

6. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-20

The establishment of the church in Thessalonica was much more difficult and dangerous than Paul's work at Philippi. They seemed to have gotten off to a good start with many converts, as recorded in Acts 17:2-11:

2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

However, jealous Jews created a riot and disturbance, forming a mob and rushing Jason's house, seeking Paul and Silas. Not finding them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials (Acts 17:5-6a).

They accused them of defying Caesar's decrees in Acts 17:6b-9:

"These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." 8 When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9 Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

The situation became so strained and dangerous that the brothers sent Paul and Silas out of town to Berea by night. In Acts 17:13-15, we learn that the Jews did not give up but pursued Paul and Silas to Berea, from which Paul once again had to flee to Athens.

It is to this church, established under great trial and tribulation, that Paul writes this letter, duly noting the troubles they had had in 1 Thess 3:7: "7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you because of your faith."

The letter, written from c. 48 to c. 54 A.D., confirms the accuracy of the gospel accounts and Luke's account, illustrating that the gospel events from Christ birth to resurrection, were not myths concocted toward the end of the century.

Greetings and Prayers: 1 Thess 1:1-3

1 Thess 1:1

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

Paul includes in the salutation Silas and Timothy as fellow workers, addressing the church of the Thessalonians. Paul states his usual prayer of grace and peace.

1 Thess 1:2-3

2 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's prayer includes rhetorically interesting structures noted for their simple harmony and beauty:

Work produced by faith.

Labor prompted by love.

Endurance inspired by hope.

The actors in our lives are faith, hope, and love. The objects in our lives are work, labor, and endurance. And the acts of our lives are to produce, to prompt, and to inspire. Tied together, as they are, they become a plan for minute by minute daily living: productive, timely, and inspirational.

The Gospel, the Source of All Power 1 Thess 1:4-10

1 Thess 1:4-5

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

The instrument by which God chooses us is the gospel—a gospel of words and power. Later Paul will write in 2 Thess 2:13-14:

... from the beginning God **chose** you to be saved through the sanctifying work of **the Spirit** and through belief in **the truth**. 14 He called you to this through our **gospel**, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul described this power in Rom 1:16: “16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .”

1 Thess 1:6-7

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere.

This passage shows the multiplying effect of the gospel where conversion leads to conversion. The Thessalonian Christians imitated Paul; believers in Macedonia and Achaia modeled themselves after the Thessalonians; their faith shined everywhere. Today, churches may generate this same effect throughout the world by doing just what the New Testament says to do—nothing more. Paul also described this multiplying effect to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:2:

2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

1 Thess 1:8b-10

Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell 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 rescues us from the coming wrath.

Actions speak louder than words. When the life and character of a church is abiding in the gospel, everyone will come to know it. In our present world, have we turned from the materialism and fleshly pleasures around to us to serve the living and true God? Are we waiting for his Son from heaven? Will we be rescued from the coming wrath?

Verse 10 reflects the theme: Are you ready?