

# PAUL'S GREETINGS, THANKSGIVING, AND AFFIRMATIONS

(1 Thessalonians 1)

## INTRODUCTION:

1. Today I want to begin a series of lessons on the book of 1 Thessalonians.
  - A. I plan to preach from this book a chapter at a time—but we will see.
  - B. It is my hope that in doing so each of us will leave this series with a better understanding of the book as well as a better understanding of some important topics. For, the book addresses:
    - i. Encouragement concerning our salvation and its impact on the lives of the saved.
    - ii. Evidence of Paul's true apostleship which helps us see the power of the gospel preached.
    - iii. Moral issues that affect churches then and now, as well as our need to work and support ourselves in this world.
    - iv. Doctrine concerning Christ's return and its relationship to our eternal salvation.
2. In this lesson I would like to examine chapter 1 and Paul's greetings, thanksgivings, and affirmations concerning their salvation, which include some encouraging words for his brethren concerning how salvation had changed their lives, which in turn provide some practical lessons and applications for us.

## BODY:

### **I. Thessalonica and the Thessalonians:**

- A. This epistle was written to the citizens of God's kingdom who lived in Thessalonica, a city of Macedonia, visited by Paul and company on their 2<sup>nd</sup> preaching tour.
  1. Their work there was the result of the vision Paul had, the "Macedonian call," to "Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9).
  2. Coming to Thessalonica meant this group had travelled about 1000 miles since departing from Antioch, entering this city via the Egnatian Way, a Roman built road of 535 miles.
    - a. This road was heavily traveled by Roman soldiers/officials, merchants, colonists, religious heralds, philosophers, pilgrims, etc.
    - b. Thessalonica's location on this road, as well as being at the intersection of the main east-west and north-south trade routes, as well as being the chief seaport of Macedonia on the Aegean Sea, offered great strategic advantages for Paul and company to maximize the effect of their preaching efforts.
- B. The Thessalonian church:
  1. The church began after Paul and company found success preaching in the Synagogue (Acts 17:1-4 – "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." <sup>4</sup> And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas."").
    - a. The conversion of these devout Gentiles and some Jews is caused the unbelieving Jews to be jealous and to stir up a mob against the disciples.
    - b. This ended with Jason posting bond for them and Paul and company departing.
  2. Paul's description of the church and his actions in 1 Thessalonians seems to indicate that Luke shortened the account, leaving out a bit of their stay/work with the Gentiles (1 Thess. 1:9 – "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you **turned to God from idols** to serve the living and true God").
    - a. The conversion of these once heathens would have required a much longer visit.
    - b. A longer visit fits with Paul's words about 1) being an example of working in a trade to providing for oneself; 2) being a model of the Christian life that these brethren were able to see long enough to follow; 3) the strong bond of affection between Paul and them; 4) and how the Philippians had sent support at Thessalonica, apparently more than once.

3. So, it seems this was mainly a gentile church with little background in the truth, which would explain the great concern Paul had for them from the beginning!

## II. Paul's greetings and thankfulness for his brethren (1:1-5):

- A. This first letter to the Thessalonians begins with the identification of its writers being Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1a).
  1. Paul does not mention his apostleship, likely indicating a good relationship between them.
    - a. Yet, Paul later defended his apostleship (1 Thess. 2:4, 6).
    - b. But, citing the authority of his position was not necessary at this time.
  2. Paul's companions are also mentioned by name:
    - a. Silvanus, the Roman name for *Silas*, was with Paul on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 15:40) and helped establish the church at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4).
    - b. Timothy also accompanied Paul on this journey and was later sent by Paul to Thessalonica to strengthen and exhort the Christians there (1 Thess. 3:1-3).
- B. Paul addresses his readers as those living in fellowship with God (1:1b).
  1. He first addresses them as the "church...in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."
    - a. This brings out the full perspective of the glory and magnificence of the church itself.
    - b. Too often it seems we forget the realm of our spiritual existence, that we live *within* the divine body of Christ, *in fellowship* with the *very God of the universe*.
    - c. This reality should affect our view of life, our decisions, and our priorities.
  2. Paul wishes for them "grace and peace," with *grace* summarizing the blessings provided in Christ, while *peace* denotes the results which come to those who receive these blessings.
- C. Paul's thanksgivings (1:2-5).
  1. Paul assures them of his thankfulness by his *continual prayers* on their behalf (1:2).
    - a. This meant much to these young Christians dealing with heathen vices and persecution.
    - b. Brethren, one of the greatest losses in local churches is the loss of appreciation of the great value our brethren truly hold. We come to live our lives disconnected and exposed to the world without the continual encouragement and joy of one another's company!
    - c. That is not the example Paul left us to follow! We are to be active **pray-ers** and **encouragers** of one another, which requires a lot of interaction!
    - d. We must ask ourselves what we are doing to facilitate this!
  2. Paul now explains *why* he was thankful for the Thessalonians, speaking first of their service to Christ in faith, love, and hope (1:3).
    - a. Serving God in faith, hope, and love is "the more excellent way" described 1 Cor. 13:13.
    - b. *Faith* and *love* are the *most noble* of motivations for one's service to Christ and others, while *hope* is the staying power that helps us endure in Christ and salvation.
    - c. Note that Paul mentions this was all happening in the "sight of our God and Father," indicating their *genuineness* as *witnessed* by God. He wanted to encourage them!
    - d. Brethren, again, we must ask if our worship and work for the Lord are based on faith, love, and hope of eternal life! Without these, our actions mean nothing!
  3. Paul was thankful for his knowledge of their "election by God" (1:4-5).
    - a. Note how Paul's affection is expressed in calling them *brethren beloved by God*.
    - b. He could confidently call them *brethren* because he *knew their election by God* (1:4).
      - i. Paul was confident in this knowledge because their election happened according to God's plan through the gospel and its resulting faith (2 Thess. 2:13-14 – "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and **belief in the truth**,<sup>14</sup> to which He **called you by our gospel**, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.>").
      - ii. We can't allow the consolation of this statement to pass without notice.
        - 1) God has *chosen* to save you/me, sinners deserving of death, through the very gospel you and I have received through faith!

- 2) So, like these brethren and Paul, we can be confident of our election/salvation!
- c. Paul could confidently call them *brethren* because he knew the power of the Holy Spirit was in their preaching (1:5).
  - i. Because the power of the Spirit behind their words, they were able to preach with great conviction, great assurance.
    - 1) If we truly know the things we read or hear preached and taught to be from God, we should live with confidence and proclaim them with assurance and conviction!
  - ii. And, Paul reminds them of their behavior among them, indicating the authenticity of their message (*the gospel*) was corroborated by the behavior of the messengers.
    - 1) Living exemplary lives of holiness, faith, and love according to the gospel is the only way our presentation of the gospel will impact others as it should.
    - 2) We can't fruit from the gospel we present to others if that same gospel is not bearing fruit in our lives!

### III. Paul encourages them by affirming their salvation (1 Thess. 1:6-10).

- A. Paul affirms their salvation based on things he had observed while with them (1:6).
  - 1. First, they became *followers* (imitators, learners) of *Paul, his companions*, and of *Christ*.
    - a. Paul is confident of their salvation because he saw how they chose to follow the example set by Paul and company, which also meant they chose to follow the Lord.
    - b. Paul here connects following them with following Christ!
    - c. Our goal should be to live the same kind of life alluded to by Paul here and in 1 Corinthians 11:1 where he states, "Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ."
  - 2. Second, Paul was confident in their salvation because he witnessed how they received the word, though it entailed *suffering/affliction*, with joy of the Holy Spirit.
    - a. This joy came as a fruit of their devotion to the Holy Spirit—to the words spoken by Paul (Gal. 5:22-23 – "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.")
    - b. This is a joy that rises above one's circumstances and praises God for being able to *suffer* for Christ (Acts 5:41), that sings to God when *imprisoned for His sake* (Acts 16:25), and that can count *trials* as joy, knowing how they perfect and complete us (Jas. 1:2-4).
      - i. If we are true disciples that follow the Spirit, *we choose joy in Christ* despite the trials and tribulations that sin and the evils of this world bring upon us.
      - ii. If there is no, or little, joy in your service to God, you should be concerned!
- B. Paul could affirm the Thessalonians' calling into Christ because after receiving the word they became examples to others of faith and conviction toward Christ (1:7-8).
  - 1. Their faith had caused them to follow the divine process of first becoming *imitators* and then *examples* (1:7).
    - a. Their faith/obedience had become become a model to follow for the brethren in their area (Macedonia) and in Achaia (the rest of Greece where Paul and company were while writing this epistle), showing the true power of faith and obedience!
    - b. Of course, the effectiveness of their example and ours is directly related to how dedicated one is to imitating Christ.
  - 2. Their faith-filled discipleship was encouraging brethren all over (1:8).
    - a. Their faith resulted in their spreading the gospel in Macedonia and Achaia, causing others to take notice.
      - i. These brethren had no thought of keeping the gospel to themselves.
      - ii. They had experienced this great salvation and desired for others to have it as well.
      - iii. Their response to Christ was so great that Paul did "not need to say anything."
    - b. What a wonderful goal this should be for all Christians—to share their faith—so that we, too, might be commended by the Holy Spirit for our dedication of faith!
- B. The Thessalonians changed lives and dedication also affirmed the genuineness of Paul's and his companions' efforts in the gospel among them (1:9-10).

1. People *everywhere* could deduce the godly nature of their work among the Thessalonians by its results it had in the Thessalonians' lives (1:9).
  - a. These brethren's faith/dedication was proof God's favor upon their efforts.
  - b. For, as Paul explains, all had seen how the Thessalonians "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1:9b).
    - i. That is what true conversion is—leaving behind the deadness and deception of sin and its idols to receive the truth and life in Christ!
    - ii. What an encouragement for these young brethren in the faith—learning that the power of the gospel in their lives was affecting people everywhere!
  - c. And, if the gospel had this power in their lives, it can and should in ours as well, leading us away from the destructive ways of sin and into the new way of life in Christ! We just must let the gospel do its work in us!
2. Paul was confident in their salvation because their conversion had changed their whole outlook and purpose of life (1:10).
  - a. They turned from the deadness of idols to live their lives in *anticipation* of the return of the *resurrected* Christ.
  - b. Their conversion to Christ resulted in *present activity* and *future hope!*
    - i. The reality of Christ's return gave meaning to their present service.
    - ii. Note that they looked for Christ in faith and obedience as their *deliverer from wrath*, which is far better than living one's life in sin and selfishness only to encounter Him at His return "in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thess. 1:8).
  - c. How much does Christ's return as your deliverer dominate your thinking and affect your life and outlook?

#### CONCLUSION:

1. As recipients of the same life-changing gospel as received by the Thessalonians, you and I need to examine ourselves as ask whether it is...
  - A. Producing in us a working of faith, a laboring of love, and a persevering of hope?
  - B. Causing us to be true followers of Christ, receiving His word into your hearts with joy?
  - C. Resulting in us being examples to others as soul-winners for Christ?
  - D. Evident that the gospel has turned us from idols of this world to serve God?
  - E. Giving us a new purpose and the outlook on life?
2. Have you received the life-changing gospel of Christ? Will you receive it today?