

**THE CHURCH WITH A GODLY REPUTATION:
LESSONS TO LIVE BY FROM THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS**

In an age when the evangelical church is best known in the world by its philosophy of pragmatism, endless preoccupation with building larger and larger churches, division, leadership by polling data, as well as ungodly men running and ruining churches by mob mentality, it is a comfort to know that the scriptures portray for us what kind of reputation that a church ought to have in the world. That church is the church at Thessalonica.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, we see the following examples of how the church at Thessalonica was known before both the church at large and the world.

Godly character 1:3, 6, 7

The church of Thessalonica was known for godly character. Paul, having left the city some time earlier wrote back to encourage the church. In verse 3, after describing his prayers for them in verse 2, remembers their “work of faith, and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul could not get out of his mind their godly character. He says that he was “constantly bearing in mind” their virtues of faith, love, and hope.”

In verse 6 Paul reminds them that they become imitators of those who brought the gospel as well as imitators of Christ! To be known as a church that imitates Christ and who receives the word from Christ’s servants like this is so encouraging. So often God’s messengers are rejected and persecuted as was Paul (2:2). However the church at Thessalonica was grateful for God’s messengers. However by receiving preachers of the gospel as men of God, they were subject to persecution. Paul reminds them here in verse 6 that they “received the word in much tribulation” but “with the joy of the Holy Spirit.” It is sometimes costly to accept truth even before professing believers. However God preserved these believers and sustained them.

As a result of all this, they became examples to other churches. Paul states in verse 7, “so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. What a sweet way for a church to be remembered and known.

An understanding of sovereign grace in their salvation 1:4

The church in Thessalonica also knew that whatever element of godly character was demonstrated in their lives was due solely to God’s gracious choice in their salvation. Paul adds in verse 4, “knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you.” God chose them, they did not choose him. They knew their complete depravity before a righteous God. They submitted their will on this and accepted that a sovereign God has a right to be merciful to whomever he desires to have mercy upon. It is his right. They took no credit, but instead lived lives of appreciation for his choice of them. When a child of God comes to understand this glorious truth, they are then ready to give God all glory and come to a point of maturity where they fully realize that God is consumed with his glory. He does not share it with anyone or anything (Isaiah 42:8). Paul is declaring the fact that this church was known for understanding God’s sovereign grace in their salvation. What a precious truth to accept and to be known for before the church and the

world. It truly glorifies God as we see here.

Gospel preaching 1:8

They were godly, they understood the power of God in salvation, and next we see that they boldly proclaimed the saving gospel of sovereign grace to the world. Paul states in verse 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.” This church, knowing the work of God in salvation, preached the gospel. When we truly believe that God can save sinners on his own, then we are truly freed to proclaim the gospel. We know people will be saved because God can do it!

Changed lives 1:9, 10

A true test of godliness in a church is how they treat men sent by God to proclaim his word. In verse 9 of chapter 1, Paul describes to the Thessalonians how they were known for treating preachers of the gospel. Paul writes, “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you.” It was a good reception. They embraced Paul and his coworkers. They did not accuse him, badger him, or reject Paul. They humbly received him and his fellow servants. The result was that they were a changed people and were a church that possessed a reputation for many good things.

The church of Thessalonica was a church with a godly reputation. Let that be our goal.