

A small child, sitting in church asked his father, "Dad, what is a Christian?"

The father replied, "A Christian is a person who loves and obeys God. They loves their friends and neighbours, and even their enemies. They pray often, they're kind, gentle, and holy, and are more interested in going to heaven than in all earthly riches. That, son, is a Christian!"

He said "Dad have you ever met one?"

This generation is desperately searching for something authentic

So what does authentic faith look like?

Paul begins the first letter of Thessalonians by telling his readers that he is convinced they have authentic faith—that they're authentic believers.

He describes what he knows of their lives.

As he describes who they are we get a good sense of what an authentic believer looks like.

Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian is one.

Not every claim to know God is authentic.

Sadly, some people may have been traumatized by someone who identified themselves as a Christian.

I am not real keen on *Antique Road Show* but the couple of times I have seen it, if the appraiser wants to authenticate a piece of pottery, they may look for markings on the bottom of the vase.

They are concerned with the style, the colors, the materials used.

There are certain things the appraiser looks for to authenticate the pottery.

If we have an authentic relationship with God, if the gospel has taken root in our lives, there are certain things that should be present within our lives.

There are at least four things in this passage that characterize signs of

authentic faith.

Authentic believers are marked by serving God.

Letters in the ancient world weren't signed at the end, but at the beginning.

Paul is writing on behalf of the missionary team.

Verse 2: Paul begins by telling the church that he is deeply grateful for them. He prays for them.

Verse 3: Further, he sees within his readers the evidence of critical qualities or virtues that the Holy Spirit produces within the lives of believers.

These are the virtues of **faith, love, and hope**.

And Paul is confident that those are present within their lives because of the way they are focused on Jesus and serving Him.

Members of this church, after putting their faith in Jesus, began to use their gifts to build into the lives of others.

Some have speaking gifts; some have serving gifts.

This church is using their gifts.

Paul said that their love for Jesus produced labor.

Behind this effort is love. Love for God, love for others.

They are responding to real needs. He also says they are sticking to it!

They are patient and persistent in the face of opposition.

Regardless, this church serves.

Faith, love, and hope produce a desire to serve Jesus.

Authentic believers have been drawn to the gospel by the Spirit.

In verse 4 Paul writes that God has chosen his people.

He is referring to what is sometimes called *election* or *predestination*.

This term has caused some confusion and even arguments among believers.

The Bible teaches two things. They can seem to be contradictory.

First, it teaches that God knows who will believe; he selects us/chooses us.

Second, it teaches that God invites all to believe, he makes salvation available to all/he wants all to believe.

In 2 Peter we read, "God is not willing that any should perish, but wants all to come to repentance and faith."

John 3:16 says, "God loves the world; he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

All are invited to believe. It is a choice that we also must make.

It's a mystery.

But on our side what we must do is believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

And if we have taken Jesus as Saviour we have been chosen whether we know it or not.

Paul knows that this is true for the Thessalonian church because of the way they responded to the gospel.

He then explains how the process worked.

Verse 5: The gospel came to them ... *with words*.

Jesus Christ died for my sins and was raised from the dead.

This is the message that everyone needs to hear from us.

Most people in our community have no idea why Jesus died.

We need to put the content of the gospel in front of those who haven't yet come to faith.

How do we do that? "with power."

Outside of Jesus Christ we are spiritually blind our hearts are hard to the gospel.

The gospel is not simply a concept or idea.

In order for the gospel to break into someone's life, the message has to be communicated in power.

We have to ask the Holy Spirit to take the Word, the gospel and

penetrate the unbeliever's mind, heart, conscience, will.

As a church many of us are praying for people to come to faith in Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit is welcomed into a life it can transform us.

We just need to be willing.

God's love, joy, peace, begin to fill our lives as we allow God to change us.

Authentic believers have experienced this work of the Spirit.

God's Spirit also convicts us of our sin.

Authentic believers have transformed lives.

Verse 5b: Paul and those with him modeled truth.

They were visible, transparent, genuine; they lived out their faith. Verse 6:

This church became imitators of Paul, Timothy, and Silas.

Five times Paul will ask his readers to imitate him, simply because he has a transformed life.

He is saying let Jesus change you as He has changed me.

But the gospel profoundly changes lives.

Jesus in the parable of the soils describes how the gospel impacts hearts and minds.

The gospel is like seed; our hearts are like soil.

Some soil refuses to accept the seed.

But when seed is planted in the right soil it germinates and grows at times in powerful, surprising ways.

A small seed put in the right soil can become a huge tree.

The gospel is living, powerful & transforming.

It produces new minds & new relationships, we become new creations.

There is no human explanation for what takes place.

Verse 6 we see the transformation of the readers took place despite "severe suffering."

Believers in the first century lived with a great deal of persecution. Officials in the Roman Empire were beginning to arrest and execute these followers of Christ.

Believers in many parts of the world today live with a great deal of persecution. Even today Christians are, imprisoned, tortured or killed for their faith in Jesus.

We're also told that despite all this their lives continued to be transformed. With this suffering also came a supernatural joy produced by the Holy Spirit.

Again, authentic believers have transformed lives (v 7) and they model truth for others.

We should ask ourselves *"Is my life different today than when I first believed?
Have I grown this past year? "*

Authentic believers communicate their faith.

These new believers embodied the truth and acted on the truth. They also communicated the truth. They shared the gospel in their community.

(v. 8): "Your faith has become known everywhere."
Apparently those who had not yet believed were talking about what was happening in the lives of those who were believing. There was a buzz moving through the region. Something extraordinary is going on in Thessalonica. Such and such a person has come to believe in God; and is a different person. It is like a new society has come into being.

First, these believers had turned away from idols.
An idol is anything the human heart substitutes for God.
It doesn't have to be a statue made of wood, stone, or some precious metal.
An idol is anything we substitute for God.
It can be money, power, status. It can be our work or another person.
It is anything that we use to fill the emptiness of our human hearts.

Second, these believers had turned to the true and living God.
The God of the Old Testament.
The God who sent his Son into the world to die for our sin.
The God who loves us and knows us.
Third, these believers were oriented toward the future.
They believe one day Jesus Christ is going to return to this planet, he will save us from the future judgment that will be unleashed on this planet.

In Conclusion: A letter,

You lived next door to me for years, we shared our dreams, our joys, and tears.

A friend to me you were indeed, a friend who helped me when in need.

My faith in you was strong and sure, we had such trust as should endure.
No spats between us ever rose; our friends were like and so our foes.

What sadness then, my friend, to find, that after all you weren't so kind.
The day my life on earth did end, I found you weren't a faithful friend.

For all those years we spent on earth, you never talked of second birth.
You never spoke of my lost soul and of the Messiah who'd make me whole.

Authentic believers have a desire to communicate their faith.
They're concerned about their neighbors, family members, and co-workers who don't know the Saviour.

This is a prayer that God wants to answer, He wants to bring people to faith, we also wants us to ask Him to give us the boldness to be involved.