

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

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Date: 03 February 2013

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like you to turn back to the passage that we read in 1 Thessalonians and as I mentioned earlier on the verses that we're going to be considering this evening are verses particularly 6 and 7 and then looking at how other parts of what Paul says to the Thessalonians impact on these verses and we'll read them again verses 6 and 7.

You became imitators of us and of the Lord in spite of severe suffering you welcome the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit and so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Now the three ways that we're going to look at this this evening is by thinking first of all about the believers actions and we're going to be thinking about how the believer accepts the message the message that came to them how the believer accepts the manner of life that Paul particularly exemplified and also how the believer accepts the or acts rather as a model of faith so how he accepts the message accepts the manner of life and acts as a model of faith and as you may have noticed it's slightly different from this morning because this morning we were thinking particularly about the Holy Spirit and how he moves and how he works in particularly the gospel and how it comes to whoever in this case the Thessalonians and of course in our case all of us here in Bon Accord and just to recap very briefly for especially those who weren't here this morning we looked at how the Spirit acted in bringing the gospel we thought about how the Spirit gives the word about how the Spirit empowers the witness and about how the Spirit as well awakens the believer so the Spirit was a work he was working through the gospel that Paul was sharing and he was making alive those who were spiritually dead and now Paul says that you are spiritually alive in fact he says in verse 4 we know brothers loved by God that he has chosen you he says we are absolutely sure that you are Christians and that must be a huge encouragement to the folks in Thessalonica these people who had been left by Paul in all kinds of opposition he'd left in the midst of a riot you may remember from this morning but he writes to them and he says I am absolutely convinced that by the things that Timothy has told me remember this morning we said that Timothy had brought word back and he talked about the faith and the life of these Thessalonian Christians and he was saying based on this testimony that I've heard about you I am absolutely convinced that you are following the Lord Jesus

Christ and that you are his and that's the kind of the background Paul had then left Thessalonica and at this point he's in Corinth during roughly an 18 month stay there it's towards the end of his second missionary journey and he's going to head back to where he started in Antioch but one of the things that he really wants to assure them in writing to them from Corinth is that he has not forgotten them that he is still praying for them still thinking about them and that he genuinely does love them but in the midst of all that and in all that encouragement and in all that assurance that he tries to bring to bring to the Thessalonians he says remember there are certain things that you need to do and I suppose these could be exemplified although of course our text is verses 6 and 7 in verse chapter 2 and verse 12 where Paul says encouraging comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. God was the one that took the initiative he called these people out of the Jewish lifestyle that they were in or the pagan lifestyle that they were in and he called them into his kingdom and into his glory and he says I encouraged and I comforted and I urged you to live as if this is what was really happening to you. In other words simply to live like you are alive. He says I know you're alive I know you're spiritually alive but you have to live in the light of that and to show others that you're alive. So the first thing he says to them and the first thing that he reminds them is that they accepted his message and this is particularly important because if we just thought that accepting the message was something that you did when you first became a Christian then surely the message didn't matter after you became a Christian. If all that Paul had said to the Thessalonian Christians was so long as you accept the fact that Jesus died so

that if you believe in him all of the effect and all of the power of his death and of his resurrection will be applied to you. If that was the whole story then of course they would have said well we've accepted that now you can carry on to Corinth and you can do as you please we feel that we're actually safe now.

But he says that I encouraged, comforted and urged you to live a life worthy of the calling that you have received. In other words he says to them it's wonderful that you have believed and in fact he says in verse 6 that you welcome the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit. You realize that this gospel was good news and that God really was acting so that he could rescue sinners from the state that they were in and bring them into a relationship with himself. They accepted it with joy but he said that even though you were accepting it with joy you then needed to act as if you really had been born again.

And so that's what we mean with our first point that the believer accepts the message. We mentioned in this morning you may remember that the Holy Spirit had given the Old Testament and of course now he's given the New Testament and it's really quite remarkable if you put yourselves in the shoes of these Thessalonian Christians that they were getting this letter and perhaps they didn't even know at the time but this letter that they had received was really going to become part of what we now have today is the Bible because everything that Paul had written in here had been directly guided by the Holy Spirit. And you remember of course that we said that this morning we said that some people really don't think that there's much of an issue in just adding bits on or taking bits away from the Bible because at the end of the day it came from the church. But what we have to remember is that every single letter and every single prophecy and every single history book the whole of the Bible came from God himself and so we have to treat it as God's word and not as the church's word.

[7 : 40] But of course this was coming from Paul but they remembered that when Paul had been in their midst and shared the gospel with them that it was really the Holy Spirit that was speaking through him. And so when he writes this letter to them and when he says I'm so glad that you've become Christians and I'm totally sure that you've become Christians but if you really are then this is the kind of life that you need to live. They had accepted Paul's message before and they were going to accept his message again. And that's the first challenge for each one of us this evening.

Particularly because sometimes we can fall into the trap of saying when I become a Christian there is no chance of my ever not becoming a Christian. And that is absolutely true. One of the greatest parts of the message of the gospel is that when you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you really do become a completely new creation. The old has gone and the new has come.

And it is completely impossible for that whole process to reverse and from going from being closed with the righteousness of Christ, being acceptable to God, being in a relationship with Him which God will ensure is perfected so that you are brought into His presence in heaven.

God wouldn't simply reverse all of that. So we can be completely sure that if God has really converted us, that we will stay converted and that we really will have eternal life, not just temporary life when we become Christians. But sometimes that can lead us to be lazy. Now it doesn't look like the Thessalonian Christians were lazy. He says that we continually remember before our God and Father your work of faith, labour of love and patience or endurance of hope. He says you're carrying on in the faith and that is exactly what you're supposed to do. But the challenge that comes to each one of us is are we living like that? Are we living the way that the Thessalonians were living?

Realising that if God had given us one part of this gospel message, that if we repent and believe the gospel then we really will find complete forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we accepting the other part of the gospel? Which of course says that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus. If you are really converted then you will grow and you will become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. That is exactly the challenge for you and it's the challenge for me. That if we are alive that we look like we're growing and it is evident to other people around us that we are really growing. But one of the really encouraging things about the Thessalonian

Christians and one of the things that perhaps doesn't apply so much to us as other people around the world facing persecution is that they accepted the word in spite of severe suffering. Back there again in verse 6, you became imitators of us and of the Lord. In spite of severe suffering you welcome the message with joy. And that is tremendously encouraging to be reading that. Because sometimes if we're so far detached from for example the church in Syria or Nigeria and all we hear

day after day are these messages about churches being burned down and Christians being killed in huge numbers. And it really distresses us to see the kind of hardships, the toil and hardships as Paul mentions himself that Christians are suffering in the world. Sometimes we think how can they have any joy in what they're going through?

[11 : 38] But Paul simply says I know that you accepted the gospel in spite of severe suffering and you didn't just grudgingly accept it, you actually accepted it in the joy of the Holy Spirit. If they had simply accepted it in joy we might have had some reason to think that this might have been based on some kind of emotional hype. That they had just become extremely excited about this kind of message and they were looking for something new. They had itching ears and because of that they just went with whatever the new word was. But Paul is convinced that this was the good soil, that their hearts were the good soil that the sower planted the seed in and it is actually producing a good fruit and a good crop.

Because it's the joy given by the Holy Spirit. It's not a human joy, it's not an excitement that we can conjure up in ourselves. It's a joy and it's a contentment that we only find from God himself. And this is something that sometimes we can overlook as Christians. We can either fall into two equally wrong categories. Either we can think that a Christian should simply be happy all the time and can almost be living in a completely surreal world, almost in a fantasy where everything that's going on around them regardless of how bad it is doesn't really matter because a Christian should quite simply just be happy all the time. Well that's not what Paul says and neither does he say that we should go around continually depressed at the state of our own lives and at the state of the world around us. We should be concerned about our own lives. We should be repenting of the sin that is in our own lives. And we should be praying for the restoration of our country when we see things falling apart spiritually. But there is no reason to be depressed about these things. The middle ground between simply being unrealistically happy all the time and being continually depressed by the world around us is having the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And that joy quite simply put is a complete confident and confident assurance that God is for us. It's the assurance that the Thessalonian Christians had when they accepted this gospel message because they realized that it had come from God and they had realized that God was a person, was a deity that would keep his own word. That's how they could have joy.

That's how they could have contentment and assurance in their lives. In a sense it didn't matter what was going on around them because they knew that God was for them and that God worked all things together for the good of those who love him. So their joy was a contentment and it was a complete assurance that God was on their side because they had accepted him and submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And again that's a challenge for us. Are we living the same way and are you and I living the same way that these Thessalonian Christians did with joy given by the Holy Spirit? Are we given to either simply complaining continually about things that are going on or are we just continually unrealistic about the state of our own lives and the state of people and society around us? Remember yourselves and me with you that the middle ground and the right way to live as a Christian is having the joy of the Holy Spirit. Praying of course every single day that the Spirit would give us that joy, reminding us of the way that we first believed the gospel. But he goes on further than that because he mentions that the Spirit both encouraged and gave joy to the preacher as well. Right at the beginning of this letter to the

[15 : 52] Thessalonians he says in verse 2, we always thank God for all of you mentioning you in our prayers. In other words Paul says, I'm thanking you and I'm thanking you with joy that you have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's something that we need, that you and I need to remember as well.

That there are people who are around us, people whom we may have grown up with, people who might be senior Christians to us and they've seen how we've gone from not being a Christian and perhaps not even caring about God or going to church. And we've been brought into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not just the joy that we have but it's the joy of the people who were witnesses to us and who maybe even themselves personally led us to the Lord Jesus Christ. As they're seeing us grow up in faith and in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, they'll have joy as well.

And that's something particularly for you folks if you're older and if you've seen people becoming Christians and are younger than you, to remember that you ought to have joy as well. And it ought

to remind you of the time when you yourself first believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thinking back if you can remember a particular time when you decided that you would give your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, when you put your whole trust in Him and you looked away from yourself and you looked to Him as your righteousness and you trusted in Him for time and for eternity. Remember that you have to be thinking about how God dealt in your life but you have to be joyfully thankful to God about how He deals with others in their lives as well. And I suppose the picture that is quite helpful is a story that was once told, really a mythical story, about a whole load of people who were in what was thought to be quite a safe ship.

And the ship ran into extremely stormy weather and eventually ran aground and was completely broken to pieces. Now there were certain people who managed to get to land and when they were on the land they found that there was this enormous lighthouse and that it was big enough to house everybody and keep everybody safe and that it was still shining out and showing other people that this particular piece of ground that if you swam to you would be safe on. And some people managed to get there tired and wet and cold and half dead. They managed to get to this rock and they climbed onto this rock and they were so grateful that they had managed to get onto this rock safe and sound. But very soon afterwards they began to almost forget the fact that they were even there. They began to take it easy, they began to make plans for their own lives and they were quite comfortable with this lighthouse that they had. There was more than enough room for them. The shore was nice and safe and really they were quite happy. And it didn't take an awful lot of time for them to completely forget that there were thousands of other people still stranded out in the waters and still perishing because they weren't themselves. After they'd been revived and strengthened again by being on land to go out and try and rescue them as well.

That if you like is how we tend to be as Christians. We can become Christians, we can have a genuine joy at the start and then the joy kind of fades just into complacency and we think well I'm a Christian now and I'm okay. And we forget that there are people even in this congregation, perhaps even in this congregation this evening, who are not trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and are as unsafe as we were before we became Christians. So remember on the one hand that we should be joyfully thankful to God that he has saved us and he has saved other Christians around us. But not to let that joy sink into apathy so that we really don't care that other people haven't yet accepted the Lord Jesus Christ.

[20 : 22] Remember that for yourselves and let me remember that as well. That's the first thing then that the believers accepted the message. They accepted what Paul had said about the gospel and they had remembered that Paul himself, just as they were, were full of joy at the fact that they had accepted this good news.

But the second point is that the believers accepted the manner of life and this flows straight on from the first point that we had. You cannot accept the message that if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will be safe for now and for eternity without accepting the second part, which says you must walk in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ who has saved you.

And as I mentioned at the start and I've mentioned repeatedly, if we are born again, then we have a living faith and a faith that produces works. But the Thessalonians were young Christians. In fact, they were days old Christians when Paul had to leave. He wasn't sure at all about how they would cope and so writing to them he says, you make sure that you become imitators of people.

And in fact, in the first couple of days of them becoming Christians, they did become imitators of other people. And you may have spotted three different groups that the Thessalonian Christians imitated.

And these are three groups that have an enormous amount to teach us as well. The first group is the missionaries themselves, Paul, Silas and Timothy.

[22 : 07] Let's look again at verse 6. You became imitators of us. Firstly, he says, you know yourselves. Later in chapter 2, he says, you know yourselves, how holy and righteous and blameless we were in front of all of you. All of you who had believed, we conducted ourselves in a manner that matched with the gospel that we were sharing.

And you became imitators of that. You copied that life that we had. And one of the fundamental points of this life that they were leading was a seriousness about the gospel that they were sharing with others. They were living a holy and righteous and a blameless life because they really did treat the conversion of others seriously. They knew that they had to live in a certain way to show that the gospel they were proclaiming really had its own effects.

And it reminds me of a really important story that I once heard about an older Christian who went to go and visit someone who had asked to see him in hospital. And he'd heard that this person in hospital was really sick and actually close to death. And so he went in to go and see the man. And he didn't really recognize the man at first. And this man who was in his bed and looking extremely ill said, do you remember who I am? And he said, I'm afraid I don't recognize you from anywhere. And he says, do you remember that there was once that you were going to preach in a place and there was a man that walked along to the church with you? And he said, I'm sorry, I just don't remember that person. And he says, well, do you remember that you preached such and such a sermon in this place and that a man walked back with you? And he says, oh, yes, I remember. It's so long since I've seen you. And, you know, I'm so sorry that you're in this state that you're in. And the man who was in the bed said to the minister, well, I remember the sermon that you preached. And it was a fine sermon and it really made an impact on me. And the minister said, well, thank God for that. And the man in the bed said, no, you won't thank me and you won't thank God after you've heard what I have to say. He said, I really didn't care about becoming a Christian. I had no interest in the gospel whatsoever. But I thought that I would just join you because you looked like you were going to church and on the way there, you were very quiet. In fact, you hardly spoke to me at all on the way to church.

And I presumed that it must have been because you were thinking over your sermon. And I thought, this must be a very holy person. They're so focused on the gospel that they're about to preach that it's taking up all of their attention. And so I was very impressed. So I came in with you to the church and I sat and I listened to your sermon. And your sermon really made an impact on me. And I realized there and then that I needed to make a decision to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. But I wasn't really sure about a few things. So, you know, I thought I should ask you on the way back.

[25 : 18] But as soon as we left the church and we started back down the road, you cracked a joke about something or other. And you spent the whole way back laughing about this or that point of theology and making light of it. And he said, I was so disappointed and I felt so awkward about the situation that I simply couldn't ask you anything about the gospel. And he said, I'm here this evening and I'm lying in my bed and I don't have long to go. And you have completely put me off the seriousness and the genuineness of the gospel of Christ. And as the story goes, he never accepted Jesus and he went into a lost eternity. Now, he was responsible for his own faith. He was responsible for the decision that he made. But this minister who had seemed very serious and who had preached the gospel seriously to begin with, had then treated the whole rest of his walk with such lightness that this man that was walking with him really just didn't feel that the gospel he presented was up to much after all. And what we need to do is we need to apply that to ourselves.

If we ever share the gospel, if we ever talk to someone about the Lord Jesus Christ, that we make sure that we're serious about it. That, of course, doesn't mean that we're doing about everything, but it means that we take things seriously and we realize the implications and the consequences of trusting or not trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, because it has eternal consequences for each one of us. Pray especially, I would really encourage you, pray especially for the ministers and the elders in our churches, that they would be serious about the gospel that they're sharing and they would make sure that their walk matches their talk, so to speak. But our third point, our first point was that the believers accepted the message. Our second point was that our believers accepted the manner of life, that they copied Paul and Silas and Timothy. To finish off this second point, I'd like to look at two more groups very briefly.

They became imitators of Paul. They became imitators too of the churches in Judea. This is later on, this is in chapter 2. He says, you became imitators of churches in Judea which are in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 14.

Because you suffered the same things that they did. You suffered persecutions from the Jews and you were treated in the same way that they were. But there's an incredibly important point in that. These congregations, these churches in Judea were an awful long way away from these churches in Thessalonica. They, in fact, didn't have particularly much in common and there were far more non-Jewish Christians in Thessalonica than there were in Judea. But what it reminds us is that these churches that were in Judea were older Christians than these churches in Thessalonica. But Paul nevertheless says, you became imitators of these older Christians. They had their own problems. They had problems with Jewish ceremonial law and they had their own opinions about certain things in the Bible.

[28 : 45] But you overlooked that and you recognized that they had been longer with the Lord Jesus Christ and knew more of His grace and His dealings in their lives than you did. And so you copied them because you saw something of the Lord Jesus Christ in the way that they walked and the way that they talked. And you remember yourselves, particularly for being in Aberdeen when there are so many different congregations with all kinds of different opinions, some of them we may not agree with.

Look in all these churches and when you see Christians who are both longer in the faith and more mature than yourself, that you recognize every single one of God's people are washed in the same blood. They have as much to tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ from their own experience as we have to tell others. So they accepted the example of churches that weren't exactly like them, but had a longer experience in the Lord's service. And lastly, of course, they became imitators of the Lord. Back in verse six, you became imitators of us and of the Lord. Especially when we read in John chapter one, we hear that Jesus came into the world and was full of grace and truth. Any way that these Thessalonians imitated Christians, they were only imitating Christians insofar as those Christians were imitating Jesus Christ himself. They were recognizing that wherever they saw grace and truth in these people's lives, that was what was in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And those were the things that they should be copying. Ultimately, you and I need to look to the Lord Jesus Christ as our whole example. He alone is our perfect example for life and for faith. And then lastly, our third point very briefly is that the believers acted as models of faith. Verse seven, and so you became a model to all the believers in

Macedonia and Achaia. Now, as you know from this morning, Macedonia was where Thessalonica was and places like Corinth were in this region called Achaia. And it's quite a big area and there may not have been the greatest communication with the Christians that were in Thessalonica. But nevertheless, the testimony of these Jews, of these Jewish Christians comes to the church in Athens and Corinth and they realize this faith, even as young Christians, that they're putting in the Lord Jesus.

This total reliance on him, their, as he mentions at the beginning, their faith, their love and their hope. These things, these simple things that the Christians should have been doing, they were making sure that they were exercising these things in their daily walk. And the Christians that were even younger than them, who were down in Corinth and these kind of places, they were seeing there is definitely spiritual life in Thessalonica. We've heard about it, some may have even seen it for themselves. These people are going on with the Lord Jesus Christ. And so they actually became a model, even as young as they were, and as humble as they were in accepting other people's examples. They themselves became an example to the Christians around them. And it's an interesting word that Paul uses and a word that we would recognize immediately. When he says in verse 8, the Lord's message rang out from you. The word he actually uses is where we get the word echo from.

And effectively what it means is just an echo or a noise. And you can immediately build up this image of the word of truth, the gospel of God coming to these Thessalonian Christians. And as soon as they receive it, they're sharing it with other people. Because as we've mentioned in the first two points, they saw just how important this message was. They accepted it with joy and they shared it with those who were around them. And the simple question to conclude that is, do you really know the Lord Jesus Christ? And is he making such an impact in your life that you are daily growing in grace and knowledge and you're sharing him with other people? The Thessalonian Christians accepted Paul's message.

[33 : 27] They accepted his manner of life and ultimately the manner of life of the Lord Jesus himself. But they also in doing these things became a model of faith, an example, not just to these people in Corinth and in the rest of Greece, but they've become an example to us as well. And we should be making sure that just as much as they imitate the Lord Jesus Christ, we should be imitating these Thessalonian Christians from whom we've learned so much this evening. They put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and it was so serious and so special to them that they shared it with others. And you and I need to make sure that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we do the same with ourselves. Amen.

May God bless his word to us. Let's pray.