



Nov 8, 2020 - The Evidence of Witness - I Thessalonians 1:2-10

OPEN

For what are you thankful? There is a train conductor in Spijkenisse, Netherlands who is very thankful! Earlier this week a train overran the elevated storage track but was saved from crashing down to the ground by a whale's tale art installation! [read more](#)

In response to the command to be thankful always (I Thessalonians 5:18) we have been examining **evidence of gratitude in the lives of Jesus' followers**. What is the evidence in your lives that you are grateful to God?

So far, we have considered six specific evidences or markers of thankfulness in the believers life:

<u>Evidence</u>	<u>Seen from the letter to...</u>
Submission	Rome and Ephesus
Generosity, Freedom	Corinth
Joy	Colossae
Celebration	Thessaloniki
Intercession	Philippians

DIG

Today we are looking at **I Thessalonians 1:2-10** to see how thankfulness motivates and even *facilitates* our witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

First, there must be spiritual transformation - vv. 2-4

Paul began his first letter to the church at Thessaloniki in his very typical style – with thanksgiving for their faith. The only exception to this practice is the letter to the Galatians. In fact, on thanksgiving Sunday we noted that regardless of Paul's circumstances, he could always celebrate the power of God's Good News in the lives of believers. To illustrate this, we noted this same passage.

It is important that we see Paul was not just being polite - such greetings of gratitude were not common at that time. Nor was he trying to flatter his readers. Rather, he was attempting to put the emphasis on God's transforming power. Consider two things that he expressed through his thanksgiving.

- **Transformed in resilience – vv. 2-3**

Paul's appreciation for this congregation was constant. He remembered three things about them in particular – their work, labor, and endurance. They had become resilient Christians. If you look at the story of Paul's three weeks in Thessaloniki (Acts 16:1-15) you discover a church that was forged together through opposition. This reminds me of "inertia friction welding". Two pieces of metal are lined up so that rotating motion of one creates enough friction to forge the two pieces into one. Think about the way the Thessalonians and Paul's team were "forged" together by the fires of opposition.

- **Transformed in relationship – v. 4b**

Relationship had been established with God. But Paul's gratitude and thanks did not center upon how well the Thessalonians clung to God. Notice that he emphasized that these brothers and sisters were "loved by God" and that God had "chosen" them. Do you realize that simply by acknowledging the transforming power of God in the life of another believer is a way of witnessing to the power of the Gospel?

Second, there must be spiritual emulation - vv. 5-6

Another component of our witness for God concerns emulation. As Paul thought about the Gospel taking root in Thessaloniki he thought of two essential ingredients.

- **Mature modeling – v. 5**

The Thessalonian believers lived out what had been lived before them. Paul's ministry team proved to be effective spiritual role models. Verse 5 notes the presence of the Holy Spirit's power and conviction.

- **Meaningful mimicking – v. 6**

The Thessalonians emulated a Gospel driven life (the Greek word Paul used is the source of our English word "mimick"). What is more, they did so regardless of suffering (see 2:13-14) and with joy. What made this possible? The Holy Spirit's work.

Followers of Jesus who emulate mature Gospel models produce and spread thanksgiving throughout the Body of Christ. This translates into witness. Remember, this is not mindless spiritual pantomime (*pantomimos* - "all mimicking"). It is an ongoing experience of maturing in Christ – see 4:9-10.

Third, there must be spiritual communication - vv. 7-10

Having been transformed, and having emulated Gospel living, what was the result in the experience of the Thessalonian church? They, in turn, became a model or pattern of Gospel living for others.

According to verse 8 the “Lord’s message rang out”. The result was **communication**, or witness of the Gospel message. Look at the progressive impact of the Thessalonian’s testimony.

- **Regionally** – “Macedonia” (v.7); their home province
- **Nationally** – “Achaia” (v.7); another province in Greece
- **Globally** – “in every place” (v.8)

Do you think that the Thessalonians set out to have a strategic impact upon the churches in Italy, Asia Minor, Syria, or Palestine? I believe that they were not focused on how far their testimony was communicated. I believe that they were focused upon the quality of their walk with Christ. They concentrated upon **living the life of Jesus** and as a result, the Gospel was communicated!

What was their testimony?

- *They **welcomed** the Gospel – v. 9a*
- *They were **willing** to repent – v. 9b*
- *They **worked** and served God – v. 9b*
- *They **waited** for Jesus’ return – v. 10*

With that kind of Gospel living, Paul and his ministry team did not even need to elaborate (v.8b)! The story of faith in the Thessalonians conveyed the Gospel well. Why? Because it was a lived Gospel rather than empty rhetoric. There is no use sharing the life of Jesus if we are not living it!

REFLECT

How do you feel about being a witness of the Gospel? It sounds quite daunting, doesn’t it? However, what we see in the lives of the Thessalonians is that they focused on their growth in Christ and as a result they were effective witnesses.

Unfortunately, sometimes we get it backwards. We sometimes try and try to be a good witness, thinking that if we can do so, it will propel us forward in our walk of faith.

“*Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary*” is a quote that has unfortunately been attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis, who founded the Franciscan Order in 1209, was in fact a great preacher and often used words to communicate the Gospel!

In an online article, Glenn Stanton suggests that this misquote creates “a useless dichotomy between speech and action.” Read more at [FactChecker: Misquoting Francis of Assisi](#))

I agree. It is a useless argument to debate whether speaking or living the Gospel is better. Of course, we must do both. And the Thessalonians’ testimony teaches us that gratitude for salvation propels us to proclaim God’s Good News.

Take some time to ponder what Paul wrote in Romans 1:16.

***I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is
the power of God that brings salvation to
everyone who believes: first to the Jew,
then to the Gentile.***

Do we really believe that the Gospel has power to change people’s lives? Do you believe it has the power to change your life?