

## 1 Thessalonians 1

### Intro:

--Thessalonica was an important city named after the half-sister of Alexander the Great. It was situated along main Roman roadways and had a busy port. Some estimate there were approximately 200,000 people living in the city at that time.

--The backstory of Paul's arrival in Thessalonica and his connection with the church is given to us in **Acts 17**. The summary is:

1) Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke arrive in Philippi, where Paul and Silas are imprisoned and miraculously delivered by the Lord. Paul and Silas go on to Thessalonica but leave Timothy and Luke behind to minister.

2) Paul and Silas arrive in Thessalonica, and a small church is started. Jealous Jews arrive and stir up a mob, which causes them to flee to Berea. Even then, the same Jews come and stir up another mob. Paul is forced to leave and departs for Athens, but leaves Timothy and Silas behind with instructions to meet him there.

3) Paul leaves Athens for Corinth, and Timothy and Silas meet him there with word from the churches in Macedonia (**Acts 18:5**). Getting news of their condition, Paul writes this letter back to them from Corinth (Also writing to address the situation with the Galatians around this time).

--Paul writes this letter for three main reasons:

1) They were a persecuted church (**2:14-16; 3:1-5**).

2) They were new believers, and he had not been there as long as he would have liked (**2:17**).

--In **Acts 17:2** we are told Paul taught there for three Sabbaths, which would put his stay at somewhere around three to five weeks. But that might only be speaking about how long he taught in the synagogue.

--It seems that he was there for a longer period because we know he received two monetary gifts from Philippi while there (**Phil. 4:16**), and he was there long enough to work his trade (**1 Thess. 2:9+2 Thess. 3:7-10**). Even so, Paul felt his time with these believers was too short.

3) They had some doctrinal confusion about the Lord's return (**4:13-18**).

--Written around 50AD, twenty-some years after the death of Christ, 1 Thessalonians is likely Paul's first epistle (maybe Galatians was written at the same time). At this point, he has been saved for 17-18 years, a missionary for 7-8, and is stepping into a new form of ministry.

### Verse 1:

--Paul introduces himself, Silas, and Timothy as they too were known and shared in the planting and ministry of this church family.

--**Silvanus** is the Latin or Roman form of the Greek name Silas. Silas was a well-known Jewish believer from Jerusalem (**Acts 15:22-23**) as well as a Roman citizen (**Acts 16:37**).

--He joined up with Paul on his second missionary journey (**Acts 16**) but after that, he apparently left ministry with Paul and joined Peter (**1 Peter 5:12**).

--**To the church of the Thessalonians**. . . **church** is the Greek word *ekklesia*, which referred to a gathering of citizens called from their homes to a public place of assembly. The church as *called-out-ones* was in early use. \*Separated to and for a cause!\*

--The church was a group of called-out Thessalonian people. **Church** always refers to people and not buildings or religious organizational structures.

--**in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. . . is a unique phrasing Paul doesn't use again. It clearly puts God the Father and Jesus Christ on equal footing.

--**in God** they were a people distinct from pagan idolatrous worship. **in**. . . **the Lord Jesus Christ** they were a people distinct from mere religious Judaism.

#### **Verses 2-4:**

--**(2)** Verses **2-10** are really one long sentence in the Greek text, which flows from Paul's thankfulness to God. These are all reasons he is praising God for His work in the Thessalonians.

--**We**. . . Includes Silas and Timothy. Did the three men sit down together and pray for each of their church plants? (Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, etc.) I don't doubt that they did!

--Prayer and intercession are a special aspect of Christian love. No other religion brings together three people (The Lord, the prayer, and the prayed for) in the same way. \*Thankful hearts will be prayerful hearts.\*

--**always**. . . **remembering**. . . **without ceasing**. . . Every minister should care for those they minister to by consistently praying for them and the work of God.

--**(3) your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ**. . . First, Paul is thankful for the three cardinal virtues of the Christian life as evidenced in their lives. This triad is seen multiple times in Scripture (**5:8; Rom. 5:2-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Col. 1:4-5; Heb. 6:10-12; 1 Peter 1:21-22**).

--There is some ambiguity in the language regarding the descriptions, but Paul seems to be saying he is thankful for: *Faith's work, Love's labor, and Hope's patience*.

\*Hiebert (1&2 Thessalonians): "Here for the first time, chronologically, in Paul's writings we have this famous triad: *faith, love, hope*. But Paul's stress is not on these virtues alone, but rather on what they produce. They are the active ingredients of the Christian life, finding expression in active work, patient toil, and enduring constancy. Thus Paul does not link these basic virtues with that which is beautiful, poetic, and ethereal, but rather with that which is toilsome and difficult. They are seen to their best advantage amid the rugged demands of daily life."

--These virtues are spiritual realities *in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God*. Faith, love and hope are fruits of His life, seen and known clearly by God. Others may not see them in us but God does! \*Think of Joseph, David, or Jesus!\*

--**(4) knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.** . . Paul is thankfully confident in their election.

--Once you start talking about election, it is very possible to get bogged down in theological weeds. But if we simply look at what Paul says, his point here is clear.

--First, Paul is speaking to the saved Thessalonians believers about their election. Not warning unsaved people about being non-elect or worrying about giving a false impression to non-elect.

--Second, the Greek word for **knowing** (*eido*) means to know by observation. Paul is confident in their election by what He observes in their lives. His observations will be described through the rest of the chapter but are such as:

-God moved powerfully to save some. \*God always moves first!\*

-The New Covenant promise of the Holy Spirit was evident in their lives.

-They were enduring fierce persecutions with joy!

-They turned from serving and worshipping idols.

-Spiritual fruit was being born by their witness.

--Now, we need to step back for a second and realize the practical unlikeliness of this sentence. This was said by a once proud Pharisee of pagan Gentiles! What a miracle! Election is a work of God that humbled sons and daughters praise Him for.

**\*Matthew 7:13-14: Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.\***

--In one way, all believers should sense the miracle of God that they are on the narrow way when so many are on the broad path. What reason, other than God, do we have for our life?

--In another way, I am exceptionally grateful for the goodness of God in how many I get to travel that narrow way with. Often, it feels like more than a few are walking with me, and that is a blessing many Christians through the ages have not experienced. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the family of God I get to walk with as I go the way of all the earth.

#### **Verse 5:**

--Here, Paul describes what made him confident in their election.

--**For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.** . . it is very possible for the gospel to come in word only and without power. What would that look like?

--It would look like the opposite of this. The right message with no power, no Holy Spirit, no assurance, no following Christ's example, no endurance or root, no joy, etc.

--Understanding this terrible possibility is important for us because the gospel in word only is all around us! And, the tragic influence of a powerless word will grow to be one of the defining features of the last days.

**\*2 Timothy 3:1+5: *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!\****

--If the Christianity we claim cannot change us, it is not New Testament Christianity. The power of the gospel is a new heart, a new nature, the Holy Spirit, new desires, priorities, identities, worship, service, meaning, morality, and destiny. A new man or woman. A son or daughter of God.

--The gospel in word proclaims men free. The gospel in power makes them free.

--As someone who has grown up in Christian circles, surrounded by the word of the gospel, and yet knowing the power of God in my own life, let me ask you: *How has the word of God come to you? In word only, or in power?*

--***as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*** Paul, Silas, and Timothy add their own witness to the power of God. The life of God was evidenced in them as they birthed and equipped this fellowship of believers.

**Verse 6:**

--***And you became followers of us and of the Lord.*** . . Their willingness to follow Paul and his companions was so important. Remember, the Thessalonians had no Christian homes or backgrounds. They hadn't seen Jesus personally. They didn't even have Bibles outside of possibly some familiarity with the OT if they were Jews. The Christian example of Paul and his companions was so important!

**\*1 Corinthians 4:16+ 11:1: *Therefore I urge you, imitate me. . . Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.\****

--Good godly examples were also important because even in Paul's day, there were plenty of ungodly examples (As 2:1-12 seems to infer).

**\*Philippians 3:17-19: *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.\****

--***having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.*** They counted the cost in following Paul, Silas, Timothy and Jesus Christ.

--Yes, they denied themselves and took up their cross daily, but they also found new life and joy in the Holy Spirit. The Christian finds the sorrows of earth and the joys of heaven. The Holy Spirit is a new well of spiritual life and joy that the unsaved cannot draw from. They do not understand.

--The Holy Spirit should be the source of our joy and our only explanation!

**\*Romans 15:13: Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.\***

**Verse 7:**

--**so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.** Their willingness to joyfully follow Christ, despite hardship, became an example to Christians all over their area of the world. Thessalonica was in Macedonia, and Paul was writing from Achaia.

--Paul was truly honoring this fellowship. Most of the fellowships he wrote to were not models!

--It seems the particularly difficult part of this hardship was that it was coming from their countrymen and not outsiders or even Rome—**2:14-15.**

--The Greek word for **examples** was used for an *imprint, mold, or the mark of a strike.*

--Don't we all need examples of those who follow Christ through hardships?! We all need this reminder from time to time, even in America, where we are not threatened with imprisonment or death.

**\*1 Peter 5:9: Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.\***

--The example moved from Christ, to the disciples, to Paul, the Thessalonians, and all Macedonia and Achaia!

**Verse 8:**

--Here, we find a wonderful and natural progression. The Thessalonians believers were saved, became followers, then examples, and finally witnesses.

--The **word of the Lord**—the message from Jesus Christ and about Jesus Christ—went out all over their area. The message was by them and about them. Everyone was hearing about some Thessalonian turning from idols to joyfully serve Jesus Christ despite sufferings. We call this revival!

--May God give CCPhilly and the Church of Philadelphia the same witness in our area!

**Verses 9-10:**

--**(9)** The Greek for **turned** is a single and definite act. A decisive and willing choice. They were not going back to their previous gods which were neither **living** nor **true**.

**\*Jeremiah 10:10: But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, and the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.\***

--Their turning from idols was a blessed evidence of God's work to Paul. It is not easy for us to understand the superstitious fears of dark powers or retribution tied to the worship of these fickle false gods. There were also aspects of fellowship (meals/holidays), career (guilds), and sexuality (temple prostitutes). How was this change explained in their day?

**\*Acts 17:6: *But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."***\*

--God met them in idolatry and saved them. They didn't "clean up" first and then decide to come to God on their own. They were forgiven and then turned from idols to God in service.

--Our worship and service are always tied together. If I serve myself, then I also worship myself. What are our lives about? I cannot worship God on Sundays and serve myself the rest of the week.

**\*Daniel 3:18: *But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.***\*

**\*Matthew 4:10: *Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve."***\*

--Am I saved? Am I a servant of God?

--**(10) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus . . .**

They clearly believe the resurrected Jesus Christ will return just as He came. This is literal and not spiritual. \*Don't get duped by a weird Youtube preacher who claims Jesus "spiritually" returned sometime or somewhere!\*

--Again, this hope of a literal return of King Jesus to set up His kingdom was the slanderous charge of the day.

**\*Acts 17:7: *Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.***\*

--the Greek for **wait** is in the present tense—which means it is something that could happen at any moment. Clearly, the Bible teaches "imminence."

--To **wait** is also to look forward to something with patience and confidence. What does this look like for us practically?

**\*Luke 19:13: *Do business till I come.***\*

--What business pleases God in your life? Do that till He comes!

--***who delivers us from the wrath to come.***

--The Greek word for **wrath** (*orge*) is always used for God's judgment of the wicked, not the present trials or tribulations of believers. Paul is speaking about the wrath of God that would soon come upon their persecutors. \***delivers us** Vs. them\*

--We have an assurance of deliverance from God's wrath on a sinful Christ-rejecting world.

**\*Romans 5:9: *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.***\*

**\*1 Thessalonians 5:9: *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.***\*

--Far from being a stumblingblock as it is for many today, the idea of God's wrath was an answer to the sufferings and injustice these early believers endured and witnessed all around them.

--God loves us, but He hates, with holy hatred, the sin that we love. All sin will justly and righteously face the wrath of God—on the cross, or unrepentant sinners for all eternity.