

1 Thessalonians Chapter 1

Opening Remarks

Welcome back to our Monday Night Bible Study: I am excited to be with you again as we begin our new series for the Fall Semester! Pastor Jamie, Dr. Scott, and I will divide up the series, but Pastor Jamie is graciously allowing me to teach half of the lessons this Fall, including one of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible, 1 Thessalonians' fifth chapter. But tonight, we will begin with an Introduction and Chapter 1.

As we begin, let's remember a central truth about these Scriptures which we hold so close to our hearts: "Your Word is a Lamp for my feet, a Light on my path" (**Psalm 119:105**).

Please remember that the video of each session and the accompanying notes may be found at rockymountchurch.com/raw.

Let's pray and dive right in!

Introduction to the Series

1 Thessalonians 1:1

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace.”

Author and Date:

Unlike some Biblical books in which the author may be debated, Paul names himself right from the start in his initial Letter to the Thessalonian Church, along with his close friend and fellow missionary, Silvanus (also known as Silas), and his young protégé, Timothy of Lystra (**Acts 16:1-5**). Silas was a prophet chosen by the Church to be a missionary along with Judas Barsabbas, in addition to Paul’s constant journeyman, Barnabas. Sadly, you may remember that Paul and Barnabas conflicted over the inclusion of young John Mark in a subsequent missionary trip, resulting in separate journeys for the leading pair. John Mark ultimately traveled with Barnabas, and Paul chose Silas, and later, Timothy, to accompany him on his second missionary journey (**Acts 15:22-17:9**).

Paul wrote this initial Letter in approximately A.D. 50 from Corinth, according to numerous scholars, and it is considered one of his earliest

Letters – written only seventeen years after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ! We also know from the Book of Acts that Paul and his companions were originally in Thessalonica for *at least* three weeks, but likely for a few months, given that he received funds from the Philippian Church at least two separate times during his stay in Thessalonica (see **Philippians 4:16**).

The City of Thessalonica:

This great city was founded in 315 B.C. by Cassander, a “general of Alexander the Great.” Thessalonica, the name of Cassander’s wife, was also a daughter of Philip of Macedon and the sister of Alexander.

The City of Thessalonica was situated in a protected bay in the northwest Aegean Sea, and it ultimately became a major seaport which exploded in wealth, influence, and population. By the time Paul visited the city and founded the Thessalonian Church there, the population is estimated at being between 100,000 to 200,000 people. Thessalonica is currently known as the Grecian city, Salonika and hosts a population of 300,000 people.

In 42 B.C., Thessalonica was given the status of a “free city” by Rome because the Thessalonians helped Ceasar Augustus (also known as Octavian) and Antony defeat Brutus and Cassius in the well-known

Roman civil war. The Thessalonian citizens were essentially allowed to govern themselves following the great war between the warring Roman troops. Thessalonica was comprised of Romans, Greeks, and Jews by the time the Church was founded there by Paul and his companions.

Many years later, during World War I, the Allies used the city as a base for soldiers. In World War II, the Nazis gathered many Jews from the city – 60,000 in total – and executed them.

Themes:

In addition to Paul's constant emphasis of the Gospel, there are three additional major themes in the Thessalonian Letters: 1) Eschatological Truth (theologies of the end times) including instructions about hope for the Christian, discussions of the antichrist, and the topic of the Rapture (although the phrase "The Rapture" is never actually used in Scripture). When we get to Chapter 5, we will present three distinct perspectives regarding the *timing* of the Rapture; 2) Holy Living including what it means to live separate and sanctified lives; 3) Faith during persecution.

The Thompson Chain-Reference notes accurately conclude the purpose of this Letter from Paul too: 1 Thessalonians was written "to comfort believers and encourage them to live a life of purity by expounding on the doctrine of Christ's imminent return."

Here in Verse 1, we see that Paul greets those committed to, or “in,” the love of the Father and those committed to, or “in,” the Lord Jesus Christ. This indelible link is central to our understanding of Christianity – to be in accord to the Father is to be in accord to the Son (see **John 5:17-47**). Paul then extends to the Thessalonians his standard greeting – and two central themes of the Gospel Message – grace and peace. I personally end each of my email messages with this salutation as a testament of these two truths made possible only by our Lord.

When Paul originally brought the Word of God to Thessalonica, he did so with the truth of the Gospel in mind. According to Acts 17, Paul’s message to the Thessalonians included Jesus’s suffering and resurrection, and it may have also included Paul’s and his companions’ own encounter with suffering in their previous city. Some of Paul’s fellow Jews were converted in Thessalonica during his time there, as were some “God-fearing Greeks” and a “number of the leading women.”

We cannot forget that *many* early Christians suffered for the Message which we are so freely able to share today, including the Thessalonian Church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, many years later, also notes that all of us – as Paul and these believers did – must be willing to take up this cross of suffering upon ourselves:

“Self-denial means knowing only Christ, no longer knowing oneself. It means no longer seeing oneself, only him who is going ahead, no longer seeing the way which is too difficult for us. Self-denial says only: ‘he is going ahead, hold fast to him.’”

When we are willing to take on *this* level of suffering for Christ, *then* we can truly understand the meaning of “grace and peace” that Paul desired for this amazing Church in Thessalonica to understand.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

“We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers. We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We should initially observe Paul’s statement that he and his fellow leaders “always” kindly remembered, in *thankfulness* to God, this Church which had withstood much persecution because of their own faithfulness to Jesus. This was one of seven “thankfulness” sections which Paul noted in 1 Thessalonians (See **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:14, 19, 20; 3:6, 10; 5:24**).

Then Paul went on to fondly note three recollections about the Thessalonians:

- 1) First, he recalled their works produced by faith. Good Christian works are always a result of sound, continuing faith in Jesus and His Word. Our *work* must always be produced *by* faith: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works” (**James 2:18**). The Thessalonians were doing works *because of their faith in Christ*, not simply doing good works for the sake of doing good works.
- 2) Second, Paul recalled that their labor was motivated by *love*. In other words, not only did the Thessalonians work because of their faith, their primary reason for doing so was due to their love for Jesus Christ. Paul later wrote to the Corinthian Church much of the same: “Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love – but the greatest of these is love” (**1 Corinthians 13:13**). Jesus personally added to this conversation, noting that the Ephesus Church was busy with works – and that *He* had even *noticed* their works – but He then added this admonishment, “... You have abandoned the love you did at first” (**Revelation 2:4b**; see also **Revelation 2:1-7**). This love Jesus was referring to was obviously to be for Jesus, but *also* for one another – something the Ephesus Church

seemingly had forgotten, but for which the Thessalonian Church was commended by Paul.

This is a lesson for us too – we can work all day long, or even all year long, but if we forget to love Jesus and others, our works are in vain.

- 3) Third, we see that Paul recalled the Thessalonians' endurance which was inspired by their hope in Jesus Christ. Why endurance? It was because of the *level* of persecution that these Christians endured, and that Paul had endured in that very city.

Other than Jesus, *no one* understood the Thessalonians' suffering more than Paul: "Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers; toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing. Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to

stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If boasting is necessary, I will boast about my weaknesses. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows I am not lying. In Damascus, a ruler under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to arrest me. So I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.”

Even in Thessalonica during the early foundation of the Church, Paul and Silas had to be snuck out of the city by the Christians who were converted during their stay. Some of these Christians, including Jason, were attacked by a Jewish mob and subjected to financial penalties (see **Acts 17:5-10**).

You obviously cannot tell now, but twenty years ago I was an avid mountain cyclist. To be competitive in that world, I had to learn endurance – especially on the longer uphill rides along the single-track trails. I had to learn patience and the proper times to rest, usually in a curve where the trail might be slightly more level for a moment. Paul also equated this Christian Walk of ours’ with a sports metaphor, noting that we must “run the race” utilizing “self-control in everything” (see **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**).

Endurance is simply a *must* for the Christian. Jesus later told the Church of Smyrna that some of them would be thrown into prison and that they should be “faithful to the point of death” (see

Revelation 2:8-14). Jesus also warned His disciples several times that they would suffer for His Name (see **Matthew 10:16-23**; **John 15:20**; **John 16:1-4**; and **John 16:33**: “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”

And that is the key – our *hope* must be *in Jesus* if we are to enduringly walk in faith as the Thessalonians did. Jesus promises us rewards and Heaven, to be sure – but our hope remains *in Jesus* and in His finished work on the Cross.

Nick Saban, the famous former football coach of the University of Alabama, held fast to a simple rule for his team after a game, win or lose, and regardless of how big or how small the game might have been: Celebrate or mourn for twenty-four hours and move on.

In the Christian Walk, we must also constantly look and move forward, “*in Jesus*” as Paul said, regardless of circumstances and with our eyes fastened to – fixed upon – the Author and Finisher of our faith (**Hebrews 12:2**)! The Thessalonians were commended by Paul here in Verse 3 for doing that very thing. By the end of this chapter, and even more specifically by the end of this Letter, we will see that much of this hope in Jesus is based on Paul’s understanding regarding Jesus’s return for His Church. We too have hope in Jesus, and in His return! We must endure in Him!

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6

“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. You know how we lived among you for your benefit, and you yourselves became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit.”

Whoo-hoo: Paul is so kind as to bring up the topic of “election” again, or “chosen” in the CSB. We will address this first: I believe the “chosen” here are those Thessalonians who, in their own free will, accepted God’s gift of grace and therefore became grafted into God’s family because of the work of Christ. *We* may not be able to “harmonize” God’s sovereignty and His allowance of humanity’s free will, but *God* certainly does not have a problem doing so. Scripture teaches election but it also teaches that God desires *all* people to be saved. Notes Leighton Flowers:

“Because He is loving, impartial, and fair, God has made a way for all to be saved. He desires that all come to the saving knowledge of the truth so that they may share in the mercy that was bought with Christ’s blood.”

We see this theme repeatedly: God does not want anyone to perish “but all to come to repentance” (**2 Peter 3:9b**. See also **Ezekiel 18:23**; **Matthew 18:14**; **John 12:47**; and **1 Timothy 2:4**).

Who did Paul say this to? The Church, of course. Here Paul describes the Thessalonians the way that God describes us: as brothers and sisters who *know* that we are loved by God. Paul is implying here that the Thessalonians were a spiritual family – their bond and their love is in God.

There are more than seventy-five New Testament Scriptures that speak to this family-oriented theme in Verse 4. All the way through the Letter to the Galatians, for example, Paul appeals to the Church by reminding them that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. For example, he says it like this, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted” (**Galatians 6:1**). Paul said to the Thessalonians too – you are brothers and sisters – and you are *loved* by *God*.

I don’t know if the Thessalonians had forgotten this truth – but *we* do sometimes. We are to love one another and remember that God loves us!

In Verses 4-6, Paul also reminds the Thessalonians that he and his companions did not just come *talking* about the Gospel, they also came

to the Thessalonians the Gospel with the *power* and *actions* of the Holy Spirit – *demonstrating* proof of their commitment to the Gospel message *by* the very *power* that the *Holy Spirit* gave them and offers *everyone* who believes.

When we *first* see this power of the Holy Spirit which demonstrates the truth of the Gospel following the ascension of Jesus, it happens at Pentecost: “When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them” (**Acts 2:1-4**). Says Michael Welker, “The fire signifies the purity of truth. These were not the deceptive tongues of mortal existence but rather the pure tongues of the new creation. It was an overload because the joint declaration of the wonders of God by the infant church was heard and understood in every language of the world.”

And the Holy Spirit was not done – the next time we see such an outpouring in the Book of Acts is in Chapter 4: The disciples, having faced persecution and having boldly shared the Gospel, prayed with the Church and the results are startling and amazing: “When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were

all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the Word boldly (**Acts 4:31**).

Then we see it again in Chapters 10-11 when the Cornelius, a faithful Gentile, and his household and servants are filled with the Holy Spirit, much to the surprise of the Jewish Peter and his associates: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God” (**Acts 10:44-46**).

Finally, we see this yet again in the Book of Acts when the “fervent” Apollos and his fellow disciples meet the great Apostle, Paul: “Paul said, ‘John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. Now there were about twelve men in all” (**Acts 19:4-7**).

Back to our story tonight, when Paul originally spoke to the Thessalonians, he did so while demonstrating this power of the Holy Spirit, and I believe he did so while demonstrating the same gifts of the Spirit as evidenced throughout the Book of Acts. And we should

remember this too: No genuine work of God has ever been done without the power of the Holy Spirit behind it. Not one. Ever.

This power of the Spirit is meant for us too, Christians. As Frank Macchia said, “Ascended into the Father bearing the Spirit in fullness and in victory over sin and death, Christ poured forth the Spirit upon the disciples. He overcame their baptism in fire in order to baptize them in the Spirit. He thus shows himself to be both Messiah (who bears the Spirit) and Lord (who gives the Spirit).”

Additionally, Jesus personally testifies to this central truth, “When the Counselor comes, the one I will send you from the Father – the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father – he will testify about me” (**John 15:26**).

So, what does the Spirit do? He, being poured out from both the Father and the Son, testifies to the truth of the Gospel and bears witness not only through the Father and Son, *but upon* the Christian disciples to whom the Spirit is poured!

Here is a question for us all tonight: If we are truly saved – if the power of the Spirit has been poured out upon and within us – then why do we allow ourselves to become so moribund, so lacking in vitality and power, so often?!

We have access to the *same power* and the *same Spirit* that the direct Apostles and original disciples of Jesus Christ did. We limit *ourselves* by limiting the Spirit's work within us! We will come back to this in Chapter 5, but we have to stop living such spiritually anemic lives *if* our desire is to see others transformed by the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit! To demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – then we must walk in the power of the Spirit. We must seek and accept the works of the Spirit within us, being fully humble to ask for and receive His gifts and His works in our lives.

Here in 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6, Paul reminds this persecuted Thessalonian Church that the works that Paul and his companions did among them were the works of Spirit-empowerment for the *purpose* of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, despite their *own* persecution too. Not only that, but he also commended them for doing so with all the *joy* of the Holy Spirit. What an amazing and necessary reminder to us too – we are to walk *in the power and the joy of the Spirit* regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves!

1 Thessalonians 7-9

“As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God

has gone out. Therefore, we don't need to say anything, for they themselves report what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

“As a result” are key words which link the previous verses to the current set of verses. In other words, “as a result” of your imitating of the Apostles who led you to Christ; “as a result” of your Spirit-filled lives; “as a result” of your joy from the Holy Spirit, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

Macedonia in the north and Achai in the south make up a large portion of Greece today, and included Philippi, Athens, and Corinth in those days. Two quick notes here: 1) The Thessalonians were so faithful that the cities around them knew of Christ; 2) The Thessalonian Church was obviously comprised of many Gentiles, as they generally would have been the only ones overtly turning away from baseless and false idols.

These Thessalonian people were excited about their Lord and His Church! Have you ever been there? Have you ever been so excited to tell people about Jesus that it overflowed from everything you do and from everything you say? Do we have a heart for evangelism?

Evangelism: telling people about Jesus, is:

- 1) Friendship – one friend telling another about Jesus.
- 2) Powerful – it transforms lives.

- 3) Intoxicating – the person sharing the gospel, the person receiving the gospel, and heaven itself erupt in joy at even one person’s salvation.
- 4) Joyfully Addictive – once you have led someone to Christ, you want to lead more people to Christ.

- derived from Earley and Wheeler

Remember Jesus’s words in **Luke 15:10**: “I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presences of God’s angels over one sinner who repents.”

When we witness to others, it changes us! Greg Laurie said this about evangelism: “Something happened to me – I got a taste of what it was like to be used by God. I knew that no matter what I did in life, I wanted to continue to share the gospel.”

The Thessalonians were not *just* sharing the Gospel – they were *also* joyfully waiting for Jesus to return. Let’s look at the last verse of Chapter 1:

1 Thessalonians 1:10

“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”

Wow, what an ending to an incredible chapter! We see here that the Thessalonians are waiting for Jesus *as* they are serving Him.

There are some scholars and Christians who deny this sense of imminence that is noted here in 1 Thessalonians because of their own understanding of the end times, but in *these* verses, we see Paul's *constant* assertion that Jesus could come at *any* time (see also **1 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20; Romans 8:23; Galatians 3:5**). It seems rather obvious to me that this "wrath to come" is that which is described in **Daniel 9:24-27**, but we will discuss all of this in detail when we get to Chapter 5.

So, moving the wrath and Rapture discussion to several weeks from now, let's focus on two central truths about Jesus Christ in this last verse of Chapter 1: 1) First, Jesus was raised from the dead! This is a *key* understanding of the Gospel Message, and it is no coincidence that the Holy Spirit led Paul to end this first section by remembering the Gospel truth that Jesus rose from the dead; 2) Second, we are reminded that *Jesus is our* Rescuer of the coming wrath. We are *not* assigned to wrath – we are assigned to life and peace in Christ our Lord! Praise God!

As we conclude this night, we should be reminded that if the Thessalonians were looking for Jesus's return way back then, how much more we should we be looking for Him now! We should not idly sit by looking for Him either; instead, we should be sharing the Gospel *as* we

wait, just as the Thessalonians did. This is our call just as it was their call – and thank God that He judges us faithful to do His work!

Pray

1 & 2 Thessalonians Sources (1 Thessalonians 1)

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