

1 Thessalonians 1

The Perfect Church

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.

7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

We have come to this exceptional chapter in the New Testament where Paul, now in Corinth, approximately he writes this epistle to the Thessalonians A.D 51. It was the first ever letter penned to the churches he visited in his journeys.

The background to this letter is found in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17:1-14. Here we see Paul's clear and direct approach to ministering. When he visited cities, he would go straight to the Synagogues and meet with the religious leaders. He would open the scriptures and effectually argue that Christ is the Messiah who had to suffer and rise again in order to atone for the sins of mankind.

In Thessalonica, on hearing the Gospel as preached by Paul, a great number of devout Greeks and some of the chief proselyte women believed. These gentile Greeks had at one time left their pagan temples to seek truth in Jewish worship. Now on hearing Paul's testimony they believed in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and were supernaturally born again by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the Jewish leaders saw these people converted, they were angered and gathered a mob from the street market and caused uproar. They assaulted the house of Jason where Paul and Silas (also known as Silvanus) were staying and took Jason to the rulers and let him go after a while.

With all this trouble surrounding them, the brethren immediately took Paul and Silas by night to Berea. During Paul's time in Berea where many were converted, including devout Jews, but the Jews of Thessalonica found out about this and came to stir up trouble again. Once again, the brethren had to take Paul away and he sailed to Athens, but Silas and Timothy were left behind.

During the time at Athens, Paul was burdened for the new believers he had left behind, because of the persecution caused by his preaching. Before leaving for Corinth he decided to send Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the welfare of the church and see how they were enduring persecution. When Timothy returned he reported back to Paul that the young converts in Thessalonica were adhering to what they had been taught by Paul during his visit to them and this was when Paul was stirred to write this letter.

Have you ever written a love letter to anyone? Well, this letter from Paul to the Thessalonians has all the passion and concern of any love letter. Paul had been given the burden for the early church. Everywhere he went his purpose was to show people the gospel message and help them establish fellowships amongst themselves in their community. He had barely been with the Thessalonians four weeks and he was forced to leave them. Then Timothy returns and reports that

the Thessalonians are continuing in the faith, Paul himself is encouraged. He is thankful for their ongoing devotion to Christ and their desire to hold firm to the gospel truth they have been taught despite their affliction.

Now, having looked at some of the background, let's delve into the meat of this passage and see what we can learn from it and how we can apply it to our lives today.

Verse 1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We see from the opening greeting in that although Paul is considered the author, Silvanus (Silus) and Timothy are in agreement with him and also desire to thank God for these converts as well as bringing heartening encouragement to them. Also Paul uses the words "Grace" and "Peace" in his greeting to all his Letters.

The words in verse 2 must have brought great encouragement to his people of Thessalonica. Paul had been driven out and was far away from these infants in faith to whom he had brought good news. Their joy at receiving word from him and knowing that he had not forgotten them, but was lifting them up in prayer, would almost certainly have given them much needed spiritual boost. This was an infant church in the early weeks of new found faith who were mature beyond their spiritual years, adhering to all they'd been taught.

The way the gospel was offered to the Thessalonians is a model for how the gospel should be communicated today: [Alan Cairns of the FPC says this is the best described as the "apostolic blueprint for evangelism"](#).

So let's look at this chapter and I have broken it up into 3 points to give a better understanding of the Thessalonians.

1. Conversion of the Thessalonians Verse 2-5
2. Example of the Thessalonians Verse 6-9
3. Hope of the Thessalonians Verse 10

1. Let's begin with Conversion.

These new converts in Christ were not just babes gradually being weaned on the milk of the Bible basics, but they were mature in nature taken in the meat of the Word of God.

Their understanding and practical application of major theological doctrines such as the Trinity, Christ's second coming, the day of the Lord, blessed assurance, conversion, election, resurrection, sanctification and Christian behaviour are evident throughout the book of Thessalonians.

Here in verses **2** and **3** *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;*

We see Paul acknowledge their steadfastness which is a result of their amazing conversion while suffering much affliction or persecution *verse 6*.

Through this major transformation they were bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit. As Paul writes in verse **3** there was evidently amongst them the '*work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope*'. This reminds us of *1 Corinthians 13:13 So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

These are the three major fundamental virtues in the Christian with a maturity in Christ. They had a heart felt love and burden to share the Gospel of Christ.

Let's look for a moment and see what these 3 applied virtues mean and how we need them in our Christian life.

1. work of faith,
2. labour of love,
3. patience of hope

1. **Work of faith** here doesn't mean they have to work at having faith, it is a saving faith when they were converted. When Paul preached like in *Act 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul is telling us, we first need to repent towards God, because it is God we have offended by our sin and disobedience. As a sinner the person must put their faith in Jesus, because He died on the cross for our sins.

The Thessalonians faith wasn't just believing in Jesus as a historical person who died a few decades ago! Who did many wonderful miracles.

2. **Labour of love**, here is the fruit of loving acts when converted. Loving acts or good works are a product of our salvation and its defiantly not the way of earning salvation, like the Church of Rome and other cults do.

If we turn and look at Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

You see a person must receive Jesus Christ salvation as a free gift and not a reward for good works. To illustrate this just say my wife Debbie bought me this fancy road bike costing thousands of pounds like the bikes you see on the Tour de France, a nice shiny red one with all the electronic gadgets.

I see the bike and I am totally in shock; I am excited and then I am thinking how she could afford this bike! After a few seconds I am worried and get my wallet out my back pocket and open it up to find just £10 and a few pound coins.

I offer the money "Let me pay for it", I say. My wife is upset by being insulted, she says "this is a Free Gift and if you give me money for it, it will no longer be free!"

You see we cannot pay God for the free gift of salvation. We cannot earn our salvation through doing good works. Think about it? Are you enjoying Gods free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ today? Or are you trying to earn Salvation?

3 Patience of hope the Thessalonians had an enduring long-suffering expecting the immediate return of the coming of the Lord, which is a trait all Christians should have.

We as Christians endure hard times, but we have victory over difficult situations in our Christian walk by living in hope, which is referred throughout this whole epistle. In the book of James, he helps us illustrate this James 5:7-8 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. 8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Just like here in Scotland with arable farms the farmer must wait patiently for his crops to be harvest, it is a long process, but he can't just rush the crop to grow.

Here in Scotland the main crop we grow is Spring Barley, which is sown in March time, also farmers do a winter crop which isn't much as a spring harvest, but that seed is sown in the autumn time. Also, they may plant oilseed rape, potatoes and other kinds of root crops.

I can imagine the farmers will have cattle with sheep, cows and pigs, so they are busy all year round, waiting on the big harvest coming in.

You see we as Christians need to be like farmers, instead of looking in the newspapers or television news for the coming Lord as signs, this won't make the Lord Jesus come any quicker.

We need to keep patient, but busy like the farmer waiting for the big harvest of Barley. Just like the farmer we must live by faith waiting for the harvest to come ripe, like us waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus.

During the year the farmer will do various jobs around the farm with the harvest, he will check the crop for disease and then go out and spray pesticides to make the crop healthy. He's always busy!

We too must be like the farmer, we must further the kingdom of God, I mean by this is that we need to be out sharing the gospel message of Jesus to different people, praying the Holy Spirit will convict them of their sins and that they are converted and born again. Then they will have that hope of the coming lord Jesus to take us home to Heaven.

The end of verse 3 says, *in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father*; These Thessalonians lived these three attributes of being effective Christians '*work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope*'. All for Jesus in the sight of God, can you be like them?

In verse 4 we read *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God*. Paul is comforting the Thessalonians telling them that God loves them and has saved or elected them. For three weeks or so in *Act 17: 3* Paul explained claiming, about Jesus Christ from the prophesy's in the Old Testament scriptures and his testimony of meeting Jesus on the Damascus road.

As Paul taught the Regeneration the work of our Sovereign God (God has supreme power and authority) was imparting His grace on them, that their hearts might be softened in order to receive the new birth of being born again. We have no part in God's sovereign work in the regeneration process.

In *Acts 17:4* We see some of them believed and were converted, this is our active part. If we are **not** to believe and reject Jesus as Messiah, we are not saved or part of the elect.

Let's look down at verse 5 as we read *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know*

what manner of men we were among you for your sake. We read that it's not enough to merely hear the gospel. We must be convicted of its truths, and that assurance can only come through the power of the Holy Spirit. The same power convicts us to share the gospel effectually with others.

It is to our shame when we, at times, react in an ungodly manner to situations which we find stressful and difficult. We may even be embarrassed to admit our faith and confidence in Christ alone, to others in fear of persecution.

Let us not be ignorant of the power of the Gospel, it has the power to save as confirmed in Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

And in Isaiah 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

2. Example

In verse 6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. Paul commends the Thessalonians for their steadfast **example**, despite much suffering and persecution. They were not ashamed of the gospel of Christ and found joy of the Holy Spirit regardless of their circumstances. This mirrored in a similar way in Romans 5: 3-5 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Next, we look at verses 7-9 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. 9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

Verses 7-8 they became examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, these areas are the northern and south areas of Greece.

Which powerfully shows what happens when our lives are a godly example and a witness to others. As Paul writes this, he's heard reports abroad regarding the faith of those converted at Thessalonica.

It is amazing to see the results of the gospel being proclaimed far and wide abroad. Thessalonica would have been the ideal place being the capital of the Roman region of Macedonia with a population of 100.000.

The city with its natural harbour was ideal for shipping and trading with different people sailing in and out. Also routes north and south for land travel, this made the city multicultural and bustling atmosphere, which attracted trade and philosophy. Which brought Greco-Roman and Egyptian religions with its idol worship of various Gods.

We read **verse 9** *For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;*

When these people were converted the change was visible in their words and actions. They turned away from the worship of idols and in that itself was a drastic turn from previous pagan, idol worshipping life.

However, it wasn't just the outward change to their pagan worship which was noticed. If we think about it carefully, we begin to see and understand deeper things which must have been noticed by the unconverted.

These early converts gave up an idolatrous life, which deemed normal in their society where they were generally allowed to practice unhindered and instead, they adopted a new life. A life following Christ, which brought them suffering!

The unconverted must have thought they were mad! Why give up a relatively easy life that seemed good for one that caused suffering?

These early converts had found joy in the Spirit of God and knew the peace that surpasses all understanding. It set them apart and made them effective witnesses to the power of the Spirit in a person's life.

What is the most effective witnessing tool we have? Is it the words we use or the actions we display? Arguably the most effective witnessing tool we have is our own conduct, our own speech and our own actions. We are no longer man centred ~ we are God centred and everything we should do, should mirror Christ example.

To illustrate this, *I am a ultra-runner and I was out regularly running with this lady Louise who was a friend of my wife and family. Over the weeks as we ran I shared my faith and she had mentioned that she had bad experience with churches years ago and was backslid. Over the weeks I heard that she started*

attending a local church and I thought great. Later on she told my wife it was how me and my wife conducted ourselves that brought her back to searching for Jesus again to find that relationship she had with Him.

If we carry on as we were before our conversion, we hide the light that has been revealed to us which is Christ Jesus. Matthew 5: 14-16 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Our Life is an example to others and through Jesus Christ, should be revealed to others.

3. Hope

Let's look at our last verse, verse 10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

The Thessalonians are to wait, just like us today, waiting on the second coming of Jesus Christ that will happen one day and it is not for us to give ideas, opinions or speculate in any way, when that day shall be. Jesus said in Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. Even Jesus doesn't know when he will return.

It is interesting that the end of the 5 chapters of this book that they end with a reference to Jesus returning again!

Let's look at our point.

Hope, this must be one of the most wonderful 4 letter words we have in the English language, when we apply it to a life in Christ. What does that word 'hope' mean to you? Such a small word with such powerful meaning. Without it we'd be lost ~ eternally separated from God. How could we endure life's suffering and trials without the knowledge of that hope we have in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

What joy and confidence do we experience knowing that we have Hope in a wonderful blessed Saviour. Who through his atoning blood has delivered us, who has saved us from the coming judgment and wrath of God.

Christ will come again! We can confidently hope and expect that day, as promised in verse 10 of this chapter, but we don't need to fear the coming judgment because of the price he already paid at Calvary.

As you leave here today think of these things. Think about your conversion and how it has changed the way you conduct yourself daily. Do we set a godly example to others as we go about our daily lives? What does what we say and do reflect about who we are and what we believe?

Most importantly do you have that hope in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour and the assurance that you have been delivered from the coming wrath of God. In Him, and Him alone you can know peace and joy in your life regardless of external circumstances.

There's a well-known hymn which says, '*Blessed assurance Jesus is mine, oh what a foretaste of glory divine*'. If you want to know that blessed assurance of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, ask Him to draw you close to Him and reveal to you through the power of the Holy Spirit with the truth of the Gospel message.

If you have questions or want to speak further about accepting Christ as your personal Saviour, come and speak to me further.