

# 1 Thessalonians 1

## INTRODUCTION:

- What does being a follower of Jesus look like on the ground? What is Christianity supposed to be all about vs. how is it perceived?
- Faith, love, and hope = major theme in 1 Thess and in Paul's writings
- Each of these things can be misunderstood. In our own country, you can have faith without evidence. You can have love without proof. You can claim to have hope and nobody can see it.
  - "I have faith" but you don't seem to value spiritual things
  - "I love her" but you treat her poorly and are incredibly selfish
  - "I have hope" but you panic at every trial and difficulty
- Is this what God expects or are we missing something?

*[1] Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*

- Paul elevates Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy by including them in his greeting, which isn't always the norm in the other letters. Why?
  - The Thessalonians were a little miffed that Paul hadn't come back to them. Instead, Paul sent Timothy from Athens to go to them and then Timothy met up w/ Paul in Corinth for a debrief
  - By elevating Silas and Timothy as a "we," he postures them not just as substitutes but as co-laborers
- This is an important leadership concept for us to grasp. Leadership in the body of Christ isn't a pyramid where there is the top person and then people beneath him. Instead, it is a plurality of leaders that serve the body.
  - For those who are developing leaders (your kids, employees, DG leader potentials, etc) it is important that you posture people and position them as leaders in reality, not just in theory
    - Example: This is why I have other elders preach not just when I am absent but when I am here. These men aren't substitutes; they are trusted and valued companions
- Paul does much the same thing here w/ his companions.
- Grace to you and peace = standard greeting

*[2] We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, [3] remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- When Paul prays and remembers them there are three specific things that he thinks about. For Paul, this is very much the DNA of the Christian life: Faith, Love, and Hope
  - In each of the terms in this triad we see a root and a fruit
- Faith = the bedrock of all that we are, without which it is impossible to please God, to be sure and certain of that which is unseen → In this case that Jesus is who he says he is, did what he claimed to do, and is coming again to judge and to rule

- Faith is the root - faith in the gospel. Faith results in work.
  - C.f. Ephesians 2:1-11
  - We are saved by faith alone, but it is an active faith. Faith spurs us to action, the same way Jesus' faith that God would raise him from the dead spurred him to go to the cross
  - Paul praises the Lord for the the Thessalonians faith as evidenced by their works, their changed lives. Faith leads to action.
- Love = what defines a believer today in the way that he interacts with the world around him. In other words, love leads to action
  - Love is the outpouring of the character of God in the world around us.
  - We love God by obeying his every word
  - We love one another by serving one another and forgiving one another like Jesus
  - We love the world by bringing the Good News to all people - even our enemies
  - Love results in labor. You can be dutiful without being loving, but that is not honoring to Christ. Having been forgiving, and having known great love, disciples are now - TODAY defined by love.
  - Perhaps the ultimate question we should be asking ourselves is, "Am I loving those around me?" This is a litmus test of our true self.
  - If faith is the foundation of our past transformation, love should define today
- Hope = the posture of anticipation that gives us confidence to face today and tomorrow knowing what is to come
  - Hope is not some wistful thinking like we use it in our daily lives, "I hope it won't rain."
  - Hope is an eager expectation of something that is promised.
  - Abraham looked forward with faith and hope to the fulfillment of God's promises
  - Moses looked forward with hope across the Red Sea, knowing that God had promised exodus
  - We have hope now as well in the return of Christ.
  - *2 Timothy 4:8, Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*
  - As the Thessalonians stand upon the bedrock of faith, laboring in love, they are steadfast in affliction because of hope in the resurrection and the return of Jesus
  - Hope leads to action
- As you look at the DNA of a believer, we:
  - Stand by faith alone, by grace alone, through God's provision, which leads to work
  - We live today a life defined by love - love for God and love for our neighbor. This love causes us to labor for others
  - We look forward to the future with hope, knowing that regardless of what may assail us today, we know there is a far country ahead of us that is greater. This hope causes us to live TODAY with a different perspective and set of values
- **Faith, love, and hope lead to action.**

- As Paul reflects upon his brief time w/ the Thessalonians, this is what he remembers about them. Their faith. Their love. Their hope.
  - Can you imagine being a people defined by these things?
  - Faith - not works, religion, ritual, or culture but FAITH in the living Christ
  - Love - not anger, resent, bitterness, infighting, backstabbing, or gossip but LOVE
  - Hope - not nail biting panic, worry, and anxiety, but HOPE in the face of death, and if death, then definitely turmoil of the day
- In light of these things...

*[4] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

- What was the evidence of their faith, love and hope? Changed lives. When Paul came, they responded to the gospel in action and he saw visible change.
- This change is the evidence for Paul that God has truly worked within them, chosen them, elected them
  - What does that mean? It means that God did the work in them first, not the other way around.
- Salvation isn't about the sinking Titanic, where God reaches out a hand and you have only to grasp. Salvation is a pool filled with dead bodies - dead for years - and God pulls them out and resurrects them to life. This is what choosing, election means. God moved, not you.
- This is an important theme in Thessalonians b/c the people were afraid they would somehow mess up their salvation by, for example, dying before Jesus came back
  - If God elected them. If God worked in them. If this is evidenced (as Paul claims). He wants to reassure them that they have no fear.
- What is the evidence of such a divine act? Paul gives four things:
  - They heard the gospel
  - The gospel worked in power of the Holy Spirit
  - There was evidence of conviction of sin and repentance as a response
- And there was more...

*You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. [6] And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, [7] so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.*

- Evidence = imitation of Paul and company as well as of the Lord
  - Duckling discipleship
  - Imitated b/c **Faith, love, and hope lead to action.** What did they imitate?
- Specifically, received the Word in affliction w/ supernatural joy
  - Just as Paul, Silas, and Timothy (and others) had done
- So amazing was their faithful SUFFERING that they became an example to the other believers in Macedonia (Philippians, the Boreans, etc), and in Achaia (ah kay ah).
  - Achaia is 300 miles from Thessaloniki... Pre-Internet
- We are moved by stories of heroic sacrifice.
  - Many remember the stories from ISIS when they were beheading

- Stories of believers within Iran, under Soviet Rule, or in China today
- We respect when missionaries and nationals suffer for Jesus
- Martyrdom - in some strange way - is extremely inspiring. Perhaps most obviously because it reminds us of Jesus.
  - Indeed, in the flesh it is hard to imagine something more Christlike than laying down your life in obedience to the Father
  - There is a special place for martyrs under the throne of God, Revelation says
- I want to have the kind of faith that stands as a testimony worthy of imitation. Don't you?
  - Wouldn't you be proud, in Christ, to be part of a church that stands so steadfast in the midst of suffering that people in Roanoke, Pittsburgh, and Boston have heard through word of mouth, not the internet, about the Lord's work here?
  - And after a month of time spent with Paul and his merry men!
  - This has nothing to do, primarily with Paul. This has to do with, as we see before - the gospel came to you not only in word, but in power and in the HS, and with full conviction" which lead to action and change

*[8] For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. [9] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you 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, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

- Paul comes full circle, referencing faith, hope, and love once again
- What Paul is doing here is thanking God for the Thessalonians and reminding them of their own testimony, the visible evidence of their salvation, so that they can rest assured in the future and labor in love today as they remember their faith in Jesus.
- All across Greece people have heard of the Thessalonian church. In obedience to the gospel, and in the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit, there is visible evidence of:
  - FAITH - They turned away from idols to serve towards God
  - LOVE - They serve the living and true God (and one another as we will see)
  - HOPE - They are waiting for the Son to return, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (so they have no fear of judgement)
- Author and Pastor Bill Hull wrote, "We judge ourselves based upon our intentions, but others judge us based upon our actions."
  - People knew of the Thessalonians b/c they didn't just learn about Jesus, they learned to obey Jesus by following and imitating Paul. This kind of faith, love, and hope change them so much so that the rest of Greece found out
- **Faith, love, and hope lead to action, and when people see change they see Jesus more clearly. That type of life is inspiring to other believers!**

#### CONCLUSION:

- One Sentence Summary: **Paul thanks God for the Thessalonian Church b/c he knows that they are true believers as evidenced by their faith, love, and hope which led them to action.**

- That's what this whole section is about. Paul praying for them and reminding them of their very real faith in Jesus as evidenced by their changed life.
- Some of you wonder where you stand with Jesus. You may wonder if, although you go to church, will go to heaven when you die. Paul writes these things in part to reveal evidence of salvation. Faith, Love, & Hope.
- FAITH - Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you from your sins or are you still trusting in Jesus plus \_\_\_\_\_? Have you come to believe in Jesus so much so that you consider him to be your king - your only king? This is the first evidence.
- LOVE - Are you growing in your love for God (seen as obedience to his Word) and for other people? Not, are you as loving as the next guy, but would those around you say you have grown in love over the course of your spiritual life towards family, friend, and foe? This is the second evidence.
- HOPE - In the midst of difficulty, trial, tribulation, persecution, are you panicking and anxious or are you growing in steadfast confidence in the Lord? This kind of peace that transcends all understanding is Paul's third evidence in this section.
- Notice that each of these are scalable. You can grow in love. You can grow in hope. You can grow in faith. The question is - are they evident in your life? If they are not, you have cause of concern, to test if your salvation is genuine.
- Take some time to talk through the following questions at your table or journal about them this week.

## Table Talk / Journaling Prompts

- Are you placing your faith in King Jesus, having turned from your old way of life and worship to follow him and only him?
- As a believer, have you grown in love for people and for God? Do you have a desire to obey God? Do you have a desire to serve people?
- When disaster strikes, do you find that you panic or pray? Are you clinging to God when difficult comes or are you blaming him and running away?
- Look at the testimony of the Thessalonians. What is your testimony? How did you (1) turn from idols to (2) serve the Living God, and (3) eagerly wait for his return?