

The Power of Gospel-Driven Ministry, Part 3

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

The real proof of genuine faith that comes when we receive the Word, number one; when we receive it in the midst of suffering, number two; and when we receive the Word in much affliction and additionally with the joy of the Holy Spirit. That is something absolutely remarkable. That is the evidence, the true evidence, of supernatural transformation. That's the mark of regenerative power, the power of the Holy Spirit, the outcome of Gospel-driven ministry.

And we can see in our third point the propagation of a Gospel-driven ministry. The propagation, or the spread. This point covers verses 7-10, we're just going to break it up into two parts, here, starting with verses 7-8. "You received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit," verse 6, "so that" or with the result that, "you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia, for not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth you in Macedonia and Achaia,

but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.”

The Thessalonians observed Gospel-driven ministry in Paul, Silas, and Timothy. They then imitated the example that they saw in them, and the result of their imitation, it starts here in verses 7-8. This is what happens when believers imitate apostolic examples, when they imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the fruit of that imitation. It’s the propagation, it’s the spread of more Gospel-driven ministry because it’s the spread of the Gospel itself.

So first, notice there, we see the propagation of reputation. Reputation. When you imitate godly examples, you become a godly example for other Christians to imitate. When you imitate the godly example, you become a godly example. By following godly examples, we become godly examples to other people. Notice for the Thessalonians, the spread of their reputation. It didn’t stay local. It didn’t stay bound within their own zip code, their own city. They had a regional influence that spread farther than they could have ever imagine.

“You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” It’s incredible!

Thessalonica, it was situated in a prime location for influence, for spreading the reputation of this little group of believers. It was a great location. The, the city had the best harbor in the Aegean Sea, and all kinds of people were in and out of the city, soldiers and sailors, merchants, tradesmen. And when something significant happened, news spread rapidly, as you might imagine. That’s because Thessalonica also, in addition to having a great harbor, it sat on the Via Egnatia, the major east-west road that connected Rome with the rest of the Empire. And then also directly to the west of the city was an important north-south road, a major artery that connected the province of Macedonia with the province of Achaia. So by land and by sea, news spread quickly from this little city.

So here’s this small band of young Christians, new Christians, by the way, and they’re proclaiming the Gospel. They’re getting blow-back, they’re getting hurt, they’re enduring the persecution, they’re responding to all that affliction with great joy. And when other believers in Macedonia

and Achaia, when they heard the news, this had a strengthening effect. It had such an encouraging effect on their faith. It emboldened the other Christians to stand firm as well, and they followed that Thessalonian example. The word, example, there, is the word *tupos* from which we get the word, type. Type: It refers to the impression that an object makes when it's pressed against something soft. You can think of a signet ring kind of pressing itself into some wax or clay. That's the idea. The casting of a die, the minting of a coin, all the same principle. The image that the hard form leaves on the softer substance, that's the idea, here. The example, the type.

Listen, younger Christians, they're impressionable, aren't they? That's why the early discipleship of a Christian is so important to set them on the right trajectory of growth. Younger Christians are always going to look to older Christians as examples, as models of godly behavior. They're going to look to them for, for patterns of living, habits of life. That's as it should be. It's a great privilege. It's also a great responsibility.

As a Christian, you've gotta realize that others are watching you. Others are observing your life. So what are you modeling for those who look at your life? What does your marriage look like? Wives, how do you treat your husbands? How do you treat them in public? How do you treat them in private? Husbands, how do you treat your wives? Parents, how do you talk to your children? What do they see in you? That you're consistent with the things that people see here at home where no one's looking, or you think no one's looking? Are you modeling the Gospel for others, setting an example, no matter the circumstances, no matter the cost?

Listen, don't miss this opportunity. God has given us such a wonderful opportunity to be an example of Gospel transformation to many who are watching our lives, to many who are looking to the outcome of our faith. Like the Thessalonians of days past, we need to model true Christianity for generations of Christians coming after us by receiving the Word, by receiving it even amid much affliction, amid any suffering that comes to us because of it, by receiving it with the joy of the Holy Spirit even in the midst of that suffering. That's what true Christianity looks like. We need to model it.

So that's the first mark of the propagation of a Gospel-driven ministry. You spread a type, you spread a pattern, an example that others can follow. And the spread of that example means the Gospel spreads with that as well. People see a type of the Gospel. We see that here. We see the propagation not just of a godly reputation and example, but we see, second, the propagation of the Gospel itself. The Gospel goes forth. It's consistent with the life that's lived according to the Gospel. It becomes a vessel to carry the Gospel.

The fact is, here the Word of the Lord, the very message which the Lord has spoken, that is what sounded forth through their bold witness. That verb that's translated, sounded forth, in verse 8, it's directly related to a verb that means, to sound or to ring. It's like the blast of a trumpet. We're talking about a deafening tone. This is the ring of a bell. It could even refer sometimes in some contexts to the peal of thunder, like the booming sound of lightning as it pierces through the sky. When the Word of the Lord came to Thessalonica, it was like a nuclear bomb went off, and there were shock waves of reverberation. As people carried the news of that Gospel, its

effect went around the region to other believers as that reverberation blasted around, verse 8, “not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth.”

Just a footnote, here. When Paul refers to, the word of the Lord sounding forth, he is talking about the spread of the Gospel message. And when he says that their “faith toward God has gone forth,” he’s not just talking about the message. He’s talking about the evidence of their behavior, their life. Okay? So we’re talking about the verbal message of the Gospel, the verbal testimony, and it’s accompanied, here, by a living testimony, by a life that corresponds to the message of the Gospel, a life that’s consistent with the Gospel. Both are important; both are here.

It’s interesting to note that Paul wrote both of the Thessalonian epistles, he wrote them from the city of Corinth in Achaia, and it was during his ministry in Corinth that he was running into people who were telling him about these believers from Thessalonica. This is no exaggeration Paul is making, here. This isn’t just, this isn’t some kind of flattery or

encouragement. He really means what he writes here. "In every place your faith toward God has gone forth, and we have no need to say anything." That is, we don't need to talk about what God has done in your church and in your life because the message is out already. Other people are circulating the message.

Listen, folks, that's our opportunity as well. That's what we can see here. The message of Christianity in many parts of our country has almost disappeared. But God has placed us here in our region for such a time as this. We have a tremendous privilege of being his witnesses right here, here in our own Jerusalem, in our own Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. We're surrounded by people, neighbors, co-workers, friends, family. In fact, some of the industries in our area keep bringing people from other parts of the world into our city. The nations to our doorstep.

We need to orient ourselves to the opportunity that God is bringing to us. What are we going to do about it? God can use us too, beloved, to sound forth the verbal testimony of the Gospel. He can use us here to show forth the living testimony of the Gospel by the way we live. If we take care of the depth of our



ministry, God will take care of the breadth. May he cause the Gospel to sound forth from us as well. Amen?

The propagation of a godly reputation, a transformed life; propagation of the message of the Gospel itself, which is the very cause and principle of a transformed life; and third, the propagation of the testimony of true conversion. That's verses 9-10. Look at it there, "They themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

Believers in Macedonia and Achaia were telling Paul, reporting to him about how the Thessalonians originally received these missionaries, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, when they first came into the city. And the essence of the report was this: There's true conversion there. There's true conversion. There's a before and an after. There's a turning from and a turning to. There's something repented of and something embraced. Thessalonian believers, here, are a changed people, and it's a

remarkable bit of news that had spread everywhere. This had not been seen anywhere in Thessalonica or in all Macedonia.

Just to break this down a bit. As the message spread throughout the region, Paul heard the propagation of the story of true Christianity. And first, he heard about real conversions; second, he heard about a new devotion; and third, he heard about an abiding expectation. I guess these are sub-points of a sub-point, aren't they? Hope you can stay with me. But there are just three things here that we see with this propagation of the story of true conversion. This is what happens when we ourselves observe and imitate mature Christians, follow godly examples. Word spreads, and it spreads quickly.

First, consider the spread of the news of real conversion. It's something remarkable. Paul said, "You turned to God from idols." The word, turned, *epistrephó*, it's a classic word for conversion. It means a complete change of direction, a complete reorientation of life. They were worshiping idols; they turned away from idols to worship God. Old affections, old behaviors, they were abandoned. A new allegiance was embraced. Why was that such an incredible report? Because in the ancient world, turning

away from one's idol meant turning away from one's temple. Turning away from the temple had significant social and cultural implications.

The first century was not like our world. It was not secular; it was very religious, deeply religious. Your entire business, life, and network, not to mention all your family relationships, all of it wrapped up in temple worship, temple sacrifice. So when these Thessalonians turned to God from idols, this isn't, oh, yeah, I believe in Jesus. This is true conversion because there were implications to, I believe in Jesus. It meant getting cut off. They knew they could lose their business. They knew they could be rejected, marginalized from the culture. They'd become social pariahs. No one would want to associate with them. Even worse, they risked absolute persecution, persecution that eventually did become a reality for the Thessalonians. Being a Christian cost something during those times. There's no easy believism in that day.

It's been different for many, many years in our country, hasn't it? People have been able to profess Christianity in this country, and it hasn't really cost them anything. In fact, they

feel like they can join a very powerful voting block in this country and wield influence. But that's changing, isn't it? I wonder how many people will continue to profess Christ when it costs, when there are tax penalties, when it means the loss of a job or job opportunities. I wonder how many professing Christians will stop professing openly, in public, because they, they are ashamed of the Gospel and ashamed of Christ; afraid to endure scorn for the sake of Christ. Sadly, that's happening, not among true Christians, but it is happening among the professing church. Folks, we've got to stand firm. We will not bow. We've got to stand firm.

The word that spread about the Thessalonians was this, these people turned to God from idols. They sacrificed; it cost them. They turned away; they rejected dead, lifeless idols. They embraced the true and living God to serve him. And that's the second thing we see here, how Paul heard about these Thessalonians, the report he heard from others. He heard about real conversion. He also heard about a new devotion.

A new devotion, end of verse 9, "You turned to God from idols," to what? "to serve the living and true God." Interesting

word there, the word, serve. It's the verb *douleuó*, which means, to enslave oneself to someone else. The noun form is *doulos*, slave. This is the very essence of full and absolute devotion to God. We consider ourselves owned by him. Why? Because we are owned by him, right? We're redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished, spotless. This is the mark of every true Christian. We're slaves to God.

When you become a Christian, listen, it is the end of you. No longer are you the lord of your life. No longer is this life about your ambitions, your goals, your preferences, your dreams. It's not about your self-fulfillment, your self-actualization. When you become a Christian, this is about the death of you. This is about new life of Christ lived in and through you. And that's why Paul said, "For me to live is Christ," Philippians 1:21. Over in Galatians 2:20, same idea, "I have been crucified with Christ." Dead. Put to death on a cross. "I've been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me."

Listen, folks, Christianity is about serving God. It's about slavery to God through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary, and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, my burden is light." Don't forget, folks, there is a yoke. There is a burden.

There is a slavery, here, to a new master, but it's an easy yoke. It's a light burden. Becoming a Christian means switching slave masters. We go from slavery to sin, Satan, and death. We go to righteousness, Jesus Christ, and eternal life. In contrast to our former enslavement to sin, which leads us into eternal hell, Jesus' yoke is easy. His burden is light. Here's the secret, Slavery to Christ is not slavery at all; it's true freedom. Following his laws and his rules it's joy everlasting.

Paul was hearing wonderful news about these Thessalonians. He was hearing about real conversion. He was hearing about this new devotion to God. Third, he heard about an abiding expectation. "They themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, how you turned to God from idols to

serve the living and true God,” and this in verse 10, “and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” What a powerful, powerful summation of the hope of the Gospel! The resurrected and risen Christ is now in heaven, and he will return one day to administer retribution for the ungodly, but also to rescue and reward the godly, those whom he has made his own. That is the hope of the Gospel that we all believe, amen, and there’s no hope in this life. There’s hope in him.

As the shadows of sin and depravity grow longer over our land, as the cold night descends upon the world, Christians look to the future with joy, with eager expectation. We have an abiding hope, which puts all the suffering of this life into the right perspective. We’re not cowering, we’re not fearful. We’re bold, we’re courageous because we know Jesus Christ, and we know he wins in the end, and he’ll protect us and preserve us all the way to the end.

Just a couple of notes, here. First, if we’re to be delivered from the coming wrath, it follows that there is a coming wrath. Do you believe that? Christ has saved us by his

death on the cross. He has died in our place. He has died the death that we should've died for our sins. He has rescued us from this very wrath, from this divine wrath, from eschatological wrath. We're not going to face the divine retribution that's gonna be unleashed on the rest of the unbelieving world. There is a coming wrath, which is a harrowing, terrifying reality for those who do not obey the Gospel.

As I said, many profess Christianity, but very few truly obey the Gospel they claim to believe. That's not my observation. It is an observation, but it's not only mine. Jesus warned people, Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who," what? "does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day," not just a few, not just some bad apples, "on that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, do many mighty works in your name?' Then I'll declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"



Listen, let's not fool ourselves, folks. There are many religious people attending churches here in our county, here in our state. In fact, you know some of these people personally. You know them by name, and Jesus is telling you they're in danger of being cast away from Christ. They're in danger of hell. They will not be rescued from the coming wrath. Instead, they're going to experience the vengeance of Christ which, 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says, "will come, and it will come with the holy angels in flaming fire."

Do we believe all the Bible or just parts? Do we just like the happy parts? What about these scary parts? These scary parts are to provoke us to evangelism. They're to provoke us to care and have compassion on people who profess Christ, but don't live a Christian life. Are you concerned about those people? It's a terrifying reality that many professing Christians will face because they don't obey. They don't obey the Gospel that they profess. There's no true conversion in their lives. Listen, if you love them, you're going to tell them the truth. If you don't tell them, who will? Who will? We want them to join us. We want, we want them to join with all true Christians who've experienced a true conversion, who've enslaved themselves to the obedience

of the Lord Jesus Christ, who have this abiding expectation and hope that our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed coming back to get us.

So when Paul heard about the Thessalonians, he heard about real conversion. He heard about their new devotion. He heard about their abiding expectation. We see these virtues, faith, hope, and love, this is where we see them show up again, right? We've already talked about that back in verse 3, faith, love, and hope. They're the mark of every true Christian. We see them showing up right here as well.

The Thessalonians' conversions, like the conversions of all true Christians, it brought to life the three principle Christian virtues, faith, love, and hope. And Paul structured verses 9 and 10 so that we could see that fleshed out. Look at those verses again. He says, "You turned to God from idols." What's that? Faith. He says, "You served the living and true God." What's that? That's love; that's devotion to God in love. And he says, "You wait for his Son from heaven." You know what that is? Hope. That's hope.

Faith, love, hope, mark of true conversion. This is the report that Paul was receiving about the Thessalonian believers from other people. Thessalonian believers first observed those virtues at work in Paul and Silas and Timothy. They imitated their faith. As they imitated them, they became an example to other Christians as well. Beloved, that's a mark for us; that's a pattern for us. No different pattern. This is how the Gospel spreads. It's our privilege and opportunity as well to propagate the Gospel through the power of a Gospel-driven ministry. With God's help we will do exactly that.