



Living For the Glory of God, Part 5: A Church That Brings Glory to God

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 4:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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Over the last several weeks, we have covered a lot of ground as we have been fleshing out and applying the doxology found in Philippians 4:20 -- **“To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Philippians 4:20, ESV)** we have been applying this verse to the whole of our lives. We’ve spent a four weeks talking about what this means for our individual lives, for our marriages, and for our families. And now this morning, we are going to consider what it means for us as a church to live and work together to bring glory to God. And really, that’s why we are here. That is what, above all else, we are to be about. In the OT, Isaiah, speaking for God, wrote of the purpose of His gathering and redemption of His covenant people from the ends of the earth. He wrote: **“I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”**” (Isaiah 43:6–7, ESV)

Now, before we even get into this text, I want us to have fresh in our minds and to bring to your remembrance, who we are as the people of God. There are a lot of belittling things, and misinformed statements made about the church and so I want to remind you of our identity, our calling, our high standing, the Scriptural terms used to describe us in the Word of God. Beloved, we are the Bride of Christ – a people who are loved by Christ with a special love, chosen to be the object of His salvation and His sanctifying, strengthening, and life-giving love. We are the household of God, a part of God’s family, recipients of the favor of God. More than that we are disciples of the one true God, who is Lord and King and Sovereign over all, united together with God by the blood of Christ that has saved us and the Spirit of God who dwells in each of and with us corporately. As the church, we are the pillar and the buttress of truth, called to declare, to obey and to hold fast to the truth of God in Christ and the truth of God’s Word, in a world of lies and falsehoods. God’s word has described us as a people have been born from above by the grace of God, marvelously saved from our sins by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and washed thoroughly clean before God by

Jesus' shed blood. We are a people with a living hope – an inheritance in heaven that is incorruptible, that is undefiled and that will never fade away.

We are people who love a Savior we have never seen, keeping His statutes; loving Him with heart, soul and might; serving Him exclusively, putting away the idols we once served, humbly worshipping Him as God and King, gladly submitting to His Lordship, and joyfully proclaiming before the world, ***“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.”***
(Revelation 19:6, ESV)

Beloved, being the church, being the people of God is no small thing. It is the greatest thing, the greatest calling, the whole sum of our lives, the central reality of our lives from which everything else must spring. We need to see ourselves as God sees us, as the gospel defines us, as the Word of God describes us. We are not just a collection, some loose affiliation of people who are fans of Jesus, not a community of do-gooders, or a book club that likes to talk about the Bible. There is something glorious about us as God's people. We are a people of divine destiny and great responsibility in this world.

And so for that reason, we must put away every small vision of who we are and embrace the truth according to Scripture. Maybe you have never thought of yourself or the church in these terms, but we need to. It's heady stuff, strong words, but words that are absolutely true.

So, then, how do we bring glory to God as his church, as His people? Well, in the text that we are looking at this morning, we will see the description of the model church. For all of Paul's love for the Philippians, it is the church in Thessalonica that he holds forth as the example church, the model church. And if the church in Thessalonica is the model church, then we can safely say that it is church that brought glory to God and in studying the description of this church, we can see a blueprint for our own – the ideal that we must pursue.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 and Pray

Paul founded the Thessalonian church during his second missionary journey. Acts 17 describes it. Paul and his missionary band had been preaching in Philippi and after being run out of there, they traveled 100 miles up the Egnatian Way, the Roman road from the Adriatic Sea to the Middle East, to the city of Thessalonica. Immediately, Paul located a synagogue and began to teach the Scriptures. For three weeks he preached and taught the gospel of Christ. Two very distinct responses emerged. Those whose hearts were prepared by the Holy Spirit, gladly embraced the truth and were saved. And those who rejected the gospel became an angry mob, desiring to rid the city of these who “turned the world upside down.” Paul had to flee under the cover of night, but not before God used Him to plant a church upon which God placed His favor and which, through God’s power, became an example to all of real and true devotion to God – a church that brought Him glory. In this first letter that Paul wrote to them, after leaving Thessalonica, he describes 9 distinct characteristics of this model church that I want for us to see and emulate this morning. And the first thing I want for us to see about the Thessalonian church is that they were

1. A Truly Saved People. Look at verse 1 again and notice what it says. **“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.” (1 Thessalonians 1:1, ESV)** Now, if you aren’t careful, you will miss one of the most important words in that verse, the word “in.” That’s not an inconsequential preposition but instead, it represents the difference between being saved or lost, the difference between heaven and hell. Paul refers to the church in Thessalonica as being “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” in contrast to being “in Adam” or “in the lost world.” They were a people whom Paul describes as being “in Christ.” They were a people who had received the gospel of Christ, wholeheartedly and joyfully. They had not stumbled at the gospel of Jesus Christ, but believed that He was the only begotten Son of the Living God, the One whom God the Father put forward as the perfect sacrifice for their sins. They believed that on the cross Jesus endured the suffering and penalty of God’s wrath against sin to purchase them from death unto life and make them the children of God. They heard the truth of the gospel, Christ substitutionary suffering, the redemption of God, that “he who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him,” and having believed the gospel, they became united with God the Father through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. They were “in Christ.” **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2Co 5:17)**

Here’s the picture – this was not a dead church full of religious people who did not know Christ, a church that was a church in name only. No, the life of God flowed through them as

they were united with Him by faith in Christ. In other words, there were few tares among the wheat. And the reason I say that is this: Being identified with Christ in Thessalonica was not something one did casually because it cost you deeply. It cost you friends, social standing, sometimes jobs, sometimes families – a number of things. There were few, if any, casual attenders, few cultural or nominal Christians. It was costly to trust Christ and to be identified as a Christian, as a member of a faithful church. It always is.

Jesus said, **“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”** (Matthew 10:34–39, ESV) In reading the rest of this letter, you can see that it was this kind of devotion that characterized these people. They heard the gospel, they recognized their sin and they responded with saving faith in Jesus Christ and in the midst of that converted congregation, who treasured Christ above all things, God worked powerfully. God’s work was evidenced in their

2. Transformed Lives. Paul continues saying: **“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, ESV) Paul gave glory to God and thanked God for three characteristics of their changed lives as the people of God. In other words, they were saved and it showed. In particular, Paul thanked God for their:

Work of faith -- Paul praised and thanked God for the work of faith in their lives. Living, saving faith produces a life that desires to serve the glory of God, that desires holiness, faithfulness, and obedience to His commandments. It shows itself in a life that is not arranged around personal priorities any longer, but one that is lived for Christ’s glory. James 2:26 illustrates this truth well: **“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”** (James 2:26, ESV) Salvation manifests itself in Spirit-driven, Christ exalting works -- deeds of love and kindness; the deeds of mercy; the exercise of spiritual gifts; the teaching; the nurturing; the training; the building up; the serving; the

helping, not for any reason but for the praise of God and out of love for His church. In fact notice that Paul is praising God for their

Labor of love – The word for labor is one that means toil, exertion, and fatigue. It is labor for the Kingdom that is not motivated by personal gain. Love impelled their labor. Biblical love is willing to sacrifice for others. It is others oriented. To love sacrificially is to labor until it hurts. It is a love of blood, sweat and tears. The Apostle John wrote: **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”** (1 John 3:16–18, ESV) The Thessalonian church did just that. And they had

Steadfastness of hope in Christ – That’s another way of saying that they were not fickle. They had spiritual stick-to-it-ive-ness. They lived and labored in light of eternity. They were willing to undergo any kind of opposition, any obstacles, to endure anything for the sake of Christ for whom they lived. You see they lived with this kind of mentality: “If I can have the approval of just one person then let it be the approval of Jesus Christ. In the end I am living to hear Jesus say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’ And whatever the cost, whatever that requires, I’m all in.” That was the mentality of the Thessalonians because they were

3. Certain of Their Election. Paul continued, saying, **“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,”** (1 Thessalonians 1:4, ESV) More than that in his second letter, Paul writes: **“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”** (2 Thessalonians 2:13, ESV) Paul knew, and by extension, the Thessalonians understood God’s sovereign and eternal choice of them to be His church and to be recipients of His grace and live to the praise of His glory. They understood they were God’s people, chosen by God, saved for His glory and for His purpose, simply because God chose to save them, not because of anything they did but because of His choosing love. Why do we talk about election? Why do we talk about God’s grace in the midst of our sin to call us to Himself, to grant us faith in Him – faith and salvation that we would have in no other way? First, because it is throughout the word of God. But second, when we understand that salvation is a gift from God and not anything that we can accomplish, it has a deep effect on our souls.

First of all, this truth caused them and causes us to **worship** God and do away with pride. Knowing you are chosen of God, that He has set His saving love on you is the root of worship. Second, it encourages and grows our love for God. If we think that we have contributed anything of merit to our salvation, then our love for God is diminished by just that amount. If it's all of Him, then our love for God must be boundless. Third, it make us realize that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and it gives us a sense of destiny, that we have been chosen by God to advance His Kingdom for such a time and place one we are in. It gave the Thessalonians a sense of chosenness for God's glory and when a church grasps that, God can use them for glorious, God sized things. No truth so inspires confidence in God to build His church in His way than this truth. They understood these truths; they were true believers with transformed lives because they received with gladness

4. Bold, Faithful Preaching. Paul says in verse 5, ***“Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.”*** (1 Thessalonians 1:5, ESV) This was a church that was fashioned by the Word of God – not human wisdom, not slick psychology, but the Word of Truth. One of the hallmarks of a church that brings glory to God is the centrality of the preaching of the Word of God, initially in the presentation of the gospel, but in the preaching of the entire counsel of the Word of God.

Paul says – our gospel (notice how personally he holds the gospel truth) came to you not only in words – it has to come in words, we know that. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. But the point is that the Word came in power, in the Holy Spirit and with conviction. Paul is making is that the preaching did come in slick marketing, creative words, or smooth rhetoric. In fact, speaking to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, ***“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 2:1–5, ESV)

That is the kind of preaching that builds churches that please God and bring Him glory and are Christ-magnifying – preaching that rests upon the power of God's word to do the work.

It's not about the preacher; it is about faithfulness to the message and the work of the Spirit of God in two ways – first, to cause the preacher to preach with conviction God's truth – confident of the truth of the gospel, strongly confident of the reality of Jesus Christ, strongly confident of the saving message, strongly confident that the word would not return void but in the words of Isaiah 55:11 that it would be fulfilled. **“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”** (Isaiah 55:11, ESV)

But then second, the conviction in the hearts of the hearers that what they were hearing was indeed the Word of God, and the thought -- "When God speaks, I have to listen for me. I have to obey it. I can't shrug it off, I can't pick out the parts I like. I need to hear the truth and I need to be changed by Christ." They heard bold, faithful preaching, which they received with conviction and it led to

5. Christlike Character At the end of verse 5 and in the beginning of verse 6, Paul says: **“You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord...”** (1 Thessalonians 1:5–6, ESV) In other words the Thessalonian church looked up to Paul and patterned their lives after him and more importantly, after the Lord Jesus Christ.

Their lives were distinctly Christian. The fruit of the Spirit was evident their lives. **“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”** (Galatians 5:19–25, ESV) They were a church with

6. Unwavering Commitment And True Joy. Paul says of the church, **“for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,”** (1 Thessalonians 1:6, ESV) This is a phrase that means "severe pressure," like grapes being squeezed until the juice comes out.

Remember, these Thessalonians were faced with incredible persecution and opposition. They lost their families and friends, even their jobs for the sake of the gospel. But in the midst of it all they had a transcendent joy in Christ. In the face of all this opposition and pressure and persecution, these people were characterized by joy. Their allegiance to and love for Christ were so powerful that they were willing to endure whatever came for the sake of the glory of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and they did it joyfully as the Holy Spirit led them and built them in their faith. Nothing could deter them. They were unshaken in their commitment to Christ who overjoyed their souls, clinging to the truth of His words, **“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**” (John 16:33, ESV) For this reason, they were

7. Earnestly Evangelistic. Paul says they received the word in the midst of affliction but with great joy, in such a way **“so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.”** (1 Thessalonians 1:7–8, ESV) Get the idea here. Paul is saying, “No matter where, you are the model. You are the model church to the Bereans, the Philippians, the Corinthians and the Athenians. Your lives are great testimonies of the truth and power of the gospel. You show others what they’re to be like in Christ.” Their behavior was so distinctly Christian, that their lives bore powerful testimony to the truth about God

But it wasn’t just something people saw, it was something they heard from them. In addition to the exemplary lives they were living, they were bold and enthusiastic evangelists. They spoke to everyone about Jesus Christ, unashamed of the gospel, confident that they had the words of life. They were clear and distinct and accurate in their sharing of the gospel message. In fact the phrase “sounded forth” comes from a Greek word that means “to resound, to ring out, to echo forth.” It’s a term that was used to describe a trumpet blast, or rolling thunder. I grew up when church bells would loudly ring on Sunday morning calling people to house of God, and during the week at noon, an inescapable reminder of the reality of God. That was the way they lived, they way we must live as the church.

Apparently it was not through an organized evangelistic campaign that their witness went forth, though that is certainly a good thing. Instead, it was through the personal lives and testimonies of these transformed individuals that neighbors heard about their **faith in God**. As they went the gospel was heard **everywhere**, so an apostolic missionary campaign was not needed. What was attractive was the way they lived—the community of their faith, the

realness of their walk with God, which changed their life. That gave power to the message of the gospel they proclaimed.

This is the one glaring area in which we must improve, where we must repent, where we must be busy...

Moreover, the Thessalonians had a reputation, one of

8. True Repentance and Devotion. Paul must have been overjoyed to be able to say: ***“For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”*** (1 Thessalonians 1:9, ESV) Think about this order for a moment. They turned to God from idols, not from idols to God. It wasn't that they had become fed up with their idols and then decided to give God a chance. No, what happened is they came face to face with the living God and the message of Jesus Christ, and what Christ had done for them was so beautiful and precious to them that they turned to that God in faith. Leaving their idols behind was then easy to do.

Now their idols were carved statues, trees with altars, false gods, whatever. But it can be anything. An idol is anything other than Christ that is central of the affection and devotion of our hearts. Every one of us has a variety of idols that attract us. They could include money, a person or relationship, a sense of achievement, even a sense of spirituality that allows someone sense of fulfillment apart from any kind of dealing with their sinfulness. But when people see the beauty of who Christ is, the wonderful liberating power of his grace, and turn to him, then leaving the idols behind becomes easy. That is the essence of repentance – turning from sin, turning from idols they once loved and served, to turn to God.

The Thessalonians just weren't like everyone else anymore. They were not wasting their time serving dead and false idols, but were serving the living and true God. No longer married to the world, they discarded all their idols – religious, secular, material, or otherwise. And they lived in

9. Expectant Hope. Paul says, they were glad to serve God, **“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” (1 Thessalonians 1:10, ESV)** They lived expecting the return of Christ at any moment, looking for Christ to come and rescue them from the wrath of the Father that is coming on unbelievers. They were living as sojourners, as exiles, as aliens, ready to go at a moment’s notice. That is true freedom. That’s what breaks the back of living too closely tied to this earth, destroys the pull of materialism. That’s what puts to death getting caught up in amassing worldly wealth and reputation, power and position, stuff. It is what puts everything in its rightful place.

This was the church in Thessalonica. This is what a God-glorifying church looks like: A truly saved people, with transformed lives, certain of their election, welcoming bold faithful preaching, Christlike character, unwavering commitment and true joy, earnestly evangelistic, true repentance and devotion, and expectant hope.

I see us becoming more and more that kind of church, but we aren’t perfect. We have places we need to grow...

As I said earlier, we must be a people who are moved by the grace of God, shaped by the Word and the Spirit of God, Who long for His power and presence with us, who seek His glory and praise, who live with one eye to the heavens in light of the soon return of Christ, and who know that no sacrifice is too great to make the name of Christ great in our lives, our homes, our communities and throughout the world.

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