



Paul Gives Thanks for the Thessalonians 1 Thessalonians Chapter 1

Introduction

We see in his letter to the Thessalonians that the apostle Paul was a pastor at heart. “Pastor” is a word derived from the Latin noun which means “shepherd”. It is related to the verb “pascere” which means “to lead to pasture and cause to eat”. A good shepherd cares for His flock endlessly. He lives with his sheep twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, guiding, nourishing, and protecting them regardless of how he feels, the weather, or the dangers. *The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep* (John 10:11). In the same way, a church pastor selflessly leads his flock and makes sure they are provided with spiritual food. Jesus is The Good Shepherd (John 10:11-16). He is the example Paul followed in shepherding his flock.

As a missionary pastor, Paul traveled approximately ten thousand miles over land and sea and personally established at least twenty churches. He never forgot or neglected any of them. The believers in the churches he planted were his “*joy and crown*” (1 Thessalonians 2:19; Philippians 4:1). He rejoiced over their salvation, agonized in their suffering, prayed for them always, and guided them with his letters when he could not visit in person. He loved them with Christ’s love.

Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians reveals the depth of his love for his flock in Thessalonica. Chapter 1 is filled with thankfulness, remembrance, joy, and praise.

Outline of 1 Thessalonians Chapter 1

- I. Thankful Remembrance - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5
- II. Joyful Praise - 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

I. Thankful Remembrance - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

- A. Greeting - 1 Thessalonians 1:1

In Paul’s day, personal letters usually began with a word of introduction naming the writer(s), addressing the recipients, and giving a word of blessing.

- 1. *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy* - 1:1

Paul names not only himself as the writer, but also his fellow missionaries who had been with him in Thessalonica. Silvanus is the Latin name for Silas who was a Roman citizen. (He is called Silas in Acts 16 and 17.) Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and Greek father (Acts 16:1). Paul had chosen both Silvanus and

Timothy to accompany him on his second missionary journey. They shared Paul’s personal interest in the new believers they had been forced to leave behind. But Paul stands out as the author of the letter while Silvanus and Timothy provided heartfelt support and agreement.

- 2. *To the church of the Thessalonians* - 1:1

The recipients of Paul’s letter were new believers. While some came from a Jewish background, the majority were Gentiles with pagan roots. Paul’s greeting shows his confidence in them because they are *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. This designates them as members of the body of believers with Christ as the head (Colossians 1:18). The position of every believer is “in Christ”. Please read Ephesians 1:3-14 to see all the blessings believers have *in Christ*.

- 3. Grace and Peace - 1:1

Jewish letters often contained “peace” (shalom) in the greeting. Paul added “grace” to it, making his letter distinctly Christian. As Matthew Henry notes, “The free grace and favor of God is the spring of all peace and prosperity we can enjoy” (The Matthew Henry Commentary).

- B. Thankful Prayer - 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (*we*, 1:2) prayed often for their “flock” and when they did so, it was always with *thanks to God*. They had good reason for thankfulness as they remembered the Thessalonians’, *work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope*.

John Stott, in The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, notes, “Faith, hope, and love are sure evidences of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Every Christian without exception is a believer, a lover, and a hoper.” Faith, love, and hope are gifts from God, *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning* (James 1:17). We do not work for these gifts, for they are graces God has planted within each believer, but all three are at work within those who belong to Christ.

- 1. *Work of faith* - 1:3

“While salvation is received by faith and not works, the reality of saving faith is attested by its practical effect, the *work of faith*” (Word Biblical Commentary, 1 & 2

Thessalonians, F.F. Bruce). The Thessalonians' faith was a true and living faith because it was a working faith. *Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead* (James 2:17). We were *created in Christ Jesus for good works* (Ephesians 2:10).

2. Labor of love - 1:3

The love of the Thessalonians was demonstrated in their "labor" of serving *the living and true God* (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Love is not a sentimental feeling. Love is an action word. Love labors. This was evident in the lives of the new believers, as we shall see later in this lesson. How is your love laboring? In what ways is your love of the Lord evident in your life?

3. Patience of hope - 1:3

The word "patience" is the Greek "hupomone" which indicates deliberate purpose and loyalty even in the greatest trials and suffering. In fact, Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words defines "hupomone" as, "Patience which grows only in trial" (W.E. Vine). It is endurance inspired by hope in Christ. What trials are you now enduring? As you face these trials, remember that you are in Christ and your hope is in Christ. Paul will speak much more of this throughout both of his Thessalonian letters.

C. Confidence of Election - 1 Thessalonians 1:4

Paul was thankful because he knew the Thessalonians were among the elect of God. The doctrine of election, or being chosen, is a truth that runs throughout Scripture. God chose Abraham (Nehemiah 9:7) and He chose Abraham's descendants after him (Deuteronomy 4:37; 1 Kings 3:8). God chose the nation of Israel to be His treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:7). Psalm 65:4 declares, *Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You.*

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul applies the term "elect" to Christians in Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:1; and Titus 1:1. Election denotes that salvation, which comes through faith, is *the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How could Paul know that the Thessalonians were among the elect? He had confidence of their election because he saw faith, love, and hope at work in their lives. Their conduct made their election evident. God's choice of the Thessalonians was the reason they had faith, love, and hope. Paul had seen the fruits of this in their lives and gave *thanks to God always* (1:2).

D. Paul's Presentation of the Gospel - 1 Thessalonians 1:5

First of all, what is the gospel that Paul preached? It is the "the good news" from God that Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, came to earth to die for our sins. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin and God raised Him from the dead to give us eternal life. The gospel is life-changing news. In Acts 17:6, the Jews reported to the city officials that Paul's preaching of the gospel was turning the world upside down. That is what the gospel message does! It changes people and causes them to see the world in a whole different way.

In verse 5, Paul describes the manner in which the gospel was presented to the Thessalonians. He makes four points.

1. Paul presented the gospel with words, but it was not with words alone.
2. The gospel went forth with power. *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12).
3. The gospel was presented and received in the Holy Spirit. Paul preached by the power of the Holy Spirit who also worked in the hearts of the Thessalonians to convict them of sin and turn them to Christ. See John 16:7-15 where Jesus explained the marvelous working of the Holy Spirit to His apostles.
4. Paul preached the gospel message in much assurance. He was absolutely sure of the truth of what he taught. Furthermore, the message he delivered was confirmed by the integrity of his own life and the lives of his fellow missionaries.

It has been said that actions speak louder than words. When the gospel message goes out, both words and actions are needed. Those who share their faith in Christ with others must back it up with their lives. Is this true of you? Pause and consider your answer.

II. Joyful Praise - 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

In the last verses of this chapter, Paul shares his delight in the Thessalonians' response to the gospel. He writes beautiful words of praise that must have been a great encouragement to them. Paul describes what

happened in their lives after he preached the word to them. In all that follows, we see their *labor of love* (1:3) shining through.

A. The Thessalonians Received the Word -
1 Thessalonians 1:6

As was explained in Lesson 1, Thessalonica was a city of many religions. Besides the numerous pagan gods, there was the imperial cult that called for emperor worship, and there was Judaism. The Jews who turned to Christ as their Messiah may have been disowned by their families and were certainly persecuted. The pagan culture disdained Greeks who converted to Judaism, and those who were converted to Christianity would have faced even greater hostility. Furthermore, those who converted to Christianity no longer gave divine honors to the emperor and were persecuted for being disloyal to the empire which provided them with many material benefits.

The Thessalonian believers, both Jews and Gentiles, had received the word in spite of the opposition and suffering it brought. Even more, they had received it *with joy* which came from the Holy Spirit. Notice that "joy" is listed second in the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

B. The Thessalonians "Lived" the Word -
1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

They became *followers* of the missionaries who taught them and thus followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The NASB and ESV Bibles use the more literal translation, "imitators". Paul used this word to describe the Thessalonians' actions after receiving the gospel. They imitated the missionaries, who were imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy were men of the gospel who reflected the reality of living "in Christ". As imitators, the Thessalonians joyfully followed their example and embraced their sufferings. "They lived in such a way that their hope transcended the struggles of the world" (1 & 2 Thessalonians, The Hope of Salvation, James H. Grant Jr.).

As the Thessalonians followed Christ in faith, they became examples to all the surrounding region. How did this happen without newspapers, television, computers, and cell phones? In the first century, travelers often collected news and carried it from place to place. It has already been mentioned that because of its strategic location, Thessalonica hosted many travelers, especially pagan worshipers and those involved in commerce. These travelers, passing through the city, heard about the new "religion" and its bold and faithful followers. They conveyed the information as they travelled throughout Macedonia and Achaia. Other believers heard about them and surely rejoiced!

C. The Thessalonians Passed It On -
1 Thessalonians 1:8-9

Paul had no need to tell anyone about the new Christians in Thessalonica because *in every place....their faith toward God had gone out*. Their faith had become known by their words, their conduct, and their repentance.

1. By their words - 1:8

Paul wrote, *From you the word of the Lord has sounded forth*. The Greek word "execheo", translated "sounded forth", means "to sound forth as a trumpet or thunder". The Thessalonians were not shy about sharing their words. They trumpeted forth the gospel message. Marvin R. Vincent (Word Studies in the New Testament) says it was an "unmistakable proclamation. It seemed to reverberate through the hills and valleys of Greece" (The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, John R.W. Stott).

2. By their lives - 1:8-9

Your faith toward God has gone out. The Thessalonians' way of life and their works resulting from their faith in God was renown. People noticed and talked about it. One commentator calls it "holy gossip". The Thessalonians were a model to other believers.

3. By their repentance - 1:9

The Thessalonian believers had welcomed Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. They had welcomed the gospel message the missionaries had brought and, as a result, had turned away from idols to serve the *living and true God*.

*Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
They have ears, but they do not hear;
Noses they have, but they do not smell;
They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk.
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them. (Psalm 115:4-8)*

As the Psalmist explains, an idol has no life and can offer no hope. Those who make them and serve them are spiritually dead. The Thessalonians had turned from death to life, from serving dead gods to serving the living and true God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe. In short, the Thessalonians had repented. They had experienced a change in heart and mind and turned from the world's way of seeing and doing things to God's way.

You may think that the Thessalonians' struggle in turning from idols has no application in your life, but Tim Keller points out that all sin is primarily idolatry, "Sin isn't only doing bad things, it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God" ("Talking About Idolatry in a Postmodern Age," monergism.com).

In our day, people build their lives upon idols such as financial security, power, sports, recreation, appearance, social status, digital media, and on and on. These are all things that can take the place of Christ in people's lives. What idols are crowding Christ out of your life? Like the Thessalonians, you need to repent and turn to the living and true God. What people or pursuits do you need to turn away from, even if it invites difficulties and discrimination? Who or what will you chose to serve today?

A common misconception is that following Christ involves a one-time repentance and turning to God through Him. While this is true, it is not the whole truth. Repentance is not just a one-time occurrence, but something that is required daily. Each day a Christian must take up his or her cross and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). The temptation can be to follow your heart into sin, to follow your friends into things that distract you from Christ, to follow your lusts into immorality. What temptation is calling you to follow? Will you turn from (repent of) whatever it is that tempts you and, like the Thessalonians, will you turn around and follow Christ? Will you do it in spite of the discomfort, hardship, and suffering it may bring? To what extent are you willing to suffer for Christ's sake?

D. Serving God - 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

The Thessalonians had received the gospel and were faithful to pass it on with both words and deeds. As their words sounded forth and their lives displayed repentance, they served the living and true God. They not only left their old way of life, they began new lives of service as God's children. Paul had preached to them about Christ's return and they were patiently awaiting His deliverance on that day. But while they waited, they were working, serving God.

1. Waiting - 1:10

Part of serving is waiting, a subject which Paul addresses repeatedly in his letters to the Thessalonians:

- waiting for their hearts to be established holy and blameless at His coming (1Thessalonians 3:13);
- waiting for the resurrection of the dead and the Lord's glorious descent from heaven to be with Him forever(1 Thessalonians 4:14-17);

- watching soberly while waiting (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8);
- waiting as those who are set apart for God (1 Thessalonians 5:23);
- not growing weary of doing good (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

Waiting is a passive word, but it does not sanction a passive lifestyle. Christians work, serving God, while they wait. Are you waiting for Christ's return? What are you doing while you wait?

2. Delivered - 1:10

The Thessalonians had been delivered from slavery to sin and pagan idols by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. All believers have experienced this deliverance. Christ continues to deliver those who are His day by day, moment by moment, as they live "in Him", committed to a life of faith and repentance.

The Thessalonians and all believers are also delivered from *the wrath to come*, the divine judgment which will be poured out on the wicked when Christ returns. *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Christians are a delivered people -- past, present, and future!

Application

The Thessalonians had heard the gospel message and seen it in action in the lives of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. They had received the gospel and were passing it on, sharing it by word of mouth and making it known through their daily behavior. "The communication of the gospel is by seeing as well as by hearing. The double strand runs all through the Bible: image and word, vision and voice, opening the eyes of the blind and unstopping the ears of the deaf. Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1-14) and the Image of God (Colossians 1:15). The Word became visible, the Image audible ... We are familiar enough with the verbal element in evangelism. Where is the visual?" ([I Will Heal Their Land, Report of the South African Congress on Evangelism](#), Douglas Webster).

How do your words and your way of life present the gospel to others? What is there in your words and actions that would draw others to Christ? How does your life stand out as separate from the secular world around you? How is your love for Christ visible?

QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all lesson notes and references.

1. a. In what ways are you like the Thessalonian believers?

b. In what way would you like to be more like the Thessalonian believers?
2. What did you learn about "*election*" from Chapter 1 or the lesson notes?

DAY TWO: Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

3. a. From verse 2, find the word which describes Paul's preaching. What gave Paul the ability to preach like this?

b. Why was Paul's boldness especially significant?

c. Use Acts 16:16-24 to describe Paul's treatment in Philippi.
4. a. List 7 things that were not a part of Paul's ministry. Give verses.

b. Using verses 3-9, list the characteristics of Paul's ministry

c. ? (Thought Question) In what ways is "*pleasing men*" (verse 4) different than pleasing God?

d. Do you think it is more difficult to please men or please God? Give reasons?

e. Which is more necessary? Why?
5. Using verses 10-11, list the characteristics of Paul's behavior.
6. a. How did Paul conduct himself among the Thessalonians:
As a mother?

As a father?

b. What was Paul's purpose in ministering in these ways? Give verse.

DAY THREE: Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16.

7. Why did Paul thank God for the Thessalonians?

8. a. How did the word of God effectively work in the Thessalonians?

b. Who else had the Thessalonians imitated? In what way? See 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

c. Use Hebrews 13:7 to explain what it means to become an imitator. Give three points.

d. Are you an imitator of anyone? If so, share who you imitate and in what way.

9. a. What does Paul reveal about the Judeans?

b. How do the following verses help explain these things?

Acts 2:22-24

Acts 4:8-18

Acts 7:51-59

Acts 8:1

Acts 13:49-50

Acts 14:19

10. What was the result of the Jew's attitudes and actions?

DAY FOUR: 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20.

11. a. What was Paul's "*great desire*"? Why did he desire this?

b. How had satan "*hindered*" Paul?

12. How does Paul describe the Thessalonians in these verses?

13. a. When would Paul ultimately rejoice in the Thessalonians?
- b. ♥(Heart Question) What reasons will you have for rejoicing at that time?

DAY FIVE: Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-9.

14. a. What was it that Paul could “*no longer endure*”? Use 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 also.
- b. What did Paul do because of this? What was his purpose? Give verse.
- c. Why did Paul feel this was necessary?
- d. What sacrifice did he make in doing this? Give verse.
- e. ♥(Heart Question) Can you share a sacrifice you have made recently for the benefit of someone else? How did this ultimately bring you joy?

15. a. What news did Timothy bring back?

b. How did this news affect Paul?

16. Put verse 8 into your own words.

17. What was Paul’s continuing desire?

DAY SIX: Read 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13.

18. What did Paul pray for himself?

19. What did he pray for the Thessalonians?

20. What will you pray right now for yourself and others in your Bible study group? Write a brief prayer of two to three sentences and be prepared to share it with your group.