

*1 Thessalonians 1:5b-7***PREFACE**

We all have heard the phrases, “no man is an island,” and “for whom the bell tolls.” My guess is that few of us know the origin of those phrases. They were written by John Donne in 1624. He was a Christian writer (1572-1631), and during a time of sickness wrote *Devotions upon emergent occasions and seuerall steps in my sickness*. Here is a portion from what he wrote in *Meditation XVII* of that work:

All mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated... As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come: so this bell calls us all...

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

It is impossible to overestimate the breadth and depth of one individual's impact on others—and this is especially true when it comes to kingdom life, for every effect from one person to another is magnified and amplified (as we saw last week) by the power of God.

In our last session we looked at how much the supernatural power of God was at work both in Paul and the missionaries, and in the people of Thessalonica when the gospel was presented to them. It was presented by means of the spoken word, but it came *to* them—and was received *by* them—in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction (v5).

Now, from v5b to the end of the chapter, we see how that gospel and its effects were played out in the Thessalonians, and “sounded forth” from Paul and his men, through the Thessalonians, to people far and wide.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-7.**CHARACTER AND IMITATION**

what kind of men we proved to be... (v5)

You also became imitators of us... (v6)

First, a word of caution regarding our interpretation of these two remarks by Paul: Don't lose sight of the fact that in v5 the apostle has explicitly credited all this to the power of God working through the Holy Spirit. Let that same Spirit translate this for us into a *heavenly* perspective.

Paul did not remake himself, by the power of his own will, from a persecutor of Christians to the messenger of Christ to the Christians. It took a blinding, supernatural visitation from the Lord Himself ([Acts 9:1-9](#)), followed by several years of meditation, prayer and training ([Galatians 1:17-18](#)). Nowhere does Paul take ultimate credit for who and what he has become in and through Christ.

Read Romans 15:15-19.

Note:

v15: because of the **grace that was given me by God**

v16: so that my/the offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, [how?] **sanctified by the Holy Spirit**

v18: I will not presume to speak of anything except **what Christ has accomplished through me** [how?]

v19: **in the power of the Spirit**

You also became imitators of us...

Just so, he would not expect the Thessalonians to learn how to become good little Christians by mimicking his own behavior. The same process that took place in him must occur in them. Read all of v6:

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

We can imitate the behavior of our leaders until we are blue in the face—and it will mean nothing. But by coming to Christ, and letting the Spirit work in and through us, we “become” imitators of them.

5B

I recall an interview I saw a number of years ago with Billy Graham’s music director, Cliff Barrows. I was struck by the level of respect with which he held the evangelist. After the many decades of their close association, traveling together, ministering together, he still referred to him as “Mister Graham”—not “Billy.” And in the interview he went on to explain how resolute Graham was, over the many years of travel away from wives and family, to guard the men’s—and the crusade’s—integrity and reputation. He spoke of how, for example, they never permitted—even for the most innocent reason—women in their hotel rooms. And these were not dictates of a puritanical leader, but righteous standards all the men had heartily embraced as brothers, and ambassadors for Christ. They were determined not to bring shame and dishonor upon the name of their Lord.

I am reminded of this when I read the end of v5:

just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

How could Paul or Billy Graham preach Christ in public, and dishonor Him in private. They could not—they *would* not. How utterly fragile is the faith of those who just moments before had worshiped pagan idols, and how easily that brand new faith would be shattered by the discovery—even the rumor—of being played false by hypocrites. No righteous words coming from their lips could win out over unrighteous behavior in their personal lives. Paul and his men were determined to be a faithful witness in *all* respects of their lives.

v6

And that effort bore fruit. Immediately Paul writes of the positive effect that had on the Thessalonians.

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord,

Sidebar: The KJVs “followers” is not inaccurate, but thin. The Greek *mimetes* (a word from the theatre) means to mimic what one sees someone else doing.

In 1 Corinthians Paul stated explicitly what is only implied here.

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Nowhere does Paul claim a life of perfection worthy of being imitated; he just strove to be the earthly, visible example of Christ. In the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Brown). W. Bauder writes,

The example or type is not here a representation of particular qualities, but, first, conduct which is shaped by a definite goal, and, secondly, the experience of persecution and suffering for Christ's sake—in short, it is a life in fellowship with Christ. To be an imitator of the apostle accordingly means laying hold of Christ in the consciousness of one's own imperfections and letting one's life be continually remoulded by Christ in obedience to Him.

And the rest of v6 gives the evidence demonstrating that the Thessalonians did indeed imitate both Paul and Christ.

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

On his way to Thessalonica, during their stay in Philippi, Paul and Silvanus were afforded the opportunity to live out this "tribulation with joy."

Read Acts 16:23-25.

In their expressions of joy, Paul and Silas [[Silvanus](#)] were imitating Christ Jesus, just as they encouraged the Thessalonians to imitate them.

Read Matthew 5:43-45.

[[Note in v45 what "sons" really means](#)]

And here's the kicker: the imitation does not stop until it reaches Father God Himself.

Read Matthew 5:48.

Thessalonians (us) → Apostle Paul → Christ Jesus → God the Father

In v5 Paul wrote that the gospel came to the Thessalonians and they received it "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." How could he say this? The first reason he states is that they suffered through "much tribulation" with the joy that only comes by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

tribulation^{nasb}, **affliction**^{kjvs,esv}, **severe suffering**^{niv} = *thlipsis* = from <G2346> (thlibo); **pressure** (literal or figurative) :- afflicted (-tion), anguish, burdened, **persecution**, tribulation, trouble.

We read of such other-worldly joy when Peter along with other apostles were brought before the Council [[Sanhedrin](#)] for their incessant preaching. [[set up with v33, and Gamaliel's counsel](#)]

Read Acts 5:40-42.

That is a joy that the world cannot comprehend—a joy that comes only through the Spirit. And it sustained even the brand new converts at Thessalonica. Paul refers to it in Chapter Two.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15.

This is chronicled in Acts 17.

Read Acts 17:4-9.

That is, after they had demanded and received their bribe, they let them go.

There is nothing new under the sun: the same hatred against faith in Christ we see today has been around since before Christ was crucified. He said it would happen—and it has. And this the Thessalonians experienced from the outset. But they were not dissuaded.

v7

Let me put together v6a and v7:

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord (v6a)... so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. (v7)

The word “example” is a bit soft; the NIV comes closer to the idea with “model.”

typon (too'-pohn) = from <G5180> (tupto); **a die (as struck)**, i.e. (by implication) a stamp or scar; by analogy a shape, i.e. a statue, (figurative) style or resemblance; specially a sampler (“**type**”), i.e. a model (for imitation) or instance (for warning) :- en- (ex-) ample, fashion, figure, form, manner, pattern, print; **suggests an exact reproduction.**

Early on these new believers in Thessalonica were modeling Christ to other new Christians in their region of the world. What a marvelous testimony! Would that that would be *our* epitaph:

“He modeled Christ”
“She modeled Christ”
“This church modeled Christ”