

The Ideal Church

1 Thessalonians

1317A

If you have your Bibles this morning, turn with me please back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, the passage from which our message will be taken this morning. Again as I mentioned, we're going to continue in the series on the church, discussing the ideal church this morning. We've talked about various aspects of the church. We've talked about various dimensions of the church. We've talked about some particulars about the people in the church. This morning we're going to continue by talking about the ideal church.

First Thessalonians 1 to 10, which we read. Very evidently in the Word of God the chief end of God in the creation of man was to have a people of whom God could say, "I am theirs and they are mine." "I will be their God and they shall be my people." This is God's overall plan continuously through Scripture, to call out a people for His name.

It was Israel up until...really up until Matthew chapter 12 when they rejected the Messiah ultimately and then in chapter 13 He brought about the parables of the church age and it was instituted in Acts chapter 2.

God is forever trying to call out a people for His name. And the remarkable story of the Bible is the way in which God still continued with this purpose to call out a people for His name in spite of first of all the fall of Adam, which corrupted the initial plan. And then secondly, the constant sin and ultimate rejection of Israel which caused God to turn to what we call and what the Bible calls the church.

To this God answered with the body of believers. To the failure of Adam and the failure of Israel, God brought about the existence of the church. Still God was calling out a people who could be His people and He could be their God. And you come to Matthew 16 and the very words of Christ when He says, "I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it."

As if to say I know that Adam fell, I know that Israel rejected, but this time my church is going to be built and even the gates of Hell aren't going to stop it. The church is Christ's. The church on earth is really a visible extension of the life of Christ. For it is only that... It's only as we live the Christ life in us that we are really Christians at all.

The only way that you can be a member of the true church is to be made alive with the very life of Christ. That's exactly what Christ was saying when He said, "I am come that they might have life." That's exactly what the Bible meant when John says, "He hath the Son, hath life." That's what Christ meant when He said, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life."

The only light that the true church has is the Christ life. So we are as the church, the true church, and

I'm not talking about the walls and the buildings, but about us who know Christ, we are an extension of the life of Christ in this world. And at the same time that we are an extension of the life of Christ, we are most assuredly an extension of the ministry of Christ.

But sad to say most churches are infinitely far from that. Most churches are a church only by virtue of the fact that they're a building that is called a church. As we look at this chapter, I want us to ask ourselves several questions. And then this chapter's going to answer them for us.

First of all, I want us to ask ourselves: How can a church be the extension of the Christ life. Then I want us to ask: How can a church strip off all of its nonessentials and be exactly what Christ intended that church to be, no more and no less? What qualities make a church the ideal church?

Now what I'm going to say to you this morning out of this passage is not new. There's one thing I'm going to say to you that you haven't heard before. But this is what the word of God presents here as the picture of the ideal church, and I think it's critical to understand that as we begin a ministry together.

Now you can go to the book of Ephesians and you can find the doctrine of the ideal church in chapter 4. You can go to the book of Acts and you can see the history of the ideal church, but we're going to go the Thessalonica and we're going to see the practice of the ideal church; the practical outworking, the qualities exhibited by these believers in Thessalonica that made them an ideal church.

There are five qualities of an ideal church shared with us in these ten verses. And I think having seen these we will understand exactly what God expects out of us as a church. The first quality of this church was that it was a saved church, a saved church.

Verse 1, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy unto the church of the Thessalonians," now watch this, "which is," now here comes the key, "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." Now to be in God and in Christ is to be saved. That's the key. Then he says to that church, "Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers." And now he's thanking them for the fact that they are a saved church in verse 3. He says, "because we remember without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope," here it comes again, "in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father, knowing brethren beloved you're election of God. For, our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit." You notice they're in all parts of the Trinity? They're in God, they're in Christ, they're in the Holy Spirit. "And in much assurance, as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."

Now we'll stop right there. Those five verses tell us one thing in the main. They have all dimensions, but one thing in the main about this church and that was that it was a saved church. Now just to give you a little more indication of it, if you want to, turn over to Acts Chapter 17. And Paul is on his second missionary journey when he arrives at Thessalonica and he arrives there and he leads this group of people to Christ in this one incident.

Acts 17, verse 1, "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where was a synagogue of the Jews." Now it doesn't say there was a church there

does it? There was a synagogue of the Jews there. "And Paul as his manner was went in unto them." Now you tell me where did Paul preach? In the synagogue of the Jews; that was his manner. "And three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered."

Do you remember last week what we said about the fact that the Jews have a stumbling block over the cross? That the Jews stumble over the cross, we talked about this last Sunday night. Because they never could understand why their king, their Messiah had to suffer. And so Paul has to go into these places and say that Christ needed to suffer. That's his message. "And risen again from the dead and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ."

Now watch what happened in verse 4. "And some of them believed and consorted with Paul and Silas." Now Silas is the same as Silvanus in Thessalonians 1. "And of the devout Greeks a great multitude and of the chief women not a few." They had a tremendous reaping on three different Sabbath days.

Paul was only there three weeks, that's all he was there. Maybe two weeks with three Sabbaths. He wasn't there very long. Go back to the book of Thessalonians. And in just those three ministries there, there was a tremendous reception of the gospel. And the key to this whole thing is in verse 5. Paul says, when I look back at our time with you and I see what happened, I know that the gospel did not come in word only, but in what? In power.

Paul had just been there on his second journey and Silas or Silvanus, another name for Silas, was with him. And it hadn't been very long from the time that Paul left Thessalonica until he wrote this letter back. Paul went to Berea and had a tremendous result there and in the next chapter. Then he went to Athens and then he went to Corinth. And by the time he got to Corinth he wrote back to them to tell them that he had already heard about the genuineness of their faith in just that brief time.

Timothy had come to Paul there in Corinth and he told Paul what the Thessalonians had done since they had been saved, and Paul writes to rejoice with them. Go back to the key again in verse 1. He says, "The church of the Thessalonians which is in God" and later he says in Christ.

1 John 1:3, the Bible says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you how that you may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." To be in God and in Christ is truly to have fellowship is it not? This is the saved church.

Here is a pure church. The success of this church based at the very beginning on the fact that they were pure through and through. They were a pure church because all of the vital parts of the church — that is every single individual within this church — was in vital union with God and with Christ and with the Holy Spirit in verse 4 and 5, verse 5. Now that is a saved church.

Part of the problem with churches today is that there is so much dead weight it's holding them back. There are broken links in the chain and the church cannot operate. Now this church was a miracle church. This church had a fantastic history. It had a fantastic beginning and just as fantastic a ministry. And it was because there was purity in the very body itself.

And I'll tell you as long as there are people in the confines of the church who are not in vital union

with Jesus Christ, they are dead weight. A church to be a miracle church must be a saved church. It must eliminate all its dross. It must purify itself as it examines itself. That's why there is such a thing as discipline in the church. That's why Paul reiterates again to the Corinthians that if you've got some dead weight get it out, because you can't operate with it.

If there is someone in you teaching any other doctrine than that of Jesus Christ and so forth and so on, get rid of him. If there is anyone among you who is not in vital union with Jesus Christ, do not call him a member. Do not allow him to be involved in the operation of that which is basic to the church, for if it is not a totally saved church there's dead weight and you have to have a saved church as the first step to the ideal church.

So I say to you this morning what I said last Sunday morning, there are going to be many people who think they're going to be accepted by God but who are not. They're going to be many, as we said, who are going to say 'Lord, Lord,' and He's going to say 'I never knew you.'" And I know as well as you do that the problem with the church today is just that. There are some churches where I doubt that there are a handful of people who really are saved.

I praise God for this church, because I know the great majority really know Jesus Christ. Perhaps there's some who don't. You're not in vital union to Jesus Christ. We welcome you to come and hear about Jesus Christ. But in reality you are not a part of the body of Christ or the fellowship of Christ because you come in this door until you know that Christ and then you become a part of His body. And then you become a part of His church. And when the saved church purifies it... When the church purifies itself, becomes a saved church, then it has an impact on the world.

Notice what he says at the end of verse 1. He says, "Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Here's an interesting little side light. If you look in your Bible, you'll see the word "be." It's in italics. That means it's not in the sentence. This is a sentence without a verb. Now any of you that teach school and know anything about grammar know that you can't have a sentence without a verb unless it is a specific kind of a sentence and that's called an exclamation. And you can have an exclamation without a verb. And you use them all the time. You say to somebody more power to you, right?

Well, you know that's exactly what Paul is saying right here? He uses *charis*, the word "grace," which he uses 100 times in the New Testament. He uses really *shalom*, which is the word "peace," *eirēnē* in the Greek. He uses forty times and here's the way it comes out. More grace and peace to you. You know? You're saved, you're on the right road, more power to you. More grace and peace to you. You've got some, have more.

He says that very evidently there is grace and peace related to this church because they stand in Christ, but more power to them. And then he goes into thanking them for what they really are. He says in verse 3 that's he's thankful for them...verse 2... He says in verse 3 why he's thankful. And he uses three words, the three great truths of Christian living; the three, the triad of 1 Corinthians. He uses faith, love, and hope.

These three in different order appear in Paul's chapter of 1 Corinthians, faith, love and hope, the triad of Christian virtue. Now we know this another indication that this was a saved church, because Paul mentions these three things. And again mentions their hope that it is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then when you come to verse 4, we find a very interesting statement. He says that "they are God's chosen ones." "Your election of God." Now election is a very important thing. He says this is the...this is the true church, this is the real stuff. There's no dead weight. There's no broken link. You are really in fact what you claim to be. You are God's chosen one.

The body of Christ and the church of Thessalonica are synonymous. It is the true church, each member washed in the blood of the Lamb, each member pure, and then their effect on the world, absolutely fantastic as we shall see. But notice the election of God that makes this so secure. And recall the words of Paul in Romans 8 when he says in verse 29, "For whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover brethren, whom he did predestinate, them he also called and whom he called he also justified and whom he justified he also glorified."

Peter told the believers gathered at Pontus and Cappadocia and Galatia and in Asia Minor and Bithynia, he told them, he said, "You are the elect according to the foreknowledge of God." Now foreknowledge is a very important word. It does not mean that God knows before. It doesn't mean that at all. We pointed out to you last week that the word "know" means a love relationship, does it not?

And so when God says, "You whom I foreknew," He is saying, "You whom I had a predetermined love relationship with." This is in effect what election means. Paul is saying we are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, as he says so clearly.

By a predetermined love relationship God calls us to Himself. This is the essence of Christianity. It is not men seeking God. It is God seeking men and then men in turn seeking back. You say, well when did this election take place of this church? Well, it really took place — in Ephesians 4:1 it indicates it took place — before the foundation of the world. Or Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4.

Well, when did it come to fulfillment? Well, it came to fulfillment when Paul went to Thessalonica and preached the gospel. Look at Chapter 2, verse 13. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when you receive the Word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

In other words, he says, you received it and believed but you were predetermined to a love relationship with God. What a fantastic church this was; spotless church, a saved church, an elect church. The visible church was the invisible church. The church that men could see was the real church. They were a saved church. And I'll tell you something, when the church so-called is the church real, look out world you're about to be turned upside down.

And then in verse 5, Paul points out that the evidence of their salvation was the fact that the gospel came in power. Paul says, "I knew you were the elect of God, because of the way you received the gospel." The kingdom of God is in power not in word. Paul had preached, Silas had preached, Timothy had preached, and they had received the Word of God. It comes in power not in word.

First Corinthians Chapter 2, Paul says, "And I brethren when I came to you," verse 1, "came not with

excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God, for I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith should stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Real apostolic preaching is preaching in power and in the Holy Spirit, and that's exactly what he says in verse 5, in power and in the Holy Spirit. These people had not just received words; they had received the very power of God. They weren't just diddling around with a new theology like those on Mars Hill. They weren't exploring a new philosophy. They were hearing, believing, and receiving Christ.

And hearing and believing isn't enough without receiving. Do you remember in Matthew 13, the parable of the seeds sown on the stony ground? How that it grew up for a little while and then as it grew up, the shallow ground give it very little root and when the sun came it scorched it, it died, it withered away, and that's like those who hear and they accept. They have an apprehension of the gospel, but they have never taken it into vital union with Christ and they die when the first adversity comes along.

Paul says that the word didn't come to them strictly in human wisdom, but it came in the power of God. Certainly, that's what he was saying in Romans 1:16 when he said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God." In 1 Corinthians he talks about the fact that Christ is the power of God and certainly Christ is the gospel. It's the power of God alone that saves them. Jesus says, "No man comes under the Father but by me and the Spirit of God is the one that draws to the Father." No preacher can ever bring anyone to Jesus Christ.

I was talking to a guy the other night where my... There was three drunk teenagers who ran into my car. It was a hit and run. And the policeman came along to take the information and I was sitting in his car and he asked me what I did. And I told him that I was a minister. And he said, "Oh," he said, "how many souls have you saved?" And I said, "Well, none yet and I really don't expect to save any." "You don't?" And then I had proceeded to tell him that it wasn't any human that could save anybody. It wasn't any clever words that could save anybody. It was simply the power of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ that could bring men to salvation.

There is Holy Spirit dynamite, if you please, in the gospel. It is enough dynamite, if you'll notice in verse 9, it is enough dynamite to demolish idols, to shatter them. But more than that it is a constructive dynamite. It doesn't only shatter it builds. Because notice verse 9. "They turned to God from idols and they turned to serve the living God, the true God." Not only does it destroy, it builds. It is Holy Spirit dynamite that shatters the idols and reconstructs a new man.

As Paul says, "If any man be in Christ, he's a new creation." You carefully read your Bible in the New Testament and you'll find that the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit always go together.

In Acts 1:8 it says, "You shall receive power after that," what, "the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The Holy Spirit is always connected with power. Notice that he says also in verse 5 that our message came in much assurance. That means we spoke boldly. And he says, "As you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." He's saying we came and we preached with power and we

preached boldly and then he says you remember that don't you? You know we did that. We don't need to explain it, you know it.

Truly this was a saved church. They had heard the message, they had received the message. They had met the Christ of the gospel in vital union with him. They were a unity of the body of Christ and consequently they were about to explode on the world like nobody had ever done. They were a saved church.

There's a second great quality and that is that they were a surrendered church. Look at verse 6. "And you became followers of us and of the Lord." Stop there. "You became followers of us and of the Lord." Notice the word followers. It's the Greek word *mimētēs*, from which we get our word "mimic." Paul is saying you mimicked us.

You say well Paul now wait a minute that's a pretty...you know, you've got to be careful with stuff like that. You're setting yourself up as an example. And Paul, we're not supposed to follow anybody but Christ. You know we always say that to people. Well, your problem is you're following men. You're patterning your life after men and you should after Christ.

Well, you know, that's not too easy for some people because the only Christ that they have any idea about is the one that you show them. So if they're mimicking you, maybe the problem is not them, maybe the problem is you and me. Because Paul says, "Your success is...your surrender is evident because you're mimicking me."

Now in the first place, you've got to be some kind of a Christian to want that. I really don't think I'm in a position to ask anybody to mimic me, to imitate me, but Paul does. You see these Gentiles had never met Christ. They didn't know anything about Him other than what Paul told them. You see Paul to them was the personification of Jesus Christ. And all they knew to do was to mimic what Paul was. But get the significance.

"You became followers of us and of," whom, "the Lord." You see he pushes it back where it belongs. He is saying mimic me because I am imitating the Lord. Remember in 1 Corinthians 11:1 he says, "Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ." And then in Ephesians 5:1 he says, "Be followers of God."

Now watch this thought. First notice the logical order. He says, "Follow me because I follow Christ and He imitates God." Is it not true that God expressly revealed Himself in Christ? Is not Christ the image of God? And am I not to be the image of Christ? So the logical order is right. Paul says to these people, he says, "You mimic me because I'm imitating Christ who is the express image of God." You see the logical order?

They were surrendered. They were surrendered to Christ-likeness. And that's why "of us," Paul puts first and then "of the Lord," because it's logical that they would have known them first of all as a representation of Christ. Here is the quality of the ideal church. Surrender to Christ-likeness. Now, I think this is the answer to what Christ prayed in John 17 when He said "That they may be one." Christ prayed for unity. And you know how unity comes? Unity comes from being like Christ. Christ is not divided is He? Not at all.

Christ doesn't think one thing here and another thing here and have little ideas here and there. Christ is unity. Do you remember when those in Matthew 12, those Pharisees came to Him and said "That what you do you do by the power of Satan." And Christ said, "I'm not divided. A house divided can't stand." Christ is in total truth and always truth, never divided.

And unity comes from all of us being like Christ who is united. Someone has written: "To dwell above with saints we love. Oh yes, that will be glory. To dwell below with saints we know, well, that's another story." And you know we always kind of hassle around trying to figure out how we can all get united. And yesterday at our men's mobilization it was a fantastic time, just a God blessed time. We really had a great time and we were kind...and I could just see kind of everybody talking about now how can we get more united, see? And we were all thinking well we need to be friendly over here, we need to be this over here, we need to do this. And have little welcome things and put patches on and all.

And this is all great. This is great, but you want to know how to really be united? Just all be like Christ. Will that unite us? Tozer said this, he said, "If I have 100 pianos and I want to tune them," he said, "if I go around and try to tune them to each other, I've got a mess." But he said, "If I take one tuning fork and tune them all to the tuning fork, they'll be tuned to each other."

And I'll tell you something, the same thing is true in the church. When we are all as individuals, when I am and you are surrendered to Christ's likeness, we will be totally united one to another. This was the characteristic of this church. They were a surrendered church to Christ-likeness.

You say well, what is Christ like? Well, first of all, He's the personification of love, is He not? Is He not that? Many other things about Him. But He says Himself in John 15:9, "As the Father love me and I love the Father, so you continue in my...and I love you, so you continue in my love."

Christ-likeness is the key to unity. This church was a surrendered church, surrendered to Christ-likeness. They were imitators of Jesus. So this church was the ideal church because it was a saved church and because it was a surrendered church.

Now the next three points will be brief. Thirdly, it was a suffering church. Verse 6, in the middle of the verse: "Having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit." Stop there. He says they were a suffering church because they received the word in much affliction. Now just to let you see that, go back to Acts chapter 17 again and you can see what they went through, verse 5. "The Jews who believed not," now this is after the...some of them have believed in Thessalonica, the rest who didn't believe, "moved with envy took unto them certain vial fellows of the baser sort." Isn't that interesting language?

"And gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar." Now if they had set the city in an uproar to deal with these guys then there must have been something going on. There were only 70,000 people in Thessalonica at this time. And these Christians just in a matter of weeks had set the whole city on its ear. They had turned it upside down. And it caused such a stir that these men got together and decided to do something about it.

"They gathered a company and set all the city in an uproar and assaulted the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not they drew Jason and certain

brethren unto the rulers of the city crying these that have turned the world upside down are come here also." What a compliment.

"Whom Jason hath received and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar saying there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city when they heard these things and when they had taken security of Jason and the others, they let him go."

You know, a church that is a saved church and a church that is a surrendered church, I'll tell you is going to suffer abuse from the world. And we said last Sunday what is true again and again and again, that the church must be the antagonist of the world. If it is not, it is not the ideal church. But you know something, you say oh I hate the thought of suffering, but watch that in verse 6.

"They received the word in much affliction with," what, with what, "with joy." With joy. Remember in Acts 16, Paul and Silas, before they got to Thessalonica had a little experience in a jail. Remember what happened? They were put in that jail and in the middle of the night, what were they doing? They were singing. So Paul knew a little bit about suffering with joy, didn't he?

In John 16:33, Christ said "In this world you're going to have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Paul said "In everything give thanks." There's a coach who had a sign on his desk and a little plaque. It said this, "Praise the Lord anyhow." That's a good thought.

Praise the Lord anyhow. Can you receive affliction with joy like you can receive blessing with joy? The world will never tolerate a saved and surrendered church. If the church doesn't antagonize the world, it is for two reasons, either it is not saved or it is not surrendered, because if it's saved and surrendered it's going to be the absolute thorn in the flesh of the world.

And you know something? The individuals in it are the same. If you want to judge how Christ-like you really are, I'm going to give you a little thermometer right now. If you want to know how really Christ-like you are, I want you compare yourself with what I'm about to read you. I'm going to read it to you and then I'm going to tell you where it is.

Compare yourself with this and you can judge your Christ-likeness. "If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you." Christ is speaking. Now listen to this, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they've persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

Check yourself. Does the world hate you? Does the world abuse you at all or have you become so conformed to this world that the distinction is almost rubbed out. That was John 15:18 to 20. And Christ was telling His disciples to get ready, because they were going to suffer.

Saved, surrendered believer is going to suffer abuse from the world. Look at the eleven of the first twelve apostles. They were martyred. Look at the first three centuries of church history. Satan tried to rub out the church, didn't he, and the more he killed Christians the faster the church grew. Whenever the church suffers the church grows. Whenever the church becomes engulfed in the world it doesn't grow. It stops growing and it dies on the spot.

Satan found out after the first three centuries of dealing with a church in a matter of persecution that all that did was make it worse, so he decided to make Christianity the going thing, and what happened? The church went right down the drain. And nothing ever recovered it until a guy came along by the name of Martin Luther and pulled it out of its doldrums and followed by men like Calvin and Zwingli and Melancthon.

In Thessalonica, the church suffered. It was a saved, surrendered, suffering church. Fourthly and very quickly, it was a soul-winning church. Verse 7, "And so that you were an example to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia for from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves how of us what manner of entering in we had unto you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

Now the primary task of any church is this task. It is to make the gospel known to the ends of the earth. It is to the end that it may reproduce itself that the elect community to which Christ has died, to...which Christ has died to redeem may continually be added to and added to until it comes to completion. That's the purpose of the church.

And the theme of the church, whether it's the early church or the church today or Grace Community Church or any other church is evangelism and expansion. You say what about edification? Well, the end of edification is evangelism. We train and teach that you might go out and share the gospel of Christ. Evangelism is the ultimate goal. Notice the two-fold approach to evangelism.

Look at verse 7, "So that you were an example." Here's the witness of a life. Philosopher Heine looked at Christianity and he said this, he says, "You show me your redeemed life and I'll be inclined to believe in your Redeemer." That's quite an indictment of Christianity. "You show me your redeemed life and I'll be inclined to believe in your Redeemer."

Paul said that those Thessalonian Christians were examples. The word is "patterns." It's like a pattern that someone would lay out and then trace around. He says your life was literally the model or the pattern of Christian living. Remember Paul told Timothy, he said, "In all things be a pattern of good works." Or he told Titus. And then Paul told Timothy, "Be an example or a pattern of the believer," in word and conduct and so forth.

A soul-winning church is a church where the believers' lives are the pattern for other people. By the very life we live, we show some kind of a Christ to this world. But notice the second dimension of witness in verse 8. "For from you," here it comes, "sounded out." It's not only the pattern of a life, but it's the word of the gospel, is it not? Now I want you see this word, "sounded out," fantastic word. It's the word *exēcheō*, and we get our English word "echo" from it. And he's saying this. Now watch it, in verse 8. The word is the word of whom? Is it the word of the church? Is it the word of the Christian? Who is it? It's the Word of the Lord isn't it?

But he says this, fantastic thing, he says, "The Word of the Lord bounced off of you, it echoed out of you." They were nothing more than a sounding board for the Word of the Lord. It never got tainted. It came out just as pure as when God said it. You stand on a cliff and you talk and you get back an echo that says different things than you said the first time you might worry a little bit.

Normally when you say something it echoes back, you get it the same way. But I'm afraid sometimes that we find that in churches where they have in their hands the word of the Lord the echo doesn't come out very good does it? The compliment of this church was that in their witnesses they were nothing but a sounding board from which the Word of the Lord bounced out to the world.

And you know that within a matter of weeks after this, their...their testimony was all over every place. Look at the end of verse 8, it was everywhere. In every place their faith was all over. You know when you stop to think about that, it's pretty amazing. How did it spread so fast? By the time Paul just got to Corinth, they're already...they're all over the world. Well, in the first place, Thessalonica was a key location on the Egnatian highway and the Thermaic Gulf and everybody's trade went everywhere right straight through the middle of it and they had a key position. They were in the center of the commerce of the world. And all they had to do was take opportunity to use where they were and proclaim and let the word of God bounce off.

I thought about that in relation to our church. We're in a key place. Somebody told me we're in the center of the valley. Somebody told me that there's about four different cities that sort of come to a head right here. We're in a strategic place. And can it be said of us as it was of God that from that place sounds out the Word of God. Can God say that about us? God said it about the Thessalonians.

Can we take advantage of our strategic position? The witness was two-fold, it was in word and it was indeed. And quickly verse 10 tells us that they were not only a saved church, a surrendered church, a suffering church, a soul-winning church, but watch this one, they were a Second Coming church.

"And to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come." Let me just say this in closing. The idea of waiting for His Son is the idea of preparedness. The only church that can be a Second Coming church is a church that is prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ. The apostate church, the false teachers, in 2 Peter say this, they say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For all things continue as they were."

The second characteristic of an apostate, the first characteristic is they deny Christ, the second one is they always inevitably deny the Second Coming. Do you know why? Because it's always associated with judgment. And the only church that can look forward to the Second Coming is a church that is prepared for it. That's the miracle church.

Saved, surrendered, suffering, soul-winning, Second Coming. Let me say this to you, this church, Grace Community Church will never, ever be the ideal church, the miracle church unless you and I as individuals are saved, surrendered, suffering if need be, soul-winning, and Second Coming.

Father this morning we thank you for this opportunity of just sharing these simple thoughts. God we thank you for the power of the word. I thank you Lord that I don't have to get up here and just give my thoughts. Oh how ridiculous that would be. But that I can open Your Word and share what You have revealed by your Holy Spirit, the very divine truth right out of heaven, truth which Paul suffered to give to us. Truth for which ultimately he lost his head, so precious was it he cared not, but counted all things but lost.

This treasure that has come to us about this church may it become for us the pattern of our church. Oh but more than that God, this church will never be anything until each individual is what thou

wouldst have him to be.

While our heads are bowed as we sing a hymn in just a moment, before we do that we want to share with you the opportunity to check your own life. If you're here this morning and as you examine your heart, you're not saved, you don't really know Jesus Christ in a personal, vital union, right where you sit right now you can invite Him to come in. If you'd like to get involved in this tremendous movement of the church of Jesus Christ and this age, you can do it by receiving Christ right now. Just ask Him to come into your life, forgive your sin, be your Savior.

Do it right now right where you sit. Christian, are you really surrendered to Christ-likeness? Are you busy trying to adjust yourself to everybody else or are you busy trying to be like Jesus Christ? If you'd like to surrender this morning to Christ-likeness, why don't you just tell the Lord that. Why don't you just share that with Him.

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