

MARKS OF A MAXIMUM CHURCH

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

The church is a miracle of God. It's not a building, but a group of people bonded together in one fellowship. The people who make up the church are people who were hopeless in sin, going their own way, a way inevitably leading to destruction. But God, who is rich in mercy took them to Himself, saved them, forgave them, and secured them. That's a miracle! That's the story of the church at Thessalonica. Indeed it should be the story of every church.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, the city bulged with a population of approximately 200,000. The church's beginning in Thessalonica is recorded in Acts 17. Paul writes to a church well grounded, growing in the faith. Nonetheless, the church's fellowship showed initial marks of decline and division. It is Paul's purpose to assist before the problems they faced became too severe. His initial strategy focused on explaining the marks of the maximum Church according to Jesus.

As we begin our study of 1 Thessalonians 1, let's follow the outline below:

- I. **A Maximum Church is an Energetic Church (vv. 1-3)**
- II. **A Maximum Church is an Elect Church (vv. 4-5)**
- III. **A Maximum Church is an Exemplary Church (vv. 6-7)**
- IV. **A Maximum Church is an Evangelistic Church (v. 8)**
- V. **A Maximum Church is an Expectant Church (vv. 9-10)**

I. A Maximum Church is an Energetic Church (vv. 1-3)

Paul begins his apostolic counsel to the church at Thessalonica, "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. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; 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*" (vv. 1-3).

The church is not a place, but people; not a fold, but a flock; not an organization, but an organism. The purpose must be to maximize the life of God's Divine organism, the church. Hence, our focus cannot be business as usual. We must not be content with the minimum. We must seek the maximum in everything we attempt for the glory of God. This is why Paul begins his explanation of the maximum church as being the energetic church.

Three words immediately catch our eye as we read the first three verses—faith, love, and hope. Indeed these same three words elsewhere describe the Christian's entire life (cp. 1 Cor. 13:13). *Faith* is the perspective of our past and remains instrumental in initiating our entrance into the life of God. *Love* is the driving motive of our present and focuses on our continuing in the Christian life. *Hope* is the perspective of the believer's future and renews our trust in Christ for eternity.

The energetic church depends on the work of faith. Faith produces service for the Lord Jesus. As we mentioned earlier, faith includes the initiation into the Christian life, but faith does not end there. Our continued service for the Lord is directly linked to the level of faith in our lives.

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Indeed genuine faith always produces good works (James 2:17; Eph. 2:8-10). A faith empty of works is a questionable faith.

The energetic church also depends on the labor of love. The term “labor” literally means in the Greek language “a beating.” Loving labor is labor which continues to the point of exhaustion. A church which loves is a church which labors, labors exhaustively for the Lord.

The energetic church depends on the patience of hope. Understand: Biblical hope is not the idea of bearing something with grim resignation. Instead, hope has the idea of endurance because of a fundamental trust in the promises of God. And, while Christians are living in more and more depressing times, the only thing that will keep them going day in and day out is the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

II. A Maximum Church is an Elect Church (vv. 4-5)

A maximum church is not only an *energetic* church, it is also an *elect* church. Paul writes, “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. 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” (vv. 4-5). Election is both an exceptionally difficult doctrine as well as an undeniably Biblical doctrine. Someone rightly said, to explain election risks losing one’s mind, but to explain away election risks losing one’s soul. The truth is, while election may be a mystery in our comprehension, it is nonetheless a blessing in our apprehension.

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Reflection Connection

Do you ever ponder your election by God? How do you feel? What evidence do you consider when you affirm your election?

First, let us note the source of election (v. 4). Our election is “of God.” It is a free act of God’s will whereby before the foundation of the world He decreed His blessings to certain persons (cp. 1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:4). In short, God chose us to be His own before the foundation of the world. Furthermore, election is a “family truth” for God’s children. By “family truth” is meant a doctrine to encourage and assure the saved—people within the family of God—not a proclamation to the lost. And, while we may not be able to understand it fully, we may rejoice in it immensely.

Second, let us note the course of election (v. 5). Paul knew the election of the Thessalonians. Yet how was he able to know their election? Is it possible for you or me to know the election of another person? Paul knew by his own experience as he preached to them. Not only in “word only” but also power, assurance, and the Holy Spirit convinced Paul of their status.



III. A Maximum Church is an Exemplary Church (vv. 6-7)

Paul makes imitating the apostolic model a cornerstone of the New Testament church. He writes, “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (vv. 6-7).

First in significance is the Thessalonians becoming *imitators* (v. 6). Often we link imitators to being lazy, unthinking, or uncreative. Contrarily, Paul links imitation to moral integrity—“ye became followers” of us and the Lord. The Greek term translated “followers” is *mimetes* and literally refers to an “imitator” or “mime.” Hence, when one “mimics,” one “follows” another carefully (cp. 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Heb. 6:12).

Reflection Connection

Reflect upon your own life and ponder precisely to whom you are following. Is the one you “follow” or “imitate” a worthy model? Explain.

The Thessalonians became moral and theological “followers” or “imitators” of the apostolic example Paul and his companions modeled. In addition, note the ultimate model is Jesus Himself—“and of the Lord.” Paul very well knew and taught that the early church was to mimic apostles only as the apostles mimicked the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1). No less should we today. Only then will true joy and peace be ours (cp. John 16:33).

Second, the Thessalonians were *demonstrators* (v. 7). Not only did they imitate proper example, the Thessalonians became “ensamples to all that believe” in their sphere of influence. The Greek term behind the English word “ensamples” is *tupos*. The term does not exactly mean “example” as we may commonly assume. Rather, *tupos* was a term used to communicate the result of the blow of a hammer, the “mark” left on the object pounded by the hammer.

As the Thessalonians had been pounded by the Gospel Paul preached—consequently transformed by the Gospel they received—they became a “mark” to others who believe. No one who receives the Gospel escapes the impression the Gospel makes on his or her life. No one.

IV. A Maximum Church is an Evangelistic Church (v. 8)

The Thessalonian congregation was a church engaged in aggressive evangelism. A fire burned after souls for Christ. Paul wrote, “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” (v. 8). A maximum church must be an evangelistic church, and an evangelistic church is branded with three specific marks.

The first mark of an evangelistic church is *information*. Paul identifies the information continually flowing from an evangelistic church—*information*. Or, in the Apostle’s words, “the word of the Lord.” The content of our message is



Reflection Connection

Reflect on your own conversion. What role did the Word of God actively play? Be prepared to share with the entire study group.

God's Word. And, the content remains the same whether we are preaching the Gospel to the lost or declaring the truths of Scripture to God's children.

As for God's Word used to save souls, David the King wrote, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul..." (Psa. 19:7). James the Apostle concurred, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth... Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (1:18, 21).

The church has a message which comes from heaven. We are charged with the responsibility of getting it out. God has a message for the entire world. The church is His mouthpiece. If we don't say it, it will not be said!

The second mark of an evangelistic church is *communication*. Paul acknowledged the Thessalonians "sounded out" the Gospel of Jesus. The idea pertains to a trumpet blast. While the church of Jesus Christ awaits the sounding of the last trumpet (4:16), the church must blow a trumpet of their own, "sounding out" the Gospel music of salvation to all who believe. Their "sounding out" the Gospel must be loud and continuous, allowing any and all who will come to drink the water of life freely (cp. Rev. 22:17).

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The third mark of an evangelistic church is *reputation*. Paul exhorted the church to make sure their "faith to God-ward" was "spread abroad." The Thessalonians were ancient celebrities, a church with a widely-known evangelistic reputation. When people passed through, it would be virtually certain they would hear about Jesus.

What a magnificent model for the church today. Far too often we are known for our beautiful buildings, massive programs, large budgets, and big crowds. The Thessalonians were known for telling people about Jesus. What is your reputation? Should the question be asked about your church, what would be the one thing for which you are known?

V. A Maximum Church is an Expectant Church (vv. 9-10)

Paul finishes out the chapter with these words, "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; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (vv. 9-10). As we stated in the introduction, the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus is a key truth Paul conveys to the Thessalonians in his correspondence.



Paul repeats what he earlier mentioned (v. 3): the Thessalonians had “turned to God” in genuine conversion. The verb tense makes the turning a once for all event. Once a child of God, always a child of God. In their case, they turned from idols to serve the true one and only Almighty God. Paul then makes his first pronouncement on the Second Coming of Jesus.

First, His Second Coming is a return—“His Son from heaven.” Believers are not so much interested in an event; rather believers are interested in the Person (cp. Phil. 3:20). And, if He does not come today, we think He very well could come tomorrow.

Next, His Second Coming is a rescue—“deliver us.” When Christ appears, He appears to rescue His saints. Someone might retort, “I thought I was already rescued through His death on the cross.” While it is true we who believe have been saved from eternal death by Christ’s one sacrifice on the cross, we nonetheless are still susceptible to temporal pain. Besides Paul identifies precisely what it is from which God will rescue believers—the *coming wrath* of God upon all the earth.

God’s reaction to human sin and wickedness is His wrath. And, just before His wrath is released on the earth, Christ will appear *for* His saints. After the wrath is complete, Christ will appear *with* His saints (4:16-17). We will learn more about this in lesson four.

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul claimed the Gospel came to the Thessalonians under supernatural circumstances, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance...” (v. 5). The Greek term translated “much assurance” is *plerophoria*, a word literally meaning “fullness,” and/or “abundance.” Paul here describes the willingness and freedom enjoyed not only by those who brought the Gospel to Thessalonica, but also the Thessalonians themselves as they became “ensamples” to the entire region (v. 7). In addition, *plerophoria* is used elsewhere to describe the full confidence resulting from a complete understanding in Christ (Col. 2:2).

Wrap Up

There is no need to delay. Two choices are before us all. We wait for the coming Savior or we wait for the coming wrath. Perhaps you do not know Christ as your Savior. Turn to Him now. Seek His forgiveness today. How?

First, acknowledge your sin to Him. Do not be dismissive nor offer excuses. Honestly confess yourself a sinner in need of mercy. Second, ask Him to forgive you. Christ never turns away the truly repentant heart.

Finally, receive Him as your Lord and Savior. He promised to deliver and save all who believe (John 3:16). Thank Him for His generous mercy and grace to save all who trust in Him. Now present yourself to the church. Talk to the pastor. You will need to be baptized as a covenant expression of your new life in Him. Praise the Lord!

