

# A Study of 1 Thessalonians



In the previous lesson we heard Paul's opening words to the church at Thessalonica. He was not able to stay there long in person, but was able to write to address the needs and concerns of the church.

Paul assured these brothers and sisters of his love and God's love. He remarked that they were "chosen" by God. They were chosen as they responded to the gospel. Paul prayed for these young Christians individually and daily.

He continues his commendation of the Thessalonians in verses 6-10 of 1 Thessalonians 1.

## **Imitating the Lord and the Lord's Servants**

Paul writes that the Thessalonian Christians became imitators of the one's who proclaimed the gospel and of the Lord himself.

This word translated as "imitator" in the ESV and NIV, or "follower" in the KJV, is most literally translated as "mimic." Mimic the Lord. Reproduce his character as best you can.



- 1. Why do children imitate or mimic their parents?**
- 2. Paul said these Christians imitated "us" and the Lord. Is it right to imitate another person?**
- 3. How is the reception of the gospel on the part of the Thessalonians described in verse 6?**

Christians have been persecuted throughout the centuries and continue to face persecution today in many parts of the world. The Thessalonian Christians suffered greatly for Christ from both Jews and local pagans; yet they accepted him, served him, and imitated him.

The joy of the Holy Spirit filled their lives because they loved God, imitated Christ, and lived in the hope that God provides. Joy can be experienced even in the face of

persecution. It is not the same as happiness, but comes from the presence of God's Holy Spirit who provides peace in the midst of life's storms. While happiness is centred in one's circumstances, joy is centred in one's position (with God.)

## **The Imitators Become Examples**

Because the Thessalonians imitated the Lord they became a model to others or a pattern to follow. This is a noteworthy compliment to say the least.

4. Who do people in our world try to model?
5. What are some of the traits of people you have found to be your Christian examples?
6. Is it possible to be a true Christian example without being an imitator of the Lord? Why or why not?

We are not left to wonder what the Thessalonians possessed that made them good examples or a pattern to follow. There are four distinct characterizations of them in this passage.

1. **The Thessalonian Christians welcomed the message with joy.** This word welcome is the one usually used for the reception of a guest, and it includes the thought of giving a welcome.
2. **The Thessalonian Christians were evangelistic.** The Lord's message sounded forth from them.

The word translated "sounded forth" in the ESV or "rang out" in the NIV means to sound off, like with a trumpet, or to shout till there is reverberation.

Thessalonica was in a strategic location on the Egnatian Way, and it had an excellent sea harbour. It was in a place that made for easy travel. The Thessalonian Christians were effective witnesses and proclaimers of the gospel.

The evangelistic efforts sounded forth in Macedonia (the region where Thessalonica was the capital) and Achaia (southern Greece with Corinth as its capital). Their faith was also known in more distant lands. They were faithful missionaries.



6. Why did people in Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond know about the Thessalonian Christians? What lessons can the church today learn from their example?

3. The Thessalonian Christians had a changed lifestyle.

Verse 9 tells us that they turned from idols to God to serve the living and true God. The change in the life of the Thessalonians would have been very apparent. They were in a polytheistic society. In government, religion, business, amusement, labour, and every facet of daily life their existence was based on the belief that there were many gods. What a radical change they would have to make.

7. The Thessalonian Christians had a radically changed lifestyle from their past. Do people in our culture require as radical of a change? How would that change look?

4. The Thessalonian Christians were filled with hope.

According to verse 10, they waited for the return of Christ. They knew he was in heaven, they knew he was the risen Lord, and they knew he was the one who provided deliverance from eternal wrath. This is the message of the gospel: a) a risen Lord, b) a returning Lord, c) a delivering Lord, d) a Lord who will judge the world.

The waiting for the Christian is a constant vigil, not knowing when Jesus will come, but living in eager expectation of that coming. The word translated “wait” in verse 10 means a sustained expectation. This type of waiting is not an unproductive effortless time expending exercise, but rather an active, growing, serving, evangelistic period of loving God while waiting for the return of Christ.

8. Describe how a proper understanding of being delivered from eternal wrath should impact Christians.
9. After looking at the description of the Thessalonian Christians in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10 how do they compare with the churches of which you are familiar? What do we need to do to better follow their example and the example of Christ?