**1 Thessalonians 1:7-10**

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**Do Others Speak Well of You?**

***7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.***

* In the past several weeks we have been examining the apostle Paul’s opening chapter of his first letter to the church of the Thessalonians . . . a faithful church that had come under severe persecution and for whom Paul was very concerned.
* As I mentioned several weeks ago, Paul’s personal affection for this church is obvious. Besides his letter to the Philippian church, Paul addressed no other church with as much affection as he did the Thessalonians.
* Last week we saw, in our study of v. 4-6, that Paul commends the Thessalonians because they had become ***imitators of* he, Silas and Timothy *and of the Lord***.
  + And despite the fact that they had come under severe persecution from the Jews and the pagan Greeks, the Thessalonians demonstrated great ***joy*** in the midst of their ***tribulation*** because they truly knew that Jesus Christ is the object of the Christian’s ***joy***, not our worldly circumstances.

**The students had become teachers**

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***7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.***

* Now, as we continue in v. 7 we see **the result of their** **joy in the midst of persecution . . . they, themselves, had become *an example* for others to imitate. The students had become teachers.**
* In v. 6, when Paul says that ***you became imitators of us and of the Lord***, the verb ***became*** is used in the passive voice, meaning that **a power outside of themselves had caused them to *become imitators of the missionaries and of the Lord****.*
  + The external power that had caused them to ***become imitators*** was the Holy Spirit.
* Now, here in v. 7 we see that same verb used as Paul states that ***you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia***.
  + But here in v. 7 the verb ***became*** is used differently. Instead of being used in the passive voice, Paul uses it in the **middle voice**.
  + Grammatically, the **middle voice indicates action that is self-initiated upon oneself.**
  + In other words, by his use of the middle voice here in v. 7, Paul is, in effect, saying . . . **“you have caused yourselves to become examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.**
* The word ***example*** that Paul uses here in v. 7 is interesting. The Greek word is *tupon* and is used to describe how a die is used to imprint an image on a piece of metal when it is struck.

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* + For example, when a die of the image of George Washington is pressed upon a blank piece of silver, the resulting image turns the blank silver round into a quarter.
  + In the same way, when a sinful descendant of Adam is pressed upon by the Holy Spirit, the image that begins to appear is that of Jesus Christ.
  + And, in turn, Paul states here in v. 7 that the by their demonstration of great faith, the Thessalonian believers were being used by God to press the image of abiding faith upon those who heard of their perseverance with joy in the midst of their suffering.
* Here in his statements in v. 6 & 7 Paul is teaching us an important truth regarding the result of receiving faith.
  + As Paul says in v. 6, the Holy Spirit works in every person who is saved, causing us to ***become imitators*** of the Lord, through faith.
  + But after we have been saved, we learn what it means to be followers and imitators of Jesus Christ and we begin to act accordingly. In effect, by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, we choose to follow the leading of the Spirit and we cause ourselves to ***become examples*** for others to see and be like.
  + By the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us we ***become examples*** of what a transformed life looks like.
* And for the Thessalonians, word of their faith and of their joy in the midst of persecution had a far-ranging impact on the early church. Here in v. 7 Paul states that word of their faith and their ***example*** had reached ***all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia***.
  + The city of Thessalonica was in the region of Macedonia, which was the northern part of ancient Greece. But it is significant to note that word of their perseverance had even reached the Christians in Achaia . . . the southern part of Greece.
  + So, despite being in the far northern portion of Greece, word of the Thessalonians and their faith had reached into southern Greece.
* But, as Paul next points out, in v. 8, word of the Thessalonians had gone out even further . . . ***For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth.***
  + Amazingly, word of the faith of the Thessalonians had extended beyond Greece and into the far reaches of the Mediterranean.
  + While Paul’s statement that word of their faith toward God had reached ***every place***, we should consider his words hyperbolic. For the sake of emphasis and encouragement, Paul is exaggerating . . . but probably not by very much.

**How and why was the testimony of the Thessalonians having such a far-reaching impact?**

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* We might ask **“how and why was the testimony of the Thessalonians having such a far-reaching impact?”**
* First, regarding the **“how,”** we must remember that the city of Thessalonica was a very important city in the Roman Empire.
  + Having a large seaport made it an important center of commerce and trade. In addition, Thessalonica was a major city along the Egnatian Way . . . the Roman road that linked Rome to Constantinople.

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* + The Apian Way was the Italian part of the Roman road that ran from Rome to the southeastern coast of Italy. The Egnatian Way began on the west coast of Greece and ran all the way to Constantinople, 695 miles to the east. The Egnatian Way was the most important road in the Roman Empire.
  + In a time when even the best roads were nothing more than trails of dirt and mud, the Romans paved the Apian Way and the Egnatian Way with cobblestones. **The Egnatian Way was a paved road, 20 feet wide and 695 miles long.** **It was the “superhighway” of the ancient world**.

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* So, by its location as a major seaport and major city along the most important road in the Roman Empire, Thessalonica was a very important and influential city. Thousands of travelers made their way through Thessalonica every day, by road and by sea.
* From what we can discern from New Testament accounts, it appears that the persecution of the Thessalonian Christians was significant enough that it gained the attention of a great many people in Thessalonica.
  + Even those who were not directly involved in the events surrounding the Christians would have been interested to hear of group of non-Jews who had renounced Zeus, Hermes, Artemis, Apollo and the other pagan gods.
  + With the accusation that they were traitors for worshipping their King, Jesus, instead of the Roman Emperor, they surely would have incited curiosity and gossip among non-Christians.
  + And with their testimony of joy, while under affliction, any Christian visitors to Thessalonica would have surely rejoiced and carried the news of the great faith of the brethren abroad.
  + So, by virtue of their location in a significant commercial and geographical city, the witness of the Thessalonian church would have been noticed and spoken of as word spread.
  + D. Edmund Hiebert also makes an interesting observation concerning the impact the faith of Thessalonians had upon those who saw what they were enduring. Hiebert states that *“the spread of the gospel from Thessalonica was the result of vital Christian living rather than aggressive missionary propaganda.”*

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* + - In other words, it was not their words that testified to their great faith, but their actions.
* Regarding the question of **“why their actions had such a far-reaching impact,”** we should truly marvel at God’s sovereign plan. While God gave the Thessalonians the grace necessary to remain joyful in the midst of great persecution, **God also gave this faithful church a location in which their demonstration of great faith would receive significant attention**.
  + In just a few years after this letter was written God would see fit to have Paul under house arrest in Rome for 2 years on trumped-up charges by the Jews. But it was while he was under house arrest and continuously chained to a Roman soldier that some of the soldiers would hear and believe the gospel and take it with them and spread it throughout the Roman empire.
  + What God did through the evangelism of the Roman army through Paul was many times greater than Paul could have ever done on his own.
  + Here, in the suffering of the Thessalonians, God took what was evil and used it to accomplish so much good.
* In fact, word of what the Thessalonians were suffering and enduring for the name of Christ had begun to reach Paul even before Silas and Timothy had found him in Corinth. In the final phrase of v. 8 we read . . . ***so that we have no need to say anything***.

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* + With this phrase, Paul is saying that **unsolicited word was reaching Paul regarding the Thessalonian church.**
    - In other words, Paul was encountering Christians, while in Corinth, who were bringing him word of what was happening in Thessalonica and how the Christians there were standing firm in their faith.

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**Two specific subjects Paul had received word concerning**

***9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God***

* There were two specific areas that Paul had received word . . . ***For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God***.
* As I have already pointed out, Paul and his companions were being maliciously slandered and falsely accused by Paul’s enemies of seeking financial gain from the unwitting Thessalonians.
  + Now, here in v. 9 Paul cites the fact that in the unsolicited reports he has received concerning the Thessalonians, ***they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you***.
  + Here in v. 9 the pronoun ***they*** refers to those who were bringing these reports to Paul.
  + And in his statement regarding ***what kind of a reception we had with you***, the term ***reception*** does not truly convey the meaning of the Greek term *eisodos*. The Greek term has the connotation of **not only the initial greeting** given to Paul, Silas and Timothy, **but the fact that the Thessalonians extended both their friendship and their hearts**.
    - In other words, the Thessalonians fully embraced the party of missionaries as they brought them the gospel message.
    - Far from having to deceive and weasel their way into the hearts of the Thessalonians, the Thessalonians, themselves, were the ones who drew the missionaries into close personal fellowship.
* The purpose of this first statement in v. 9 is to reassure the Thessalonians that although Paul, Silas and Timothy were being false accused by their enemies, the word that was reaching Paul’s ears was the truth . . . that Paul and his faithful companions were being truthfully reported as having been nothing but an encouragement and a blessing to the Thessalonians.
* In the second part of v. 9 Paul relays the portion of the reports he had received that were **of even greater importance . . . *how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God***.

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* + With this exemplary report could can almost feel the joy in Paul’s words as he relays the word he has received concerning their abiding faith.
  + As Adam Clarke states in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, *“the Thessalonians were walking so conscientiously before God and man that their friends could speak of them without a blush, and their adversaries could say nothing to their disgrace.”*
* It is important, as we examine this second part of v. 9, to see the significance of Paul’s statement.
  + Note the order of events in the phrase . . . ***you turned to God from idols***. The importance of this phrase is that the Thessalonians **did not first turn away from idols**.
  + While some of the God-fearing Greeks and Jews left the synagogue to follow Paul, the language of Paul’s statement here indicates that **most of the new converts were happily ensconced in their pagan religion**.
  + But they did not abandon their pagan idols for no reason. The reason the former pagans turned away from their idols is because they **first *turned to God***.
  + The Greek word for ***turned*** is synonymous with the English word ***converted*** and means “to reverse course.” And the reason the Thessalonian pagans “reversed the course of their lives” . . . away from paganism . . . was because they chose to **reverse course and follow God**.
  + In first choosing to **turn to God**, the result was their turning away from paganism.
  + The course of your life is likened to being on a road. As unbelievers we are, without knowing it, on the road whose destination is destruction and death. But when we are called by the Holy Spirit, He causes us to stop and travel in the opposite direction . . . away from death and destruction and toward God, which leads to eternal life.
* Then, notice the final phrase of v. 9, concerning their conversion . . . ***you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God***.

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* + Here in this statement Paul points to the present duty and aim that should be the goal of every Christian . . . **service to God**.
  + Here in v. 9 Paul uses a word that is familiar to many of us. It is the Greek word *douleuō*, which is the verb form of the word *doulos*, meaning “a slave” or “bond-servant.”
  + Here in v. 9, in the phrase ***to serve a living and true God***, Paul uses the present tense verb form of ***slave*** to indicate the **continual service that every Christian renders to God, as a result of receiving faith.**
  + The significance of Paul’s statement here is that **the result of becoming a Christian is that every member of the family of God becomes a willing and joyful servant of God**.

**What is freedom?**

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* Most people . . . especially Americans, who are consumed with the idea of personal freedom and “free will” . . . believe that “freedom” means to be without a master and to do as you want.
  + But, in fact, **true freedom consists not in the freedom from a master, but the ability to choose one’s Master.**
  + **True freedom is not the ability to do as you want, but in the ability to do as you ought.**
  + And the only person who is truly free . . . the only person who is free to do as he or she ought . . . is the person who has the ability to obey God and keep His commandments.
* Paul’s statement here in v. 9 a philosophy of life that was a totally foreign concept to the pagan Greeks.
  + The idea of serving a living and true God by a life of voluntary obedience to His will was a complete departure from anything they knew. The idea of serving God was something they had never heard of.
  + Even in their pagan Greek and Roman religions, the gods they worshipped were to be feared and avoided. Because their pagan gods were capricious and often malevolent, the last thing a pagan wanted was for one of their gods to take notice of them. This only invited trouble.

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**The difference between the True God and pagan gods**

* And finally, in v. 9 Paul defines the difference between the God the Thessalonians now worshipped and their former pagan gods.
  + **First**, unlike the mythological gods the Romans and Greeks . . . and other religions . . . worship, but who do not exist, the God we worship . . . Yahweh . . . is ***a living God***.
    - Our God is not only ***a living God***, but He is the **only *living God***. All other so-called gods of human invention are merely **dead idols**, created by men.
  + **Second**, because Yahweh is the only ***living God***, He is, therefore, **the only one and *true God***. Unlike the **false pagan gods, which are created by man**, Yahweh is the **one, true eternally self-existent *God*** . . . without beginning and without end.

**The eschatological significance of v. 10**

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***10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.***

* Then, having expressed his gratitude for the positive reports that had reached him concerning the Thessalonians, in v. 10 Paul concludes this opening chapter with a topic that highlights his later doctrinal instruction . . . the topic of eschatology . . . the return of the Lord.
* In his commendation of the Thessalonians for the reports he had received of their having ***turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,*** Paul then further commends them in v. 10 . . . ***and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.***
* It is interesting to note that the statement of their faith in Jesus, ***whom God raised from the dead*** . . . the resurrection . . . is sandwiched between two significant eschatological statements.
* **The first eschatological statement** is that the Thessalonians were faithfully ***waiting for His Son from heaven***.
  + With this statement we are reminded that every generation of Christians has lived with the expectation of the return of Christ. Since the moment Jesus ascended to heaven, in Acts 1:9, every Christian has lived with the **hope** of seeing the return of Christ.
  + This **blessed hope** was particularly strong in the early church, as the first generation of Christians remembered the words of the angels who told the apostles in Acts 1:11 . . .

***Acts 1:11— "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."***

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* + The early church fully expected that the Lord would return soon and always lived with the expectation of His return. Unfortunately, as the years, decades and centuries churn on, this expectation of the imminent return of Christ has dimmed in the church as it has lost its upward focus. Much of the modern-day church now focuses more on the horizontal instead of the vertical. Most of the modern-day church has lost its expectation of the imminent return of Christ.
* The **second eschatological statement** comes at the end of v. 10 . . . ***Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come***.

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* + Here in this statement we have a significant biblical truth regarding the wrath of God.
* Amazingly . . . and tragically . . . almost all non-Christians and many professing Christians either don’t believe that God will inflict His wrath upon the unbelieving world or regard the wrath of God as a blemish on His divine character.
  + I have grown weary of hearing professing Christians angrily and adamantly declare, “I believe that God is a God of love. And the God I believe in would never send anyone to hell.” Such an attitude sees the wrath of God as something for which, if true, God should make an apology for.
  + But we see in Scripture that God speaks of His divine wrath many, many more times than He does of His love.
  + God has declared His great hatred of sin and promises that He will punish every sin to the uttermost. And because God cannot lie, He will punish sin to the uttermost.
  + Furthermore, when Jesus Christ suffered on the cross, He was suffering the wrath of the Father as He suffered, to the uttermost, the wrath of God on our behalf.
  + So, if God does not punish all sin and all sinners for every sin . . . if God winks at sin and forgives without punishing, as He promised He would . . . if God punished His Son for the sins of those He came to save, yet does not punish those worthy of His wrath . . . then God punished His Son unjustly and for no reason.
* Though the Thessalonians were “babes in Christ” . . . chronologically, they were obviously well taught and fully understood the significance of both the promise of Christ’s return and the need to be **“rescued” from the wrath to come.**
* The subject of God’s wrath and the promise that the church will be rescued and spared from His wrath is one of the main subjects of both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians.
  + It was because of some misunderstandings concerning these eschatological doctrines that Paul writes to both comfort and encourage the Thessalonian church.
* In examining chapter 1 of this letter we have seen that Paul expresses his love of the brethren in Thessalonica and his thanks to God for His protection and blessing upon this persecuted church.

**1.** Paul is grateful, first of all, for the obvious ***faith, love and hope*** demonstrated by these precious brethren whom God had chosen to save from the enslavement of sin and paganism.

**2.** Paul is grateful, second of all, for the work of the Holy Spirit in these Christians as He brought them to a ***full* knowledge and *conviction*** of God’s word and how they became ***imitators of* their human teachers and of the Lord**.

**3.** Thirdly, Paul is grateful to God for the testimony of the Thessalonians . . . how word of their perseverance in the face of great persecution and affliction had become known throughout the Roman Empire.

* + This demonstration of faith was clearly seen in the testimony of men and women Paul encountered, who related to Paul how the Thessalonians were standing firm in their face.
  + For Paul, their spiritual father and friend, it must have been extremely satisfying and gratifying to hear strangers speak highly of the wonderful work that God was accomplishing in these faithful brethren.

**Do Others Speak Well of You?**

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* Of all the possible rewards that a Christian can receive, **what better reward is there than to have others . . . even unbelievers! . . . speaking well of your faith and faithfulness in refusing to turn away from or dishonor God?**
* Even though the Thessalonians did not know who might be carrying word of their faith and perseverance to the far reaches of the Roman Empire, it was reward enough to know that they had honored God with the actions and words.
* Many of the things we do here on the earth are seen by others and we may be commended for them. In those things we have received our reward . . . praise from men.
  + But there are a great many things that you can possibly do that may never be known by men. There may be good and noble things even done on behalf of men that they may never be aware of. In those things done in service to God and unknown by men, God sees and will someday commend with the praise, “well done, good and faithful servant.”
* My hope and desire is that there will be things in my life and in my actions that are worthy of commendation that someone might see and praise God for.
  + On the other hand, I am fearful that someone might see something in my life and in my actions that might bring dishonor on the Lord and on myself.
  + For the Thessalonians, many people had seen their perseverance of faith and spoke well of them . . . and of God . . . as a result.
* **My question for each of us is, do others look at you and your life and speak well of you and of God?**