



# Let's Get Ready to Rapture

First Thessalonians 1:5-10

## "Our Church is a Very, Very, Very Fine Church"

Have you ever asked someone what their church was like?  
Asked them to describe their church to you?

- They might talk about the music; that's a big thing.
- They might simply tell you about the size of the church, about its growth.
- If the church is involved in a particular program then that might be what the person tells you about.

Someone called the other day to get info about our services. They are a family looking for a Calvary Chapel because, as they put it, "Calvary's teach verse-by-verse through the whole Bible."

I like that. Nothing wrong with that as a descriptor, but is there more that should be said?

The apostle Paul described the church of the Thessalonians in the last portion of chapter one. He said they were an "example" to other churches. This is how we should want to be described - so let's dig in and listen carefully.

1Th 1:5 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.

The word "gospel" derives from the Old English *gōd-spell*, meaning *good news* or *glad tidings*. Gospel is a word-for-word translation of the Greek word *euangelion* (*eu*, "good," *angelion*, "message"). The Greek word *euangelion* is also the source via the Latinised *evangelium* of the terms "evangelist" and "evangelism" in English.

What, exactly, is the good news? Paul outlined it like this to the church in Corinth:

1Co 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 1Co 15:2 by which also you are saved...

1Co 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 1Co 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the basic outline of the good news that God has provided a way of salvation for men through the gift of His Son to the world. He suffered as a sacrifice for sin, overcame death, and now offers salvation to all who will accept it.

Further, the gospel is good news because it is a gift of God. Jesus is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe. Salvation is thus available to all; it cannot be achieved, but it can be received by believing.

Paul sometimes calls the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ "the gospel." Sometimes he modifies it, calling it "our gospel" because it is the message proclaimed by he and his companions. Sometimes he calls it "my gospel" because the truth that in Jesus Christ Jews and Gentiles are equal and are saved the same way had been entrusted to him.

He also calls it "the gospel of God" because God had revealed it; and "the gospel of Christ" because the good news focused upon Jesus.

We ought to be described as a church that emphasizes not just the need for personal salvation but the absolute priority of getting saved. We should stress that getting saved and having your life transformed takes precedence over personal or social or political reformation. Transform the man and you reform society as a consequence.

The gospel did not come "in **word** only," but it did come preached as words they could understand. Paul taught them from God's Word.

Calvary Chapel's generally excel in this descriptor. That's not to brag, or say that other churches do not excel in teaching God's Word. It's just an accurate observation.

Having said that, we want to excel in *all* these descriptors - not just this one.

The gospel came "in **power**." This doesn't mean external evidences, like miracles. If that's what Paul had meant he would have used the plural form, "powers."

He is referring here to the internal working of God the Holy Spirit upon hearts as the word was shared.

As a descriptor of the church this speaks of a confidence that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. In practical terms it means that we stay on message, not getting sidetracked by other methods to produce results.

The gospel came to them "in much **assurance**." I'm told by the language scholars that this "assurance," or it could be translated "conviction," relates to the one delivering the message, not the hearers.

As a descriptor it means we must be bold in sharing the gospel.

This boldness cannot come from any effort on your part. It isn't a personality trait or a skill you can learn. It is a holy boldness that is produced in you by "the Holy Spirit."

It is precisely the reason the disciples were told to wait until the Day of Pentecost for the gift of the Holy Spirit. They needed His empowering to come upon them in order to have this boldness.

We believe that there is such a thing as the baptism with the Holy Spirit but perhaps we don't emphasize it enough.

How might we emphasize it more? In the Gospel of Luke Jesus spoke of this baptism with the Holy Spirit when He encouraged us to ask, seek, and knock for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He said, "So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who keep asking him!" (Luke 11:13 ISV).

"As you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake." One commentator summarizes this by saying, "the whole man preaches." The character and conduct of the messenger of the gospel should give no cause to doubt the message.

It doesn't mean we must be perfect; only that we be thoughtful of how our character and conduct affects others - both believers and nonbelievers.

Paul even goes so far as to say,

1Th 1:6 And you became followers of us and of The Lord...

Don't you find it odd that Paul said they followed him and The Lord rather than The Lord and him, or just The Lord?

He's simply pointing out what we all know is true: You are the Jesus people see. You are the living epistles. Live accordingly.

The next important descriptor is that we would endure afflictions joyfully.

1Th 1:6 ...having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

Remember that Paul and company had, quite literally, been run out of town. Before that he had been beaten and illegally incarcerated in Philippi.

Nevertheless these Thessalonians "received the word," knowing similar treatment was their lot.

They didn't simply resign themselves to suffering. It was accompanied by an inner "joy of the Holy Spirit."

Are we those who count it all joy when we fall into various trials?  
Are we excited to share in the fellowship of His sufferings?

Then there is the whole issue of what is going on in the world - why there is so much suffering. The problem of pain is thought to be the insurmountable issue that proves there is no God; or that God hasn't the power to act.

While individual circumstances will remain a mystery this side of Heaven, we understand God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish eternally. I'm genuinely sorry for a person's loss, but it is compounded if they are lost eternally.

We are described as being involved in a cosmic spiritual warfare. Satan has been defeated; Jesus defeated Him at every point throughout His life, then finally and ultimately on the Cross and via His resurrection. But the devil fights on wreaking havoc where he may. Let's realize we are in a war and that there will be casualties.

Next descriptor: Be examples.

1Th 1:7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

It's one thing to be a good example to nonbelievers, but here we are told they were examples to believers. And all this within a short period of time.

I sometimes think I was a better example in things like faith and trusting God when I was first saved.

The fact they were great examples as young believers - and that many of us were, too - tells me that our example doesn't come through effort by by empowering. Having begun in the Spirit I will not be made perfect by the flesh.

Next descriptor: Evangelism.

1Th 1:8 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.  
1Th 1:9 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,

You've probably heard the phrase, "Preach the gospel; use words if necessary." Well, **that's not what Paul meant.** I'm not sure that even makes sense. Words *are* necessary.

And when it's something more than words, it's not just being a good, moral person. **It is taking a stand for God.**

In whatever walk of life you find yourself you can bet there will be a way to "turn to God from idols." It might come as a crisis where you are called upon to compromise your faith - sort of like Daniel's three friends called upon to bow to the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Or Daniel himself, knowing he'd be violating the decree of King Darius if he prayed publicly as was his manner.

There will come a moment, or moments, when you will choose whether or not to "turn to God from idols" and thereby give the testimony you are a servant of the living God.

The final characteristic: Expectancy.

1Th 1:10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

"Wait" is a word, and in a verb tense, that pictures a people who are eagerly and expectantly looking forward to the coming of Jesus, which is anticipated to be at any moment.

We strongly teach the Doctrine of Imminence. Nothing needs to happen before Jesus can return to resurrect and rapture the church.

One author noted that this expectancy has been lost in modern times. Then he says, "That attitude of expectation is the bloom, as it were, of the Christian character. Without it there is something lacking: the Christian who does not look upward and onward [lacks] one mark of perfection."

The "wrath to come" distinguishes it as a separate period of time from that in which we are living. It is the future seven-year Great Tribulation. We - the church, elect in Jesus Christ - will not be on the earth for any portion of it. We will be delivered from it.

Again, we get high marks as a church for talking about the imminent return of Jesus. We also need to be sure that it effects our daily decisions.

Any church, at any given time, has room for improvement in one or more of these descriptors. Let's just make sure that these are the areas in which we wish to be perfected by God.

Let's let these things dictate the kind of church we are and not any worldly standards.