

Introduction

One of our daughters called us recently and wanted to know what a New Testament church was. She is going to a new church, one that had broken off of another church. They produced a document stating that they were a New Testament church, and in that document, they shared their concept of a New Testament church. After reviewing their document, I told her that the document describes a certain denomination. The form of government mentioned was a congregational form of government, which is used by that particular denomination of the church they were attending. They did not have a plurality of elders, which the Bible calls a presbytery, shepherding the church; they had one pastor over everything. If someone was basing my assessment strictly on church government, I would not consider their church a New Testament church.

Many people believe that a New Testament church is one that teaches from the New Testament. They only want teachings and principles that come out of the New Testament. While I believe we have a new covenant, I teach from both the Old and New Testament. I preached through the book of Genesis a few years ago. It took eighty-six messages to get through it. It was a very rich study. For those that believe that you must only teach from the New Testament, our church would not be considered a New Testament church. (I wholeheartedly believe we are a New Testament church.)

Bob Deffinbaugh, a teaching pastor at Community Bible Church, who also writes for Bible.org, said, “In the denominational and Bible church circles, it probably conveys the idea of Bible-believing, or New Testament teaching.” He went on to say that a New Testament church is much more than a doctrinal statement. “A New Testament church is a church which is structured and governed in accordance with New Testament principles and practices.” I would agree with that. A New Testament church is more than teaching from the New Testament. It should have a New Testament government. It should also contain the life and practices of the churches in the New Testament. Bob concluded his article on New Testament churches by saying, “I would not want to recommend that you attend a church simply because it claimed to be New Testament in its organizational structure. If I had to choose between a supposedly New Testament church which had no life, no vitality, no ministry, no outreach or vision, and a church which was faithful to the Scriptures in every way but in the matter of church structure, but had a vibrant ministry, I would not linger long over a decision. A church without New Testament principles, but with New Testament life is more New Testament than one with only the proper forms.”¹ Bob prioritized the body life and ministry in the church more than the government structure or form.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy had preached the gospel to the Thessalonians, and their response is characterized by three things. First, they accepted the word of God, not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which performs its work in us. Second, the Thessalonians imitated the churches in Judea. Third, they endured suffering. In Part 1, we looked at how they received the word of God. In Part 2, we will look at how they imitated the churches in Judea. Next week, in Part 3, we will look at how they endured suffering.

How The Thessalonians Responded to the Gospel

1. They received God’s word – Part 1
2. They imitated the churches in Judea – Part 2
3. They endured sufferings – Part 3

¹ <https://bible.org/seriespage/what-new-testament-church>, Bob Deffinbaugh, Pastor, Community Bible Church

(1 Th 2:13–16) “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. {14} For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, {15} who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, {16} hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

1. **They received God’s word** (1 Th 2:13)

The Thessalonians received the word of God and accepted it for what it really is, the word of God. The word of God includes all of Scripture, but many times it refers to the gospel message. For example, in Acts 6:7, “the word of God kept spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” Clearly, the word of God included the gospel message. Paul, Timothy and Silas preached the gospel to them, and they had received the gospel message. They continued teaching the word of God to them, and the Thessalonians received the word being preached to them as God’s word, not the words of men.

(1 Th 2:13) “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

(Ac 6:7) “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

They understood that the Scriptures were inspired by God, and because of that, they are our authority in all matters of faith, doctrine, life, and moral standards. They understood that it was truth, and it could be trusted. They understood the importance of God’s word, that it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness. They understood that the Scriptures give us the wisdom, knowledge, understanding, discernment, and direction. They understood that it is by the Scriptures that we grow in respect to our salvation. They understood that God’s word performs its work in our lives, and we are transformed by the renewing of our minds with the Scriptures. They received and accepted the word of God as the word of God.

(2 Ti 3:16–17) “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; {17} so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

2. **They imitated the churches in Judea** (1 Th 2:14a)

The second way that the Thessalonians had received the gospel message was that they became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea.

(1 Th 2:14a) “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea...”

What is a church? The Greek word is ekklesia, which means a calling out (ek + kaleo). The church is the saints of God, those who are called out. There is a universal church, which includes all believers. The universal church is the bride of Christ. Christ is not coming back for just a local congregation, but for His bride, the church. There are also local churches, local bodies, or congregations. The church in Thessalonica, a local church, was imitating the churches in Judea, local churches in Judea. A local church is a group of believers who have been joined together in a community to love God and one another. They are a local body of Christ, with Christ being the Head, and with elders who have been called by God to shepherd His flock, and these elders are going to give an account to God for those that they are overseeing and shepherding.

If we want to see what a New Testament church should be, we need to look at the churches in Judea. Paul taught people in every city how the churches in Judea operated. The church in Jerusalem was a model for the other churches to imitate.

Karen and I were part of a network called Antioch Churches and Ministries (ACM). ACM used Antioch as the model church, rather than the Jerusalem church. There were some unique things about the Antioch church, as there are with every church, but the church government, church priorities, doctrine, and church life were the same. Paul and Barnabas, who led the church in Antioch, modeled the Antioch church after Jerusalem. Barnabas had been sent to Antioch from Jerusalem to plant the church, and he was closely connected to the church in Jerusalem. Everywhere that Paul went, he used the churches in Judea as the model to imitate. We have no record of the Thessalonians sending representatives to Jerusalem to learn how they operate their churches, so they learned from Paul and his team members.

(1 Th 2:14a) “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea,…”

(1 Th 1:6) “You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,”

How did the churches in Judea operate? How were the Thessalonians imitating them? Were they imitating their church government? Were they imitating the ministries that were operating within the churches, like feeding the widows? Were they imitating the priorities of the Judean churches? What were they imitating? In looking at the churches in Judea, we will look at three areas:

- A. Church government and offices
- B. Church priorities
- C. Church vision

A. Church Government and Offices

I believe that the Thessalonians were imitating the church government of the Judean churches, and the Judean churches had apostles and elders. In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to discuss the issue of circumcision and salvation, and they met with the apostles and elders. The apostles had founded the church in Jerusalem, but by Acts 15, they had raised up elders. Elders, pastors, overseers, bishops, and shepherds all refer to the same office. The church in Jerusalem was overseen by elders, who shepherded the flock. In Acts 15, at the end of their debate, James stood up and gave the final decision, and based on that passage, we believe that James was the Lead Pastor.

(Ac 15:4–19) “When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.... {6} The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.... {13} After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me.... {19} “Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,”

Since the Thessalonians were imitating the Judean churches, Paul would have raised up elders to oversee, feed, and care for the flock. Paul and Barnabas had raised up elders in every church that they planted, so the church in Thessalonica would have been like the rest of the churches they planted. They established a New Testament government. Many churches today call themselves New Testament churches, but their government structure does not resemble the elder-run churches in the New Testament.

(Ac 14:23) “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

In addition to the office of elder, there is another office in the New Testament churches, the office of deacon. After giving the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3, Paul then gave the qualifications for deacons. The qualifications were similar, but did not include any requirements for teaching. The word deacon is a transliteration of the Greek word, diakonos, which means a waiter or servant. Deacons and deaconesses were official servants in the churches, and they are servant leaders over various ministries within a church. All of us are called to serve, but some people are called to serve in an official capacity.

In Paul’s letters to the Philippians and the Romans, he addressed it “to the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.” The Philippian church had elders and deacons.

(Php 1:1) “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:”

At the conclusion of Paul’s letter to the Romans, he commended to them Phoebe, who was a servant (deaconess) of the church in Cenchrea. Cenchrea was just a few miles from Corinth, which was a church in Achaia. In chapter one, Paul stated that the Thessalonians had become an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. Philippi is in Macedonia and Cenchrea is in Achaia, so I believe the Thessalonians had a model government for these other churches to follow, including both the office of elder and the office of deacon.

(Ro 16:1) “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;”

(1 Th 1:6–7) “You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, {7} so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.”

The first deacons put into office were in Jerusalem. They were put there to oversee a ministry to the widows. There was a problem and the Hellenistic widows (Greek-speaking) were being overlooked in the serving of food. The apostles were made aware of the problem, and they asked the church to choose seven men that they could put in charge of this ministry, so that they could devote themselves to the ministry of the word and to prayer. The church in Jerusalem did not

have these seven deacons for the sake of having deacons. They did not have the ministry to the widows for the sake of having a ministry. They had needs in the church, and they developed a ministry to widows, and then put deacons in place to manage the ministry. I believe the Thessalonians imitated the churches in Judea in their church government and offices. Since there were deacons and elders in Corinth and Philippi, it is logical to believe that the Thessalonian church also had elders and deacons.

Recently, I took my mother to get her hair done, and I had an interesting conversation with the hair dresser about where they were going to church. They have a son with a handicap, and he does not do well in large groups of people. Therefore, she goes to church while her husband stays home with their son. The following week, he goes to church, and she stays home with their son. They have been considering going to a church in Cartersville that has a special ministry to people with special needs. At that church, she and her husband would be able to attend church together, and their son would be well-cared for. That church has obviously seen a need for this ministry, just as the Jerusalem church had a ministry for feeding widows. Churches should have ministries to take care of needs, not just to have a ministry. I don't think that a ministry to widows or to people with special needs makes a New Testament church. But New Testament churches took care of the needs of people, so if you have needs within the body, the church should find a way to take care of those needs.

B. Church Priorities

Another consideration of New Testament churches is their priorities. We find a great description of the priorities of the church in Jerusalem in Acts 2. They were devoted to four things: apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

(Ac 2:42) "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Most people would define the apostles' teaching as sound doctrine that the apostles passed down for us to follow. They would equate the apostles' teaching to Scripture, rather than coming from someone in the office of apostle today, since many do not believe in apostles today. I believe that there are apostles today, and churches would do well to have a working relationship with an apostle and bring in apostolic teaching. I also believe that we are to devote ourselves to the sound doctrine that the early apostles taught.

In Barna's recent survey on biblical worldview, sixty-two percent of pastors did not have a biblical worldview. In order to be devoted to the apostles' teaching, we must have pastors that are going to teach the word of God for what it really is, the word of God. If Barna's survey is accurate, the majority of churches, both mainstream denominations and non-denominational, are not teaching sound doctrine. A New Testament church is devoted to the apostles' teaching, and that includes everyone, including the pastors.

The church in Jerusalem was devoted to fellowship. Some would say that the fellowship took place during the breaking of bread, which means sharing a meal together. At that time, when a meal was served, the host would say a blessing on the food, hold up a piece of bread and break it, which was the official start of the meal. So, the term breaking of bread, meant to share a meal together. I believe that a lot of fellowship happens before a service, after a service, and at other times outside of scheduled services. I believe that there is great fellowship while having meals together, but I am not convinced that these two items are to be combined into one activity. The

early church was devoted to having meals together, and during their meal together, they took communion. A true New Testament church is going to be devoted to both fellowship and sharing meals together.

The early church met in homes. *“The earliest building certainly devoted to Christian use is at Dura Europos on the Euphrates River in eastern Roman Syria. It was a house that came into Christian possession and was remodeled in the 240s. Two rooms were combined to form the assembly room, and another room became a baptistery—the only room decorated with pictures. Dura was destroyed by the Sassanian Persians in 256, so the house's use as a church was short-lived.”*²

In Acts 2:46, we see that the saints were continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread house to house, and were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. The primary reason for going to the temple was for prayer. The Jews had a prayer meeting at three o'clock every afternoon. Many of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem attended these prayer meetings every day.

(Ac 2:46) “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,”

In Acts 3, when Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray at that meeting, they saw the beggar and God healed him. Gentile believers would not be allowed to go into the temple and pray, so this was something specific for the Jewish believers, and it was for a limited time. We also see that Peter preached the gospel message at the so-called portico of Solomon, which was in the temple. For a brief period, the apostles went to the temples and took the opportunity to preach to the Jews. As the Jews became more hostile toward Christians, this opportunity went away. The believers did not have their Sunday gathering at the temple. They went there to pray, and if they knew that an apostle was going to preach, they may have gone there to hear him.

(Ac 3:1-12) “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth *hour*, the hour of prayer.... {11} While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. {12} But when Peter saw *this*, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?”

The churches in Jerusalem and everywhere else met in homes. The homes limited the size of how many could attend. At the same time, homes provided an intimate setting where people could fellowship, and share meals together.

The temple was not the only place that they prayed. I believe the Jewish prayer meetings were only for Jewish believers, and some went and participated. I believe that most of the praying was done in the homes when they met. In Acts 1:12-14, the apostles were gathered together into an upper room where they were staying, and were with one mind continually devoting themselves to prayer. This was not at the temple, but in the home where they were staying. A hundred and twenty people gathered there, so it must have been a fairly large home. (The large gathering may have taken place in a courtyard, and not inside the home.) The key is that they were devoting themselves to prayer, and it took place in a home.

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/november/why-and-when-did-christians-start-constructing-special.html>

(Ac 1:12–15) “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. {13} When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son* of James. {14} These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. {15} At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,”

We find another account in Acts 12. Peter and James had been arrested, and James had been put to death. On the night before Peter was going to be put to death, an angel came and delivered him out of the prison. Luke records that fervent prayer was being made for him. When Peter got out and realized that he was not dreaming or seeing a vision, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. It was a prayer meeting and it was being held in a home. It was probably a local congregation that met in that home, and the saints had gathered there to pray together for Peter’s deliverance from prison.

(Ac 12:5–12) “So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God... {12} And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.”

In Acts 19, Paul was in Ephesus, and for three months he reasoned and persuaded people in the synagogue about the kingdom of God. When some became hardened and disobedient, and spoke evil of the Way, he withdrew and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. The church services were not being held at the synagogue; it was an outreach ministry to the Jews, and they allowed people to share things in the porticos. In Acts 3:11, Peter preached the gospel at the so-called portico of Solomon, in the temple in Jerusalem. Paul was using the temple in Ephesus in a similar way, until it began to get hostile. Then, he began to teach at the school of Tyrannus. That particular school let people rent a classroom or meeting room space, and Paul took advantage of the facility, and taught daily classes. The church is called to make disciples, which is what Paul was doing.

(Ac 19:8–10) “And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God. {9} But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. {10} This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”

(Ac 3:11) “While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.”

The church in Jerusalem met in the temple and from house to house. There was prayer, preaching and evangelism taking place in the temple, but the Sunday meetings were in homes. In Ephesus, there was evangelism and teaching at the synagogue and their meetings were also in homes. The teaching ended at the synagogue, but continued at the School of Tyrannus. We know that because Paul wrote to the Corinthians from Ephesus, and he said, “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”

(1 Co 16:19) “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”

New Testament churches are devoted to corporate prayer. They are committed to fellowship, breaking of bread, and to the apostles’ teaching. Many churches consider themselves New Testament churches because they focus on the New Testament, not the Old Testament. I believe a New Testament church follows the example of the churches in Judea.

C. Church Vision (Identity)

When a lawyer asked Jesus about which is the great commandment in the Law, Jesus told him to love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is God’s desire, that we love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. I cannot think of anything more important than for a church to love God and love one another.

(Mt 22:35–40) “One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, {36} “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” {37} And He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ {38} “This is the great and foremost commandment. {39} “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ {40} “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Some people think that a New Testament church is where all the gifts are being exercised. There is one denomination that calls themselves a New Testament church, and the use of the gifts is a key priority in their church services. However, in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul said if we spoke in tongues, or had the gift of prophecy, but did not have love, we were nothing. God’s priority is love over the gifts. We are to pursue love, yet earnestly desire spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are important, especially the greater ones that edify the body, but love is even more important.

(1 Co 13:1–2) “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. {2} If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

(1 Co 14:1) “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.”

In Revelation, John was on the island of Patmos, and God gave him a prophetic word to the seven churches in Asia. In Revelation 2, he addressed the church in Ephesus. This had been a great church. Paul had spent a lot of time there. Aquila and Priscilla planted a church there. It was a great church. God commended them for their deeds, toil, perseverance, and discernment, but he had this against them; they had left their first love. The church was not loving God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. God warned them to repent and do the deeds they did at first, or else He was going to remove their lampstand out of its place. God was going to close down that local church if they did not repent and start loving Him with their whole heart. When God is looking at a church, He is looking to see if the members of that church love Him with their whole heart.

(Re 2:2–5) “‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and

you found them *to be* false; {3} and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. {4} 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. {5} 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.'

In John 13, Jesus gave us a new commandment, that we love one another in the same way that He loved us. Then, He said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Love is the earmark of the church. Love is the chief way that people will know that we are Christians. If you want a good evangelism program, one of the keys is to love one another. Churches must love God and love one another.

(Jn 13:34–35) "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. {35} "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John said, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" A loving church is going to take care of the needs of the brethren. They will lay their lives down for one another, and in practical terms, they will share with one another and serve one another.

(1 Jn 3:16–17) "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. {17} But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

The church in Jerusalem was a loving church. We see in Acts 2:44-45 that they were selling property and possessions and sharing with anyone that had a need. They were doing exactly what the apostle John had written. They were laying down their lives for one another. That is what the church in Thessalonica also did. They imitated the church in Jerusalem and loved one another.

(Ac 2:44–45) "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; {45} and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need."

The church in Thessalonica had also been taught to love, and they were a loving church. They had imitated the churches in Judea in this area as well. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had been with the Thessalonians a very brief time, but in that brief time they prioritized teaching on love. In chapter four, they wrote, "for you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus." We know from John 13:34 that the commandment the Lord gave was to love one another. In verses nine and ten, they wrote, "that as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. The Thessalonians were a loving church; it was an established priority for them.

(1 Th 4:2) "For you know what commandments we gave you by *the authority* of the Lord Jesus."

(1 Th 4:9–10) "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; {10} for indeed you do

practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,”

A number of years ago I was asked to preach at a church. I was led to preach out on the church of Ephesus, using Acts 19 as my primary text. Lots of great things were happening in Ephesus. I closed with God’s warning to the church out of Revelations 2. I encouraged that church to love God with all their heart. Unfortunately, that church closed down about two years later. God removed their lampstand. If a church is going to love God, the leaders need to love God. They need to set the example for the flock. They need to teach and encourage the flock to love God and one another. Love has to be the greatest priority in a New Testament church.

Conclusion and Applications

When my daughter called and spoke to us about the church, that calls themselves a New Testament church, I reviewed the document that she had received from the church. Only one of these four key priorities was evident. I do not know about the greatest commandment. The church just had a split, so there is evidence that love may have also been missing. Most churches today are devoted to three things: exciting children’s ministry, excellent music, and dynamic preaching. There is very little corporate prayer, sharing of meals together, which includes the taking of communion in that meal, and to fellowship. That is the American church, not the New Testament church.

The Thessalonians became imitators of the churches in Judea. Paul, Silas, and Timothy ordained elders, and they had a New Testament government. They were a loving church, and when an offering was taken for the poor in Jerusalem, they were an example to the other churches in their giving. They gave out of their poverty, according to the ability and beyond their ability. They gave because they were a church that laid down its life for one another. The Thessalonians were devoted to the same key priorities as the church in Jerusalem. They were devoted to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to breaking of bread, and prayer. Like all the churches at that time, they met in homes, which was very conducive to what they were devoted to doing. A New Testament church is more than a good government, and sound doctrine. They must be devoted to these key priorities.

If you are looking for a new church, I encourage you to look for a church that preaches God’s word. Look for a church that accepts God’s word for what it is, not the word of men, but the word of God that performs its work in you. I encourage you to find a church that is being built according to the pattern of the churches in Judea. Look for a church that is following the greatest command, to love God. Look for a church that is following the second greatest command, to love one another. Look for a church that has the same priorities as the churches in Judea. Look for a church that is devoted to the apostles’ teaching. Look for a church that is devoted to fellowship. Fellowship happens in small groups, around the dinner table, and other places. Look for a church that promotes small groups and fellowship. Look for a church that promotes breaking of bread. There is something special about breaking bread together. The Lord’s Supper was always part of these fellowship meals. Look for a church that takes time to remember what Christ did for us on the cross. Look for a church that is devoted to prayer. The leaders should be devoted to prayer. They should encourage prayer. The church should take time to pray together corporately, and that is not just a few stragglers on a Tuesday night. It should be the church coming together to prayer, and it should be something that the church is devoted to.

On an individual basis, how are you doing with these priorities? Are you devoted to the word of God? Do you accept it for what it is? Are you renewing your mind with the word of God? Do you have a reading time? Do you take time to meditate on God's word? Do you take time to study God's word? Is the word of God performing its work in your life?

How are you doing with your fellowship with others? Do you carve out time to meet with others? Is fellowship with other believers a high priority in your life? Are you part of a small group ministry? Are you getting together with other believers on an individual basis? Do you talk about spiritual things? Do you talk about the Cowboys game, or do you talk about what God is speaking to you about in your quiet times? Do you share insights from your study times? How is your fellowship with others?

How is your prayer time? Do you spend time each day praying to the Lord? Do you have a regular time and place to meet with God? Do you have a prayer plan? The Lord gave his disciples a model prayer, which is really a prayer outline. Do you spend time hallowing His name? Do you take time to thank Him for everything He has done for you? Do you cast your cares on Him? Do you take time to listen to Him? How is your prayer time with the Lord?

Take some time this week reflect on these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas that you need to tweak or adjust.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for this letter to the Thessalonians. Thank You for the example of the Judean churches. Thank You for the example of the Thessalonian church. Help us to build our lives on Your word. May Your word richly dwell inside us. May Your word perform its work in our lives. Father, help us to build the Connection Church after the pattern of the New Testament churches. Help us to be devoted to prayer, fellowship, breaking of bread, and to Your word. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

How the Thessalonians Received the Gospel – Part 2: They Imitated the Churches in Judea

Introduction

1. **They received God's word** (1 Th 2:13, Ac 6:7, 2 Tim 3:16-17)

2. **They imitated the churches in Judea** (1 Th 2:14a, 1 Th 1:6)
 - A. **Church Government and Offices** (Ac 15:4–19, Ac 14:23, Php 1:1, Ro 16:1, 1 Th 1:6-7)

 - B. **Church Priorities** (Ac 2:42, 2:46, 3:1-12, 1:12-14, 12:5–12, 19:8-10, 3:11, 1 Co 16:19)

 - C. **Earmark of the church** (Mt 22:35–40, 1 Co 13:1–2, 14:1, Rev 2:2-5, Jn 13:34-35, 1 Jn 3:16–17, Ac 2:44-45, 1 Th 4:1-2, 9-10)

Conclusion and Applications