



Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 6, 2010 Released on Wednesday, June 2, 2010

“Visible to God”

Lesson Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Background Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Devotional Reading: Titus 2:11-15

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, 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 labor 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 show 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.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to show how Paul celebrated the gospel's effect on believers in Thessalonica: their work of faith, labor of love, and patience in hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

Principle: to realize that conversion to Christ affects all aspects of life.

Application: to urge Christians to live lives of power and joy in spite of negative circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

What You See Is What You Get

Do you remember using a personal computer in the 1980s? If you do, you probably remember being amazed at all the things it could do. Personal computers made it easy to do what was tedious on a typewriter. They fit the text to the length of the line, started a new page at just the right point, and even helped check the spelling.

But with their dark monitors with green or amber dots forming the letters, those early computers did not show exactly how a document would look when it was printed. It was a later generation of computers that offered WYSIWYG (pronounced WIH-see-wig), or “what you see is what you get,” a feature that today’s computer users take for granted.

Today’s text is about what-you-see-is-what-you-get faith. It describes a group of young-in-the-faith Christians whose lives were changed by the gospel. There was no questioning whether their inward and outward lives were in tune with each other. Since they had come to believe in Jesus Christ, they were visibly, obviously becoming a new kind of people.

If we are content with the idea that faith in Jesus is an inward, private matter that does not affect our public life, this text will challenge us!

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 51

Place: from Corinth

Thessalonica was a prosperous port and center of trade in the region of Macedonia, the northern part of the Greek peninsula. Like most cities of its kind, it was filled with all kinds of people and all kinds of beliefs. Economically there was a wide gap between the rich merchants and poor laborers. Socially there was powerful pressure to conform to established standards. Religiously there were many followers of pagan cults, some encouraging grossly immoral practices, but also a notable number of faithful Jewish worshipers of the God of Israel.

When Paul first visited the city, on what we call his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1–10), his preaching there led many to believe in Jesus. But it also provoked persecution, and Paul was forced to leave after only a short time. The new believers were left alone to face the pressures of their environment. Would they persist in their new faith, or would they go back to their old lives?

When he was able, Paul sent his assistant Timothy to visit the Thessalonian Christians and report back (1 Thessalonians 3:1–5). Timothy’s visit confirmed that the new believers were faithful and growing. Though not without problems, the church was demonstrating its faith through action (vs. 6–8).

Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians probably just a few months after leaving the city and soon after receiving Timothy’s report. He begins with a thankful celebration of the Thessalonians’ transforming faith. Far from succumbing to the pressures of their culture, they had become examples to believers in their region and beyond. Through the centuries, their example continues to speak to us today.

THANKSGIVING FOR THE THESSALONIANS (1 Thessalonians 1:1-3)

1. What were Silas' and Timothy's personal backgrounds? (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

In the world of ancient Greece and Rome, it is customary to begin a letter with a salutation that names the writer and the addressees and that offers a brief greeting. *Paul* uses this format, but he deliberately alters it to express the profound relationship he has with his fellow Christians. After naming himself and his assistants, *Silvanus* (or Silas as he is called in Acts) and *Timothy*.

Silvanus accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Timothy was Paul's "son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), for Paul had led this young man to faith in Christ. Timothy joined Paul and Silas at Lystra (Acts 16:1-3) on the second missionary journey.

2. How did Paul greet the Thessalonian believers? (vs. 1,2)

Paul greeted the Thessalonian believers by wishing them grace and peace. While "grace" was a common salutation, it has a special meaning for believers. God's grace is the source of our salvation (Eph. 2:8) as well as all the blessings God bestows upon us (Rom. 5:2). The peace spoken of by Paul is spiritual well-being, and it flows from God's grace to us.

Following the greeting in a Greek letter was a word of thanksgiving. But Paul's thanksgiving was no mere formality. He goes to great lengths to describe exactly why he *thinks God* constantly for the Thessalonian Christians. These believers were a constant source of joy to Paul and his two missionary associates because of their visible commitment to the Lord. They are of the utmost importance to him as fellow members of God's family. Again, that reality is reflected in his constant prayer on their behalf.

3. What three virtues did the Thessalonians exhibit? (v. 3)

Paul constantly remembered three things that characterized these Thessalonian Christians. Their commitment to God was visible. These three things were connected with Christian character qualities. These were "faith," "love," and "hope."

First, their work was motivated by their faith. Work is the essential fruit of faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). James pointed out the absolute necessity of works accompanying faith (James 2:14-26). Faith without works invalidates any profession of faith.

Second, their labor was produced by their love. Labor refers to toilsome or wearisome work. They labored even in the midst of persecution. Their love was in response to the love God bestowed on them (Romans 5:5). We can love God as we should only because He has loved us first (1 John 4:19).

Third, they were patient due to their hope in Christ. The word "patience" speaks of endurance. They served Christ while bearing up under difficult circumstances (2 Thessalonians 1:4). Endurance ruled out discouragement, for they had the hope of a better day ahead no matter how bleak their situation might be. Christian hope anticipates the future certainty of Christ's return for the church (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13-18).

Faith, love, and hope are virtues that should indelibly mark every Christian life (1 Cor. 13:13). These virtues give rise to behavior that is notably praiseworthy.

SALVATION OF THE THESSALONIANS (1 Thess. 1:4-6)

4. How did Paul know that the Thessalonians had been chosen by God? (vs. 4,5)

It was evident to Paul and his associates that the Thessalonian believers were chosen by God. Paul addressed them as "brethren," meaning they were fellow Christians. They were beloved of God. God's love is the source of our election to salvation and holiness of life (Eph. 1:4).

Paul knew the Thessalonians had been chosen by God because he saw the dramatic change that had taken place in their lives. Paul explained that when he traveled around delivering the gospel, it was not just done with words (1 Cor. 2:4). His message was empowered by God (Acts 4:33; Rom. 1:16). This may have included the occurrence of miracles along with the preaching (Rom. 15:19; Gal. 3:5). The miracles authenticated Paul as an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) and sometimes drew crowds to hear his preaching (Acts 14:8-18).

The Holy Spirit was also involved in driving the message home to their hearts and convincing them of their sin and of the righteousness that Christ provides (John 16:8-11; Acts 1:8). References to power and the Holy Spirit are linked together in the Scriptures (Rom. 1:4). The Thessalonians received the gospel message from Paul with the full assurance that it was the truth.

Paul was fully certain in his own mind and heart of the truthfulness of the gospel that he preached. He was unwavering in his proclamation of the truth (1 Cor. 2:2). His message was clear and unapologetic. It was a message that would change lives radically.

Paul and his missionary associates did not just proclaim a convincing message; their lives demonstrated a consistency with that message. The Thessalonians had observed their earnestness, dedication, and willingness to suffer for Christ (Acts 17:5-10). They practiced what they preached.

5. Whom did the Thessalonians imitate after their conversion to Christ? (v. 6)

Paul noted that the Thessalonians became imitators of the missionaries and of the Lord. The word "followers" means "imitators." It is normal for new converts to imitate those who led them to Christ.

The Thessalonian church made Christ the ultimate example to be imitated (Eph. 5:1). The notion of imitating the Lord would include, among other things, living lives of holiness (1 Pet. 1:15,16), extending mercy to others (Luke 6:36), and being willing to suffer for righteousness' sake (1 Pet. 2:20-21).

The Thessalonian believers suffered as a result of having received the gospel (1 Thess. 2:14). In spite of outward trials, they possessed inward joy. The indwelling Holy Spirit was the source of this joy (Gal. 5:22).

Christian joy is determined not by our external circumstances but by our personal relationship with the Lord. Paul and Silas illustrated this in their jail experience at Philippi (Acts 16:23-25). They rejoiced in the Lord in spite of their cruel beatings, chains, and imprisonment. How pleased Paul was to see the Thessalonians follow his example!

TESTIMONY OF THE THESSALONIANS (1 Thess. 1:7-10)

6. How did the Thessalonians become model Christians? (vs. 7,8)

The Thessalonian believers became examples for other believers. The word "ensamples" means "model" or "pattern." They were models for all the believers in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia, which composed all of Greece.

Paul called attention to the Thessalonians as publishers of the good news. This was further proof that they were chosen by God. After receiving the gospel, they made it known to others. They sounded it out, letting it ring out unimpeded. God's Word was "sounded out" (v. 8) like a trumpet echoing throughout all of Greece. It rang out everywhere in their own province of Macedonia and then on to neighboring Achaia. The two regions together represent a span of hundreds of miles, a great distance for the new believers' reputation to have spread.

Paul went on to say that the story of the Thessalonian believers is so widely known that he hears about it before he can tell it.

7. What was entailed in the conversion of the Thessalonians? (v. 9)

At the heart of the reports Paul heard was the account of the conversion of the Thessalonians to God from the worship of idols (Acts 14:15; 26:18-20). Paul's mention of idol worship suggests that the church predominantly consisted of Gentiles who had been pagans. The pagan people of this period worship *idols* not out of love, gratitude, or awe, but to placate the whims of the gods so that their own lives will go well. Pagan worship is like ritualized bribery, offering the gods a payoff in return for favors. Paul says that the Thessalonians serve *the living and true God*. God is often called "the living God" in contrast with idols, which have no life at all (compare Daniel 6:26).

This was a change in their worship practice, a practice they had probably been steeped in from their earliest years. It was a momentous inward change first of all (Titus 3:5). Then it was outwardly manifested as they entered an entirely new life of fellowship with God.

8. The Thessalonian Christians faced persecution when they turned from idols to the living and true God. What problems do we face today when we turn away from the idols of our culture?

As new believers reorient their priorities, their entire lives begin to transform. Everything—leisure time activities, spending habits, topics of conversation, even the way a person reacts to stress—changes. Often this change is startling to friends and relatives, and some relationships are broken in the process. This may be complicated further if the church does not quickly supply new relationships to support those who have lost the support of former friends. Some people find that becoming a believer costs them financially, as their previous job may have involved dishonest activities or required immoral behavior. At a spiritual level, a new believer may quickly face strong temptations or spiritual oppression as the devil tries to discourage him or her. Yet in all these trials, we have the power of the living and true God on our side.

9. While the Thessalonian Christians were serving God, for whom were they waiting? (v. 10)

The Thessalonian Christians had turned to God not only to serve Him but also to wait for the return of His Son from heaven. The concept of waiting conveys the idea of waiting with confidence and patience.

The new believers now have a different expectation of the future, a "hope" that impels them to be steadfast. Their hope is in the very *Son* of the one true, living God. He has died and risen again on their behalf and promised to return to gather them to himself. The rest of the world, still in rebellion against God, will be subject to His *wrath*, His holy judgment against those who have rebelled against Him. But the believers expectantly await their Lord's arrival to deliver them from wrath and bless them as His people.

The bleak hopelessness of paganism has been replaced. Gone is the expectation that life ends in cold, unforgiving death. The promises of Christ give us the confidence to expect much more.

Throughout 1 Thessalonians, Paul expressed his hope in the return of Christ (2:19; 4:16). The apostle believed that Christ's return could occur during his lifetime, for he spoke in 4:17 of "we which are alive" when He returns. By way of application, this means that we too should be looking for Christ's return from heaven for us at any moment.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** The best thanks we can give for others is to pray for them consistently (1 Thess. 1-1,2).
- 2.** Faith, hope, and love are characterized not just by attitudes but by actions that should mark every Christian life (vs. 3,4).
- 3.** If we are simply faithful messengers of God, His powerful Word will do the rest (v. 5).
- 4.** We will never be worthy examples to others if we lack joy in our lives (vs. 6,7).
- 5.** Humble faith speaks more loudly than any words (v. 8).
- 6.** Serving Christ and looking for His coming go hand in hand (vs. 9,10).

CONCLUSION

Change for a Lifetime

Paul describes Christian faith as more than mere ritual. It embraces every aspect of life, bringing purpose, direction, and confidence. It transforms ordinary people into world-changers. It gives meaning to the most mundane of daily affairs. It provides assurance that the future contains boundless blessing.

Knowing Jesus Christ makes us the people God intended us to be, living as God intended us to live. The change is public, visible, and unmistakable. And it continues for a lifetime.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we confess that sometimes we are content to keep You in a corner of our lives. Today we offer ourselves to You to be remade. We invite You into every part of us, so that we can be clearly Yours in every way. In Jesus' name, amen!

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

It is possible to be very busy in God's service but have the wrong motivation. For the next lesson, think about motives an individual might have that center on personal enhancement rather than God's glory. Next week's lesson is "Pleasing to God" and will show what Paul thought about this subject. Study 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20.

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