

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Joyous and Thankful (1 Thess. 1:1-10)

Lesson #4 for July 28, 2012

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Timothy 1:15; Galatians 5:19-23; Daniel 12:2.

1. In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul focused on the faith, love, and hope manifested by the Thessalonian believers. He told the Thessalonians that he had been praying for them constantly, and he was so thankful that their lives gave evidence of the life-changing power possible through the Holy Spirit—despite the fact that they lived in a pagan and corrupt society.
2. Try to imagine that you yourself had grown up in Thessalonica as a pagan, attending drunken festivals to the idol-gods. But now, you have heard about and been converted to Christianity, and your friends are asking what happened to you. What would you say? How would you convince them that your life had changed for the better? No hangovers? No STDs?
3. While many of the pagan cults described dying and rising saviors of various kinds, no one had actually seen that happen. Does the fact that Jesus died and rose to life and was witnessed physically by hundreds of people set Christianity apart? The new believers had clearly come to believe that Jesus had not only risen from the dead but also that He was coming again to take them back to heaven with Him. Is hard evidence better than “mystery”?
4. In this context, why did Paul talk about “the wrath to come”? (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10) What is that? Was he talking about God’s wrath? The Bible speaks about God’s wrath in several places. If one has opportunity to compare the different places, he would discover that God’s wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices. Do you think that is what Paul had in mind when he wrote those words?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3. What was Paul talking about in these verses? How do you think the love, faith, and hope mentioned there were manifested in the lives of the Thessalonians? Earlier, Paul greeted the Thessalonians by wishing them “grace” and “peace.” It was Paul’s custom to change the traditional Greek greeting, *cheirein*, into the Christian greeting, *grace, charis*. What do you think people thought when they heard him say that? Paul also used the word *peace*. No doubt, he had in mind the many rich meanings included in the Hebrew *shalom*.
6. Notice that in talking about the key phrases or words so often mentioned in connection with the gospel, Paul specifically talked about what those traits accomplish. Faith works. Genuine love leads to active labor for God. Hope demands patience. Clearly, Paul was not just theorizing. He was talking about actions.
7. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4. What is implied by the idea that we have been chosen or elected by God? As a Christian, is your life made different by the fact that God has chosen you? Some Christian groups have taken the idea of election all the way to predestination. (Contrast John 3:16) Those people suggest that God makes the choices about who is going to be saved, and there is nothing we can do or say about it. Is that an attempt to avoid feeling responsible for a change in lifestyle or behavior? What is the truth about “election”? How was this related to the idea that we can be “once saved, always saved”? Why do these ideas attract certain people?
8. Read Joshua 24:15; 1 Timothy 2:4; Revelation 3:20. Do these verses suggest that we need to make an important choice or perhaps multiple choices regarding our salvation? And how do these texts relate to ones like Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26? In those verses, some believe it says we have only one chance; and if we accept it and then turn away, we will never get another chance. (Contrast Matthew 18:22) God has done everything that He can do—except to cast our vote—to make provisions for our salvation. He never will make our decision! He refuses to set aside our freedom of choice. If God removes freedom, He eliminates the possibility of love.
9. Review your understanding of the meaning of *faith*. Why would it be “impossible without God’s drawing power”? What is your understanding of the role of our choice in salvation? (COL 159.3)

10. Why would anyone refuse God's salvation? Is that just complete perversity? Why do you think Lucifer rebelled in heaven? There was no one to tempt him. The environment was certainly not to blame. If Lucifer really believed that God was "arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe"—as he has claimed since he rebelled—would he have dared to rebel in the first place? How did Paul convince the Thessalonians that Jesus was the Messiah? Would it be easy to convince the Jews in the synagogue that their hoped-for Deliverer had been crucified as a traitor to the Roman government? What evidence did Paul provide from the Old Testament to support his arguments? (See *Acts of the Apostles*, page 225-227) In the light of 1 Thessalonians 1:5, does it sound like they accepted his message and had faith in God? Were their convictions strong enough to cause them to completely change their paradigm regarding salvation? What does it mean to bring "power and the Holy Spirit" to someone? Did they receive the Holy Spirit as the disciples did at Pentecost? Why would the Gentiles in Thessalonica be moved by the Jewish Scriptures?
11. Paul was thankful—even rejoicing—that the Thessalonians had not only accepted a theoretical change, but also they had exhibited God's power in their lives. Timothy had reported that the changes which had taken place in them could not be explained except by divine intervention. Prayers were answered; lives changed. Does the Holy Spirit put "steel" in your convictions?
12. Did Paul then believe that his work for the Thessalonians had been worth it? How does one know that the Holy Spirit is working in his/her life? In the local church? (Read Galatians 5:19-23; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11) You can identify a Christian by the fruit s/he bears.
13. In what ways does the Holy Spirit work in and for us? There are four levels of the Holy Spirit's activity in human lives: **1)** He keeps us alive by making all the "natural" processes of the human body work. (Acts 17:28) "Every pulsation of the heart is a rebound from the touch of the finger of God." (*RH*, December 2, 1890, par. 15) **2)** He woos us and draws us to Himself. (John 6:44; 12:32) **3)** He convicts us of the truth leading to conversion and baptism. (1 Thessalonians 1:5) And, **4)** He gives us "gifts" so we can more effectively carry the gospel to others and build up the church. (1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Ephesians 4:11-16)
14. Can you see the fruit of the Spirit at work in the lives of the Christians around you as well as in your own life? Do you sometimes do things out of love that you would never have considered doing before you became a Christian? (*GC* 555)
15. People may come to believe something without acting on it. Most people in the United States these days believe that cigarette smoking is dangerous, but many continue to smoke. There are three steps necessary before we adopt a new behavior. First, we must recognize the importance of doing something. Then, we must actually change our attitude about it. And finally, we must put it into practice—with the help of the Holy Spirit.
16. What do you think it took to bring deep conviction to the Thessalonians? Can we bring deep conviction to others? Or, is that exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit? If so, what is our work? Do we need to have a deep conviction about the gospel and salvation for ourselves? Is it essential that we have that before we try to witness to others?
17. Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to have clearly in mind what it meant to live a Christian life. (1 Thessalonians 1:6,7) They had not had the privilege of seeing Jesus while He was on this earth. So, Paul did his best to represent the kind of life that Jesus lived. Thus, he was able to call them to live lives like himself and his fellow workers in the same way as they sought to live lives like Jesus. Apparently, in the process they were suffering considerably and became examples.
18. However he accomplished this, it does seem that Paul was successful. The Thessalonians were imitating him and his colleagues and were becoming examples to others around them. Paul rejoiced that the gospel was actually working in the lives of the Thessalonians. They had even become examples for others to follow. Was this an example of the basic principle describing how the human mind works—"by beholding we become changed"? (*GC* 555)
19. Have you ever met someone whose Christian example was such that you would feel safe

following his/her example? Don't we usually tell people to follow only Jesus? But, as human beings we need role models. We sometimes need counsel and guidance, especially when difficult times come along. Furthermore, whether we like it or not, people are looking at us, and our influence is impacting their lives every day. So, how many "veteran" Christians do you know in whom you can see the life of Jesus being lived out? If not, why not? If there were a number of people actually living lives like the life of Jesus, would it lead to the final events in this earth's history? Is that what the 144,000 will do? Of course, it is always safest to look to the life of Jesus Himself. Even Paul recognized that. (1 Timothy 1:15; Ephesians 3:8) Why do you suppose Paul made such statements? Should we be making similar statements? Would that convince the people to whom we are witnessing of the power of the gospel to change their lives?

20. We do not know exactly why the Thessalonians were suffering because of their new religion. How many of us would continue to be faithful to God if we were suffering because of our beliefs? Why is it that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"? What kind of role model are we in the church? Would you dare to suggest to a new Christian that s/he should follow your example?
21. Does it sound like the Thessalonian believers were particularly good examples of the effects of the gospel working in people's lives? What do you think was actually being said about them? How did the news about these particular Christians in Thessalonica travel to other cities, even cities at considerable distance from their home? How did Christians communicate with each other at a time when Christianity was unrecognized and even illegal? What kind of changes had taken place in the lives of the Thessalonians? Were people who looked at them able to see the gospel being lived out and give glory to God? (Matthew 5:16)
22. When Paul talked about the news of the Thessalonians spreading, we must remember that there was no regular "mail" service. Were Christians—perhaps businessmen and women—traveling regularly and spreading the news from one church to another? In that part of the world, the best means of travel was by boat. All of the major cities were located at or near harbors. Was that the way the news of the gospel was carried around?
23. Do you think it would be easy to convince a group of idol-worshipping Thessalonians that a friend of yours back in Judea had died and come back to life again? In light of the problems that the Jews were causing in many areas of the Mediterranean world, would you be inclined to suggest this was a crazy Jewish message?

The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. Their hearts burned with zeal for their Savior, who had delivered them from fear of "the wrath to come." Through the grace of Christ a marvelous transformation had taken place in their lives, and the word of the Lord, as spoken through them, was accompanied with power. Hearts were won by the truths presented, and souls were added to the number of believers.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 256.

24. Is there a direct relationship among the "wrath" of God, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His second coming? Is the hope of the second coming an essential part of our Christianity? (1 Corinthians 15:12-17; John 11:24,25; Daniel 12:2) Is the wrath Paul was talking about, God's wrath? What is that? Could you define or explain God's wrath from the Bible? Remember that if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christianity has lost its punch. What would be the purpose of Christ's first coming if there was to be no second coming? More than that, Satan might have won by keeping Christ in the grave! We do not want to be liars like Satan was. Jesus is our resurrection and life! Everyone who has died will arise either in the first resurrection (at the second coming) or at the second resurrection (at the third coming), and we will all be alive at the same time—some inside the holy city, New Jerusalem, and some outside.
25. Look at Ellen White's comments about Paul's work in Thessalonica found in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 255,256. Is it fair for the world to expect to see a change in Christians? Gandhi is reported to have said, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Would he say that about your church or even about you? If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence to convict you?

26. The world has never seen an event like the second coming. Is it irrational to believe in such a radical idea? On the other hand, how many of the prophecies and predictions in the Bible have failed to come true?
27. Do you feel comfortable talking about the solid evidences from the Word of God? Have the teachings of the Bible made a significant impact on the way you actually live? If Paul were reporting on you or even your Sabbath school class or your church, what would he say? What do you think Paul would say to your church if he arrived to spend three or four weeks with you? Would his words be encouraging or frightening?
28. Have we taken advantage of God's promise to transform our lives through the Holy Spirit? Why do so many Christians' lives look so much like the lives of people in the world?
29. Often, it is the tendency for new Christians who take their Christianity seriously to become discouraged. At such times, it is very helpful to remember the words of the well-known Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee, to a struggling new Christian:
- "No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm losing my salvation." Nee said, "Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died."—Lou Nicholes, *Hebrews: Patterns for Living* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2004), p. 31.
30. Take a look at the key words in our passage for today. What is the meaning of *grace*? No doubt, in Paul's mind that originated from the Hebrew verb that literally means "to bend down." It suggests that someone is bending over in kindness to help another person up. We may not deserve it, but God bends down to touch our lives almost every day.
31. When using the word *peace*, Paul was doubtless thinking of the Hebrew word *shalom*. It means "to be complete, to be whole, to prosper, to be in health." God promises to give this kind of peace to His true followers. (Psalms 85:8; 1 Chronicles 22:9,10; Numbers 6:24-26.)
32. *Faith*, as suggested by Paul in this passage, is always active. It is a relationship with God so close and so meaningful that it transforms the lives of His followers.
33. *Hope* is not just "wishful thinking." It is a confident expectation concerning the second coming of Jesus based on the more than adequate evidence provided in Scripture. It kept the Thessalonians faithful, even in times of persecution.
34. The love that Paul spoke about is *agape*. It is a kind of selfless reaching out to and caring for others in the same way that Jesus did.
35. So, how are these traits manifested in the lives of Christians you know?
36. Having read 1 Thessalonians 1, what do you think was Paul's approach to the Gentile pagans in Thessalonica? First of all, he had to convince them of the uselessness of their pagan deities. Then, he had to convince them that: 1) the one true God was the God of Christianity, and 2) that same God had come down to live as a human being on this earth. He did not speak of the life of Jesus in his letters, but he emphasized the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection. (1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11)
37. Are there any idols we need to turn away from in order to follow Christ in our day? What kind of reputation does your church have in the community?

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