

# 1 Thessalonians

## Chapter 1

### Introduction:

1. The apostle Paul is the writer of this encouraging and practical letter to the church of the Thessalonians. vs. 1
2. Paul had been saved for about eighteen years and been a missionary for about eight years when he penned this letter on his second missionary journey. This is Paul's first letter.
3. In Paul's day, Thessalonica was a huge city of over 200,000 people. It was the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia.
4. The birth of this church can be seen in **Acts 17:1-10**. It was certainly a rocky beginning.
  - Paul, Silas, and Timothy immediately went into the Jewish synagogue and spent three weeks explaining exactly who Jesus Christ was. vs. 1-3
  - Some of the Jews believed and began to associate with Paul, but a great multitude of Gentiles believed, including many prominent women in Thessalonica. vs. 4
  - The unbelieving Jews stirred up the entire city, caused a mob scene, and dragged Jason (Paul's host) and many other believers before the rulers and charged them with treason. vs. 5-9
  - Things were heating up, so the Thessalonian believers thought it best for Paul and his co-laborers to slip out of town while they were able to (vs. 10). What a start for a new church. They didn't cover that in Church Planting 101 in Bible College!
  - The events of **Acts 17:1-10** most likely happened over a period of several months, allowing Paul to root and ground these new believers in the truth of God.
5. Paul escapes to Berea and then on to Athens. While in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to continue teaching the new converts there.  
**1 Thessalonians 3:1-2**
6. Finally, Paul, Silas, and Timothy meet up together again at Corinth (**Acts 18:5**). Timothy reported to Paul the state of the infant church and it is from here that Paul wrote the book of Thessalonians, around A.D. 51-52.

### Verse 1

1. In Paul's day, people didn't sign their name at the end of the letter, but rather at the beginning. Although Paul mentions Silas and Timothy out of courtesy, Paul is clearly the writer of this epistle. 3:5
2. Paul addresses this group of people (saved Jews and Gentiles) as "*the church of the Thessalonians.*"
3. What made them a church? It was the spiritual position they shared. Paul says that they are **in** God the Father and **in** the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - A local church is a called out assembly of believers who have been joined together in Christ, as part of His body. **1 Corinthians 12:13**

- They were **physically** in Thessalonica, but **spiritually** they were in God the Father and Jesus Christ. What a wonderful place to be!
4. Paul greets them with the words "*grace*" and "*peace*."
  5. The world is looking for **grace** to make it through the hard times of life, and the world clamors after **peace** (world peace, internal peace, peace in their relationships).
  6. But to find the precious commodities of grace and peace, you have to go to the source of grace and peace - God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. You will not find them anywhere else.

### Verse 2

1. Paul was so thankful for these new converts and prayed for them regularly. Paul's prayer life was truly amazing. What he said of the Thessalonians, he said of so many others. **Romans 1:9; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4; 1 Thessalonians 3:10**
2. This little verse teaches us three things about our prayer lives:
  - They should include thankfulness. "*we give thanks*" - **cf. Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 1:3, 2:7, 3:15, 4:2**
  - They should be consistent. "*always*" - cf. 5:17
  - They should include others. "*making mention of you*"
3. Many times, we only remember "us" in prayer - our needs, our wants, our problems.
4. Like Paul, we must remember to pray for others. It is so crucial. How much of your prayer life is spent praying for others? **Colossians 4:12**

### Verse 3

1. This verse gives us in summary form what the Christian life is all about.
2. When Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, he remembered three things about them:
  - Their work of faith
  - Their labor of love
  - Their patience of hope
3. These three are the key components that are designed to bring fullness in the life of a believer. They represent spiritual maturity.
  - The Christian life **functions** on the basis of faith (our faith resting in God's Word and applying God's Word to the details of our lives). 2:13; **cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17**
  - The Christian life should be **motivated** by love (love for Christ and love for people). 3:12, 4:9-10; **cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14**
  - The Christian life is **sustained** by hope (we patiently continue our work of faith and labor of love, knowing that Christ could return at any moment). 4:16-18; **cf. Titus 2:13**
4. These same three characteristics of the Christian life are seen in verses 9-10.
  - Work of faith - "*ye turned to God from idols*"
  - Labor of love - "*to serve the living and true God*"
  - Patience of hope - "*and to wait for his Son from heaven*"
5. We also see these three as a progression when you serve God in a ministry:

- **Work of faith** - you begin a ministry, not fully knowing all you are getting into. You begin serving in that ministry as a work of faith, trusting Christ and His Word. Paul could not have imagined all that would happen when he began the work in Thessalonica.
  - **Labor of love** - after a while, it becomes a labor of love. You develop a deep love and bond to those you are ministering to. 2:8
  - **Patience of hope** - even when you go through difficult times of trial in your ministry (and you will), you stay faithful and determined, knowing that Christ will return and remember your work of faith and labor of love. **Hebrews 6:10**
6. Isn't it interesting that we see all three of these (faith, hope, love) in **1 Corinthians 13:13**?
- "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."
  - If love doesn't motivate us, all that we do will be hollow and empty.
7. One other sidenote before leaving this incredible verse - notice Paul did not say that we are doing this **for** our Lord Jesus Christ, but rather "**in** our Lord Jesus Christ."
- The Christian life is **not** you trying to muster the strength and willpower to do something for Jesus.
  - All that we do must find its power, strength, and substance in Christ. All that we do **in Him** is done in the sight of God the Father. God the Father will only reward us for what we have done in and through Christ and His divine power.

#### Verse 4

1. Paul calls them "*brethren beloved.*" Paul had a deep love in his heart for these Thessalonian believers.
2. Paul said that he knew their election of God. The word "*election*" simply means "selection." If you are elected by God, you are selected or chosen by God.
3. This is an interesting verse because it contradicts the teaching of Calvinism.
  - In Calvin's theological system, there should be the word "unconditional" before the word "election." It is the belief that God elected certain ones to eternal life before the foundation of the world and placed them in Christ. He did it for no reason other than it was His "sovereign will." It was an unconditional election.
4. In Calvin's system no other person could know if you were one of the elect because the elect **prove** that they are the elect by persevering in their faith to the end.
5. Yet Paul said that he knew the Thessalonians' election of God. How did he know it? The next word in verse 5 connects it to this verse, "*For.*"
6. As you read the chapter, here is what you discover. The Thessalonians' election did not happen in eternity past, but rather it happened in time, and it happened in response to their hearing and receiving the gospel of Christ. vs. 5-6, 9

#### Verse 5

1. This verse is a masterpiece on the subject of church planting and personal evangelism.
2. Paul founded this church on the gospel. The word "gospel" simply means "good news."
3. What good news did Paul share with these people? **Acts 17:1-3**

- The good news that Jesus Christ came to this earth and died for their sins on a cross outside Jerusalem. **Romans 5:6, 8**
  - The good news was that Jesus did not stay dead. He arose from the dead on the third day. vs. 10
4. Paul shared this good news, not through his own power and strength, but in the power of God's Holy Spirit.
  5. This sounds like a great plan in starting a church – Spirit-filled witnesses proclaiming Christ and His finished work for salvation. Man, in all his cleverness, cannot improve on this plan.
  6. But we see another important principle in this verse. Our talk doesn't mean a whole lot if our walk doesn't match our talk.
  7. Paul's gospel had come *"in much assurance."* What does he mean by this? This next phrase will explain it. *"As ye know what manner of men we were among you..."*
  8. Here is what Paul is saying. The assurance that their gospel was true was found in the way Paul and his companions lived their daily lives.
    - Their manner of conduct was such that it brought assurance that they were on the level, and their message was true.
    - Their verbal testimony was confirmed by their daily conduct. This is so crucial.
    - A person's verbal testimony can be destroyed by a lack of integrity.

#### Verse 6

1. Thessalonica was a city steeped in paganism and idolatry. In verses 6-10, we will be able to see firsthand the difference the gospel makes in a person's life.
2. These people had been followers of false religion and idolatrous superstition, but now they had become followers of the Lord.
3. In this verse, we see the importance of the human touch. Paul said that they *"became followers of us, and of the Lord."* **1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17**
4. Paul and his co-laborers provided sound teaching, but also a living example for these new believers to see and model. This can be referred to as discipleship, mentoring, or spiritual fathering. Regardless of what you call it, people need this desperately.
5. This verse reveals to us why this is so crucial for new believers. These believers had been paying a price for their newfound faith. When they received God's Word, it was received with *"much affliction."*
  - We read of some of the persecution that these new believers endured in **Acts 17:5-6**.
6. Becoming a follower of the Lord does not mean the absence of problems. When trials and difficulties come to the new believer (and they will), every **new** believer needs a more **mature** saint who can encourage and help him or her through these times of difficulty.
7. The last phrase of this verse is such an encouragement. Despite *"much affliction"* they possessed *"joy of the Holy Ghost."*
8. Joy is not dependent on outward circumstances, but on the inner working of God's Spirit in our hearts. Joy is the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22**).  
**cf. 2 Corinthians 7:4, 8:2**

### Verse 7

1. The church of the Thessalonians is sometimes referred to as "the model church" based on this verse.
2. The word "*ensamples*" means "a model for imitation."
3. Christ had made such a difference in these people's lives that they were an inspiration and example to other believers all throughout Macedonia and Achaia (a term used to describe the whole of Greece).
4. Even though this church would still be considered a new church plant, they had gotten rooted and grounded in God's truth, and their lives had radically changed.

### Verse 8-9

1. The scope and impact of these verses are absolutely enormous. Paul makes a huge statement that is one of the greatest compliments that he could ever give to a church.
2. In his travels, Paul had no need to tell others of what God had done in Thessalonica. Why is this?
  - Because they had personally been sounding out the Word of the Lord.
  - Because their faith to God had been spread abroad.
3. Obviously this church had already caught a zeal for evangelism and missions. People had been going out from their local assembly and evangelizing other parts of Macedonia, Greece, and even beyond Greece.
  - The phrase "*sounding forth*" means "to echo forth, to resound."
  - Their faith was echoing forth and reverberating from Thessalonica throughout the world. What a challenge this is to churches today!
4. No longer was their faith in idols, but their faith was God-ward and they were not ashamed to let people know it.
5. When Paul would travel from city to city, he would commonly give testimony and report of what God had done in other cities and churches. **2 Corinthians 8:1-2, 24, 9:2**
6. But Paul says in verse 9, "*For they themselves* (the people spreading the Word from Thessalonica) *shew of us* (Paul and his co-laborers) *what manner of entering in we had unto you...*" **Acts 17:1-4**
  - In other words, these Thessalonian converts were living proof of the fruitful, godly ministry Paul had reaped in Thessalonica. Paul didn't have to say anything. As they say, "A picture is worth a thousand words."
7. The Thessalonian's lives demonstrated the decision that they had made when confronted with the gospel of Christ.
8. Paul says that they had "*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*"
  - This is a great verse that demonstrates what Gentile salvation is in this dispensation of grace today.
  - The word "turned" is also translated in other places as "converted." It means "to revert." It carries the idea of a reversal.
  - Their faith laid in idols previously, but they repented (to think differently) and believed Paul's gospel. We see this same thing over and over again.  
**Acts 11:21, 14:15, 15:19, 20:21, 26:18**

- It was Paul's manner to **reason** with people out of the Scriptures (**Acts 17:2**). Paul was looking for a change to take place in people's inner thinking process (repentance) which would result in a faith (a turning, converting) in Jesus Christ.
9. There is a very popular teaching today that says a person must repent of all of their sins in order to be saved and prove their repentance by forsaking those sins. If this isn't done, then they are chalked up as "false professions."
    - Many who are proponents of this teaching would say that they believe in salvation by grace through faith alone, but they teeter very closely to a works based religious system.
    - If we have to repent of all of our sins in order for God to forgive them, then this would mean that we must remember every sin and repent of it. If we forget to repent of one, we are damned, because it only takes one unforgiven sin to keep us from God's presence (remember Adam and Eve).
    - These people inevitably end up using the four gospels (written before the cross and specifically dealing with Israel), the Old Testament (Scriptures calling Israel to repentance), early Acts (the twelve calling the nation of Israel to repent of crucifying Christ), and Hebrew epistles to substantiate their beliefs.
  10. The gospel revealed and entrusted to Paul (the apostle to the Gentiles) never called for the repentance of sins in order to be saved.
  11. Paul's gospel was that:
    - Christ dealt fully with the sin issue on the cross. He made a full and complete payment for the sins of all of mankind on the cross. **2 Corinthians 5:19**
    - He then called upon people to turn from any preconceived ideas, religious rituals, or idolatrous practices that they were trusting in, and turn to the living God and trust His Son alone for salvation and forgiveness.
    - If you are trusting in the fact that you repented of all your sins, then you are trusting in something **you** did rather than the finished work of Jesus Christ.
  12. Through God's grace and faith alone in Christ we are totally and completely reconciled to God. Redemption and forgiveness of sins are the present possession of every believer. **Ephesians 1:7, 12-13, 2:8-9**
  13. Faith in Christ not only brings salvation, it also brings new direction and change into our lives. The Thessalonians no longer served the idols that they used to trust in. They now served the living and true God. vs. 9
  14. When a person repents (changes their mind) of the idolatrous system they used to believe in and turns in faith to Jesus Christ, this naturally results in a changed life. **Ephesians 2:8-10; Acts 26:20**
  15. There is an innate desire within believers to serve their Savior after receiving His grace and forgiveness. **2 Corinthians 5:15**