

# A model Church and a model Leader

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1 Thessalonians was written about 50 AD – just 17 years after Jesus’ resurrection. It is probably the first book in the New Testament to be written and gives us important insights into the life of the early church.

1 Thessalonians was written to encourage the new Christians in Thessalonica as they were facing persecution for their faith. Paul commends them for being a **‘model church’** and encourages them to be steadfast in their love for the Lord, to continue to grow in their faith, and to live in a pure and honourable way before the Lord.

Paul was in Thessalonica for a just over a week, and left behind a group of brand new Christians – a mixture of Jews and Gentiles – living in a pagan and hostile culture with no church organisation, no Bible and no support systems. The Church thrived!

Paul must have had outstanding leadership qualities to pioneer this new Church in such a short time and to leave them in such a healthy state. (Paul didn’t leave them willingly – see Acts 17) . 1 Thessalonians shows that he demonstrated the character qualities of righteousness, selflessness, endurance, discipline and love. He was a **‘model leader’**.

## A model Church

The word “church” is ekklesia – *those called out of the world to build the Kingdom of God.*

### What were they called?

- The church of the Thessalonians
- Brothers/sisters, saints, disciples (learners)
- The elect, the people of God, children of God
- Believers
- Christians (Acts 11:26)

### What were they like?

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians remembering especially:

- their *work produced by faith*
- their *labour prompted by love*
- their *endurance inspired by hope*
- how they imitated him, regardless of the suffering this caused
- their welcoming of the message of the gospel, *with joy given by the Holy Spirit*
- how they became a *model* for other believers
- how the Lord’s message *rang out* from them to others *everywhere*
- how they *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*
- how they are waiting for Jesus’ return *from heaven.*

### What did they do?

The church at Thessalonica was one of the earliest New Testament churches. In Acts and in the other New Testament letters we read what life was like for brand new Christians living in a pagan and hostile culture.

Members of the early church:

- Were filled with the Holy Spirit
- Received teaching and grew in their knowledge of the Lord
- Broke bread together
- Prayed together
- Sold possessions and distributed to those in need
- Praised God together
- Evangelised continually
- Healed the sick
- Shared their possessions
- Did miracles, signs and wonders
- Delivered people from demons
- Suffered persecution
- Suffered martyrdom
- Baptised believers
- Expected Jesus to return at any time
- Lived in the fear of the Lord
- Raised the dead
- Prophesied
- Sent out missionaries
- Proclaimed the Word of God
- Fasted
- Established standards for Christian and Church life
- Encouraged and strengthened each other
- Preached the Gospel
- Sung hymns
- Worked to support themselves
- Gave to the poor
- Debated about Jesus in public
- Burnt idolatrous materials
- Influenced politicians

*Any others? How does our Church life compare with this?*

## **A model leader**

Paul obviously had a very effective ministry among the Thessalonians and they were now strong Christians. False accusations had been made about him so Paul found it necessary to defend his ministry.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Paul describes how he had had *previously suffered and been insulted* in Philippi and met *strong opposition*. But he says his gospel does *not spring from error or impure motives*. He is *approved by God* and just wants please Him.

Paul then lists some of the qualities he demonstrated before them:

- He didn't use flattery and wasn't greedy
- He wasn't looking for praise from men.
- He wasn't a burden to them.
- He was *gentle, like a mother caring for her children*.
- He loved them and they became dear to him.
- He didn't just share the gospel with them, but shared his life as well.
- He worked hard so he wouldn't be a burden to them.
- He was *holy, righteous and blameless* among them.
- He dealt with them as a father deals with his children.
- He encouraged and comforted them and urged them *to live lives worthy of God*.

Would that every Christian leader modeled these same qualities as they serve the people in their churches! Pastors would do well to evaluate their ministries against the way that Paul ministered to the Thessalonians.

Maybe we can learn from the Thessalonian Church – a 'model Church' with a 'model leader':

- Church is all about a bunch of people living for Jesus; living like Jesus out there in society, and making a difference for the Kingdom of God.
- Church leaders are servants; also living like Jesus; equipping us to be as Jesus to the world around us