

## Message #4

## I Thessalonians 1:6-10

The other day, Torii Hunter of the Detroit Tigers was being interviewed concerning the fact that Prince Fielder is copying and mimicking him. Now Torii Hunter is a Bible believing Christian and he has a tremendous reputation as being a quality man. Torii Hunter likes classical music and he has apparently influenced Prince Fielder to like it as well. In the interview, he was being asked about the fact that Mr. Fielder is now copying him and Torii Hunter wisely said, "I am flattered that he copies me, but you don't want him copying everything about me because not all things are good." I loved that answer. He is smart enough to know that he is not perfect.

The Apostle Paul walked so close with God that he was not afraid to say to people "be imitators of me" (I Cor. 4:16). In fact, he qualified that by saying "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1). In fact, notice carefully from **verse 6** that Paul says you became imitators of us "**and of the Lord.**" So what made this imitating legitimate was that Paul followed the Lord.

Paul certainly admitted he was not perfect. In fact, there were several occasions when he admitted this point. On one occasion he called himself a "wretched man," on another occasion he called himself the "chief of sinners." However, Paul was sold out to Jesus Christ. He loved the Word and he applied the Word and he could legitimately say "follow me."

Now even admitting that we, too, are wretched and we, too, are sinful, I would still question whether any person is really in a position to say as Paul said, "be an imitator of me" or "mimic me." I seriously doubt that any of us can actually say that at the same level Paul could. I doubt that Paul would promote young people going to some godless secular university like we would. I doubt that Paul would ever take some leisure sight-seeing vacation just to see things in the world like we would. You probably would never hear Paul use the word "retirement" like we would. I seriously doubt that if Paul were here today that he would spend much time watching TV like we would. You would not find Paul going on a computer to Google sports scores like we would. When Paul said "follow me," or "mimic me," he said it at a very unique level of being completely sold out to Jesus Christ.

It is clear from this text that the Thessalonians had in fact done their best to imitate Paul and his team. Paul was not just flattered by the fact that the Thessalonians were imitating him; he always thanked God for it. We may recall that **verses 2-10** are really one very long sentence. The idea is that Paul and his team was thankful for these believers and one of the reasons for it is because these Thessalonians became mimickers and imitators of the Apostle Paul. This is the point:

**GOD'S TRUE MINISTERS ARE ALWAYS THANKFUL WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE IMITATE THEM IN THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE WORD OF GOD AND IN THEIR COMMITMENT LIVING THE WORD AND COMMUNICATING THE WORD.**

Now the verb “you became” is an aorist passive. What this grammatically means is that the Thessalonians were not the initial source of this action, but the recipients of the action. The mimicking process started at a point of time in the past and God initiated the action. The process began in Acts 17:4. So from the moment God saved them, God worked in their lives and started the process of making them apostle mimickers.

This is an important point to see. Once we believe on Christ, we need to take in apostolic instruction and apply it to our lives. We are to imitate people who go after the Word in understanding and application. When God saves a person, He will instigate a passion in the person to know and apply His Word and if the person pursues that, then it is cause for great thankfulness. However, if one does not pursue this, it is a terrible shame.

Now what were the specific ways in which the Thessalonians mimicked the apostles? What are the things to actually look for in one who is following Jesus Christ? What are the things to look for in one worth mimicking? What does it mean to mimic godliness to the point that the apostles would always thank God for you?

Well as we look down through these verses, it is quite clear that the Thessalonians mimicked the apostles in at least seven ways:

**MIMIC WAY #1** – Those who mimic apostles are those who receive God’s Word. **1:6a**

Here is where proper godliness really starts—you want to take in the Word of God. You want to understand the written Scriptures. People who will be honored by God are people who love to receive the true Word of the true God.

Now the participle “receive” (δεχομαι) is aorist middle. Now exegetically the aorist is best viewed as a culminative aorist. What that means is that this was their entire pointed focus. The middle voice indicates that this focus was in and of themselves. What all of this technical talk means is that these Thessalonians had a passion to know “the word” (τον λογον). This church was dedicated to carefully understanding the true Word of the true God.

The religious world had all kinds of religious teachings that came from all kinds of religious teachers. The Jews based their teachings on the O.T. Law and on the traditions of men. The false religions all had their catechisms. The Thessalonians would not accept that. They were after grace truth that came from these apostles. They were after the Word of God.

We may be assured of this; no church will ever be praised by God until their focus is that of wanting to carefully take in the Word of the God. People may praise a church that has its focus on a band or entertainment. People may praise a church that has its focus on business or psychological seminars. People may praise a church that has its focus on social reform, political reform, moral reform or welfare reform, but that church will not ever be praised by God. God wants church serious about His Word.

There is a big trial in Arizona concerning an evil woman who slaughtered her boyfriend. Some of his friends were being asked whether or not he would be in favor of her being put to death. One answered, well he would have in this life, but he didn't know now that he was gone. The reason he didn't know is because he didn't know God's Word. God's Word is pretty clear in both the O.T. and the N.T. that God sanctions the death penalty. But since people don't know the Word, they don't know what to believe or think about eternity. This Thessalonian church had it figured right.

Regardless of the trouble, regardless of the hassle, they were focused on God's Word. This is a great praiseworthy point.

**MIMIC WAY #2** – Those who mimic apostles are those who receive the Word, manifesting a Holy Spirit-produced joy even when in times of trouble. **1:6b**

These believers manifested a joy in the midst of trouble. Now they had trouble from the moment they came to faith in Jesus Christ. Religious Jews became jealous of the impact the grace Gospel was making and they stirred up people to persecute any who responded. We may remember that Jason was dragged into court because he housed Paul and his team (Acts 17:6-9). But these believers continued to manifest a joyful attitude.

Now in order to be joyful when you are being attacked, you must be in close touch with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is able to produce an unspeakable joy in the mind and heart of one who is in tune with God. These believers were. They manifested that joy and the apostles were thankful for that.

**MIMIC WAY #3** – Those who mimic the apostles are those who become examples to others. **1:7**

Now the word “example” (τυπος) is the word from which we get our English word type. This word “type” is a word that means to stamp something so that it gives an impression or pattern of something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 452). These Thessalonians were the prototype of what an apostolic mimicker is supposed to be.

Now notice who it was that they became an example to; not unbelievers, but “all the believers” in Macedonia and in Achaia. This Thessalonian church became an example of what an apostolic church is supposed to be—namely be a place that is focused on the Word of God.

The churches of Macedonia included the Philippian church and the Berean church. The believers in Achaia included the Corinthian church and the Cenchrean church. Apparently when people would get to these places, one of the topics of discussion was the intense commitment to the Word of God that the Thessalonian church had. They were dedicated to the grace/faith system and to Pauline doctrine and they were communicating that to others. As one commentator observed, the Thessalonians were spreading the Word faster than Paul could travel.

The Thessalonian church was Paul's prototype of what a church is supposed to be. Those people were after the Word of God no matter what the obstacle and they wanted to know biblical prophecy.

**MIMIC WAY #4** – Those who mimic the apostles sound forth the Word to others. **1:8**

When we read this verse it becomes very clear that the doctrine of election does not eliminate the need for evangelism. In fact, this church was known as being a church that heralded the Word of God and specifically the “grace/faith” message.

Do we not see what made this church so special to Paul and to God; it loved the Word of God. Now the verb “sound forth” (εξήχεω) is a strong word which means to thunder forth or blast forth as a trumpet (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 160). Now carefully observe what this church was known for—thundering forth the Word of God and specifically thundering forth the grace “faith” message. This church was devoted to communicating God's Word.

This church was known as being a church that authoritatively taught the Word of the Lord. This church was known as a church that maintained a serious focus on understanding and teaching the Word of God. When you went to this Thessalonian church, you came away thinking that this church is really zeroed in on carefully understanding and expounding the Scriptures.

Not only did the people of this church receive the Word of God, but they preached the Word of God. They were so dedicated to the Word of God that Paul said, “We have no need to say anything.” This was not something that could be said about many churches, but it could the Thessalonian church.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said that he read that 70%-80% of church growth occurs when people at church witness to their friends and family (*Be Ready*, p. 36). If this is accurate, then we see the importance of everyone at church knowing the Word and communicating the Word. This is what people need. The force of the word “sound forth” is that we need to be somewhat authoritative in what we communicate. That is what pleases God.

**MIMIC WAY #5** – Those who mimic the apostles turn to God away from idols. **1:9a**

Now the Thessalonians lived in an idolatrous, polytheistic world. But that world is no match for the power of the Gospel. Notice the chronology, turn to God, which then means turn from idols. They first placed their faith in Christ and then turned from idols. The verb “turn” is aorist which means this happened in one moment of time. Now the word “turn” is one that means to completely turn around or do a complete turn about. So they completely turned to the true God and turned their back on their idolatrous religions.

These Thessalonians had completely turned away from anything idolatrous to a relationship with the true God. Do not overlook the fact that they turned to “the God” (τον θεον).

This is important. It wasn't that they just turned their life around to some religion. They turned from any idolatrous thing to the one and only true God. Other believers were testifying how these Thessalonians had turned away from idols and were totally devoted to the Word of God.

If one is in religion that is not focused on the one and only true God, they are in idolatry.

**MIMIC WAY #6** – Those who mimic the apostles serve the living and true God. **1:9b**

Thessalonica is located about 50 miles north of Mount Olympus, where supposedly, according to Greek mythology, was the home of the Greek gods. The Gospel had turned these Thessalonians completely around and they devoted themselves to understanding the Word and serving God.

It isn't just serving in religion that counts for eternity. It is serving the living and true God that counts for eternity. Two key points are brought out here about God that we must always keep in our minds: 1) God is living; 2) God is true.

God is always and continually alive and God is always and continually true. There will not ever be a time when God will not be alive and there will not ever be a time when God will ever be false.

In the Thessalonian world, there were all kinds of religious people caught up in serving all kinds of religious causes. None of that meant anything. The only thing that meant something was serving the living and true God.

**MIMIC WAY #7** – Those who mimic the apostles anticipate and wait for the return of Jesus Christ. **1:10**

Now the infinitive “to wait” is present tense, meaning that a true apostolic church continually waits for Jesus Christ. **Notice we are not continually waiting for signs, we are waiting for the Son. We are not continually waiting for signs, we are waiting for our Savior.**

In **verse 10** there are three important points brought out: 1) We are waiting for Jesus to come from heaven; 2) Jesus, who is coming from heaven, is the One who was raised from the dead; 3) Jesus is the only One who can rescue from God's wrath.

This clearly helps establish the Pre-Tribulation Rapture position because there are no signs we are waiting for. Right at the beginning of this Thessalonian letter, Paul mentions the fact that the coming of the Son of God will rescue us from the future wrath to come.

He will develop the doctrine of the Rapture later, but he presents the idea right here. Believers who believe as the apostles believe are waiting for Christ to come and get them before the time of wrath comes.

Don't miss this point—the wrath of God is coming. Make no mistake about this. Our only escape is Jesus Christ. Believe on Him and be saved from God's wrath.