

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 — How Can I Recognize Genuine Faith?

March 3, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds Church! If you are new this morning, we are glad to have you. Our mission at CrossWinds is Reaching People With Jesus. That is not just a slogan. It is how we live. What does it look like for people like you and me to reach people with Jesus?

On Wednesday night, during AWANA, a woman from church told her her reaching-people-with-Jesus story. She works in the medical profession. That week, a woman came into the office who was struggling with smoking, alcohol, and depression. As she worked with her, she felt the need to cross the line and talk about Jesus.

She asked her if she had considered praying about her problems. That led to the woman breaking into tears. She was part of the church in the past, but after a tragedy in her family, she left the church and stopped reading her Bible. The woman from CrossWinds told her she reads her Bible and attends church. God helps her in difficult times through His word and his people. Then she said, “Maybe God had us cross paths to call you back to him.” She said, “I think you are right.”

While that story is encouraging, it is a small example of what it may look like for each of us to live out our mission of reaching people with Jesus where God places us.

Before we get into our study, if you have seen the news, you know there is a lot of concern with AI and deep fakes. These are videos and pictures that are generated by artificial intelligence. They look like reality but didn't happen in

reality. There is great concern for how we can tell the difference between AI generated fantasy and reality in the future.

As I thought about this, I realized this is nothing new. We have struggled with this in the church for the last 2,000 years. How can we tell the difference between fake faith and genuine saving faith? This morning, we will learn how to tell the difference.

This morning, we are in the second week of our study in 1 Thessalonians. Two weeks ago, when we began the series, we didn't open the book of 1 Thessalonians. We looked at two things. First, it was the background of this city. That is important to understand this letter. Second, we turned to Acts 17:1-10 to learn how the gospel came to the city.

Background

You may remember, the city of Thessalonica was in a strategic location. It was on the Via Egnatia highway leading from Rome to the Orient. Many travelers and goods passed through the city. It was also a port city on the northern edge of the Aegean Sea. It was a big city, one of Rome's largest. It was also the capital city of the entire region of Macedonia. It was a city in love with Rome. The more they ingratiated themselves to Rome, the more wealth and power they derived from Rome. They even worshipped the Roman emperor as a god.



It was a city with a Jewish synagogue. The Jews in the city were wealthy and powerful. When Paul came to the city, he began at the Jewish synagogue,

where he preached for three weeks until they kicked him out. When Paul left, several Jews became Christians and followed him. Paul also worked in the markets, making and selling tents. While there, he met many Gentiles that he also told about Jesus. They also trusted in Jesus and joined the new church. In four to six weeks, Paul reached a small group of people that became the first church.

That is when the problems began. The Jews in the city did not like Paul speaking about Jesus and people leaving their synagogue to follow him. They knew they were no match for him in public debate, so they went to the market and found some troublemakers. They hired them to create a riot in the city. The troublemakers claimed that Paul and Silas were encouraging people to worship a different king than Caesar, a king named Jesus. They accused Paul and Silas of treason. This led to the politarchs, the men in charge of the city, kicking Paul and Silas out of the city without giving them a chance to explain themselves.

Paul left for Berea. Then, he traveled to Athens. While in Athens, he was very concerned about this baby church in this hostile city. If they were rioting against Paul and Silas for speaking about Jesus, imagine what it would be like to be part of the church and follow Jesus! Will they make it? Will they survive? From Athens, Paul sent Timothy to find out how they were doing. Paul then traveled to Corinth for a year and a half. While there, Timothy returned with the good news that this new church was doing great. They had a few questions they wanted Paul to answer. Paul zipped off a letter to them. It is in our Bible as 1 Thessalonians.

Two weeks ago, we finished by looking at a brief outline of the book. The first half is Paul defending himself. Paul explains that he was not the troublemaker people made him out to be. In the second half of the letter, he answered their questions. Questions such as: What are Christian sexual ethics, and why do they matter? That was important in the city of Thessalonica, which had a large prostitution industry for the travelers passing through town. What happens to people when they die? What will happen when Jesus returns? How should a Christian live in a society that is falling apart around them?

Looking at my outline, you will see a little section on the top featuring verses 1:1-10 called Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians. After Paul introduced himself in the letter, and addressed the letter, he spent a few sentences thanking God for the Thessalonians in the letter. The purpose of this section is to greet the people he writes to and let them know of his love and care for them. It is the small talk section. We do the same thing. When seeing someone, we talk about the weather and ask them about their children before getting to the substance of the conversation. That is similar to what Paul does in the opening verses. That is the section we will study. Let's read it together.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 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

The Big Picture of 1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 — Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:13 — Paul Defends Himself.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 — Paul Defends how he acted while in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10 — Paul defends why he cannot return.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 — Paul encourages faithfulness in persecution.

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 — Transitional Prayer

1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:2 — Paul Answers Their Questions.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 — What is proper Christian sexual conduct?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 — What happens to Christians when they die?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 — What will happen when Jesus returns?

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 — How should Christians be different in the world?

of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. 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, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 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. 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, 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 1:1–10 (ESV)

Let's look at the first verse.

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)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy are the authors of the letter. They wrote to the church of the Thessalonians. Look how Paul identifies this church. It is not called Paul's church. It was God's church. God created the church. Jesus sustained the church. It was God's work in that city, not the work of Paul and Silas. In our day, when it is easy to identify a church by a pastor's name. That is a little sketchy. All churches belong to God the Father and Jesus the Son, not to the pastor who leads them.

Where do we go from here? The opening greeting does appear to have a central theme. As I studied, I found one. It is in verse 4.

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,... 1 Thessalonians 1:4 (ESV)

In this greeting, Paul was confident that the Christians in the church of Thessalonica were genuine Christians. They were the real deal. There was no fake faith. The Greek word is elect. Paul was confident that the Christians in

Thessalonica were genuine Christians, chosen by God in eternity past. As we work through the verses, Paul gives ten reasons why he was confident that the Christians in Thessalonica were genuine.

This is an applicable topic for us. Isn't this a question we ask all the time? How do we know if someone is a genuine Christian? How can we tell the difference between fake faith and genuine faith? Parents have children who trusted in Jesus at age 8 in AWANA, but as adults that are not too interested in Jesus. Should we be confident they have genuine saving faith or was the faith they displayed at age 8 fake? They were interested in Jesus because they followed their friends.

A wife marries a man who grew up in the church, but once they are married, he is no longer interested in the church. He claims to be a Christian because he came forward at a camp summer rally at age 12. How do we know if his faith is the real deal? The opening verses in 1 Thessalonians give us an answer.

Of the ten pieces of evidence for genuine faith in these verses, three are qualities seen in someone's life in the present. They are found in verse 3. The remaining evidences are found in verses 5 to 10. They are most evidenced when you look back on someone's conversion story, though that isn't always true for all of them.

Ten questions to recognize genuine faith?

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)

When Paul prays for this church, he continually remembers three pieces of evidence that prove their faith is the real deal. It is their work of faith, their labor of love, and the steadfastness of their hope in our Lord Jesus. Let's look at these.

Do I have faith that shows itself in what I do?

True saving faith is always seen in how we live our lives. We cannot claim to be a Christian but have a faith that does not impact our lives. True faith, genuine faith, will always have an impact on the choices we make. True saving faith will always produce in our lives decisions that are representative of the love we have for Jesus in our hearts. The word for *works* in the Greek is *ergon*. It refers to the deeds and actions taken in our lives. If someone is a genuine Christian, it will always show up in their choices. These choices do not save us. They are evidence that that Jesus did save us.

Nobody is more adamant than Paul that we are not saved by what we do.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

Paul says the only way to be made right with God is by God's grace to us through Jesus. We are made right with God by faith alone. We are made right with God by trusting in Jesus to save us from our sins and asking Jesus to be in charge of our lives. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. All we can do is receive what God has done for us by dying in our place for our sins on the cross.

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20 (ESV)

No works of the laws can make us right before God. When we read the Old Testament, and we read the Ten Commandments, as well as other laws, there is no obedience to God's laws that will earn God's favor. There is no obedience to God's laws that will forgive us of our sins and make us right in God's sight. I like to say it this way. The Ten Commandments are not a ladder up which we climb to God. They are a mirror that shows us how far short we fall from God. God's laws serve to show us our sins, not forgive us of our sins.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1 (ESV)

We are made right with God by faith in Jesus. Jesus alone is the one who gives us peace with God. It is only when we trust in what Jesus did for us, not in the good deeds we can do for ourselves, that we are made right with God.

That being said, while Paul is clear that the only way we can be made right with God is by faith alone in Jesus alone, genuine saving faith in Jesus will never alone. Genuine saving faith on the inside will always display itself by the way we live our lives on the outside. Look what Paul says immediately after Ephesians 2:8-9.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

As a church, we are to be about good works in our community. As Christians, we are to be about good works in our homes, our family, and places of work. We are not saved by good works, when we have saving faith in Jesus, the fruit of God's saving presence in our hearts will be good works.

If people claim to have genuine faith, but there is a selfishness to their lives and good works does not flow out of their lives, their faith may be fake faith.

This is why Christians have historically been known for good works, such as helping immigrants, caring for the poor, starting orphanages, leading in foster care, helping people in their time of need, starting organizations like the YMCA, starting the Red Cross, and the list goes on and on.

Look what James says about this.

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. James 2:17-18 (ESV)

You cannot see faith in someone's heart. You don't know if they have real faith or counterfeit faith. We can see the works in people's lives.

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. James 2:26 (ESV)

James says the distinguishing difference between fake faith and genuine faith how that faith works, how it changes the good works in their lives. I ask you, how is your life different from those who don't know Jesus around you? What evidence is in your life that your faith is working itself out? Looking in the mirror, you may see a moral difference. Maybe there are different friendship choices. If you are younger, there will be dating differences.

Do I have faith that shows itself in what I love?

The first evidence for genuine faith is genuine faith shows up in my choices, the things I do. The second evidence of genuine faith is a love that labors. This is not about what we do in our lives but where we expend our effort. This is not talking about the results of our efforts but where we endeavor to place our efforts. A genuine Christian faith is not just recognizable by what it does, but in what it is motivated to do.

Think of it this way. When a young man loves a woman, he pursues her. He puts energy into knowing her and romancing her. This is not work for him. The genuine love in his heart motivates his life. What we love is the second way we recognize genuine faith in someone's life. As a lover pursues the one he loves, those with genuine faith pursue Jesus, will pursue Jesus and the one they love. The word for labor is the word *kopos*. It means hard labor. It means wearing oneself out to the point of exhaustion. It is sweating it out. Remember that this refers not to the deed itself but to how hard we work at something. We put effort into what is important to us. We put great effort into what we love.

When a man loves a woman, he will write to her. He will buy her flowers. He will be patient with her. He puts plenty of energy and creativity into romancing her.

Similarly, this is how we recognize a genuine Christian. If they genuinely love Jesus, it will be evidenced by the time, energy, and effort they put into knowing Jesus and becoming more like Jesus. You can recognize a genuine Christian, because you don't have to force them to read their Bible. They want to read their Bible. You can recognize a genuine Christian because you don't have to beg them to make time for church. Their heart wants to go to church. You can recognize a genuine Christian because you don't have to tell them to give and to serve. They love Jesus and the church and want to give and serve.

If you have someone who claims to be a Christian, but there is little motivation in their heart to know Jesus better, to open their Bible, and to serve others in the name of Jesus, that might have fake faith, not genuine faith.

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 2 Corinthians 5:14 (ESV)

What a great summary of genuine faith. The love of Christ controls us. What Jesus has done for us is such a big deal that it controls our lives. At the center of us is not our hobbies, is not our work, is not our sports, it is Jesus. He defines magnetic north in our lives. Our love for Jesus after what he has done for us controls us.

Do I have faith that perseveres under pressure?

The third evidence of genuine faith is

...a steadfastness of hope in the return of Jesus...

People genuinely saved by Jesus will never walk away from Jesus, and they will look forward to the return of Jesus.

...training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, Titus 2:12–13 (ESV)

Some people claim to be Christians even though they don't believe Jesus is coming back. They are not looking forward to Jesus coming back. That cannot be true. Those with genuine faith are looking forward to Jesus' return, not just to living the Christian life here and now.

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:2 (ESV)

Genuine Christians look forward to being with Jesus, which the Bible describes as better than anything we can experience in this life. When Jesus returns, it will be a great day. The Bible says there will be no more sorrow, no more crying, and no more pain. When Jesus comes back, Jesus will reward us

for how we lived. He will shower the joy of his presence on us for all eternity. God is the source of all joy. He is the creator of all pleasure. As Christians, we will be the objects of God's favor for all eternity. When Jesus returns, we will experience more joy on that day, and for the rest of eternity, than any delight we can experience or have experienced in this life. When Jesus returns, that will be a great day. That is why genuine Christians look forward to it.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19 (ESV)

John says that one of the ways we can tell the difference between genuine faith and fake faith is only those with genuine faith will persevere in the faith. Those with fake faith will eventually walk away.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:13 (ESV)

That verse sums it up. Those who walk away from Jesus give evidence they never knew Jesus, or they wouldn't have walked away from him.

During the Reformation, this was called the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. Some people misused it. When people went through difficult times, they would say, "I hope you can hold on to your faith. If you give up on your faith, we will know you never had true saving faith. Hope you make it to the end!"

When Christians are in hard times, the Bible repeatedly tells us to encourage people in those times. We are to come around them, support them, and help them. Perseverance of the saints is done in community, not in singularity. We encourage one another in the faith. Look how Paul describes it.

...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. Acts 14:22 (ESV)

This is what the Thessalonians faced. They were persecuted for Jesus. I suspect some of them lost their jobs for Jesus. They were socially ostracized because of Jesus, yet when it was hard to follow Jesus, they continued following Jesus and kept their thoughts thinking of what it would be like on that great and glorious day when Jesus returned. That is evidence of genuine faith in someone's life.

The easiest way to apply this is to look at COVID. When COVID hit, many people left the church and didn't return to the church. What does that tell us about their faith?

Does the word of God strike me with power and conviction?

...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 1:5a (ESV)

Paul moves from describing what genuine saving faith looked in the lives of the Thessalonians to looking back at his time with the Thessalonians before he was run out of town. When they trusted in Jesus, there was evidence of their faith being genuine.

Let's look at two points. First, the gospel must be shared with words. Second, for the gospel to be effective, the Holy Spirit must accompany those words with power.

When Paul preached to the Thessalonians, he shared the gospel with words. I hope you realize that. Nobody becomes a Christian by osmosis. Nobody becomes a Christian because we sat next to them on the subway. We must use words. Those words need to be spoken words or written words.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 (ESV)

We have to tell people about Jesus. On the plane flying home from California, I sat beside an orthodox Jew from Brooklyn, New York. He wore a black hat and pants, a white shirt, and had long tassels in his hair. He had prayer tassels on his belt. He was decked out in Jewish garb. Before the plane took off, he talked to his friend in Hebrew on the phone. I knew this would be an interesting flight, so I broke the ice by quoting a few verses from the Old Testament in Hebrew. My Hebrew is rusty, but I still remembered a few. You can picture what happened when his eyes turned big as saucers when he heard Hebrew from the mouth of a white boy from Iowa. We had a great conversation. He was from Brooklyn, New York. I was able to get the gospel into the conversation a few times, but as I look back on my conversation with him, I regret that I didn't speak the gospel to him with greater clarity and conviction. How many times will an Orthodox Jew living in an all-Jewish community in Brooklyn, New York be forced to sit next to a Christian pastor for an hour? He probably doesn't have many opportunities to hear about Jesus. There was no way he would learn about Jesus by sitting next to me. I needed to speak about Jesus.

I had that man for an hour, but each of us has the people in our lives for a limited period of time. We don't want to let that time pass and regret that we didn't speak about Jesus more. Parents, you will only have your children in your home for 18 years. Trust me. That time goes fast.

[since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 1 Peter 1:23 \(ESV\)](#)

While we have to tell people about Jesus, one of the most effective ways to share the gospel is to share the Bible, to show people the words of the Bible,

not just our words. The Bible tells us that the words of God are living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword.

People are not saved by our logic our cleverness our manipulation or by our touching of their on heartstrings. The most powerful thing we can use to create faith and mature faith in someone's life is the Bible.

That is why, as a pastor, I fill my sermons with the Bible. You may forget my words. They have little power, but when it comes to God's words, that is power. Those are the spoke or written words God uses to create spiritual life.

There is a third component necessary for our words and God's word to effectively change a life. That is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has to take words about Jesus and apply them to people's lives. If the Holy Spirit doesn't show up to make the preaching of God's words effective, all of our words will make no more penetration in someone's life than a bullet bouncing off a rock.

[And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— Ephesians 2:1–2 \(ESV\)](#)

The Bible describes everyone as spiritually dead, completely lifeless, and dense as a rock. When we tell people the good news of Jesus and what he has done for us, there is zero penetration unless God shows up and has those words penetrate a dead heart.

Paul looks back on the times he spoke with the Thessalonians about Jesus, and he was aware that God was at work in their lives. When he preached about Jesus he saw the Holy Spirit showing up producing deep conviction on their faces. He saw the Holy Spirit show up in power changing their lives. Paul

saw the Holy Spirit at work in them. That was evidence they experienced genuine saving faith, not fake faith. That is still true today.

When you became a Christian, did the Holy Spirit make Word of God come alive to you? Did it cut into your heart convicting you of sin and leading you to repentance? Today, when the word of God is preached or when the Word of God is ready, does the Holy Spirit show up in your life making the Word of God come alive to you? If he does, that is evidence that your faith in Christ is genuine saving faith, not a fake faith.

Do I have a new life?

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,.. 1 Thessalonians 1:6a (ESV)

Here is another quality of genuine faith. When a Christian has new life, and they will begin to automatically imitate Jesus and other Christians, without even being around them. Think about this in Thessalonica. It didn't take years for them to begin to become like Jesus. It happened overnight. Paul and Silas were only there for a few weeks; then, they were gone for a few months. When Timothy arrived to check on them, they were dramatically different than the crime-ridden, sex-saturated, emperor-worshipping culture around them. Instead of following the ungodliness of the culture and acting like the devil, they were miniature copies of Jesus. That is what it means to be a Christian. The word Christian means little Christ.

Where did this change come from? There was no time to train them in Christian life and ethics. This change came about naturally. When they trusted in Jesus, they were given a new life, a new heart. That heart no longer wanted to

pursue the Satan-saturated culture around them. Their new heart naturally made them like Jesus.

This doesn't mean there was no room for growth. Of course, there was room for growth. It means there was a decisive change in the direction of their heart, the orientation of their lives. That is solid evidence of genuine saving faith.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4 (ESV)

You recognize genuine Christians because God supernaturally gives them a new heart, a new life.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

Are we perfect the moment we come to Jesus? Absolute not. This is not a matter of perfection in life, but genuine saving faith supernaturally produces a decisive change in the direction of someone's life. If there is no supernatural change in direction, we may be dealing with fake faith, not genuine faith.

Do I have joy that transcends my circumstances?

...for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,... 1 Thessalonians 1:6b (ESV)

These new Christians were joyful despite the trials they faced for Jesus. No matter how tough it became, how much money they lost, and how much social ostracization they faced, they were still joyful people despite their circumstances. That was because their joy came from Jesus, not their circumstances. That is evidence of genuine faith, not fake faith.

Are difficult circumstances overwhelming, such as the loss of a job, the loss of a child, a spouse, or a family member? Of course, they are. All of us will

find ourselves facing overwhelming times in life. I know a number of you are facing those times right now. Some of you are battling cancer. Others of you are struggling after a divorce. Others of you are struggling after the death of a child. Yet, despite those things, when there is genuine faith, the Holy Spirit gives us joy that doesn't come from our circumstances. It is a joy that comes from God. He holds us together when our world falls apart.

The Jews in this city ran Paul and Silas out of town. At least Paul and Silas could leave town. Imagine being the people of the church who had to stay in that town. That would be a hot mess. I am sure many lost their jobs, others found themselves shunned by family and friends. In spite of all this, they had a joy from God that nobody could explain.

For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, 1 Thessalonians 2:14 (ESV)

The Jews in Judea were the ones who crucified Jesus. They were a hostile mess. That is what the Jews in Thessalonica were like to the church in Thessalonica. They persecuted them and threatened their lives.

For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 1 Thessalonians 3:4 (ESV)

This is something that applies to us. This past week, I ran across an article that talked about how persecution against the church in America has doubled in the last two years. Our society is becoming less tolerant of the Christian faith. Many see the Christian faith as hateful and bigoted. In the next decade, the church in America will become more like the church in Thessalonica. Will we still

have joy when we find ourselves suffering for Jesus? Those with genuine faith will.

Is my faith being followed?

...so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 1 Thessalonians 1:7 (ESV)

This means the Christians in Thessalonica were so solid in their faith, especially after suffering for their faith, that they became an example to other believers. As we look at the map, Macedonia was the northern part. Achaia was the



southern part. Thessalonica was located on the Via Egnatia highway. People traveled through the city, learned about the church, and brought news of the church to other cities. They were a port city. Sailors came to town, learned about the church, and couldn't help but tell other people around the ancient world about it. People who traveled through the city couldn't help but talk about how this church suffered for Jesus, and they suffered well. They were not perfect. That was one reason Paul wrote this letter: to encourage them, but they were on the right track.

When you have been through hard times, and you find Christians wanting to follow your faith and learn from your faith, that is evidence of genuine faith.

I think of some of the premarital counseling appointments I have done over the years. When a young couple is getting married, I ask them who is a

spiritual mentor or hero they want to follow. I have had young men say to me, they want to be like their father. Their father had many difficult times in life but he was faithful to Jesus in his life. They want to be like him. Some young women tell me they want to be like their mother. Their mother had times of suffering in her life but she was faithful to Jesus throughout her life. As a new wife, she looks at her mom as her hero.

When people want to imitate someone's faith, because they suffered well, that is evidence of genuine saving faith, not fake faith.

Am I a bold witness?

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 1:8 (ESV)

This speaks of the word of the Lord sounding forth from them through Macedonia and all Achaia. In Greek, the little phrase "sounding forth" means blasting like a trumpet. Their witness was so loud it was like someone playing taps on a trumpet in a mall. That would get everyone's attention. One evidence of genuine faith is that this church was unafraid to tell people about Jesus despite suffering. They knew the gospel was real. They knew it changed lives. It changed their life. This church was only a few months old, but everybody in Macedonia and Achaia heard about Jesus because of them. That is some bold witnessing. They talked about Jesus in the marketplace. They talked about Jesus in the coffee shops. It was not the size of the church that mattered. It was the boldness of the church that brought the gospel everywhere.

When people are willing to brave that awkward feeling of telling someone about Jesus, that is evidence of genuine faith.

When I was studying, I kept thinking of my daughter. A few years ago, laid on her heart that her best friend was not a Christian. She set up a time to meet with her. She brought her Bible. As best she could, she explained the gospel and invited her best friend to ask Jesus to save her from her sins. Her best friend trusted in Jesus. Today she is a Christian that attends a church each week in college. Genuine faith boldly shares that faith.

Have I left my old life behind?

...and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 1 Thessalonians 1:9b (ESV)

The next evidence of genuine faith is those with genuine faith will turn away from their old life. They turned to God to pursue a new life. As we saw two weeks ago, Thessalonica was filled with idol worship. They worshipped emperors. The genuine Christians of the city left the temples, the emperor worship, and the sex-saturation of the city. They were even willing to leave behind their family and friends if that was what they needed to do to break from their old life to their new life.

That is how we can recognize genuine faith today. Instead of keeping one foot planted in the world and one foot in life with Jesus, there is a solid bread away from the old life and pursuit of the new life. That is what saving faith does when it is in someone's life.

Am I looking forward to Jesus' return?

...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)

This is similar to what we saw under point three. Genuine Christians look forward to the return of Jesus. They are especially excited about Jesus delivering us from the wrath to come.

This is an important reminder. Jesus is coming back. He came for the first time to die to save those who would trust in him. He is returning the second time, not to die but to carry out wrath against sin. Jesus is coming back to execute justice for sin. Ultimately everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus. For those who have not trusted in Jesus, Jesus will be their judge who will determine their just and final punishment in the lake of fire. For those who have trusted in Jesus, Jesus will come back to give us our eternal rewards based on how we lived. When Jesus returns, we will forever be with Jesus, which the Bible describes as better than anything this world has to offer.

Conclusion

This week, when you turn on the news, you will see articles about AI and deep fakes. Many will be concerned that we will soon be unable to tell the difference between computer-generated deep-fakes and reality. Thankfully, as Christians, we go into this week knowing how to discern the difference between fake faith and genuine faith.

If you are like me, God sometimes encouraged me in these verses by reminding me that my faith is genuine. At other times, God gently reminded me what genuine faith looks like and areas of life where I can grow to become more like Savior.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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