

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER 16TH - 17TH, 2021 // BOOK OF 1 THESSALONIANS

THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS WHO WROTE 1 THESSALONIANS?

1 Thessalonians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to a group of believers in Thessalonica around A.D. 51 (most likely the earliest letter of Paul).

- Paul wrote the letter, but did so with the greeting and support of Silas and Timothy who had been with him when he first traveled to Thessalonica (Acts 17). The three men had been jailed and then ran out of town (Timothy was later sent).

The apostle Paul was one of the most influential leaders in the early church who planted more than a dozen churches and authored 13 books of the Bible.

- Paul probably wrote this letter from Corinth (or Athens) after his protégé Timothy returned from Thessalonica with the good news that the church there was flourishing.

The city of Thessalonica is located in modern Greece, and at the time of this letter was an urban city of the Roman Empire with strong Greek culture and influence.

- Thessalonica was a large city with a booming commercial center located along trade routes near the Mediterranean.

- It was an ethnically and culturally diverse city.

BACKGROUND & HISTORICAL SETTING OF THESSALONICA.

Acts 17 tells us that Paul and Silas had visited this city and led many Jews and Greeks to Christ through preaching the gospel.

- But many of the Jews in the city incited a mob and falsely accused the Christians of defying Caesar by proclaiming that Jesus is King (Acts 17:7).
- So Paul and Silas had to leave the city to escape the intense persecution.

As an ethnically and culturally diverse city, Thessalonica was a hub for worship of the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods.

- Transferring your allegiance to Jesus from pagan gods (including the Emperor) came at a great cost (your family, friends, job, home, and life).
- Nevertheless, the Christians in Thessalonica were staying faithful to Jesus in the midst of societal persecution and hostility.

WHAT IS 1 THESSALONIANS ABOUT?

Chapters 1-3 of 1 Thessalonians are a celebration of the faithfulness of these believers, while chapters 4-5 challenge this group to continue to grow in the Lord.

- Paul is going to challenge them to commit to holiness and sexual purity (4:1-8), love and service (4:9-12), and hold onto the hope of Jesus' final return (4:13-5:11).

WHY STUDY 1 THESSALONIANS?

Following Jesus as King produces a counter-cultural (HOLY) way of life.

- Sometimes our lifestyle causes suspicion, misunderstanding, and conflict among our neighbors.
- The response of Jesus followers to hostility should always be holiness, love, generosity, and grace motivated by future hope of Jesus' return.

We need hope and encouragement!

- We need to understand now more than ever before what it means to live counter-cultural, holy, Christ-like lives in a godless culture.
- When our lifestyle causes hostility from the unbelieving world, we need to be reminded that our response as Jesus people should always be one of love, generosity, and grace.

GREETINGS & THANKSGIVING (1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-3)

This letter reads like most of Paul's other letters, but authorship of the book in verse is actually attributed equally to Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy.

- Paul and Silas started this church (Acts 17:1-9), and Timothy had later visited to instruct and encourage them - it was actually his good report that inspired this letter.

- This church was founded in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ - this was God's church!

"Grace to you and peace", was the customary greeting of Paul, and it's a reminder to believers that our best health and riches are the personal, relational gifts from God Himself.

- "Grace" is the unmerited favor of God that we've received from Christ and we continue to receive from Him everyday.
- "Peace" is a judicial statement related to our standing with God and our daily fellowship with Him.

Paul is so grateful for this faithful church (vs. 2).

- His ministry was often marked by faithfully preaching the gospel and establishing a healthy church in a city, and then watching them get misled by false teaching or immorality as soon as he left (Galatia, Corinth).
- How refreshing and encouraging it must have been for him to see faithful believers holding to truth and living holy lives.

Paul identifies three marks of these believers' faithfulness -

1. "Your work of faith" - their faith in Christ produced work (fruit) in their lives. True faith does this!
2. "... labor of love" - their love for Jesus produced labor. A labor of love isn't burdensome, it's a delight born out of affection and desire.
3. "Steadfastness of hope" - even as they experienced intense persecution, they had steadfastness born from hope.

The hope they held to steadfastly was placed in, "our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 3).

- When we understand that nothing painful, unpleasant, or distressing we endure here on earth is permanent because of the coming of Christ's Kingdom - we can patiently endure.
- What are we placing our hope in? Is our faith for Jesus and love for Jesus producing "work" and "labor" for His Kingdom?

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN (1 THESSALONIANS 1:4-5)

Who deserves the credit for these faithful believers and their amazing lives? God! Why? Because God loved them and chose them (vs. 4).

- The credit and the gratitude for us belonging eternally to God should be given to the Lord, not to us.

- God predetermined that you would be called, saved, conformed to the likeness of Jesus, and someday you'd glorified - you've been chosen (Rom. 8:29).

If you're a Christian, God has chosen you to be in His family AND there was a time that you actively responded to Christ in order to be saved- both realities are true.

- Somehow, in the mystery of God, us being chosen by God works hand-in-hand with us person being drawn by God (John 6:44) and believing unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

- This should create in us humility and gratitude.

God's mercy and love have come to us not because of who we are, but because of the kind of God that He is.

- We are "loved by God" (vs. 4) - the Bible actually uses the imagery of God adopting us as sons and daughters (Eph. 3:20, Rom. 8:15, Gal. 3:26), not hiring us as employees or servants.

- Knowing that we're loved by God transforms us.

An evidence of the fact that these believers were, "chosen by God" was that the gospel came to them not only in word, but, "in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction" (vs. 5).

- The Gospel, if it's truly received in someone's life, isn't a set of theoretical ideas or words.
- It's power (dunamis, "dynamite") from the Holy Spirit that stirs our spirits and brings about conviction and change.

"HOW DO I KNOW IF I'VE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD?"

- If you've believed the Gospel of Jesus and you've seen its power and the Holy Spirit bring about conviction and change in your life - you've been chosen by God to be a part of His family.

"WHAT IF I HAVEN'T BELIEVED OR SEEN GOD'S POWER BRING CONVICTION OR CHANGE IN MY LIFE?"

- Believe the Gospel and see God's power bring conviction and change in your life! That's evidence that you've been chosen!

What Paul is getting these believers to understand is that God's entire plan for their salvation was born in the heart of God long before humanity was created or the universe was even formed.

- It starts with God, it was initiated by God, and it's being completed by God in the hearts and lives of His children that He loves more than we ever imagine.

- Do you know how much you're loved?

LIVES SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL (1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10)

The Thessalonians responded to the gospel by becoming, "imitators of us and the Lord" (vs. 6).

- They stopped following other things, but instead followed Paul and the Lord.
- This a picture of discipleship- we ultimately follow the Lord but we all need someone in our lives that we look to help us model new behaviors, a new lifestyle, and a new spiritual life.

The Thessalonians responded to the gospel by then becoming, "an example to all the believers..." (vs. 7).

- There came a point in their spiritual maturity when they became a Paul or Silas to someone else - they modeled the Christian life to other young believers.

- Spiritual arrested adolescence comes about when we want to constantly be served by our spiritual parents but we don't want to grow up and become a spiritual parent ourselves.

The Thessalonians responded to the gospel by, "sounding forth the word of the Lord..." (vs. 8).

- Paul basically says, "you guys are doing so amazing at preaching the gospel and discipling people, you're putting me out of business! We don't even need to say anything!"

- It wasn't just their lives and it wasn't just their words - it was BOTH working together to sound forth the word of the Lord everywhere.

Those who received the gospel from the Thessalonians had reported to Paul about the gospel message and testimony given to them.

- When the Thessalonians received the gospel, they...
 1. "Turned from idols" - we get a picture of the necessity of repentance. We turn from what we are worshipping that's not God and change our minds and actions.
 2. "To serve the living and true God" - no Greek or Roman could take in the idea of 'serving' a god, but here we get a picture of the necessity of surrendering and submitting to God as King.
 3. "And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus..." - the idea is that we place our hope first in Jesus as the resurrected King who is coming again to bring about His eternal Kingdom on earth.
 4. "Who delivers us from the wrath to come..." - we are saved from something, and that something is the righteous wrath of a holy God.
- Why would we be under God's wrath? Because we have failed to acknowledge and honor God, worshipped and given our lives over to false idols that can't save, we've rejected His rule and declared ourselves to be god over our own life (Romans 1).

In our natural state, what we want isn't God - we want ourselves, our sin, our will, our ideas, and our idols (Rom. 1:26-31).

- Because of this, God's, "wrath to come" will be poured out on those who refuse to repent.
- But in His goodness, God has graciously made a way for guilty sinners to be forgiven!
- Our sin debt was paid in full by the loving and gracious sacrifice of Jesus.

HOW HAVE YOU RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL?

- Have you believed and followed? (vs. 6)
- Have you repented, surrendered, put your hope in Jesus, and looked to Him for deliverance from the "wrath to come" (vs. 9-10)?
- Are you growing and maturing? Is the example of your life and your testimony, "sounding forth the word of the Lord"? (vs. 7-8)

DO YOU KNOW THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL?

- What God has done for you through Jesus is not just words, ideas, or concepts - it's power to change, convict, and transform every single aspect of your life (vs. 5).
- It should produce in you fruit, labor born out of love, and a hope that's patient, steadfast and isn't shaken (vs. 3).

DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH YOU'RE LOVED?

- God had you in His heart before the foundations of the world (vs. 4, Eph. 1:4).
- God chose you to be His not because of you, but because of His love and character (1 Jn 4:19).
- He's given you forgiveness, grace, mercy, peace, and a new purpose and life filled with joy and meaning!
- He loves you more than you'll ever understand.