

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

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Despite the suffering that the Thessalonians have experienced, they persist in their faith in Jesus. News of their good example has spread to the other churches in Greece and beyond—their testimony of turning from idolatry to faith in God, and their anticipation of Jesus their Savior's return to earth.

Paul continues to praise the Thessalonians for their faith in God, and the good effect it has had on other believers. He writes that the Thessalonians *also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit*. Paul is pointing to the fact that the Thessalonians now share in common with him and *the Lord* a time of *much tribulation*, suffering for the sake of their obedience to God. Paul certainly suffered for the Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:23-27), and the Thessalonians saw it firsthand and shared in it. One of the Thessalonians, Jason, was forcibly dragged out of his home to be tried by the city authorities (Acts 17:6). By this, they were *imitators* of Paul and Jesus, not simply because they suffered, but because they *received the word* of the Gospel and believed it, despite the *tribulation* it caused. And they did so with *the joy of the Holy Spirit*. The Thessalonians rejoiced in their suffering (James 1:2). They considered the gift of eternal life, the power to be freed of sin, to be in right relationship with God, and the opportunity to be found faithful at the appearing of Jesus worth the opposition of their neighbors, and worse.

They became faithful followers, even with much affliction. So much so that the word of their changed lives and faithfulness began to spread. Paul compliments the growing reputation of the Thessalonians' courageous belief: *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia*. Macedonia is northern Greece, while Achaia is southern Greece. Corinth, where Paul likely wrote this letter, was in Achaia. So the *example* of the Thessalonians has spread throughout Greece, for other *believers* to imitate them, just as they had become *imitators of the Lord*. It is worth remembering that all of the churches in Greece were newborn. Any word of neighboring believers boldly persevering through an attack would greatly impact others young in the faith.

Paul observes that apparently due to their excellent example of enduring unjust suffering with joy, *the word of the Lord has sounded forth* from the Thessalonian believers. Actions speak louder than words, as they say. Their faithful actions have *sounded forth*. And this *sounding forth* has occurred *not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place their faith toward God has gone forth*. It seems word of their faithfulness has spread even beyond Greece, perhaps to the Roman province of Asia, where the city of Ephesus was, or perhaps even to Rome itself. Due to their example, Paul and company had *no need to say anything*. The Thessalonians' actions spoke for themselves. Paul is paying these believers an extremely high compliment. It seems he is giving them a bit of a preview into the glory they can receive when Jesus returns and finds them continuing to live faithfully.

Without specifying, Paul implies that the story of the Thessalonians' coming to faith has gone even further to other churches outside of Greece. He tells them this to encourage them in their trials. Our suffering for Christ will be rewarded in eternity, but there are also sometimes immediate positive results in the present. Other believers have been strengthened to see the Thessalonians believe in Jesus and endure hardship, which will help them to withstand their own suffering for Jesus' sake. Suffering for Jesus' sake is the path to the greatest fulfillment and reward in this life, and in the life to come. And with Paul telling the Thessalonians, "Look how your endurance has inspired other believers," the strengthening effect rebounds back to them, emboldening them to soldier on, to continue to live out their faith in God.

Paul notes that *we have no need to say anything* because of the powerful testimony of the Thessalonian church; he has nothing to add to it. Their testimony speaks for itself. The *report* has spread *about* telling of *what kind of a reception* Paul had with the Thessalonians when they first heard the gospel. Beforehand, they were idolators (believing in the false Greek gods), but now the *report* spread far and wide about *how they turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God*. It was their changed lives that created the witness. Once the Thessalonians had worshipped stone statues and myths about sinful deities like Zeus; now they *serve a living and true God* who created all life, all reality, who is Lord of All, who calls His people out of selfish, dead lives into a life of love and servitude toward one another.

Their present purpose was to *serve* God, but their faithfulness was rooted in hope. The Thessalonians looked to the future, to *wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus*. This connects with verse 3, that states that Jesus is "in the presence of our God and Father." Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, learned obedience, even to death on the cross, then ascended to heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, having had all authority granted Him in heaven and on earth (Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 28:18-20). He is now in heaven, but will return to reign over the earth in person. Paul acknowledges that the Thessalonians believed this message, and were living in full assurance of this hope. They are living this life in a manner as to *wait for His Son from heaven*.

When Jesus returns from heaven, it is He *who rescues us from the wrath to come*. Here Paul lays out the hope of the resurrection, for *Jesus Himself was raised from the dead* by God, and the believers *wait* for Him to come again *from Heaven*. Our faith in Jesus rescues us from *the wrath to come*. This reference to *wrath* could refer to a number of things. First, it applies to all believers' deliverance from the wrath of God that Jesus took upon Himself by being crucified upon the cross, as every sin was nailed to that cross (Colossians 2:14). Every believer will receive a new body, and be delivered from "the body of this death" (Romans 7:24; 1 Corinthians 15:15:44). Jesus will also judge the earth (Revelation 14:7). Jesus will also judge the deeds of all believers (2 Corinthians 5:10). The Thessalonians understood this, and were living "this day" for "that day." They understood that the calling of every believer is to be ready for that day. It is the theme of both Thessalonian letters for believers to "live for the end times by living faithfully now."

Paul will address the resurrection of dead believers and the Day of the Lord's judgement further on in this epistle (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9). He wants the Thessalonians to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory," so that

they will be ready when He returns: “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, 19).

Here is the connection between what we do now, and what is in the future. We prepare now for an event that is in the future. Jesus will return, and we need to be prepared when he returns, and be found faithful, that we might receive a full reward. Paul, Silas, and Timothy understood this, and it translated to them living in obedience to Christ with consistency and courage. The Thessalonians had come to believe this as well, and the resulting impact of their faithful life was the spreading of their reputation for faithfulness far and wide. Their love had become famous. Their faith gave them hope, which resulted in a life characterized by love (verse 3).

Biblical Text

6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 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.