

THE MODEL CHURCH: A STRONG CONVERSION 1 THESSALONIANS 01:05–10

Introduction

Paul says that the Thessalonian church was a pattern. He says that they were examples not only to the heathen, but also to believers. Their example is primarily found in their strong conversion and in their thundering forth the Word of the Lord (v. 8).

- I. They had ministers who preached the gospel as it should be preached (v. 5).
- II. They received the Word (the gospel) despite opposition and persecution (v. 6).
- III. They became examples to other believers (vv. 7-8).
- IV. They turned to God from idols (vv. 9-10).

I. 1 Thessalonians 01:05–06 *Preachers of the Gospel*

The model church had ministers who preached the gospel as it should be preached. When Paul went to Thessalonica, he went for one purpose and for one purpose only: to preach the gospel and to minister to the needs of people. Note three striking lessons.

1. Paul did not preach in word only; that is, he did not preach mere words, depending upon his own ability to influence people. He did not stand before people using nothing but his own words to reach people. His preaching was not dependent upon...
 - his eloquence • his novel ideas • his ability
 - his charisma • his wisdom • his appearance

When Paul stood before people and preached, he was not concerned with words and eloquence, nor with whether or not people thought he was a good preacher. He was concerned with only one thing: sharing the Word of God and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul knew that God honoured His Word and His Word only.

Mark 16:15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Rom 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

1 Cor 2:1-2 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Cor 2:4-5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

1 Cor 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

1 Cor 2:13 *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

1 Cor 9:16 *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

1 Cor 15:1-4 *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

2 Cor 4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

Heb 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow: it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

2. Paul preached in power and in the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.
 - a. Preaching in “power” (dunamis) means preaching in the power and energy of God Himself. This is what is so often missed and misunderstood. The gospel is not mere words nor just sharing an idea. Words and ideas are, of course, involved: but the gospel is more, much more. The gospel is the power of God at work in the human heart. The gospel is the power of God operating, working, stirring, convicting and energizing a person to believe and accept the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the reason it is so important for the preacher to be completely surrendered to God — living ever so closely to Him — living and moving and having his being in the Lord. The preacher must be under the control of God so that the power of God can rest upon and flow through his life. The preacher must become nothing but an instrument in the hands of God. Then and only then can the gospel — the very power of God — flow through his preaching like it should.

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Rom 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

Phil 2:13 *For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

Heb 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Jer 5:14 *Therefore this is what the Lord God Almighty says: "Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes."*

Jer 23:29 *"Is not my word like fire." declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*

- b. Preaching in the Holy Spirit means that the Holy Spirit was also working in the hearts of people. He was doing what God had sent Him to earth to do: convict the hearts of the hearers and convince them of the truth of the gospel:

=> that Jesus Christ did die for their sins.

=> that Jesus Christ does provide righteousness for men; that His righteousness does stand for the righteousness of men.

=> that Jesus Christ did bear the judgment and punishment of sin for men.

John 16:8-11 *"When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment [all born by Christ]: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."*

- c. Preaching in full assurance is a critical point. How can a minister preach and have the assurance that his preaching will bear fruit? How can he be assured that the power of God and of the Holy Spirit will rest upon his preaching? The answer is found in what is said in the following point, point three.

3. Paul lived what he preached. He lived a life that was completely surrendered to Christ. He lived and moved and had his being in Christ, walking and living ever so closely to Him. Conviction and confidence come from obedience — knowing that we are doing what we should be doing. It comes from knowing that we please God — that we are living pure and clean lives, praying and studying God's Word every day and witnessing to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we know that we are pleasing God, then we know that His presence and power will be upon us.

=> Obedience is the secret to assurance.

=> Obedience is the secret to the presence and power of God upon our lives and preaching.

=> Obedience is the secret to bearing fruit through preaching. This was the secret of Paul. Paul obeyed God; therefore, Paul was convinced that his preaching would be in power and in the Holy Spirit.

Thought 1. The world has yet to see what God will do with a man who obeys Him — totally and completely obeys Him — obeys Him...

- by living a pure and clean life.
- by praying and studying God's Word every day.
- by witnessing and sharing the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

1 Cor 9:27 *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

1 Cor 6:19-20 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

2 Cor 10:5 *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col 3:1-4 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Heb 10:22 *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

1 John 2:3 *We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.*

1 John 3:18-19 *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.*

Thought 2. The point is this: the Thessalonians had a preacher who preached the gospel as it should be preached. They had a minister who surrendered his life totally to Christ: he lived and preached Christ and Christ alone. What a dynamic example for us! When we live and preach like we should, then our preaching will be in power and in the Holy Spirit. The presence and power of God Himself will rest upon our lives and ministries.

II. *1 Thessalonians 01:06 Receiving the Gospel*

They received the Word (the gospel) despite opposition and persecution. Remember: unbelieving Jews had opposed Paul and aroused some of the city troublemakers against him. The persecution became so threatening that Paul had been forced to flee the city (cp. Acts 17:4-10) However, his absence did not stop the persecution. In fact, it seems that the attack upon the church and its young believers became even more fierce. The Jews had convinced some of the Gentile citizens — some countrymen of the believers — to join them in trying to stop the gospel and destroy the church (cp. 1 Th. 2:14). But note what Paul says:

⇒ The gospel still bore fruit. Some persons still received the Word and accepted Christ despite the opposition and persecution.

Mat 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Phil 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

2 Tim 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

⇒ The Holy Spirit rewarded the believers’ commitment to Christ. He stirred joy in their hearts and lives, giving them full assurance of their eternal salvation and deliverance from death.

1 Pet 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

John 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Rom 8:16-17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

One other fact is important: the believers became imitators (mimetai) of Paul and Christ. Is it right for people to imitate and follow preachers and other outstanding Christian leaders? A.T. Robertson gives an excellent answer to the question:

“It is a daring thing to expect people to ‘imitate’ the preacher, but Paul adds ‘and of the Lord,’ for he only expected or desired ‘imitation’ as he himself imitated the Lord Jesus, as he expressly says in 1 Cor. 11:1. The peril of it all is that people so easily and so readily imitate the preacher when he does not imitate the Lord.” (A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931, p. 11.)

1 Cor 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Thought 1. There are two striking lessons in this point.

- 1) Nothing, absolutely nothing, should keep a person from receiving the Word of the gospel — not even opposition and persecution.
- 2) Believers — preachers and laymen alike — must guard their lives ever so closely and make sure they are living for Christ and living ever so diligently for Him. Why? Because others are watching and following us — some child, some adult, some neighbour, some friend. There are people who look up to us and follow after us. Whether or not we like the fact, they are. Therefore, it behooves us to follow Christ as perfectly as we can.

1 Cor 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Eph 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.

Col 2:6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.

Heb 6:12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

1 John 1:6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

III. *1 Thessalonians 01:07–08 Witnessing and Testimony*

The model church became examples to other believers. This is a striking point: this young church was so committed to the Lord that their testimony spread all over the world. Note this: when Rome had conquered Greece, it had divided the country into two provinces, the northern province being Macedonia and the southern province being Achaia. Paul clearly says that the testimony of the church had spread all over Greece, both northern Greece and southern Greece. Then he adds that their faith had spread out beyond the borders of Greece. This must mean all over the world, for Thessalonica was a major commercial centre where salesmen, tradesmen and businessmen visited from all over the world. Just imagine the witnessing the church and its believers must have been doing day by day. Their excitement and enthusiasm for Christ and the opposition and persecution against them must have been the talk of the city and world.

Thought 1. What a glorious testimony and dynamic example of witnessing! What a lesson for us today! How desperately we need to get to the task of living for Christ and being a testimony for Him.

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

2 Cor 4:13 It is written: “I believed: therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.

Acts 4:20 “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

2 Tim 1:8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

Titus 2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.

Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

James 5:10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

Psa 66:16 Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.

Isa 43:10 “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.

Isa 62:6 I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest.

Mal 3:16 Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name.

IV. 1 Thessalonians 01:09–10 True Conversion

The model church turned to God from idols. Remember that Paul had been forced to flee from Thessalonica for his life. The only way he knew how the young church and its believers were holding up was from others who had been to Thessalonica to visit or conduct business. What he had heard thrilled his heart: the believers were standing fast in the gospel he had preached. There were three things in particular that struck him about their testimony.

1. The believers had turned to God from idols. John Walvoord makes an important point: they turned to God from idols, not from idols to God (*The Thessalonian Epistles*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973, p. 17).
 - ⇒ They did not seek to clean up their own lives by themselves. They did not try to reform themselves by turning away from idols and then turning to God.
 - ⇒ They turned to God first, then with God’s help and strength, they repented and turned away from idols.

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Acts 8:22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

Acts 17:30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Isa 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Ezek 18:21 “But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.”

What is an idol? It is crucial to understand exactly what an idol is. Very simply, every man has an idea of what God is like and what God allows and does not allow. Some men take their ideas and make images of them by carving wood or melting and moulding metal or porcelain. Other men just hold the images in their mind and picture God as being like this or like that. Either image is as much an idol as the other. An idol is merely an image of some god created by the mind of man — an image other than the God revealed by the Scripture (cp. Rom. 1:21).

Note the sharp contrast made between these images of man’s mind and God: God is the living and true God; the images are only the lifeless and false notions of men.

Acts 17:29 “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man’s design and skill.”

Rom 1:21-23 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

1 Cor 6:14-18 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

1 Cor 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.

1 John 5:21 *Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.*

Gen 6:5 *The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.*

Deu 11:26-28 *See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse — the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.*

Isa 42:8 *"I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."*

2. The believers had turned to God because of the promise of Christ's return. It was God's Son who was returning to earth, the Person who had died for them so that they might be acceptable to God and live with Him forever. They believed with all their hearts that they were to live with God forever. This was the reason they were waiting for the return of Christ. The word "wait" is in the present tense. This means that their hope for the return of Christ was alive. They expected Christ to return at any moment and eagerly looked for Him to rent the skies. Their expectation was a daily expectation.

Mat 24:44 *"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

Mat 26:64 *"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

Luke 19:13 *"So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'"*

Luke 21:27 *"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."*

John 5:28-29 *"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."*

John 14:2-3 *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*

Acts 1:11 *"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

1 Cor 1:7 *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*

1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

1 Th 4:16-18 *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

1 Th 5:23 *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Tim 6:14 *To keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

Heb 9:28 *So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

1 John 2:28 *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

Note one other significant fact. How do we know that Christ is going to return to earth and take believers to live with God forever? Because God raised up Christ from the dead. By resurrecting Christ, God...

- proved that He is the God of all power.
- proved that He has the power to raise the dead.
- proved that He is going to do just as Christ taught: raise all men, some to eternal life and some to eternal death, that is, to be eternally separated from God.

Rom 1:4 *And who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 Cor 15:16-18 *For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.*

Eph 1:19-20 *And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.*

1 Pet 1:3 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

3. The believers had turned to God to escape the wrath of God. Note this: a day of wrath is coming; it has to come, for man and his universe are corruptible and imperfect and are in rebellion against God. The world is already condemned; the day of wrath is already set. But this is the glorious news of the gospel: we can be delivered from the wrath to come. The word “rescues” (ruomenon) means to deliver us right out of the wrath. The picture is that of God rescuing and lifting us up out of the wrath.

John 3:36 *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

John 3:18 *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”*

Rom 1:18 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*

Eph 5:3-6 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Col 3:5-6 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*

Rev 11:18 *The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great — and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” ■*