

# An Apostolic Confirmation of a Church's Mission

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The Thessalonian Church's commendation is due to its demonstration of the nature of the Christian life, becoming examples of the Christian life, and disseminating the message of the Christian faith.*

**Duration:** 53:20

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 1:6

**Topics:** "Missions"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of gathering together to hear the message of God and to meditate on it. The goal is to understand God's will and fulfill His purpose in spreading the Gospel to those who have never heard of Jesus. The speaker also discusses the role of examples in the Christian life and how the gospel should be supported by both words and actions. The sermon concludes with a call to live a fully committed Christian life, presenting ourselves as living sacrifices to God and serving Him wholeheartedly.

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## Transcript

I must confess that I'm looking forward with great anticipation to this coming week. It will be my first experience here with you during missionary week, missionary conference time. I'm looking forward to the week for more reasons than one, but the main, of course, is that one should have one's ears attuned to hear what the Lord is to say to us concerning the outspreading of his gospel in this fast-closing age and in these cataclysmic times.

We know that it is our duty to be involved in the spreading of the glad tidings, and every Christian man and woman will surely have a sense of duty in the heart. But we sometimes need to reconsider our strategy, and we need to hear how things fare in this sector of the world and in that. And it is in this spirit that we trust there will be a very goodly gathering at every meeting during this coming week.

Gathering not simply to hear what the messengers may say, we shall do that, but having heard to meditate and see what has God to say to us. What will he have us do as individuals and as a people to become quite certain of this, that we are in his will, we are fulfilling his purpose, concerning our duty to the uttermost parts of the world in this matter of presenting the gospel to many who as yet have never, never heard the name of Jesus. I trust, then, that this coming week we shall come together gladly and

prayerfully.

I gather that there are quite a number of conferences held in various parts of the city and beyond its environs. Well, I, the more earnestly, plead with the people and friends of Knox to make a very special effort to be present. God wants us to hear his voice and to know his will anew, not for yesterday, but for today, and tomorrow, if there should be a tomorrow.

Well, now, I indicated this morning that I wanted to stay within the confines of one chapter today. This morning we were thinking particularly of this being an anniversary occasion, and we addressed ourselves to the first passage in the first chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians. Now, tonight I want to read a passage that begins with verse six.

It's really the second half of that chapter. And this, perhaps, will bring out, as possibly no other chapter does, the responsibility of the Church of Jesus Christ to bear the tidings of salvation out into the world and to the distant places. Now, having spoken in verse five of the way in which the gospel came to the Thessalonians, and of some of the things that happened to them, Paul goes on, and he became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy in the Holy Ghost.

You notice that contrast there. Having received the word in much affliction, it wasn't easy to believe the word of the gospel in pagan Thessalonica, but receiving the word there was joy in the Holy Ghost. Now, this is a paradox.

And there are people who are in our service tonight who know exactly what that means. When we are presented with a message of the gospel, we know that it's going to be a very difficult thing to take our stand as Christians. And yet in so doing, in the midst of a furnace of affliction, there is a joy in the Holy Ghost.

Affliction, and yet an undercurrent of joy. So that, the apostle proceeds, he were ensembles 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 to God's word is spread abroad, so that we need not speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye 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, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath which is to come. An apostolic commendation of a church's mission.

This particular letter of Paul's dates back to probably the year 50 of our era, 50 AD. And is in all probability the very first letter he ever wrote. It is therefore important on that account, there are some who believe that the letter to the Galatians was written before this.

Well, now, we can't dogmatize, but it was certainly the second, if it was not the first. This morning in our reading, our scripture reading, Mr. Lowe read to us from Acts chapter 17, which provides the background to everything that happened, or at least everything that is recorded as having happened, in Paul's mission to Thessalonica. The only thing I need to say at this stage tonight is this.

Paul didn't receive a very warm reception there, either in the synagogue of the Jews or outside. And as the apostle proceeded to preach Christ and him crucified and risen, the Savior from the wrath which is to come, he was given not only the cold shoulder, but the bitter look by quite a number of people. But there were those who believed.

There were those upon whose minds and hearts and consciences and wills the Spirit of God came in power, and there were those who received the word, it cost them, but they received the word and with it the joy of the Holy Spirit, and the joy of salvation. The Thessalonian church then proved itself to be a genuine community of God's people. And here, toward the second half of the chapter, the apostle Paul proceeds to commend them.

He not only speaks highly of them, he speaks warmly of them. Now, you may say that there's nothing very exciting about, nothing very exciting in this, but when you realize that Paul is writing within not many months after the founding of this church, what we read about in this epistle is nothing short of a divine miracle. This church has not only come into existence, it has gained the vision of evangelism and of mission, it has set about its divinely given business of spreading abroad the glad tidings, it has grown in grace, it has caught the vision and sensed the compassion of the Saviour, and it has performed such an amazing work, all in the very brief space of scarcely twelve months.

Possibly thirteen, I don't want to argue with anyone, but somewhere around there. Now, the question to which I want to address myself tonight, this is an anniversary day, but it is also the beginning of our missionary conference week, the question to which I want to address myself is this. Why commend this church? Why commend it? What is there to praise this community about? And I want to reason it out with you as briefly as possible from this very exceedingly precious passage.

We shall note two intimately related causes for the commendation elicited in the passage. First of all, the Thessalonian Church was commended by the Apostle because it so evidently demonstrated the nature of the Christian life. Now let's get this again in its setting.

They've not been converted very long. They've not had, they've not had a succession of Christian ministers and teachers of the Word, as you've had here in Knox. They've not had a background of 150 years behind them, not even 150 months.

But the Apostle writes to them and he says, look, you have become, by the grace of God, exhibits of what the Christian life is really about. And I cannot other than commend you. I cannot other than praise God on your behalf.

In the first part, he's praising God. Now in the second part, he's praising the people. He says, this is all so very wonderful.

In the space of a brief number of months, you have become sheer exhibits of what the Christian life is all about. Now, please follow the reasoning with me. We shall refer to the two-fold way in which they did this.

One, the Thessalonian Church demonstrated the nature of the Christian life by following the pattern divinely prescribed for it. The Christian life is a special life. It's a different life.

It's a divine life, implanted in the soul of man. The Christian life is not, is not ordinary human life, titivated and made a little better. The Christian life is, is the life of God, mediated through Christ, coming to us by the Holy Spirit of the Word, and implanted in our souls, so that God, by the Spirit, comes to dwell in us, and we have the life of God in our own hearts.

Now that's what the Christian life is. It's a new life. It's life of a new dimension, life of an entirely different quality from the ordinary.

To become a Christian, a man is born a second time. He's born anew. Now, this new life, if it is to come to its own, if it is to flourish and to blossom to maturity, it has to be lived according to a prescribed pattern.

There are rules and regulations for physical health. Now we all know something about those. If you get wet, your clothes get wet, and you live for a week or so in wet clothes, well, you know what to expect, don't you? There are rules and regulations concerning the physical part of our being.

So are there rules concerning the intellectual, and the mental, and the emotional. When we receive this life of God into our hearts, the new life, eternal life, this life has to be lived according to a specified pattern. Now the Thessalonians, having received the life, set about seriously to live it, and to live it according to the prescribed pattern.

Paul puts it like this, and he, he says, became followers of us and of the Lord. Now, let's analyze that a little. The first thing I want you to notice is that that divinely prescribed pattern was ideally and perfectly personified in one, our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the Christian life like? Well, ultimately, we can only point to one. He not only provided it for us by his death upon the cross, but he lived it out in his life and in his death. He exhibited all the facets of it in all their manifold glory, in temptation and in joy.

In sorrow, as in joy. In loneliness, as in the crowd. In his own home, where he was misunderstood with his disciples, where he was partly understood, and with men that crucified him.

In all kinds of circumstances, this life divine was lived out in all its perfection in him. All its graces, all its beauties, all its vast potentialities came to, came to perfect fruition in one and in one only, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. The next thing is this.

That same pattern was, however, clearly and unmistakably reproduced in his apostles. He became followers of us, aha, of us and of the Lord. Now, isn't that wonderful? Can you link yourself, Christian, can you link yourself like that with your Lord? So that if you were talking to me or talking to somebody else, could you say like this, you became followers of me? And do you thereby become a follower of the Lord? But you see, these men, these men, though they were not perfect, now let's make that clear, they were all faulty in some sense.

They were not impeccable, sinless like their Lord. They were made of the common, frail stuff that you and I are made of, but the grace of God so triumphed in them that despite all their frailties and faults, the likeness of Christ was represented in them, so much so that in a pagan city they became called Christ's Ones. I think that's wonderful.

On a previous occasion, people spoke of them that they'd been with Jesus. Why been with him? Because they bore a resemblance to him, of course. They saw him in them, and yet in the other city to which I referred, they were called Christians, Christ's Ones.

Why? Well, because they were so much like him. He lived on in them. They were not blameless, but they nevertheless bore an obvious resemblance to him.

I like to think of it, this may not be good theologically, but I like to think of it in terms of the original, typed by the typist. And then there is a first copy. Now, there may be a smudge or two on the first copy, but it's the first copy.

And the apostles were the first copy. He was the original, impeccable, faultless, without a snudge, without a sneer, without a thumb mark to spoil the page. And they were the first copy.

So then, two things. The divinely prescribed pattern was ideally and perfectly personified in the Lord. That same pattern was clearly and unmistakably reproduced in the apostles.

Now, the third is this. The pattern ideally personified in Christ, substantially reproduced in the apostles, was evidently imitated by the Thessalonians. And you, says Paul, became followers of thus and of the Lord.

Now, you may say, what is there to get excited about in that? Well, it's the word that Paul uses. He uses here, in fact, I shall have to say this at least three times tonight, this passage is a passage that is built around key words, three at least key words, key expressions. And this is one of them.

You, says Paul, became followers of me, of us and of the Lord. The RSV puts it, I think, you became imitators of us and of the Lord. Now, the Greek word, I don't like to parade my little bit of Greek like this, but permit me to say it, because the very sounding of it is significant.

It's the word *mimeti*, from which we have our English *mimic*. *Mimic*. And that's exactly what it means.

What is a *mimic*? A *mimic* looks at someone and then does exactly the same as he does, or listens to someone and reproduces that exactly, as exactly as possible. And believe it or not, the inspired apostle says this of the Thessalonians, you took a good long look at the Lord and you took a good long look at us and you got your eyes still focused on us and you're doing exactly as we did, as the Lord did and as we did. In other words, you are living the life according to the only patterns given you by God, the Lord, the original, and the apostles, the first copies.

So that, you see, there was no error here. They were living the life in the right way. Let me put it to you like this.

If you try and copy any other man or any other woman in living the Christian life, you'll make blunders. You good people have called me to be your minister here. I wouldn't like you to copy me in everything, and I don't know that I'd like to copy you in everything.

Now don't be cross with me for saying that. But you see, it's true of everybody. You have flaws, I have flaws.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and we sin. And if any man say, I have no sin, well he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him, but in our Lord, the original. There is no sin, and in the apostles, the first copy, they're sufficiently near to the original never to lead us astray.

To lead us astray. Now, these people exemplified the Christian life because they lived it according to the pattern God had given. Are you doing that? Am I? Would we be commended on the same score as individuals and of the church? Over and over again I find people saying, ah, then so-and-so did such-and-such a thing, it upset me so much.

Why should it? Our pattern is the man Christ Jesus lived and died, the pattern for men, as well as the Savior for the Lord. He is the one and only embodiment, though he finds himself followed and represented without any grave error in his apostles. Secondly, the Thessalonians having first become imitators of the

divinely set standard, thereby became the embodiment and exhibits now of that same pattern to others.

Don't miss the picture. Ye, says Paul in verse 8, were enshamples to all that believe in Macedonia. Have you got the picture? First of all, they look to the one and only pattern, the ultimate, in Jesus Christ, represented also in his apostles.

But one pattern, seen in its perfection in him, manifested then in them. Having thus set themselves to pattern their lives according to him, and as he is represented by them, now in turn they become examples, and this is the second key word. True imitators of the authorized original become in turn examples of the same authentic kind of life, the Christian life and Christian living.

If men anywhere wanted to know what the Christian life was like, and what real Christian experience was like, well, they've only to look to the Thessalonians, says Paul, and it was their aunt who lived in the life of this little church. Now again, I say, we encounter here a most graphic word. It's that word translated in the enshamples, or examples, and it certainly is a very remarkable word.

It is sometimes transliterated into English, and used as type. It's the word type. Again, forgive me for my, showing off my little bit of Greek.

It's the Greek typos, and it's transliterated into English as type. That's not a translation, it's a transliteration. Type.

Originally, the word meant the mark left by a stroke or a blow. If you, if a car bumps into a wall, it leaves a mark. The car that broke into our garden a few weeks ago left some marks.

It left the traces of its tires behind it. Well, now we won't go into that story, but that happens. You leave a mark, you bump into something, and that's what this word originally meant.

Whatever, whatever bumps, whatever collides with something else, leaves a mark. It's the mark left behind. Then it came to stand for pattern, or example.

But I suppose I can illustrate its New Testament significance best by giving you one illustration of it. In Romans chapter 6, and in verse 17, the Apostle Paul says this. You have availed from the heart that form of doctrine into which you were delivered.

Now, the AV says, which was delivered to you, but really what Paul says, the form of doctrine, and that's the word, translated form, the form of doctrine into which you were delivered. Now, can you get the picture? Paul says that the Christian doctrine, the Christian teaching, is a kind of tupos, a kind of mold, into which young babes in Christ are delivered, so that they receive their character from the mold. Let me take you to a home.

Mummy's preparing some jelly, or blancmange, or something for young Johnny on his birthday, and having a little imagination, and knowing that Johnny likes to see something exciting on the table, she doesn't bring out jelly in its ordinary form, but she gets a mold. I hope you've got these things in Canada, I'm sure you have, you're more imaginative than the British anyway. And, and so mummy goes to make the jelly.

Now, how do you make the jelly? Well, I think I know. You pour the boiling water on the jelly in the mold, do you not? And you let it freeze, and it solidifies, and sometimes it takes the form of, I've seen this, of a

bunny rabbit. And then mother turns the jelly onto her receptacle on the table, and there's a little rabbit.

Well, why a rabbit? It's just jelly, really. Ah, yes, but it's been in the mold. And the mold has made it look like a rabbit? Now, that's exactly the word we have here.

You became mold, with all the characteristics of the apostles and of the Lord himself evident in you, so that as you came into touch with other people, you molded them. They show in you all the characteristics. You were mold, and men that came into your fellowship felt that you were making them also like the apostles and like the Lord.

The Thessalonians are praised, and well they might be. Would we be praised on this ground? Do men who come near to us, do men and women who come within the doors of Knox, do they feel a sense of divine fellowship here that begins to mold their thinking and mold their living, that when they go out they're not the same again? Now, that's what we have here. The Church is an exhibition of the Christian life.

More than that, it has an active potency within it that cultivates character and produces God-like, apostolic-like men and women after the image of the apostles. Now, come with me to the second main point here. The second reason for their commendation was that they disseminated the message of the Christian faith.

Now, I didn't realize until I was coming to church tonight that I preached a sermon here not very long ago, because I've not been here very long, which virtually embodied these same two points. And I was almost apologetic, but you know I can't be, because on second thoughts you find these two points coming together in a multitude of places in the New Testament. In other words, preaching the word requires the accompaniment of life, the exhibition of what it means as well as the expression of what it says.

The gospel over the lips and the gospel in life. The gospel expounded and the gospel exhibited. Now we've come to this second point.

These Thessalonians were praised, my Paul, because they disseminated the message. They preached the gospel, they heralded the truth. From you he has sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, the two provinces of Greece, but also in every place.

Your faith to God was spread abroad. And I'd like to go on to the other part. I can't well on it tonight.

When we come there, he says, as preachers and evangelists, we don't need to say anything. They've heard about you, and what they've heard about you is so expressive and so full of significance, we don't need to preach what we have to preach elsewhere. Isn't that wonderful? My good people, is the preaching of the gospel made easier by your life than mine? Is there an apologetic that is necessary because our lives are not after this pattern? Can it be, can it be, oh God forbid, but can it be that there's something in our lives which blunts the very edge of the message? The faithful imitators of the apostles and of the Lord became examples to others.

The examples also were exponents of the gospel whereby the Christian life can be received by men and experienced by them in distant Macedonia and Achaia and wherever the glad tidings come. Now, I believe that the key to an understanding of what is meant here depends again upon the proper understanding of one word, this time a verb. I hope you'll forgive me for this.

It's Sunday evening, too, and people are a bit tired, but I have to do it. And once again I'm showing off a little bit. It's this Greek word for sounding out.

From you sounded out the word of the Lord. Now, commentators differ here. They invariably do, of course, but here I think they have a good old squabble.

Normally, from men such as Bishop, the Archbishop, Chrysostom, right down to recent times, most of them, I think, have agreed that what is reflected here is the concept of a herald. A herald making an announcement, clear as crystal, trumpeting forth the gospel, trumpeting forth. Others of them thought that Paul had in mind the sound of thunder pealing.

From you peeled forth the gospel. Now, both those suggestions, I'm sure, have a place, but respectfully I want to suggest to you that the proper understanding of the word would take us elsewhere. And it's more at hand.

It was nearer home to the Thessalonians and to other Greeks at the time. The Thessalonians are here compared, I believe, and I quote, to a parabolic arch or a sounding board. And I quote again, a sounding board which reinforces sounds and causes them to travel then in various directions.

The arch, or the sounding board, does not of itself create the sounds, it occupies a middle position, receiving sounds, reinforcing them, and then sending them on with its own complexion upon them. Now get the picture. I have sometimes preached in England in churches that have a sounding board right above the pulpit.

I suppose that those edifices were acoustically rather terrifying, and so they had a sounding board erected. I can think of two at the present time. And so when the preacher preaches, he's in a kind of a canopy.

But now, you see, the idea is this. He speaks, the words come from him, but then the words impinge upon this canopy, this sounding board above him or behind him. And the sounding board, first of all, takes the voice in and then throws it out.

And no two sounding boards are quite the same. Each one has its own distinctive characteristics, so that if I preached under one sounding board here and another one over there, my voice would not be quite the same. But the point is, they throw out the voice, reinforced by their own distinctive hue.

Now, says the Apostle Paul, that's what the Thessalonians did. They received the voice, the message, the message of the Apostle, the message of the Lord, the word of the gospel. They received it, and then the church became a sounding board.

Having received it, and believed it, and experienced it, they sent back the world, the word, and broadcast it to the north, and to the south, and to the east, and to the west, and out it went. That's why Paul praises the church. Friends were very confused by the letters in the Bible of a gentleman known to us, who died and went to be with the Lord.

A good, God-fearing Christian man, and his Bible was well-hummed and well-used. And here and there, almost on every page, there were the letters T and FT. T and FT.

And it was like that everywhere. And they were quite confused, until finally they came across a relative that was still alive, who knew the secret. Oh, said this man, what he meant was this, tried and found truth.

T and FT. Tried the truth, tested the truth, believed the truth, and found it to be reliable. That's exactly what happened here.

They received the gospel, they believed the gospel, they were transformed by the gospel, they experienced its glory, and its power, and its grace, and then they broadcast it. They sent it out, not simply as the gospel now, but as the gospel woven into the warp and goop of their own experience, reinforced by the fact that they knew it was true. My friends, that's what a church is meant to be.

Now, there may be some ecclesiastical friends among us tonight, you'll forgive me for saying this, but to me it's one of the greatest tragedies of the, of the tragedies of the twentieth century, that in so many of our churches and colleges, the word is not sent false. We disseminate our doubts more than anything we believe. And the church of the twentieth century has become largely the disseminator of doubts.

And we have men holding the highest positions in church and ecclesiastical life, who are nothing other than the persuaders of on beneath. That's not what a church was meant to be. A church was meant to receive the word of the Lord, the apostolic pyrrhugna, and then having received it, and experienced it, to send it out, impregnated, reinforced by the experience of every man and every woman on the church roll, that these things are true.

Would we be commended on this call? Are there unbelievers on the church roll enough? I hope there are not, because if there are, it means that to that extent we are short of the New Testament pattern for the church of Christ, and we need to repent. It is not enough to preach the gospel in vague terms. It must be received as from the Lord and his apostles, experienced as such, and reinforced by a whole united community of believers who know the grace of God through the gospel.

Now what is this gospel that they thus disseminated? I hurry towards a close, because I've given you the principle, but let's just analyze it very briefly. What is this gospel? Well, it is referred to as good news. Good news in a word in the first place, verse 5. For our gospel, our good news, came not to you in word only, but it did come in word, first of all.

Not in word only, but it did come in word. But you see, this is the least we can say about the gospel. Now unfortunately, this is about everything that some of us say about it.

What is the gospel? Good news in a word. That's the least, not the most. We only begin to preach the gospel in the New Testament way when we bring good news in a word.

When we announce to the angel, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. For unto you is born this day in the city of David the Savior, which is Christ the Lord. But that's only the beginnings of the gospel, the gospel in a word.

As the good news in a word, it is a message to be believed, a communication to be received, alike on account of its origin in God and of its content for sinners. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. But it is also referred to in this context as coming in power and in the Holy Spirit and in full conviction.

Now here I must repeat a little, because we referred to this this morning. It did not come simply to the Thessalonians, it did not come to them simply as a word, a bare naked word. It came as a word charged with power, charged with dynamite, in power, wrapped up in dynamite, I think were the words we used this morning, wrapped up in God's dunamis.

And of course this is quite theological and this is biblical. Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the dunamis, it is the power of God unto salvation. But wait a moment, the thing we wanted to stress this morning at this stage, and I want to stress it tonight, is this.

The gospel is no mere power. It is the power of the Holy Ghost. It's the power of a present God.

Let me put it to you like this. My dear people, in the coming of the gospel, God is coming to us. It's a thing which we rarely appreciate as we should or we would be worshipping the Lord more than we do.

When the gospel comes to us, when the word of the gospel comes to us, God is coming to us, he's visiting us, he's seeking us, he's addressing us. The sovereign Lord of the universe comes down to us in his word and he looks us in the eye and he addresses us with his word and it is the word of God. And that's what the gospel is, and God is a God of power.

And he comes to us in the gospel because he would win us and he would rule us in order to save us. Now some of us may not be quite sure what's happening to us when we hear the gospel preached. In principle of a certain theological college where I stayed for a little while and studied, he once had what appeared to be a nervous breakdown.

And his father and mother took him very concernedly to a physician. And the physician, when they saw him and his parents come in, they said to him, well now we'll have a little chat on our own, shall we? And so he bade mum and dad stay outside. And it took a considerable amount of time before the physician, who was a God-fearing man, elicited from this then young man with a crippled thirst from Cambridge, something of what was going on in his mind.

And the physician began to unravel it and he said of the fears he had. And he felt he was haunted and when he went to a church he felt an oppression come upon him. And when he sat and heard the gospel preached he felt he wanted to shout.

And he didn't know what to do with himself and he thought there must be surely something wrong with me mentally. The physician put his hand on his shoulder. My dear boy, said he, it's the hound of heaven that's after you.

It's the almighty God that's after you to save your immortal soul. Don't be frightened of him like Samuel in the temple of old. It's the Lord that's speaking to you.

The thing for you to do is this, is not to go and see another physician or to go for a holiday as your father and mother suggest, but go on your knees. And he did. And when I knew him he was the principal of a theological college and an influence upon men.

He didn't know what was happening to him. The power of the Lord, the power of the Spirit, the convictions of an immanent God dealing with him. Is there someone here tonight in that category? The gospel as they received it then was the word, the good news in a word, but the good news of a word in a word wrapped up in power and in the Holy Ghost coming with much conviction.

And lastly, if that was the gospel as they received it, what was the gospel like as they sent it forth? Now there are two views of the gospel here. The gospel as it was received, the word, good news, with power. What was the gospel as they sent it forth? Well it was that, but it was something else as well.

Paul tells us, everybody's talking about you. And they're telling me when I go to certain places what kind of a reception I had when I came to you, and how, notice, you turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God and to wait for his son from him. Now this is the gospel demonstrated.

This is what the gospel did. This is what the word of the good news coming in the power of the Holy Spirit and with much conviction did. This is the gospel expressed in life.

They turned to God from idols. Having turned to God from idols, they began to serve God. Ah, but wait a minute, a God with alliterance, a God who's alive, a God who's true and genuine.

And having turned and in serving, they discovered that life had more meaning than the present can confine, but there was a future and a hope and something that God had promised them. They began to wait. I'm not going to stay with those steps tonight, but I'm going to ask you this, my friend, and especially if you're a member of this church.

Is the gospel according to your life a word that has so come in power and in the Holy Ghost and with much conviction that you're a turned man or a turned woman? Have you turned to God from idols? The gospel that we disseminate must be a gospel that has turned us right around. Otherwise it's no gospel at all. Notice the way the apostle puts it.

Turn not from idols to God, but to God from idols. What he means is this. There's reason, there's rhyme to his mode of speaking, his mode of writing, you see.

The positive involves the negative here. The call of the gospel is primarily to turn to God. Turn your face to God, but if your face is God-like, you've got your back to the idols.

Paul didn't go around just persuading people to leave their idols. And I trust the Lord will give me grace never to try to do that. It's the wrong way around.

People have to attach to their idols until they see something better. But the biblical way is this. Get men to a full square God-like, face to face with God, eye to eye with God, mouth to mouth with God, in communion with God.

And when men have caught a vision of the glory of the grace and the power of God, they let go their idols. Turn to God from idols. I wonder whether some of us are still clinging to our idols tonight.

And you know, we're wondering why it is that we don't see the face of God clearly. Why we don't hear the voice of God succinctly and clearly. Why he doesn't hear us.

You know, half the trouble is this, we're looking in the other way. You don't catch his eye because you're not looking in his direction. The Bible uses this language, you see.

He tells people to turn round to God. We've come behind his back. The Old Testament is full of this.

One of the prophets says that they only see my hinder part. We only see the back of the Almighty. But we want to see his face.

That's the Christian life. And this is the life that counts, as the gospel is preached and disseminated in word, when it is bolstered and supported and read. Indeed, I don't need to say any more.

When it is supported with men and women and preachers of the gospel that know something of this, looking into the face of God, then it counts. A turning to God from idols to serve the living and the true God and to wait for his Son from heaven. I must leave it there.

Now, can you see why this church was commended? So much else, you see, is involved in this. Paul doesn't refer to them, to the multitude of things involved in turning and serving and waiting. A turning took place in a moment.

The serving goes on for an age. It's a present continuous serving. And so also the waiting.

Because the Christian man that has really received the Christian message and is living the Christian life knows there is an end and a terminus to history. And it is in the hand of God when he will send his Son, Jesus, whom he raised from the dead and who is already delivering us from the rock to come, when he sends him back to wind up the affairs of the universe and of time and to usher in the day of days, the everlasting day, to cast out sin and Satan and those who are so inextricably bound to him that they will not let his skirt go, to cast them out forever. An apostolic commendation of an ancient church that had not had a settled minister or pastor or a youth worker or anybody else, but had lived in an utterly pagan environment for the space of twelve, thirteen, fourteen months.

Men and women, where do we stand with all our background, with all our privileges? How far does the voice of our testimony carry? How mighty is the word of the gospel impregnated by the testimony of this church and of its people? How compelling is it in Macedonia and Achaia and where our missionaries go? Do people say of us what they said of the Thessalonians? Are you a Christian tonight? Are you living the Christian life? Are you involved in the disseminating of the Christian message in the Christian way? I beseech you by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service and mine. For our mission requires and demands nothing less of us than all that we are and all that we have to do all that is written and all to the glory of God. And his God grant us the blessing we yearn for this week and give us a vision of the distant vistas and the need of the hour and a grace to be and to become, if needs be, what according to his word the standard is for an individual Christian and for a Christian church.

Let us pray. O Lord our Heavenly Father, the shadows of the evening are upon us, and it may be that many of us are a little tired and weary at the end of the day, but we have been meditating upon thy word, which requires of us all honesty and sincerity and attention, and we ask of thee that thou wouldst make us God-fearing in this respect. O Lord, save us from trifling with thy truth and enable us to walk in the footmarks of the faithful, and by thy grace to live evidently abreast of our privileges and of our inheritance.

Forgive us our trespasses, renew a right spirit within us, and use us to fulfill thy purpose in the gift of Christ thy Son. Father, as in highest heaven, so on earth, on this bit of earth, where we are, thy will be done. Amen.

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