime) we say a lot about our true motives in ministry.

#### The Thessalonians weren't like that, though. They worked hard and got their hands dirty out of pure devotion and love for Christ (ILL: HCJB Story on card "CHURCH PLANTING: accomplished by a new believer")

#### I'm convinced that Grace Fellowship Church has this trait in common with the Thessalonians. Ever since Susan and I joined with you all our first Sunday seven weeks ago we have sensed that you all want to work hard and for the right motives (3 services, hymnals, pulpit made, Sunday dinners, etc.).

### Their **hope** produced endurance (1:3c).

[They persevered under severe persecution due to their confidence in Christ.]

#### The endurance spoken of here refers to "bearing up patiently under a heavy load."

#### And they sure had a heavy load! The Jews were so antagonistic against the gospel that they persecuted Paul and his friends even forty miles away in Berea, then when they got back to Thessalonica they turned their attention towards the Christians there! They even rounded up Gentile persecutors.

#### What kept the church above water when the floods of persecution came? Hope. This hope is further elaborated upon in verse 11 where it states that they waited in eager anticipation for the Lord's return. We'll deal with this in a few minutes.

(So there's a brief look at verses 2-3 which give a summary statement of the healthy spiritual state of the Thessalonian church. You may not have noticed but we just looked at a faith, hope, love trilogy. They exercised saving faith in the past when they received the gospel, they showed love for Christ in the present which demonstrated itself in hard work, and they had hope for Christ's return in the future which enabled them to persevere in intense trials. Paul continues reflecting upon the church in the next two verses…)

## Paul reflects upon how the church responded to the gospel because of God's choosing them and because of the apostles' example (1:4-5).

### They responded to the gospel because God's love for them led to their election (1:4).

#### Notice that the text says that God chose them, not that they chose God. The KJV is a bit misleading here because it says, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your choice of God." A better translation would be, "God's choice of you" (NASB).

#### Many Christians get uncomfortable when they come across verses like this which teach that God elected some people to eternal life. I've seen people shake their fists at God because God has not chosen everyone for salvation.

#### I think the answer to this dilemma is twofold.

##### First, the Bible doesn't **only** teach predestination, but teaches free will too.

##### Secondly, the question shouldn't be, "Why has God saved only some?" but it should be, "Why has God saved any at all?" Have **you** deserved God's grace so that you can know Him personally? Neither have I.

#### Sometimes it's claimed that no-one can ever really know whether or not he or someone else is elect, but Paul claims that very knowledge here (ILL: John and I painting the Sheffield's).

(The church didn't respond to the gospel only because they were chosen by God. There's a human element also…)

### The church responded to the gospel because Paul and his fellow-workers set a Godly example for the church (1:5). He shared both the gospel and his own life.

#### He shared the gospel with simplicity (power) and with the empowering of the Spirit, which resulted in the confidence (conviction) which the Spirit brought upon the hearers.

#### He shared his life so that the church had a visible, tangible example of how to live (but I'll discuss more about this in next week's message in chapter 2).

(So far in this passage we've seen in verses 2-3 a summary statement of three qualities of love, faith and hope which characterized the church and then in verses 4-5 some words on how the church responded to the gospel because God chose them and the apostles shared with them. In the remaining verses Paul gives us four more characteristics of the church. As we look at these traits let's evaluate our own body here at Grace to see how we measure up…)

## Paul commends the church for four more specific ways they served Christ (1:6-10).

[He praises them in four specific areas of genuine service.]

### The church modeled the gospel before other Christians (1:6-7).

#### The church modeled the gospel by imitating its leaders and Christ (1:6).

##### The word for "imitators" here in the Greek is *mimetai*. Sound familiar?

##### That's right -- we get the English "mimicker" from this word (Demonstrate the mimic game with someone in the congregation.)

##### Paul's point is that the church picked up his lifestyle. When I consider the fact that as your pastor you will be picking up my lifestyle it's a very sobering thought because it means that where I am weak to some extent this church will be weak. This is why I desperately need your prayers that I might be strong in the Lord!

##### Our ultimate example to imitate, of course, is Christ and that's why Paul said, "You became imitators of us **and the Lord**." Let's imitate Him first and we'll never go wrong!

#### The church modeled the gospel even to believers in other provinces (1:7).

##### The Thessalonians had encouraged other believers throughout two entire Roman provinces, Macedonia and Achaia.

##### These two provinces make up the entire modern day country of Greece, a country of over 50,000 square miles. That's the size of our states of Mississippi, Louisiana or New York.

##### Imagine other believers hearing about Grace Fellowship Church in a distance this large!

(But **how** did they model the gospel to other Christians? The Thessalonians had shared the gospel far and wide…)

### The church proclaimed the gospel even farther to non-Christians (1:8a).

#### This area is even larger than the area covered in verse 7, all exposed to the message of Christ by a church less than one year old!

#### What would this look like in terms we can relate to in our own geographical area? In our part of Texas this would be equivalent to reaching people for Christ in areas stretching 200 miles beyond us in each direction!

##### To the west that's half-way to Abilene.

##### To the south that's beyond Waco.

##### To the east that's almost to Tyler.

##### To the north that's half the distance to Oklahoma City!

#### The word for "rang out" here has the idea of reverberating, like a cymbal.

(Now you're probably asking, "How in the world did they have such a widespread ministry?" [Or at least you should be asking this question.] I think it's largely because they really left behind the old lifestyle as non-believers. The third characteristic Paul commended in verses 6-10 is that…)

### The church left the old life behind to turn to Christ (1:8b-9).

#### Other people told Paul how the Thessalonians had abandoned dead and false idols for a living and true God.

#### Sounds like a good exchange, doesn't it? Yet I wonder how many dead idols we may be grasping here which hinders our effectiveness for Christ.

##### A new home can be a dead idol (Mark and Elaine).

##### Any other encumbrance which deadens us to God's Spirit can be an idol or an unworthy object of our time which trips us up in sharing Christ as a way of life (Ron Jensen's commitment not to play racquetball).

##### What is it that keeps you from sharing Christ as a way of life? Fear? Lack of training? Come tonight and find some solutions!

(So the church was an example to Christians, they shared the gospel with non-Christians, and they accomplished these things because they laid aside encumbrances to serve the true God. There's one last positive characteristic I find worth mimicking in this Thessalonian church…)

### The church looked forward to Christ's return (1:10).

#### This chapter, like every other chapter in this epistle, closes with a reference to the return of Jesus Christ. This was no insignificant doctrine to Paul, so it shouldn't be to us either!

#### Notice that they were waiting for Jesus to come back from heaven, obviously meaning that they fully expected Him to return anytime. Here you see a good support for the fact that Christ's coming is imminent, it may happen at any time. That means Christians will be spared from the Great Tribulation.

#### Notice also that the next phrase indicates that the church fully expected to be delivered from "the coming wrath." This wrath of God will be demonstrated at many times, including the Great Tribulation Period, the Great White Throne Judgment, and eternal hell.

#### The Thessalonian church didn't forget that God had rescued them from an awful peril because they eagerly awaited His return. This gave them hope for the future.

#### Paul's conclusion to his first chapter here is a fitting conclusion for us, too. We need to remind each other more often of the Lord's soon return. The first century church did this often as is seen in their greeting, "Maranatha!" Maybe we need to use this greeting more to stimulate one another to remember that we are only aliens on this earth, just passing through and waiting for our Savior to return anytime to take us to our permanent home!

# Conclusion

### This morning we've observed a church worth mimicking, the church at Thessalonica. Why is this the type of church we want to imitate?

#### It demonstrated its faith in Christ through observable behavior (1:3a).

#### The motive for the church's hard work was love (1:3b).

#### The body of believers imitated its leaders' godliness (1:6).

#### This new church set an example for churches for hundreds of miles around (1:7).

#### It even farther than this (1:8).

#### It laid aside all encumbrances which would trip it up in its evangelistic purpose (1:9).

#### It's endurance during persecution came from the hope or assurance that Christ would soon return to deliver them from the trials of this life (1:3c, 10).

### In nearly every respect, the Thessalonian church was a gimper church!

### We can be this kind of gimper church, also -- if we're willing to pay the price in this newly planted church. The dividends are eternal investments in the lives of people. As one church planter said so appropriately,

"If you want something to last a season,

plant a flower.

If you want something to last a lifetime,

plant a tree.

If you want something to last an eternity,

plant a church."

### Will you join with us with a whole heart to be a light for eternity in northwest Fort Worth?

### Prayer.

**Preliminary Questions**

**Verses Questions**

Context What did the author record just prior to this passage?

Purpose Why is this passage in the Bible?

Background What historical context helps us understand this passage?

1

**Tentative Subject/Complement Statements**

Text

**Possible Illustrations**

Text

**Title**

***Passage***

**Exegetical Outline**

***Exegetical Idea:***

# I.

# II.

# III.

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Subject:

# I.

# II.

# III.

# Conclusion

### (M.I.).



**Rick Griffith**

1986

Message 2 of 10

**Title**

***Passage***

# Introduction

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# I. MP has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

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# Conclusion

### Main Idea has a blank for the key word \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ answer (verses).

### Application question

**Thought Questions**

1. Read the passage aloud. Contrast:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issue** | **Contrast** |
| Text | Text |
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1. Text-based question

Text

Text

Text

Text

1. Application to your own Christian experience

Text

Text

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