

1 Thessalonians: Chapter 1

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All right, we will begin with chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians. Let's read verses 1 through 4 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 of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you."

So Paul begins, as was his custom, with a greeting. He names himself, Sylvanus, and Timothy, as being there in Corinth. And it's interesting that throughout the letter Paul continues to use "we" oftentimes. Certainly many times referring to how he and his companions acted in Thessalonica. But it seems also that that Sylvanus and Timothy were perhaps somewhat active in the sending of the letter as well. But again, Paul is the main author.

Now, the Roman name here, Sylvanus, is equivalent to Silas. And so this is the same one who was with Paul in Philippi, who was in prison with him. And then when the earthquake happened, and the jailer then was converted, as a result of their preaching and teaching. And so this, this is just another form of the name of the same person. And then Timothy, of course, had been with them in Thessalonica, as well.

Also, we see that Paul says, he's writing to the "church of the Thessalonians, in God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." The church of the Thessalonians here. This word "church" is the Greek word, "ekklesia." And it can be used, this word can be used to refer to the church, all over the world. Or it can be used to refer to a local group of Christians. In this case, it's use in that second sense, as a local group of Christians. And so this is the church, the group, that is in Thessalonica, that makes up the body of Christ there.

And so, Paul then says that they are, they belong, or they are in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are in the church, we are in God. And if we are in God, then we are in the church. They are connected, and can never be separated.

Also, we notice that Paul gives thanksgiving for the Thessalonians, in verses 2 through 4. He says, "We give thanks to God always, for all of you." Paul was indeed thankful. This is something that was common with Paul in his letters, he would often mention his thanksgiving to God on behalf of his readers. And so, but this is not something that he did just as a formality. Paul was indeed, very sincere and extremely thankful for all of those who had obeyed the word that had been preached through him and others. And so Paul expresses his gratitude to God on their behalf, and he lets them know... We need to let people know that we are thankful to God for them. We need to encourage people, let them know how much we're thankful for them.

Paul had a lot to be thankful for regarding the Thessalonians. Notice, he lists specifically three things here, their work of faith, their labor of love, and their steadfastness of hope. Their work of faith. That is: faith works. It is not something that is passive, but rather it is active. It is that which is shown in the things that we do. In Hebrews chapter 11, we see that faith is always something that is shown in action. It causes us to act. And so Paul was thankful for their work of faith. And then he said

their labor of love, very similar idea. Love for God, and love for others, will cause us, will motivate us, to action. And then their steadfastness of hope. Their steadfastness, their endurance, is inspired...it is motivated by their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we can have that same hope. We can endure because we also can be motivated by that hope. And so we need to keep those things in mind.

Faith, hope and love are often mentioned together in Paul's writings. Of course, especially we think about in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and verse 13 — “Now abide faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love,” Paul says there. He also mentions them together in this letter, once again, in chapter 5 and verse 8. Also, in Colossians chapter 1, verses 3 through 5. And in 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 21 and 22, Peter mentions them together. And so, all three of these produce active results. They're never passive. They are active in the things that they bring about. And these three things will indeed be the subject of Paul's letter in various ways, as he goes throughout the letter.

But notice also, then he calls them “brothers, loved by God.” Paul always felt a strong bond to those to whom he was writing. And, he would, especially those that he had a hand in their conversion, their obedience to the Lord. And certainly that was the case here with the Thessalonians. And so he felt this strong bond. And so, he calls them brothers. And he says they are loved by God. Not only did he love them, but they were indeed loved by God. And we certainly need to recognize our connection, our bond, with all Christians all over the world. And we certainly have a connection, even though we may be 1000s of miles away. And so, while God loves everyone also, we need to remember that God has a special love for his children. God loves everyone, certainly. He brings the rain on the just and on the unjust, makes the sun to shine on the good and on the evil. Matthew, chapter 5, verses 43 through 45 tells us about that. But he has a special love for his people. He has a special love for his people Israel, under the law of Moses. And now he has a special love for Christians, his children, his people in Christ. And so God, rather Paul expresses that sentiment, that thought about the love that God has for them. And so Paul is indeed thankful for the Thessalonians.

And then, as we move on to verses 5 through 10 of chapter 1, we see how that Paul expresses his praise for the Thessalonians, for what they've done. Until he pretty much continues his thoughts from verses 2 to 4 into these verses. And so let's read verses five through 10 together.

“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.”

And so Paul praises the Thessalonians here for all that they've done. In verses 5 through 7, he praises them because of their acceptance of the gospel. So, as I said, Paul is really continuing his thanksgiving here, and it's kind of switching into that of commendation or praise for the Thessalonians. But he says in verse 5, that because, he says, “Our gospel came to you, not only in Word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.” And so, God delivered the gospel to them through the apostles, and those who were with them through, by the Holy Spirit, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with power. And so, then the people in Thessalonica, they were

able to recognize it as being genuine. They were able to recognize it as being indeed the Word of God. Paul will go on to talk about that later on in his writing to the Thessalonians. But so, these people did indeed, accept the gospel. The word "gospel" simply means "good news." It was good news for them. And it is good news for us. We should never be ashamed to preach the gospel. Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel" (Romans chapter 1, and verse 16). We need to make sure that people understand that it is good news.

And notice, when Paul says, "our gospel" here, he's not saying that the gospel that they preached was unique to them, that it was different from others. In fact, he would say almost just the opposite, really, in Galatians chapter 1, and verses 6 through 9, when he says that, "Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." That's verse 8 of Galatians 1. And so, Paul certainly is not saying that the gospel that they preached was unique or different. But simply he's saying, he's calling it "our gospel," because they had the responsibility of preaching it. They had the responsibility, and it was given to them.

Paul would say things like, "We have this treasure in jars of clay" (2 Corinthians 4, and verse 7). In 1 Corinthians 9, verse 16, Paul would say, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel of Christ." And so Paul, makes sure that they understand the responsibility that was given to them, the apostles and those who were with them, to preach the gospel. And so that's why he calls it "our gospel" there. It is what they preached, but it was still the Word of God.

And so, he then goes on, to say that it was theirs because they had accepted it. Notice, he says in verse 5, "You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." He says, "You became imitators of us, and of the Lord. For you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit." And so, Paul says that they received the message, and so then it became theirs, because of that. And so when we recognize God's word for what it is, we ought to accept it. And we need to obey it.

Now apparently, Paul, and his companions had performed many miracles while in Thessalonica, though Acts doesn't really record much about that. But we know that in other places, that was the case, that they performed signs and wonders and miracles, and therefore, the people would then believe them. And so, in fact, in Hebrews chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, we're told how that the signs that were done, were done to confirm the word, to prove that what was being said was, indeed, the Word of God. And so, there's no reason to think that that would not have happened in Thessalonica. And so it seems that that is probably what Paul is referring to here when he says that the gospel came with power. Not only certainly refers to boldness that they preached, but then also, perhaps miraculous power that they displayed to help the Thessalonians accept them in what they were preaching. And certainly, this verse emphasizes the inspiration of Scripture that came by the Holy Spirit, and they received it with joy in the Holy Spirit.

Paul also reminds them here of their behavior while Paul and his companions were there. That is, how they behaved toward the Thessalonians. There were those who were, it seems, accusing Paul and his companions of being charlatans, of being people who were selling what they were preaching, who were doing it for personal gain. And yet, Paul tells them, "You know how we acted in Thessalonica. You know how that we were pure and blameless. And Paul then reminds them of that, so that they would not be led astray by those who perhaps were trying to cause them to doubt what Paul was teaching them.

And so, Paul then commends them for being examples. Notice, he says, in verse 7, “So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” Now back in verse 6, he said, “You became imitators of us.” So Paul had been the example. Paul and those were with him had been the example. The Thessalonians were imitating them. But now, in verse 7, they have become the example. And so, Paul had told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11, and verse 1, “Imitate me, as I imitate Christ.” And so that's exactly what the Thessalonians were doing with Paul. And now, they were becoming examples for others to follow as well.

And so they had had a lot of opportunity to do that, to be examples, especially in the face of persecution. They had faced a lot of persecution based on what Paul says in this letter. And so, yet they remained strong, they remained true and steadfast, and did not give up. And so he says, “You became example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” Not just were they examples in Thessalonica, not only did people in Thessalonica know about them, and how they lived, but people all over the province, all over the neighboring province, knew about the Thessalonians, and they're acceptance and obedience to the gospel. And so, that's certainly a great example for us to follow. We need to live in such a way that people know we are Christians. We need to live in such a way that our faith sounds forth to the regions around us. And so let us live just that way.

Now, certainly, we see that they did have a lot of tribulation after their conversion. In Acts chapter 17, in verses 5 through 9, we read how that the Jews went in to the house of Jason, who had been the host for Paul and his companions, and they didn't find Paul in them. But they then went in and found Jason and they brought him out. And they talked about how Paul and his companions had turned the world upside down. And so they were persecuting the people who had hosted Paul and Timothy and Silas. And yet, that persecution certainly must have continued after they left. And so, the Thessalonians faced that and yet they overcame it. They did not let that persecution stop them from living as they ought to live in Christ.

We all will face persecution, if we are living Christian lives. 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 12, says, Paul says, “That all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” The question is, are we, do we desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus? Are we truly living the way we ought to live? And therefore, do we face persecution?

Now we also see that, because of their great example, Paul praises them. And so in verses 8 through 10, we see how that he praises them here. He says, “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.” And he goes on to talk about the rapport that people would give about them. And so the Thessalonian church had become an evangelistic center, the word of the Lord sounded forth from them. They must have been going out and teaching others as well. But then not only did the word of the Lord sound forth, he says, but the word about how they lived, had gone forth, the word about their faith. And so, it had become known all over the region.

Now it seems here, based on what is said in verse 9, that most of the Thessalonian Christians were Gentiles. Because it says that they turned to God from idols. That's not something that would be said about Jews. Because they did believe in the same God. They just had not accepted Christ. They had not accepted Jesus as the Christ. And so here, when it says that they turn to God from idols, that tells us that Paul is referring to Gentile Christians. And so their faith caused them to turn from those idols. And they then turned to serve the living and the true God. You see, there is only one God. I know many of you live in an area where there are many gods worshipped. The people who serve and

believe in many gods. The Bible tells us that there is only one God, and He is the creator of everything. And we must follow him. And so that is a challenge for us to teach people that there is but one God. And we must teach not only that there is one God, but we must teach people who he is and what he has done.

But notice then, in verse 10, Paul says that their focus was on the coming of Jesus. It was on his second coming. Because it had been promised. He says, to "wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." The wrath to come refers to penalty of sin. Sin has its wages, and that is death, according to Romans chapter 6, and verse 23. But But, Jesus delivers us from that penalty. He delivers us from the wrath of God. And so, these Thessalonians were waiting for Jesus to come back so that he could complete that salvation by delivering them to heaven. And so, they were living and waiting for him. And we're going look at, as we get further on into the letter, how there were misunderstandings they had about that second coming. And it caused some issues in the church there that Paul especially will deal with in the second letter that he writes. But certainly they had to focus in the right place, that is, in the return, the second coming of Jesus. And we ought also to focus upon that second coming. To always be ready to live in such a way that our lamps have oil. And so I hope that we will continue to follow the example of the Thessalonians. The example that they give us because of their obedience and their great joy. Let us live in a similar way.

Thank you.