

LIVING IN LIGHT OF HIS COMING

Week One Notes/ 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Be Encouraged (Part 1)

INTRODUCTION

The church at Thessalonica was established by Paul, Silas, and Timothy on Paul's second missionary journey, which included the province of Macedonia in Greece. Acts 17:1-10 gives us an account of the events that took place in Thessalonica.

Thessalonica was a busy city of approximately 200,000 people. The population consisted of Greeks, Romans, and a strong Jewish minority. The Jewish minority had a synagogue, and Paul stayed three Sabbaths teaching and explaining the Scriptures. Acts 17:4 says some Jews received the gospel, but also a multitude of God-fearing Greeks, and prominent women. It is unclear if Paul stayed longer than three weeks, but regardless of the length of time, he was ushered out of town quickly because his life was in danger. Likewise, the new church was facing severe persecution from their own countrymen.

Paul writes a letter (1 Thessalonian) to this young church for three reasons.

1. To let them know of his love and concern for them, and to assure them that what some were saying about him was not true.
2. He wanted to ground them in their new faith in Christ. He understood that in persecution it might be easy to abandon their new faith. He encourages them to live holy lives in a wicked culture.
3. He wanted to clear up confusion about end times, particularly the rapture or resurrection of the church. He had taught them the Lord would appear in the air and call his church to Himself. Because the church expected the Lord's return to be in their lifetime, they were confused about their loved ones who died before the rapture of the church. Paul did not want them to be confused or frightened.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 seems to be the theme verses of the entire letter. While every chapter ends with a reference to the coming of the Lord, the emphasis is on serving faithfully while they wait. Our study together will focus primarily on faithful living in the context of anticipating the Lord's immanent return.

I. The Gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

1 Thessalonians 1:5 states that the gospel (the good news of Christ) came to them in word, and in power, and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction. Paul, Silas and Timothy were the messengers—speaking the gospel, but it was the Holy Spirit who brought power and conviction to the message. The Thessalonians professed their faith in Christ, receiving the gospel with joy although persecution would follow.

Paul is commending the new church, and he is confident in God's work of salvation in their lives. Verse 4 should be a stopping point for us all as we contemplate the gospel. "**His choice of you.**" Wrapped in those four words is the most glorious and mysterious doctrine in all

of Scripture. The mystery that God chooses to have a relationship with us. This doctrine of election permeates Scripture and yet to understand it completely is beyond us.

Scripture says in the Old Testament that God chose Israel to be His people, (Deuteronomy 8:6-8). He simply set His love on them because that was His desire and His plan. Likewise, we do not choose God. We do not wake up one day and decide to become Christians. Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins; we cannot even respond to God. BUT GOD in great mercy and love quickens us (makes us alive) by His Spirit. He does a supernatural work in us by grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us that salvation has nothing to do with our own good works. Salvation is in Christ, by grace, through faith. In this holy and supernatural work of the Spirit, we are made completely new. (2Corinthians 5:17). We have a new spiritual DNA. We have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness and into His glorious kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

Our salvation, however, comes at great cost. Sin separated us from God, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). BUT GOD made Jesus to become sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God. Calvary is where the blood of Jesus was shed as payment for sin and three days later the resurrection is evidence of Christ' victory over sin and the grave. It is the great exchange of salvation—our sinfulness for His righteousness. (2 Corinthians 5:21). As a believer in Christ, God has made us His children, blessing us with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3-14).

Dear one, do you understand? God chose to have this relationship with you. The very thought of it should take our breath away. As believers in Christ, we come before Him with confidence, as His beloved children, clothed in the righteousness of The Lord Jesus Christ. Our salvation is not rule keeping religion, or “trying to do better”. It is a relationship with God through Jesus. Additionally, our salvation is not to be a source of pride or exclusion. Instead, it is the most humbling gift, compelling us to respond in thanksgiving, love, and service. The church in Thessalonica responded wholeheartedly to the gospel. Paul commends them and encourages them.

II. The Response (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

Paul categorizes the church's response to the gospel in three ways: a work of faith, a labor of love, and a steadfastness of hope. Let's explore each phrase.

A work of faith. *Faith* is a word we use a lot in religious circles, but it is also hard to define. The New Testament uses the word faith in two ways. First, it is used to describe a collection of doctrines, traditions, and ordinances. Galatians 2:6, Colossians 2:7, 1 Timothy 4:1, and Jude 1:3 are examples of this use of the word *faith*. Many times, this usage will have the article “the” in front of the word faith. (*Let us do good to all men, especially those who are of the household of the faith. Galatians 6:10*).

But when Paul commends them for their *work of faith*, he is not commending their set of doctrines. He is commending their actions of faith. This usage of the word *faith* lines up with Hebrews 11:1, *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* **Faith is a confidence in the truth of God's Word; an assurance of who God is and what He has said that inspires obedience and good works. Faith is trusting God enough to obey Him. FAITH IS NOT BASED ON OUR FEELINGS.** Faith is based on the truth of God's Word and the faithfulness of His character. The Christians in Thessalonica were living their everyday lives obeying God's

Word and participating in good works *as a response to their salvation—not in an effort to earn their salvation*. James 2:26 addresses the issue of living by faith. James says if you profess to have faith, but there is no external evidence of that faith, the faith that you are professing is dead and useless. Certainly, we are saved by grace through faith and not by works, BUT if we are truly saved, there will be good works that testify of our salvation.

Paul commends this new church for living out the gospel in every aspect of their lives.

A work of faith is not reserved for missionaries and ministers. A work of faith is not a dramatic leap into the dark, or a sensational life of signs and wonders. A work of faith is for each of us who say we are Christians. It is trusting God enough to obey His word; stepping into the light of truth that we already have. Certainly, it may include starting a ministry or caring for your neighbors, but it can also include adjusting an attitude or thought pattern that is contrary to God's Word. Works of faith are God's design for every believer in Christ.

A Labor of Love. In the original language the word *labor* is the Greek word **kopos**. It means, *“The labor which demands the whole strength of a person be exerted to the utmost if he/she is to accomplish the task. It is not the act itself, but the weariness that comes from the exertion of that act”*. Wow! There is nothing touchy/feely or easy about this word. In fact, it sounds like something very hard! But look carefully at the phrase. *Labor* is attached to the word *love*.

Agapeo is the Greek for love in this verse. This kind of love is a benevolent love, a love of the will rather than the emotions, it has intentional direction, loving as one needs to be loved as opposed to how they want to be loved. Agapeo originates with God. God is Love. You and I cannot demonstrate this kind of love unless it already lives in us through our relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit within us is the only one who can demonstrate this kind of love through us.

So why does Paul link this kind of love with such a difficult word like *labor*? BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE EXHAUSTING! This church was loving the people in their community who were persecuting them, but they were also demonstrating love to one another. Remember! This is not a love that is characterized by feelings. Feelings may come but they do not define Agape love. Sometimes it is hard work to love others—people can be difficult. Truth and love must always go together—a line so fine that only the Holy Spirit can enable us to walk it (Philippians 2:13). Also remember, we do not demonstrate love so that God will love us. We have already been loved by God, and we are simply responding to others out of the love we have already received.

A Steadfastness of Hope. Steadfastness means *a patient enduring with circumstances. A quality that does not surrender or succumb under trial*. **Hope** (elpis in the Greek) *is the desire for a good thing with the confident expectation you will receive it based on the Word of God and the character of God*. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is anticipating with confidence that God will do what He has already promised in His Word to do. The Christians in Thessalonica are expecting Christ to return—God promised. Even though they were confused about the details of that promise, their hope remained steadfast. Paul knew that persecution could sometimes cause a new Christian to waver, and he is commending them for being steadfast in the hope of Christ's return.

Let this church be an example for us. When times are tough, when we do not understand all of the events unfolding on the world stage or even the difficult events unfolding in our personal

world, stand firm and steadfast—God’s promises are true, His word is faithful and sure because HE IS. He has equipped us to live in faith and love while we hope for things we have not yet seen. Living in such a way distinguishes Christians from the rest of world. We can live in peaceful confidence when everyone else is wringing their hands in fear. We can love our neighbors when it would be easier to forget about them. We can demonstrate love to other believers even when we disagree. We can live obediently to Christ even when culture mocks us. This way of living is our response to the power of the Gospel which is at work in us and through us. This way of living has an impact on the world around us.

III. The Impact

They were examples to believers and unbelievers. (verse 7-8) They understood that salvation comes with responsibility. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that people see your good works and glorify your Father who is heaven.” We show others what God is like by our words and our actions.

They were witnesses. Verse 8 says the gospel *sounded forth from them*. The word *sounded* means to sound forth like a trumpet. It is a clear, distinct sound with no ambiguity. Our witness to a lost world must be clear, unconfused, uncompromising, and filled with love and truth.

They had a Christ-like reputation. Verse 9-10 Paul says he keeps hearing about them. Other people—saved and unsaved—had seen how these Christians turned away from idols and turned toward the living God, to serve Him while they wait for Christ return.

An idol in that day was a physical image of a pagan god—no life in it, just a dead and useless ornament. BUT the church had turned away from dead things to *a living God*, who gives a *living faith*, with a *living Holy Spirit*. ***Today, an idol is anything we look to, to give us what only Christ can give us. Certainly, an idol can be a destructive thing—substance abuse, an addiction, a sin we have tolerated. But an idol can also be a good thing that we have put in the place of God, looking to it to give us what only He can supply.***

As we examine 1 Thessalonians 1, the question must be asked of all believers. **Are we this church?** Could Paul commend us like he is commending them? We must ask this of the cooperate church body, but we must also ask it of ourselves as individuals. If the answer is sadly, *no, we are not like this church*, then the second question would be, *why not?* Let the Lord apply Psalm 139:23-24 to your life. Invite Him to expose anything in your life in that is less than His best. And then radically turn from away from whatever He exposes. He has equipped you to live as He has commanded you to live—strengthened and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Now walk in faith and cooperate with whatever He asks you to do based on His Word.

Perfection is not the goal, but total surrender is.

Our world, our country, our city, our communities, and our families need this kind of church and this kind of believer.