

## **Keeping the Church on Target** (1 Thessalonians 1:1-10)

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Have you ever wondered why a pigeon walks so funny? According to an interesting article in the Detroit Free Press, a pigeon walks the way it does so it can see where it's going. Because it can't adjust its focus as it moves, the pigeon actually has to bring its head to a complete stop between steps in order to refocus. This is the way it walks: head forward, stop; head back, stop. Don't laugh. This is the way the pigeon stays focused in life.

In a similar way, every local church needs to stay focused, especially in these days of the pragmatic entertainment-oriented churches, which compromise God's holiness and message of Bible separation (2 Cor. 6:14-17). We need to refocus and remember why the church is here and what is important in church ministry and life. God has called us to remain holy, faithful, growing in grace, spreading His Word, and evangelizing. We also need to stop promoting personal preferences, which will distract and divide the local church, and stay focused on what God wants us to be and do within the setting of the church.

Sometimes we become far too busy with all of our secular activities and personal agendas that we forget how important the local church ministry should be in our personal and family life. God has ordained the local church! Let us never forget this.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18:

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Only hell will try to harm and destroy the local church ministry. If you are set out to divide the fundamental local church, then you are part of hell's work, not God's work. Whose side are you on? When you are a divider and detriment to the local assembly (Titus 3:10), you become a partner with Satan and hell. Jesus said it, not me! I just recite it, I don't write it. You are either for local church ministry or you are against it. You can't have it both ways! You are either for Heaven

or for hell.

If we are not careful, we can forget what God expects of each one of us, as church members, who are called to be dedicated to a local church ministry. Sometimes we need to let the chips fall and redirect our ministries and lives, so that the Evil One does not find a way to interfere with God's work. Dear friend, are you part of God's work, or hell's work? Neutral you cannot be!

God has promised to bless the local church! Satan knows this. Therefore, God's people should be on guard, knowing that the devil will try to discourage them, divide them, and deter them from staying on target, as a local church ministry (1 Pet. 5:8). The devil will try to keep God's people from doing what is right. I think there are times when every church member must rekindle his vision or passion for the local church and remember how important the church really is in God's plan. If we are not careful, we can lose sight of the very place that God has promised to bless – the local church. This particular study is all about keeping the church on target.

What are the key things that keep a church on target?

### **A. God's provision (grace and peace) – vs. 1**

1 Thessalonians 1:1

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

If we come to church distressed we will send the message of distress to others. Let us get back to God's grace and peace that is only found “in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” God is its source (Phil. 4:7 - “peace of God”), Christ is its supplier (John 14:27 - “My peace I give unto you”), and we have all these blessings in view of our union with the Father and Son (2 John 1:9). We must learn to lighten up in life by allowing God to once again fill us with His remarkable grace and peace for daily living. We are to live by God's strengthening and enabling grace. Grace keeps me going in life! Grace is God's marvelous provision for daily living (2 Cor. 12:9). We

are also to live by God's wondrous peace or the inward calmness of soul that He provides for our everyday lives (Isa. 26:3 - "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee").

How we live in the real world will ultimately affect our life and ministry in the local church. In other words, if we are bent out of shape during the week, and come to church like a twisted pretzel, we will send this same message to our children, our Sunday School class, and the entire body of believers. How we walk in the church doors is important. We need to come prepared to hear God's Word, do God's work, or be involved in church life and ministry. We cannot do the work of the Lord very well, if our own lives are out of sync. God is asking us to refresh our lives once again by His marvelous strengthening, or enabling grace, and sit by His still waters of peace (Ps. 23:2). We can possess these spiritual blessings because we are "in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the place of salvation, safety and supply for daily living. I have all that I need for daily living because of this union that I have with the Lord.

Dear friend, you can't find grace and peace for living in some new age book, drugs, or a bottle of liquor. It's found in a person; it's found in God. One thing is certain. These two gifts from the Lord (grace and peace) will help keep a church on target. When we fail to live by God's provision, we will live by another means – self, the flesh, the world, and the devil. When we fail to rely upon God's grace and peace, we can become frustrated, ineffective, and find ourselves worrying instead of working for the Lord, or sulking instead of serving the Lord. Our problems will overtake us, if we fail to avail ourselves to God's grace and peace, which is the needed dynamic for effective church ministry.

## **B. God's children (praying and serving together) – vv. 2-3**

### **1. God's children praying together (vs. 2)**

1 Thessalonians 1:2

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers."

These were prayers of thanksgiving (“give thanks to God”). Paul was thanking God for the saints during his time of prayer. How about you? If you are butchering the saints you won’t be praying for them! The church does not need butchers; it needs prayer warriors. My friend, we need to thank God everyday for what He has been doing in the lives of His people. Let us remember that the church is not a building; it’s people! In view of the massive super churches being built today, you would think that the church has been relegated to nothing more than fancy buildings and breathtaking architecture. However, the church is composed of people and we should be busy prayerfully thanking God for how He has been working in people’s lives.

We need to thank God everyday for what He has been doing in the lives of new converts. We sometimes might think God should be doing more, but nevertheless, we need to be thankful for what He is doing. You can be sure that these were prayers of thanksgiving for God’s saints. However, I’m also sure they were prayers of intercession for the saints, as he made mention of them in his prayers (Eph. 6:18). Paul knew how the enemy could find some crack in the lives of His people and take control of them by his strategic traps or tricks (2 Cor. 2:11).

“My Soul be on thy guard,  
Ten Thousand foes arise;  
The hosts of sin are pressing hard  
To draw thee from the skies.  
Oh watch and fight and pray,  
The armour ne’er lay down;  
The fight of faith will not be o’er  
Till thou receive the crown.”

## **2. God’s children are serving together (vs. 3)**

1 Thessalonians 1:3

“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.”

### **aa. Their work of faith (3a)**

Paul speaks about their “work of faith,” or those things they had done for Christ out of a faith, which were produced by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). As these saints served they possessed an undying faith that God would bless their efforts. Dear friend, we need Holy Spirit inspired faith today in the church. Faith is what takes a ministry to another level. We need to have faith that God is still on the throne and wants to bless the local church ministry. As we serve the Lord, we must continue to believe that He will work through us, and use us, as vessels fit for the Master’s use (2 Tim. 2:21). We also should have faith for the future. Everyone in a church ministry needs to catch the “faith fever.” We are called upon to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith makes the way brighter and the load lighter. When there is faith in the wind there is excitement and zeal! Faith keeps a church on target!

### **bb. Their labor of love (3b)**

The believer’s “labour of love” consisted of those things that they did for the Lord, which were done out of a spirit of love, produced by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). This speaks of their service for God motivated by love for the Lord Jesus. This is why they were seen to be serving the living and true God (vs. 9) in the midst of persecution (vs. 6). They loved the Lord with all of their hearts (Mark 12:30). Dear Christian friend, let us remember that Christianity is not a life to be endured for duty’s sake, but a Person to be served for love’s sake.

Someone has said,  
“Love for God makes drudgery divine.”

A love for God will keep a church on target! Why are you serving? Why do you teach Sunday School, play special music, or usher? Why evangelize? Why preach? It should be because we love Him (1 John 4:19). When the saint’s love for the Lord decreases and Christians begin to lose their “first love” (Rev. 2:4), it’s then that the church becomes nothing more than a mechanical religious robot. Beware!

A young fellow called me the other day and left a message on the telephone. He said his girlfriend was moving away from God and he wanted us to pray for her. However, he shared at the end of his message that he truly loved God with all of his heart, and wanted to

do what was right. My friend, I wonder if we truly are in love with God today? Do we have a heart for God? What we do for the Lord is to be a labor of love! If we are serving God for any other reason but love, then we might as well stop serving! We are playing some kind of religious game, if we are not in love with God. It is always springtime in the heart that loves God.

### **cc. Their patience of hope (3c)**

When working together, as a local assembly, there is a need for patience. This “patience of hope” within this context of the Thessalonian epistle speaks of the patience and hope they possessed in view of Jesus’ imminent return in Rapture. The believers could patiently endure trials knowing that Christ could return at any moment and free them from all their tribulations. They could possess a daily blessed hope that was centered in the promise of Christ’s return for His children. This hope brought stability and refreshment into their lives. Jesus may come today!

1 Thessalonians 1:10

“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

The Rapture was dear to the hearts of these saints. The hope of Christ’s return produced patience in the lives of these saints as they endured difficulty and persecution. They knew that Jesus could return at any moment, free them from life’s trials, and take them back to Heaven, where they would enjoy His presence forever and experience freedom from all earthly trials.

“Jesus may come today  
Glad day! Glad day!  
And I would see my Friend;  
Dangers and troubles would end,  
If Jesus should come today.”

These particular saints developed patience and possessed a steadfast assurance or hope that centered in Christ’s imminent return. Do we possess this same patience and hope? How often do

we look for the Savior's return (Phil. 1:20) with great anticipation? How often do we awake in the morning and say, "Perhaps today!"

In the midst of their persecution these saints longed for Christ's imminent return and the thought of His return produced patience and hope in their hearts. No cracks had appeared in what Phillips calls their "sheer dogged endurance." As we work together we must do so with the patience and hope which comes from knowing that Jesus could return at any moment, to rescue us from life's pressures, trials, and persecution. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus!

We possess these virtues of patience and hope "in our Lord Jesus Christ" (the provision of God - vs. 3) and "in the sight of God and our Father" (the omniscience of God - vs. 3). God knows how we are doing in relationship to living the Christian life ("all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" - Heb. 4:13). We cannot hide from God!

Dearly beloved, our afflictions and trials in this life are "light" in comparison to eternity (2 Cor. 4:17). The patience and hope which is related to the Lord's return keeps a local church on target! We are to serve and live in light of Christ's coming. We are to possess patience in light of the hope we possess in Christ's imminent return. If our life has become dull and drab, it's because we have lost sight of the hope that Jesus may come today! These believers possessed a patient hope and a blessed hope (Titus 2:13) in light of the coming of Jesus Christ! This enabled them to keep a right perspective on church ministry and deal with their difficulties which they faced in life. It kept them active and dedicated to God's work in spite of their persecution and problems, knowing that when Jesus returns they would be forever freed from every trial or difficulty, and rewarded for serving and living for Him. The patient hope, centered in Christ's return, keeps our attitudes right and our outlook positive.

### **C. God's election (provides motivation or stimulus) – vs. 4**

1 Thessalonians 1:4

"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

Why does Paul speak about election after mentioning the three virtues (work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope) in verse three? The grammatical connection seems to be this. We should practice these three cardinal virtues because God was so gracious in choosing us to be His child. Behind all of the wars on election, there is this wonderful and beautiful truth that God has chosen us to be His child, so we might live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Jesus said in John 15:16:

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

Rooted in the doctrine of election is a motivating reality; God has chosen us to be His children, so we might love Him in return, and serve Him with all of our hearts. No work should be too great to do for God, as we contemplate how He could have left each one of us die in our sins, and go to hell for all eternity. Instead of righteously judging us God chose a community of believers to be His children in eternity past (Eph. 1:4), in accordance with His whole sovereign plan of redemption, which offers the Gospel to the entire world of lost mankind (John 3:16).

Election in the Bible takes on a corporate or community emphasis (1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 1:3). Furthermore, election is open - not closed (Matt. 28:19). God's choice is to save a collective and open group of people, instead of a closed group of individual people. God does not play favorites in the matter of salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). God does not bypass anyone for salvation (John 3:16; 16:8). God chooses to save a company or community of people who respond to His initiatives upon their lives (Rev. 22:17). It's these people who enter into His corporate elective plan, which was already designed in eternity past, within the counsels of God's sovereign purpose (Eph. 1:4).

I believe this is an accurate doctrinal summary on election. However, the real intent behind Paul mentioning the doctrine of election, and our subsequent salvation from hell, is to motivate us, or stir us up, so we might give our whole lives to God. Remembering the doctrine of election (God choosing us to enjoy the blessings of salvation) keeps



a church on target. It keeps our heads out of the sand and our hearts aflame. It reminds each one of us about God's grace, which has reached down to lost humanity, in order to choose a company of people to be His children. Election is much more than a theological fact. It is a stimulus for God's saints to serve the Lord in light of His choice to save lost sinners who were doomed to die the sinner's death and go to hell.

The Bible teaches both election and human freedom (1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 10:10, 13). Look at it this way. Imagine standing before a door over which is written, WHOEVER WILL MAY COME! As you step by faith through that door, you look back. Over the inside of the door you read, CHOSEN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. The doctrine of election offers assurance and motivation to live for God.

#### **D. God's Gospel (the lifeline of church activity) – vs. 5**

1 Thessalonians 1:5

“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.”

The Gospel is connected to the previous thought on election because it is through the Gospel that people are elected or chosen to be part of God's saving plan. The connective word “for” indicates the reason for their election. People have the opportunity to respond to the Gospel because He has chosen an elect body of believers to be saved. Through repentance and faith people are given the opportunity to be part of that universal elect body of believers, which God has chosen before the foundation of the world, to be His children.

Jesus said in John 17:20:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”

D.L. Moody used to say:

“The whosoever wills are the elect and the whosoever wonts are the non-elect.”

In any event, election comes to fruition through the Gospel, or the good news about what Christ has done for us on the cross, and in His resurrection. The point is this. A church that stays on target is a church that keeps the Gospel message clear. When we confuse the Gospel message with man's works, then nothing else seems to make sense. We must keep the message of the Gospel clear. It is a message of absolute grace without any kind of human achievements (Ephesians 2:8-9).

One day, I received a call from the Grace Evangelical Society. I had a nice, long friendly chat with a man about the Gospel. He said that he was looking for churches in our area that he could recommend to other people. He wanted to direct them to churches that taught the message of free grace and that faith in Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation. As he called churches, he was alarmed at how many churches incorporated discipleship, various works, and outward conformity to laws and codes as a necessary part of the Gospel presentation. My friend, the Gospel is not what we can do for God, but what God has done for us.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

A man had the duty to raise a drawbridge to allow the steamers to pass on the river below and to lower it again for trains to cross over on land. One day, this man's son visited him, desiring to watch his father at work. Quite curious, as most boys are, he peeked into a trapdoor that was always left open so his father could keep an eye on the great machinery that raised and lowered the bridge. Suddenly, the boy lost his footing and tumbled into the gears. As the father tried to reach down and pull him out, he heard the whistle of an approaching train. He knew the train would be full of people and that it would be impossible to stop the fast-moving locomotive, therefore, the bridge must be lowered!

A terrible dilemma confronted him: if he saved the people, his son would be crushed in the cogs. Frantically, he tried to free the boy, but

to no avail. Finally, the father put his hand to the lever that would start the machinery. He paused and then, with tears he pulled it. The giant gears began to work and the bridge clamped down just in time to save the train. The passengers, not knowing what the father had done, were laughing and making merry; yet the bridgekeeper had chosen to save their lives at the cost of his son's.

In this sad story there is a lesson. The heavenly Father saw the blessed Savior being nailed to a cross, while people laughed, and mocked, and spit upon Him, and yet, "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This is the Gospel!

### **1. The Gospel message is a message of power – 5a.**

Please note that the true Gospel was present in the power of the Holy Spirit ("also in power, and in the Holy Ghost"). One of the things that I long for in preaching and teaching is the power of the Holy Spirit. The same should be true for all of us in our witnessing. When we witness or share the Gospel, we need God's power to be on our side, or else the message will never get through. The Gospel is a message of power (Rom. 1:16) and the power that makes the Gospel message penetrate the hard hearts of lost humanity is the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God opens the eyes of the lost through inner conviction and shows them their need for salvation. As we witness with the Gospel message, we must totally rely upon the conviction and compelling ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). We are powerless without the ministry of the Spirit.

### **2. The Gospel message is a message of assurance – 5b.**

The true Gospel will also produce a message of assurance in the hearts of people ("and in much assurance"). Blessed assurance Jesus is mine! Oh what a foretaste of glory divine! The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that saves for eternity! We must keep the Gospel clear in order to stay on target! The simplicity of the Gospel is becoming muddied today by Lordship Salvation teaching, which says a person must become something, do something, or promise something to God in order to be saved. One of the freest and easiest things in the entire world to understand is the Gospel. Any church will be off-target doctrinally when it becomes unclear about the true

Gospel message.

The church that is no longer sure what the Gospel is has lost its base or foundation. The Thessalonians could be confident that the Gospel message was true, based upon the faithfulness and conduct of those who taught it, such as Paul and his traveling companions (“ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake”). Their motive in presenting the Gospel was to benefit the lives of the Thessalonians. These men truly cared for the souls of the unsaved people of Thessalonica. They were not charlatans, who were in it for the money, but evangelists, who were genuinely concerned about rescuing the perishing.

John Wesley was holding a meeting in a small town, an ungodly man, who was fond of music, decided to attend. He wanted to hear the "good singing," but he planned to stop listening when Wesley began to preach. He sat quietly until the song service ended. Then he covered his ears. Suddenly, a fly landed on his nose. He tried to shake it off, but to no avail. The tickling effect was so irritating, that he finally had to use one hand to shoo away the insect. At that precise moment, Wesley was quoting Jesus' words, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Startled, the unbeliever kept listening, and through the gospel message he was converted. The power is in the Gospel message (Rom. 1:16). In this unique case, God also used a fly to reach a rebellious sinner!

### **E. God’s leaders (the teachers of the assembly) – vs. 6**

1 Thessalonians 1:6 - “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

God’s leaders are the pastors, and it’s the job of the preachers to keep the church on target. If the church gets off target, many times it’s because the preacher was out playing golf, when he should have been studying and stirring the people on to service and action. On the other hand, sometimes there are people who become lax and loose in their living, which do not want to follow the pastor. The people should respect and follow the pastor as he hands out the truth of God’s Word. As the preacher follows the Lord, so the people can

follow the Lord (“And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord”). God has called men to lead the church and people to follow. As people follow God-ordained leadership, they will also be following the Lord (1 Cor. 11:1).

The key for the preacher is to keep giving out the clear Word of God, stop trying to please the people, and tickle their ears (2 Timothy 4:2-3). If preachers start preaching messages that are “people pleasers,” they might as well pack their bags and start flipping hamburgers at Macdonald’s. The preacher is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. As he faithfully gives out the whole counsel of the Word of God, he will find himself providing help for the afflicted, and bringing conviction to the hearts of those who are living in sin. The problem with many saints today is that they no longer are receiving the message of the Word of God (“having received the word” - vs. 6). They do not want to receive the pure and unadulterated message of God’s Word with joy and acceptance (“with joy of the Holy Ghost” - vs. 6).

Joy is a wonderful thing. These Christians had joy even when they were experiencing trial and tribulation (“in much affliction” - vs. 6). A Christian’s joy should be determined, not by his circumstances, but by his relationship with Christ. Externally there was affliction; internally there was joy! This is a supernatural work of God taking place in their hearts. The point is this. These saints received God’s Word during their time of affliction and they received it while possessing joy. If the preacher has to deal with a bunch of lemons every Sunday, he will soon have to start selling lemonade after the morning service! Some Christians sit, soak and sour! They have no joy in their hearts and they come parading into church ready to moan about something or take a punch at someone else who does not fit into their mold. They do not want to receive the Word of God with joy. Many Christians today want candy-coated preaching instead of Heaven-sent preaching. They want positive preaching that does not expose the sins of the saints.

Paul taught that people must follow God-ordained leadership, and as they do, they can follow the Lord and please Him. If you reject authority in the local church, you will also find yourself rejecting God’s authority, over you own life. Paul knew what he was talking about

when he spoke about the people following the preaching and direction of the local pastors. At one time he kicked against the pricks.

Acts 9:5

“And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

Saul had been like a wild animal fighting against the goads or the prodding sticks that kept animals in check. If you kick against the pricks (goads) of the local fundamental church, what is right, and preachers who stand up for truth, then you are like a wild animal that is constantly fighting against what is right, true, and God-ordained. God has not called the saints to kick against the pricks, but to follow the pastors of the local assemblies, who are fighting for the faith (Jude vs. 3), fulfilling God’s purpose as faithful preachers of the Word (2 Tim. 4:2), and promoting direction for the flock (Acts 20:28). We are never called upon to blindly follow a man (1 Tim. 5:19), but neither are we told to override God’s anointed man, who is faithfully preaching the Word (1 Chron. 16:22; Heb. 13:17).

#### **F. God’s examples (His saints who are examples for God) - vv. 7-8**

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8 goes on to declare:

“So that ye were ensamples 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-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.”

The progression of thought seems to be this. As God’s people follow the example of God’s ordained man, within the local assembly, who is following God (vs. 6), they too would become examples of Christians, who are living for God (“So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” - vs. 7).

There are three ways to be a Christian example.

##### **1. In evangelism (vs. 8)**

“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-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.”

Paul goes on to explain how these saints were an example in their bold witnessing for Christ. The connective word (“for”) looks back to verse seven, which pointed to the examples that these saints set as dedicated followers of God’s man and God Himself. They were an example of Christians who were faithful in their Gospel witness throughout all the regions that they traveled.

Because Thessalonica was a hub of travel and trade, people heard the word of the Lord from these witnessing believers, as they visited the city by ship and used its port facilities. Apparently the Thessalonians also ventured out from the city carrying the Gospel with them to Achaia and to every place. Since this was true, there was no need for Paul to say anything about the Thessalonians’ experience of salvation and deliverance from idols to other people, as he traveled throughout other lands (“so that we need not to speak anything” vs. 8). This is because the news of their salvation and transformation was so well-known through their witness, and word of mouth of others, that vast regions and churches could report to Paul what kind of reception the apostles had with the pagans at Thessalonica.

Rather than Paul telling people about what God had done in this city, people were telling him what was commonly known. It had become a matter of common knowledge that a startling transformation had taken place in the lives of many people. It was not only the talk of the town, but the talk of the known world in this day. We are once again reminded that changed lives still impact unsaved people (Matt. 5:13-16). The salt and light, which we possess, makes others thirsty and illuminated to the truth about eternal life.

Paul pictured their proclamation as a constant sound, increasingly echoing into a wider and wider circle as the church made the most of its strategic location. These saints “sounded out (rang out or reverberated) the word of the Lord,” which revolved around the Gospel plan of salvation, and how they had placed their faith in the person of Jesus Christ for salvation. A church that continually keeps a

fresh evangelistic spirit is a church that will stay on target! We need to be evangelistic in our outreach to the lost. Let's get with it my friend. People need the Lord. They are dying by the truckloads and going into the eternal nightmare of an everlasting hell.

Evangelism should be the passion of any church ministry. Give me a passion for souls! When we have the Gospel message right, then we will be ready to give the winds a mighty voice and say, "Jesus Saves, Jesus Saves!"

D.L. Moody said:

"If this world is going to be reached, I am convinced that it must be done by men and women of average talent. After all, there are comparatively few people in the world who have great talents."

What are you doing about the lost that live all around you? Does it make any difference to you? Does it make any difference to you that souls around you are lost in their sin and headed toward an eternal judgment? The liberal preachers always say that the dead enter their rest after they die. Well, I will tell you something else. Many are entering the horrors of hell when they die. There is still a Heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

Luke 16:23-24

"And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

A right vision of the lost will keep a church on target. The saints who are busy winning the lost will not be busy dividing the church and promoting their pet ways in assembly life. Beloved, let us keep our eyes on the harvest! If we do, we will keep the church on target.

## **2. In effort (vs. 9)**

1 Thessalonians 1:9



“For they themselves shew 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.”

These people were serving the Lord after their conversion experience. They were not lazy Christians who lacked heart for God and ministry. Instead, they made an all-out effort to really serve the Lord and live the victorious Christian life. Other people throughout Paul’s journeys (“they themselves” - vs.9) recognized this, and were actually telling Paul what had happened, after he had preached the Gospel in this place. Word gets around when God does something miraculous. This is why the vast regions and churches could report to Paul (“show” – announce or proclaim”) what kind of reception the apostles had with the pagans at Thessalonica. Something wonderful had taken place.

What had happened? The people were converted from a wicked, godless, pagan lifestyle and were now serving God. God changes the lives of people (2 Cor. 5:17). The text says these people “turned to God from idols.” The turning here is not an outward turning, but an *inward* turning from sin, which is what true repentance is all about. The root of all true repentance is when people inwardly turn away from their sins and former belief system, which in this case was idolatry. They do this by having a change of mind and attitude about their sin, their lost estate before God, and their belief systems which run contrary to truth.

The expression, “turned to God from idols” is simply the inward conversion that takes place when people come to Christ or express repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. People inwardly turn from the wickedness associated with their past lives. In this case, it was their love for idols. If a person is ever going to be saved, he must be willing to turn away from his sins and false belief systems. No person can be saved who is in defiance against God.

Ora Rowan wrote:  
“It’s that look that melted Peter,  
It’s that face that Stephen saw,  
It’s that heart that wept with Mary,  
Can alone from idols draw.”

After inward repentance occurs, then, and only then, can the outward transformation take place (“to serve the living and true God”). This is the fruit of repentance! After these people repented and were converted to Christ they became examples in their outward service for Christ.

My friend, we must understand today that no other god is alive, and no other god is true! There is only one “living and true God.” The teaching of pluralism says that all religions, whether it’s Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity are really worshipping the same God. But this is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible declares there is only one true and living God.

1 Corinthians 8:5-6

“For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him.”

We must remember that we serve a living God and a risen Savior who is in the world today! All the other false gods are as dead as a doe doe bird. They are like the smashed skunk, which I saw on the road the other day, that had been repeatedly run over by cars! The false gods of eastern religions have no life and reality attached to them (Ps. 115:3-7).

How wonderful it is to serve the living and true God! Have you really been serving the Lord? Are you running the race (Heb. 12:1-2), or sitting in the grandstands? My friend, don’t think that you must retire from serving the Lord in the local church ministry. Don’t sit back and let other people serve in the local church, while neglecting the gift that is in you (2 Timothy 1:6). Some Christians don’t have a servant’s heart. They make little effort to serve their wonderful Savior. They would rather sulk, live selfishly, or sit around and do nothing. It’s always too soon to quit! Do you see Paul, the apostle, retiring from serving the Lord? What age is the right age to retire? We all need to keep serving the risen Lord, even as these believers were doing (“to serve the living and true God”). If a church is going to stay on target, its members must keep actively serving the Lord, until He returns. This should be our testimony and example. We must use our gifts

and keep on keeping on. There is no time to waist. Let us “redeem” the time” (Eph. 5:16) and remain steadfast in our ministry, as older and younger saints in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:58

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

### **3. In expectation (vs. 10)**

1 Thessalonians 1:10

“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

Here is a final way we can be an example as God’s children. We are to be waiting, expecting, and anticipating Christ’s imminent return in the Rapture. God wants us to be living on our tiptoes. We are to possess an upward look that is anticipating the Lord’s return at any moment. Why is Jesus coming back again? It’s because He is alive (“whom he raised from the dead”). Jesus is alive forevermore (Rev. 1:18). He could never return if He was dead! The Bible teaches that when Christ returns He is going to deliver us from “the wrath to come.” This is a specific wrath that is mentioned in connection with Christ’s return in the Rapture for His church age saints. It is a direct reference to the wrath of the seven-year Tribulation Period (Dan. 9:27) that will fall upon an unbelieving world after Christ returns (1 Thess. 5:2-3).

The Tribulation Period will be a time of unprecedented judgment upon planet earth, when God’s wrath is going to be poured out upon the unbelieving world.

Revelation 6:16-17 envisions this awful time of judgment: “And (they) said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

First Thessalonians 5:9-10 gives God’s children this wonderful promise and hope: “For God hath not appointed us to wrath (the

wrath of the Tribulation Period), but to obtain salvation (deliverance) by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake (are alive at His coming) or sleep (are dead at His coming), we should live together with him (through rapture and resurrection).”

In other words, the true Church will be taken back to Heaven with the Lord (John 14:1-2) and escape the coming night of the Tribulation Period. We will be transported back to Heaven and live together with the Lord. What a day, glorious day, it will be!

Here is a good summary outline of 1 Thessalonians 1:10: “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Patience – to wait</li><li>2. The Person – for His Son</li><li>3. The Place - from heaven</li><li>4. The Pledge - whom He raised from the dead</li><li>5. The Precious Name - even Jesus</li><li>6. The Prospect - which delivered us from the wrath to come</li></ol> |
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I’m glad I’m going to get a rocket booster ride out of here when Jesus returns! Jesus is going to rapture and rescue me from this time of awful wrath upon planet earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The Church is not to look for wrath – but rapture. We are a delivered people! We are delivered from the wrath to come!

Revelation 3:10 gives this promise:  
“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation (“adversity” - the Tribulation Period), which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

Titus 2:13 says we are to be:  
“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

As believers, we are to possess a blessed hope in our hearts, knowing that Christ could return at any moment, in order to rescue us

from the coming Tribulation Period, and every trial that we face in life. This wonderful hope should become a daily, living reality in our hearts and lives. Let us ask ourselves these questions today. Are we experiencing patience in our times of testing and trial, because we are looking forward to Christ's return, and our glorious redemption? Have we been anticipating Christ's return and therefore living and serving in light of it? Have we been accepting the changes in our aging body, in view of Christ's imminent return, and the transformation that will take place with our body?

Philippians 3:20-21 declares:

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

Have you been looking heavenward? Until Christ returns as "the bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16) we must learn to be patient, knowing that He could return at any moment, and free us from the sorrows and pains associated with life. "Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16:22). This means our Lord does come! Friend, Christ is coming; it may be morning, night, or noon. Keep your lamps lit and burning bright! Keep looking up!

I'm listening every moment for the trumpet sound.  
What a joy we'll have together,  
When our feet shall leave the ground.  
All our toiling will be over,  
All our sorrow and its pain,  
It could happen in a moment,  
Jesus Christ could come again."

We should also be longing for Christ's return, and be prepared, at any moment, to see the very One, who has loved us and died for us. Someday, "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52), we will be changed, and then we will "meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). Dearly beloved, we must keep the upward look! We must live in the future tense! We should possess the wonderful hope of Christ's return in our hearts. We should be living on our tiptoes looking for the return of our Savior. The anticipation and expectancy of Christ's

imminent return will keep a church on target. It will keep us serving, patient, hopeful, and joyful. Lift up your head, your redemption draweth nigh!

“It could happen in a moment,  
In the twinkling of an eye,  
He could call us home to Heaven,  
He could break the eastern sky.

Hold the fort a little longer,  
In your struggle over sin,  
Trust the Great Commander’s promise,  
He will surely come again!”