

AUTHENTIC:

REAL FAITH
IN REAL LIFE

1 Thessalonians – Lesson 1

The Gospel's Power: Authentic Transformation

Review the background

Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia, in northern Greece. The apostle Paul and his co-worker Silas traveled to Thessalonica during Paul's second missionary journey, between A.D. 49 and A.D. 51. In the book of Acts, chapter 17, there is an account of Paul's experience proclaiming the gospel of Christ in Thessalonica.



Paul's visit was brief. For about a month, Paul preached in the synagogue the good news that Jesus is the long-expected Christ—the promised King over God's Kingdom. Although many heard and believed the Christian message; nevertheless, the teaching of the gospel sparked intense opposition from others in the synagogue. An angry mob formed, inciting a riot in the city and accusing Christians of promoting treason against Caesar. Paul and Silas were forced to flee from Thessalonica.

Although Paul and Silas escaped with their lives and went on to announce the

gospel in other cities, they were intensely concerned about the welfare of the new believers they had left behind. Paul traveled on to Berea, and then to Athens, but he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage the young church and to report back about their status. The letter of 1 Thessalonians is Paul's glad response to the good report he received from Timothy.

Examine the text:

The Gospel brings spiritual life to Thessalonica

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
 - a. What visible indications of commitment to the gospel are evident in the lives of the Thessalonian believers? (1:3)
 - b. Based on Timothy's encouraging report, what does Paul conclude about the impact of the gospel in the Thessalonians' lives? (1:5)
 - c. How do these Thessalonian Christians demonstrate changed lives—authentic transformation that results from the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives? (1:6-7)
 - d. How did these believers participate in the spread of the gospel message? (1:8)
 - e. What two indications of authentic faith are described in (1:9-10)?

Explore the concepts:

2. Read Acts 17:1-15 to understand the cultural barriers to the gospel.
 - a. As you reflect on the hostility that Paul and Silas experienced in Thessalonica, how is the Thessalonians' transformative response to Paul's ministry a surprising result?
 - b. To what do you attribute the Thessalonians' eagerness to proclaim the gospel? (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)
 - c. In what way has the gospel message provided ultimate **hope** for all believers, even in the midst of rejection and persecution? (1:10)

- d. What barriers do we face in *our* culture that hinder *us* from sharing the gospel in our neighborhood and in our relationships? What resources do we have to overcome these barriers?
3. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 describes how the Thessalonian believers changed the direction of their lives. They turned from serving idols to serve the living God and to wait for Christ's coming.
- a. Although we don't worship the idols that dominated pagan thought in the first century, we may find that we have been serving a different kind of idol. An idol is anything that you have elevated to be an ultimate priority in your life. An idol is something other than God that you consider essential for fulfillment and security. What sorts of idols are prominent in our 21st century culture? What earthly things do we depend on for security and significance?
- b. *For personal reflection:* It's hard to recognize that something has become an idol in our lives. It's like addiction; we live in a state of denial. Pray that God will reveal His wisdom to you in this regard.
If there is something that you fear has become an idol for you, what practical steps can you take to break free from this misplaced priority?
4. Read again 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10. Paul describes the evidence of authentic faith in the lives of these believers as both working and also waiting. He describes their lives as lives of *serving God* in the present and also *waiting for the return of Christ* in the future.
- a. How was the hope of Christ's coming Kingdom especially relevant to the Thessalonian believers? How would this hope strengthen them to live lives of service to God?

- b. How does a life perspective of *waiting* for the return of Christ supply motivation for us to *serve* God in the present?
- c. How would your life change if you allowed this confidence in Christ's return to permeate your thinking? How would it alleviate your fears?

People of Authentic Faith

Authentic faith is not something we generate within ourselves; rather, authentic faith begins with an individual's choice to incline her heart towards God. Authentic faith begins with a personal willingness to respond to the gospel message and to live a life with God.

This willing choice is met with the empowering embrace of God and authentic faith is born through the power of the Holy Spirit. God informs our faith; God nurtures our faith; God empowers our faith. God adopts us into His family of faith and we are loved as His own children. We are loved just as God the Father loves His Son.

Our adoption into God's family is only possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus died so that we may live. Jesus rose from the dead so that we may know that we also will live after death. We will live for eternity with God. It is our faith in Jesus that enables us to experience authentic transformation in this life, and an abiding hope for the next. Through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, our work of faith, our labor of love, and our steadfast hope will be evident in our lives.

Exalt the Savior

Take a moment to think about the cost of your salvation. God the Father sent God the Son to live a holy and blameless life—a life of perfect righteousness—and then to give His life willingly to pay the penalty for our failure. As we turn to Him in faith, we are connected with Him in an unbreakable relationship of love and provision and protection. Jesus gave His life; will you commit yours?

- Pray to Him right now and offer thanksgiving for His salvation.

The Gospel brings the power of God for authentic life change