

Commended
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1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

The title of our lesson this week is “commended.” Commendation is simply praising someone for who they are and what they have done and how they have lived. What are some occupations often praised in our society? What makes them praiseworthy? People are commended because of their good reputation. What are some words that describe a church with a good reputation?

In this first chapter of Paul’s first letter to the church in Thessalonica he commended their example of faithfulness and endurance. There are no perfect churches because churches are made up of imperfect people, but this small house church Paul started was gaining a good reputation and making a difference for the gospel. Centuries later they are an example to us.

Here’s the truth that should change us: It’s amazing what happens when Christians live like Christians (as our friend Chip Ingram would say)! When a church imitates Christ, God will use them to impact people with the gospel.

Here is some background on Paul’s relationship with this church. This small congregation began as a result of a three week visit Paul made to “Thessalonica (present-day Thessaloniki, Greece)...Paul...visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey but was forced to flee because of Jewish opposition. He sent Timothy to work with the largely Gentile church there, and Timothy brought him good news of their faith (3:6).”¹ Paul begins the letter by commending their faith, love, and hope:

1 Thessalonians 1 (ESV) — 1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. **2** We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, **3** remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. **4** For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, **5** because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. **6** And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

- Ken Blanchard in his book the “One Minute Manager” popularized the philosophy of “catch them doing something right.” Before you instruct or correct those you lead, give them praise for what they are doing well.
- Paul doesn’t just brag on them, he tells them he thanks God “constantly” in his prayers for all of them and their “work of faith”, hope, and love.

- Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 13:13 (ESV) — 13** So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
- If a local congregation picked out three values to embrace they couldn't go wrong with faith, hope, and love.
- What does it mean to have faith in God?
- Jesus said faith in God could move mountains (Mark 11.) The angel told Mary nothing is impossible with God and she demonstrated her faith.
- Faith in God is believing God will do what He has said, and will always do what is best for those who trust Him, beginning with saving us BY FAITH.
- This little house church was made up of people who had that kind of faith.
- What about love? What did Jesus teach us about whom we should love?
- Jesus taught us we are to love God with everything we are and to love others as we love ourselves. He also said to love our enemies.
- Christ-followers are not required to like all people but we are commanded to LOVE all people.
- Jesus also said "If you love me you will keep my commandments."
- This young church was practicing Christ-like love for Him and for others.
- Then there is hope. Hope in Christ is not wishful thinking.
- We talked about faith. Faith and hope are linked. A commentator wrote: *"Faith and hope are complementary. Faith is grounded in the reality of the past; hope is looking to the reality of the future. Without faith, there is no hope, and without hope there is no true faith. Christians are people of faith and hope. We have "the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2)."*ⁱⁱ
- Another writer said, *"When grounded in God, hope provides the motivation to live the Christian life even in the face of trouble."*ⁱⁱⁱ
- This little church was persevering in the midst of trouble. Paul only lasted there three weeks before being driven out by a mob (Acts 17.) Paul was gone but we can be sure those opposed to the gospel of Christ remained.
- In verse three, Paul talked about their *"work of faith and labor of love."*
- James said, *"...faith apart from works is dead."*^{iv} Paul's words indicate this little congregation had put their faith, love, and hope to WORK.
- In verse four Paul said their faith, hope, and love were evidence that they had been "chosen" by God. We call that the doctrine of election.
- The doctrine of election intimidates many Christ-followers.
- Warren Wiersbe writes, *"The doctrine of divine election confuses some people and frightens others, yet neither response is justified. A seminary professor once told me, "Try to explain election, and you may lose your mind. But explain it away—and you may lose your soul!""*^v
- I can't explain the doctrine of election, but I believe I can spot someone who is "in the elect." What would indicate someone is a Christ-follower?
- Several things in this text convince me these Thessalonian believers were and are "in the elect."
- Their display of Christ-like faith, hope, and love is evidence of election.

- That “life-change” is also evidence that the gospel came to them (as Paul says in verse five) *“in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.”* Their profession of faith wasn’t “head knowledge” they lived it out!
- Verse six says they became “imitators” of their teachers and of Christ and *“received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”*
- These were Christians living like Christians! They were imitating Christ and displaying the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.
- I can’t explain election but I know the “elect” when I see Christ-imitating life change that only comes by the power of God through His Holy Spirit!
- That kind of life-change makes an impression on those yet to know Christ.

7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. **8** For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. **9** For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, **10** and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

- We don’t know how the word spread so fast about the First Church of Thessalonica. Maybe it was because their city was an important seaport on the Macedonian trade routes and word traveled along with the cargo.
- What we DO know is when Christians live like Christians word spreads.
- *“Have you heard, those Thessalonians have turned from idols to serve the living and true God? They believe in Jesus’ resurrection and they are expecting him to come back. They used to be as obnoxious as anyone but now they are loving, hopeful, joyful, and generous. What changed?”*
- Paul said, *“We don’t even have to tell folks about you, they are telling us!”*
- Paul also said, their faith had “gone forth” or “rang out.” The word means it “reverberated.” In old days church bells rang on the Lord’s day not only to call in the faithful but as a testimony about God to those not attending.
- You know, none of us lives our lives without making some kind of sound.
- We have to ask ourselves if our life sounds like a beautiful chime or a clanging symbol. When our reputation as followers of Christ “rings out” is it a pleasing sound or do people cover their ears?

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- It’s amazing what happens when Christians live like Christians! When a church imitates Christ, God will use them to impact people with the gospel.
- This isn’t just a lesson about how churches should behave; there is a personal application for each of us.
- Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:4-6 that followers of Christ are “like living stones ...being built up as a spiritual house.”^{vi}
- A church that pleases Christ is built by Him one stone at a time. Every Christ follower is a living stone with a place in the structure of His church.

- We shouldn't have the attitude that the pastor and the church leadership will take care of the reputation of our church. WE ARE the reputation of the church by the way we live our lives.
- This week let's ask God to empower us, His chosen people, to strive to live Christ-like lives that will "ring out" as an example of faith, hope, and love that will draw people to His gift of salvation.
- Let's do our best to be Christians that live like Christians because we are imitating Him.

ⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Th). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/difference-faith-hope.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Manser, M. H. (2009). [Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies](#). London: Martin Manser.

^{iv} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jas 2:26). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^v Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 160). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{vi} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Pe 2:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.