

Characteristics of a Great Church

I Thess 1:1-10

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

² We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, ³ remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. ⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

⁶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Introduction

I read some time ago that Reinhold Niebuhr, the liberal European theologian, said,
"The church is a lot like Noah's ark. If it weren't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the stink inside."

Many believers can attest to this sad reality. It is that sad reality of the church

In an article I read from a website that addresses
Christians Apologetics

I found some interesting material on how to determine if
your Church is becoming secular

1 Teaching that the Bible is not inspired and inerrant.

- A The [Bible](#) is the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16) and is the measure of truth and righteousness. To claim that it is not inspired is to reduce it to the level of the Quran, or the Bhagavad-Gita, or the Book of Mormon which are mere man-made writings posing as inspired words from God.
- B When the authority of God's word is lost, then man-made doctrines creep in. The authority and inspiration of scripture is the anchor that keeps the church from drifting into error.

2 Using books instead of the Bible in Bible study.

- A It is okay to use books that assist in Bible study, but the Bible should be the central source of spiritual truth--not books about the Bible. If Bible studies are using guidebooks more than the Bible itself, then the Bible has been moved to a secondary position. If Christians are having trouble understanding God's word, then the pastor

(or Bible study leader) needs to teach them how to find its truths so they can check all things in scripture by themselves (Acts 17:11).

3 Teaching that there is more than one way to God besides Jesus.

A In this world of relativism, it is not popular to claim that Jesus is the only way to be saved. But this is what the Bible says. John 14:6, "Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." Also, Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." There is no other way to be saved. The Muslims, the Buddhists, the Taoists, etc., cannot be saved without Jesus.

4 Being embarrassed to say that Jesus is the only way to salvation.

A Like the issue above, Jesus is the only way (John 14:6). Christians should never be ashamed (Rom. 1:16) to speak the truth of God's saving work in Christ. For some, to be timid and embarrassed means that one's eyes are off of God and on people.

5 Teaching that there is no absolute right and wrong.

A As mentioned above, moral relativism is the norm of society. We often hear, "It is true if it is true for you." The Bible tells us that there are moral absolutes independent of what we think is right. Exodus 20:1-17 is a list of the ten commandments which are moral absolutes. The Bible teaches us there is absolute right and wrong. Without moral absolutes, no one can say anything is right or wrong.

6 Being careful to not offend anyone at the expense of biblical truth.

A Whether or not someone likes what the [Bible](#) says does not change the truth of the Bible. We should not be offensive just to be offensive, but we should not be afraid to speak the truth of God when the need arises. The gospel that offends no one is not the gospel of the Bible.

7 Pastors preaching moralism instead of Christ centered messages.

A Moralistic preaching is preaching that does not focus on the cross of Christ. For example, we do not try to be good

because being good is nice. We try to be good because Jesus saved us from our sins and doing what is right glorifies Him. Preaching that is not focused on the cross is not preaching. It is a waste of time.

- B Often you can detect moralistic preaching by asking if the exact same sermon could be preached in a [Mormon](#) or [Jehovah's Witness](#) setting. If so, then something is probably wrong.

8 Approving of homosexuality.

- A Homosexuality is being accepted as normal all over the world. It should not be accepted as normal in the Church. Homosexuality is a sin (1 Cor. 6:9). It is wrong. But this does not mean we are to hate homosexuals. We are to pray for them and their repentance. Homosexuals are not to be pastors or elders in churches.

9 Approving of women elders.

- A This one may offend a lot of people, but the Bible teaches that the elder is to be the husband of one wife. This is not merely a cultural norm of the time. It is what the Bible teaches. See [Should women be pastors and elders?](#)

10 Not condemning the sins of society.

- A If at all possible and according to wisdom, Christians should not be intimidated by the world when it comes to condemning sin. Sometimes, when Christian pastors condemn a sin in the world, like [abortion](#), they are attacked. Truth is not silenced by complaining voices. We do not answer to them. We answer to God.

11 Psychology as an authority on human nature.

- A The Bible tells us that people are sinners by nature, selfish, prideful, and in need of the saving work of God. The Bible tells us what is right and wrong regarding childrearing, criminal behavior, actions, and words. Psychology can give us insights on many things; but if it contradicts God's word, it is wrong. We need to accept the fact that God is the authority on man--not the psychologists.

12 Use of politically correct terms of the world from the pulpit where those terms replace biblical values and truths.

- A Is a wife or husband a "partner?" Are Christians who condemn homosexuality "homophobes?" Is it correct to say a woman can kill the baby in her womb and call it "abortion

rights" when discussing "reproductive rights"? Is accepting false theologies called "diversity awareness"? If such words and terms become the common vocabulary of the pulpit without qualification and/or explanation, then the preacher is adopting the terms of the world and not of God; and by it he is slowly being seduced by the world.

13 Going to church as a social habit.

A Church is not a social club where politically correct ideas are tried and tested. It is not a place we go to voice our opinions so that others can hear our wisdom. It is the place where we go to learn, to be corrected, to grow, and to encounter God who is not made after our own image.

14 Prayer as a last resort.

A To seek to accomplish things in life without God, whether it be big or small, is to say we do not need God and to proclaim our independence from Him. To resort to prayer as a last resort is to exclude God from the beginning of our work and to proclaim our independence from Him. Prayer is the first resort. It is the world that operates without God-- not the Christian.

15 Missionaries not sent out or supported.

A Missionary efforts needlessly curtailed. If a church cannot support a missionary effort because of legitimate circumstances, that is one thing. But, if it can and it does not specifically reach out to the world with the gospel, then it is disobeying God's word (Matt. 28:18-20).

16 Divorce statistics as common as secular society.

A What a horrible failure this is that the Christians have the same divorce rate as the unchurched. Undoubtedly, this is due to the secularization of the heart.

17 Evolution.

A Either not condemning [evolution](#) or not taking a stand on it.

What is great about the study we are beginning today is that this church at Thessalonica was in no way secular, It was a wonderful God blessed church that brought nothing

but praise from the apostle Paul. It will give us great lesson on what a church should be and what a believer should live like.

An Introduction to the Church of Thessalonica

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Its Purpose

Thessalonica as well as the saints of all ages might (1) that they might excel still more (see [notes 1Th 4:1-note](#) and [1Th 4:10-note](#)) and (2) be unblamable at Christ's coming.

W Graham Scroggie wrote that...

This letter, more than any other of Paul's, is characterized by simplicity, gentleness, and affection... here there is no controversy.

MacDonald has an interesting introductory statement noting that...

Today the Rapture and Second Advent of our Lord are widely believed and looked for by evangelical Christians. This was not always so. The revival of interest in this doctrine, especially through the writings of the early Brethren in Great Britain (1825–1850) was largely based on 1 Thessalonians. Without this short Letter we would be terribly deprived in our understanding of the various aspects of Christ's return. (MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. *Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson* or Logos)

Paul, The author, pastor and apostle is from Latin, **Paulos** meaning "little, small". Before his Damascus Road experience he was known by his Hebrew name **Saul** (Greek **Saulos**) which means "desired", "ask" or "asked for". Paul is always referred to as Saul in Acts until his clash with Bar Jesus at Paphos, when Luke suddenly writes,

Dwight Pentecost comments that...

The absence of any authoritative title indicates that the apostle is dealing with these Thessalonians in a personal and intimate way because his heart was knit to the hearts of these who were his children in the faith. If one were to turn to [Galatians 1:1](#), he would find that Paul writes, "Paul, an apostle, not of men neither by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead." Paul, in this address, is rising above the personal comment in 1 Thessalonians, and is striking an authoritative note. In the Epistle to the Galatians he deals severely with error and false teachers; he declares the Gospel of the grace of God authoritatively.

Calvin adds that Paul's omission of a specific claim to apostolic authority is a proof that those to whom he is writing had had no reluctance in recognizing him for what he was.

Silvanus,

Silas of the Acts, where alone the form Silas occurs. By Paul always **Silvanos**, of which Silas is a contraction
 Silas first appears in [Acts 15:22](#), as one of the bearers of the letter to the Gentile Christians at Antioch. He accompanied Paul on his second missionary tour, and was left behind with Timothy when Paul departed from Macedonia after his first visit. He was probably a Jewish Christian

Silas worked aggressively with Paul during the stirring events of the second missionary journey

Timothy

certain disciple...named **Timothy**, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." ([Acts 16:1-3](#))

v. 1 To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Church (1577) (**ekklesia** from **ekkaléo** = call out in turn from **ek** = out + **kaleo** = call, English > ecclesiastical) is literally "the called out ones" or "a company called out".

Although the **church** as defined in the NT is not found in the OT, the Greek word **ekklesia** is used in the [Septuagint \(LXX\)](#) to describe Israel

Not every gathering of religious people was a church for there were a number of other "assemblies" (ekklesia) in Thessalonica, including cults gathered around the gods of the pantheon and ancient labor unions gathered behind the ideology of their craft. This fact helps explain why Paul went on to give not just the **physical** address of this "assembly" but also its **spiritual** address (in God).

Of the Thessalonians

Let me give you a little background.

The city was a commercial center, Thessalonica. The largest most populous city in Asia Minor, commercially thriving, economically flourishing, a trade center. It was located at the very center point of the Thermaic Gulf which gave it a strategic port. It had running right through the middle of it the main highway east and west, known as the Egnatian highway which was the trade route. So it was a crossroads. It had multi- languages, multi-groups of people populating it though Greek was the dominant language. It was founded in about 316 A.D. which puts it about 350 years before Paul came there. And it was founded by Cassander who at the time was the king of Macedonia. And it was named after his wife who was the half-sister of Alexander the Great.

Now, at the time, Claudius was the Roman Emperor, and Claudius was, they said, crazy--to put it mildly. They said he was a slobbering, stuttering crazy man. But in his favor,

in spite of those problems, he had taken the throne because Gaius had been murdered and so he was not really the most fit, but in spite of that he was able to accommodate the Roman world with a peaceful period of time and it was during that peaceful period of time that the ministry could occur to Thessalonica.

Now, crime was rampant in the city of Thessalonica. And archaeology has told us that in many of the homes built in that city there were no windows. And the indication is the crime was so rampant that the people built their houses without windows because they were so fearful. We also know from studying history that the city was a mixture of wealthy people, a very small middle class of farmers and craftsmen and shop keepers and then a large majority of slaves. So there was tension and turmoil in the city.

Immorality was rampant. Prostitution was highly organized. Obscene pictures, they tell us, were painted all over the walls of the buildings and outside of the houses all over the city. They didn't know how to abort babies in those days but they wanted to get rid of them so babies were abandoned all over the city, particularly girl babies because they couldn't work as hard as boys. And murder was commonplace and divorce was frequent.

So

When Paul came to Philippi on his second missionary journey... he got thrown in jail. God let him out, saved the jailer and his whole household. But under tremendous pressure in Philippi he had to leave. And he left and he went to Thessalonica which would have been 100 miles away, usually about a five-day trek. And I imagine it was somewhat painful because Paul had

had his legs and his arms in stocks for a length of time. We can assume it was a very difficult trip. But he got to Thessalonica. Paul had come there with Silas and Timothy. Silas had been there with him for a long time in his travels. He picked up Timothy on the way and they came into that Thessalonian church in about 48 or 49 A.D

And when he got to Thessalonica he wanted to do the work of God there in the way that it was the priority way for him and that was to go right to the synagogue. And there was a flourishing big synagogue there. Acts 17 tells us what happened when he arrived there.

recording that

when (Paul and Silas and probably Timothy)...had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead (in short he spoke the gospel to them), and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And they stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things. And when they had received a pledge from Jason and the others, they released them. And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and

when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.
(Acts 17:1-10)

and after they had left the area a year later, Paul wrote back this letter to them.

At the time he writes he's in Corinth and he's been through persecution and hostility and pains and struggles that came along with his ministry. And he sits down and it must have been a refreshing time because all of the reports that were coming about Thessalonica were positive. And so, as he sits down in the midst of the tremendous trials of his life, he has at least this about which he can celebrate--the Thessalonian church, that little island of purity in the sea of paganism

in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

In God the Father distinguishes this assembly from any pagan secular or religious assembly (which is what the word "ekklesia" meant in secular Greek), whereas "**and the Lord Jesus Christ**" distinguishes it from Jewish assemblies (they were "in God" but not "in Christ").

W E Vine comments that the preposition **in** is frequently used by Paul to express **intimacy of union**, and is not readily explained by any simpler term. Here it introduces the spiritual description and may be paraphrased thus: "in relationship with God, as Father, and with Jesus Christ as Lord. (Vine, W.

Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson or Logos)

in keeping with Jesus' prayer,
 "that they (the men the Father gave to the Son) may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art **in** Me, and I **in** Thee, that they also may be **in** Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. (John 17:21).

Barnes writes that Paul uses "strong language, denoting, that they were a true church" for as John writes

"we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him Who is true and we are **in Him** Who is true, **in His Son Jesus Christ**. This is the true God and eternal life." (1Jo 5:20)

GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE: charis humin kai eirene: (Ro 1:7; Ep 1:2)

The common greeting among the Greeks was **chairein** ("rejoice, greetings")" while the Hebrew greeting was **shalom** ("peace, prosperity, wellbeing"). Christianity took these everyday words of greeting and transformed them into vehicles able to convey the distinctive truths of the gospel.

William Barclay writes:

When Paul took and put together these two great words, grace and peace, **charis** and **eirene**, he was doing something very wonderful. He was taking the normal greeting phrases of two great nations and molding them into one.

Grace (5485) (**charis**) (Click for in depth word study of charis) is God's free, unmerited favor bestowed through Christ upon guilty sinners. Grace is God's provision for us because of the death of Christ for our sins. God is the Source for all our

provisions. We do not earn nor deserve His gifts. We do not deserve anything from God except condemnation and eternal punishment. Nothing undermines self-effort more than the grace of God. The Bible personifies Jesus as "grace." "For the grace of God has appeared bring salvation to all men..." (see note [Titus 2:11](#)). If people do the doing, they get the glory. If God does the doing, then God gets the glory. Grace glorifies God, because God does the doing.

Peace (1515) (**eirene** = from the verb **eiro** = binding or joining together what is broken or divided and set at one again) ([Click](#) for an in depth word study on **eirene**) means set at one again and bringing about confident and unrestrained access after alienation.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, ³ remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, ⁴ **knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.**

We give thanks(Pres Active Ind) to God always for you all because

1. It was a saved church,

2. It was a Surrendered Church

3. It was a Suffering Church

4. It was a Soul Winning Church

5. It was a Second Coming Church

I IT WAS A SAVED CHURCH

4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

Better rendering is

knowing Brethren, beloved of God your election

Knowing PF A PT (as we do the genuineness of your election) (oida) in the **perfect tense** speaks of the permanence of the knowing.

Beloved of God

Beloved is a (Pf Pass Participle) Having been and continuing to be loved by God

your election .

eklogé: a (divine) selection

Original Word: ἐκλογή, ἥς, ἡ

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: eklogé

Phonetic Spelling: (ek-log-ay')

Short Definition: a choosing out, selecting, choice by God

Definition: a choosing out, selecting, choice (by God).

HELPS Word-studies

Cognate: 1589 eklogé (from 1537 /ek, "out from and to" and 3004 /légō, "speaking to a conclusion") – properly, selection out of and to a given outcome; (theologically) election. See 1586 (eklegomai).

common reference to believers

Matthew 24:22 “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the ELECT’S sake those days shall be shortened.”

Matthew 24:24 “. . . insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very ELECT.”

Matthew 24:31 “. . . and they shall gather together HIS ELECT from the four winds . . . ”

Mark 13.20, 22, 27

Romans 8.28-33 N.B. V 33 “Who shall lay anything to the charge of GOD’S ELECT? It is God that justifieth.”

Romans 9:11 “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to ELECTION might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth. ”

Romans 11:5,7 “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according TO THE ELECTION OF GRACE. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but THE ELECTION hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded. ”

Romans 11:28 “. . . but as touching the ELECTION, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. ”

Col. 3:12 “Put on therefore, as the ELECT of God. . .”

I Thes. 1:4 “Knowing, brethren beloved, YOUR ELECTION OF GOD.”

II Thes. 2:13 “. . . because God hath from the beginning CHOSEN you to salvation . . . ”

II Tim. 2:10 “Therefore I endure all things for the ELECT’S SAKES, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

Titus 1 “. . . according to the faith of God’s ELECT. . . ”

II Peter 1:10 “. . . give diligence to make your calling and ELECTION sure . . . ”

I WAS A WAND’RING SHEEP

I was a wand’ring sheep,
 I did not love the fold:
 I did not love my Shepherd’s voice,
 I would not be controlled.
 I was a way-ward child,
 I did not love my home:
 I did not love my Father’s voice,
 I loved afar to roam.

The Shepherd sought His sheep,
 the Father sought His child:
 He followed me o’er vale and hill,
 o’er deserts waste and wild:
 He found me nigh to death,
 famished, and faint and lone,
 He bound me with the bands of love,
 He saved the wand’ring one.

Jesus my Shepherd is:
 ‘Twas He that loved my soul,

'Twas He that washed me in His blood,
'Twas He that made me whole:
'Twas He that sought the lost,
That found the wand'ring sheep:
'Twas He that bro't me to the fold,
'Tis He that still doth keep.

No more a wand'ring sheep,
I love to be controlled,
I love my tender Shepherd's voice,
I love the peaceful fold:
No more a way-ward Child,
I seek no more to roam:
I love my heavenly Father's voice,
I love, I love His home!

Horatius Bonar