

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS LESSON 1 (Chapters 1-2)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“The Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God” (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Welcome to our study of the Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The Book of Acts provides much of the history for the letters that we find Paul writing. The background for these books is found in Acts 17. Here’s what happened. As Paul went into the region of Thessalonica, he found a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, he went into the synagogue and preached Christ, proving and affirming from the Scriptures that He was the Messiah. As a result, some of the Jews, and a multitude of devout Greeks, including a few leading women in that city, obeyed the Gospel and were saved. As a result, the church began there in Thessalonica. But not everyone was happy. Some of the Jews who did not believe the Gospel, and who were bent on their own power and pride, caused a persecution to arise. Members of the church—specifically, Jason and his household—were taken as surety. Paul was ushered out of the city. Thus, the Bible makes this comment about the Bereans (which relates to the Thessalonians): “These were more fair minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). No doubt there were some in Thessalonica who were noble and fair minded. But many of the Jews were not. As a result, there were problems from without, as well as from within, with which Paul dealt in his writings.

The Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians deal mainly with problems related to the Second Coming of Christ. Some of these people had not been Christians for too long, but had been Christians long enough to have had a friend or relative die in Christ. The question then arose as to what would happen to the Christians who had died and gone on, as well as what would happen to the Christians who were alive when the Lord returned. Paul deals with these issues in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff. In fact, every chapter in 1 Thessalonians will close with something related to the Second Coming. This book is permeated with concepts related to the Second Coming.

However, there also are in these books some basic principles for Christian living. For example, in chapter 1 Paul writes to encourage the Thessalonian Christians in their faithfulness, their labor of love, and their hope of patience. In chapter 2, he answers some questions that have been raised, and he deals with some criticisms. In chapter 4 he deals with problems concerning fornication, idleness, and the Christians’ need to respect elders. But again, the main problem is related to the Second Coming of Christ and the future resurrection. Paul discussed how these things related to their lives, and what they should be doing in response to the Second Coming.

In chapter 1 we see that the Christians in Thessalonica had a triune approach to Christianity and to their faith. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 we read, “We remember without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” How did these people approach Christianity? Paul commended

them for their work of faith. Faith is not something that “just happens” or that a person “just feels” as he sits around. Faith is something that we do. We put our trust in God. Faith is based on Scripture. Romans 10:17 teaches us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Faith is never just sitting around and waiting. Faith is active (Jas. 2:14ff.). James said, “You should measure your faith without your works, and I’ll show you my faith by my works.” Can you prove your faith without ever doing anything? Absolutely not! You cannot prove you are faithful unless you have done something. Thus, in Hebrews 11, every time we see the statement, “by faith,” there is an action that accompanies it. Faith is always active and working. “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Jesus said in John 9:4 that we must work the works of Him who sent us while it is day, for the night is coming when no one can work.

What was the motive for the Thessalonians’ work of faith? It was their labor of love. What we do for the cause of Christ must be motivated by love. Ephesians 4:15 teaches us that we are to “speak the truth in love.” Mark 12:30 teaches us, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” How do we get a labor of love? We first must recognize exactly how much God loved us, and allow that to be the motivating factor. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). When we think about how deeply God loved us, we need to remember that He sent His own Son to save us. God “wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). “The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). When we realize that God sent His Son from the ivory palaces of Heaven to live and die as a man on Earth, that will motivate our labor of love. This is what propelled the Thessalonians every day to get out and work for God. They had a work of faith motivated by a labor of love, which caused patience (or perseverance) of hope.

What caused these Christians to endure? What made them, in the midst of trials and troubles in a sin-sick society, keep on keeping on? It was their perseverance of hope. Where would we be without hope? “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19). We live “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Tit. 1:2). It is this hope that keeps us going every day. Paul said in Romans 5 and in Romans 8 that we are saved in hope. It is not that hope itself saves us. But it does keep us focused on salvation. What do we mean by “perseverance of hope”? Jesus said, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). In 1 John 2:25 we read, “This is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.” We have hope. We are not talking about wishful thinking. We are speaking of something about which we can be sure, and that we longingly anticipate. We have the hope of living with God beyond this life if we remain faithful. The Thessalonians had a work of faith motivated by a labor of love, which was deeply rooted in the perseverance of hope that God had given them.

However, in 1 Thessalonians 1 Paul also reminds these Christians of their election, and how they were chosen by God. When we talk about election as it is used here and in 1 Thessalonians 4, we are not talking about God somehow choosing some people to be saved and some to be lost without those people having any say-so in the matter. Election is this: God votes for us; the devil votes against us; but we cast the deciding ballot. God has already voted for all men, has He not? He wants “all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). The devil is actively doing everything he can to cause everyone to be lost. We see that in Scripture. So who makes the final decision? We do! Notice 2 Peter 1:10 where Peter said, “Be even more diligent to make your call and election

sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.” Who is responsible for making our calling and election sure? We are. We must be more diligent to make our own calling and election sure. We make the final decision because we are free moral agents. We decide whether we go to Heaven or to Hell. Now, of course, this is possible only through God’s grace. The devil is doing everything he can to tempt us. But we are free moral agents. We are the ones who decide whether we go to Heaven or to Hell. Joshua said, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River” (Josh. 24:15). Those people had a choice to make, and so do we. Not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” will go to Heaven. Rather, those who do the will of the Father will be the ones who go to Heaven.

Another thing we learn in 1 Thessalonians 1 is that the powerful Gospel which these people had received gave them great assurance. They had assurance of their faith because of their obedience to a powerful Gospel. They had not received their salvation as some sort of ordinary thing. Rather, it had been received with power. The powerful Gospel is what gave them this great assurance. The powerful Gospel is what gives every Christian true assurance. Our hope and assurance is not based in words, thinking, or ideas of men. Our hope and assurance are based on the power of the Gospel. In Romans 1:16 Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation.” Where is the power? It is in the Gospel—the good news about Jesus Christ and how He came to Earth, lived a perfect life, was crucified, was buried, and was raised on the third day to be resurrected to Heaven. It is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that the Christian’s assurance lies. You can be sure that it is something we can know beyond the shadow of a doubt. Here’s what is great about Christianity. We do not have to worry. We do not have to wonder. And we do not have to doubt. If we have obeyed the Gospel, and if we are living faithfully before God, we can be sure that we are right with Him. In 1 John 5:13 John said, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” John did not say that people had to wonder or merely have some sort of “earthly hope.” Rather, he said that people could know that they were saved.

Why did the Thessalonians have such great hope and assurance? They had thoroughly changed their lives. They ever stand as an example of true repentance. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 we read,

“They themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

This was true repentance, which is a turning from sin to God. And after their repentance, they then went to work to serve the true, living God. How is repentance defined? It is a 180-degree turn from sin to God. That is what God expects us to do. In Luke 3:6-8, certain elite Jews came out to be baptized by John the Immerser. But he said, “You need to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.” What does that tell us? It tells us that repentance is not just saying, “I’m sorry.” In 2 Corinthians 7:10 we are told that “godly sorrow produces repentance.” But sorrow in and of itself is not repentance. No doubt the Thessalonians were sorrowful for their sins. But their sorrow motivated them to turn to God from idols in order to serve the true and living God. You can tell if a person is truly repentant by the works that he does. In Matthew 21:28-30 Jesus gave an illustration. He said that a father had two sons. He said to one, “Go work in my field today.” The son said that he would, but he never did. Then the man said to his second son, “Go work in my field today.”

The son said that he would not, but later changed his mind, and went and worked in the field. Jesus asked, "Which of these two did the will of the father—the son who said he would go work, but never did, or the son who said that he would not work, but changed his mind and followed up by going to work in the father's field?" The Jews said, "The latter." They were right. Jesus' teaching was that repentance was a changed will that leads to a changed way.

In chapter 2 we also learn concerning the Thessalonians that Paul's preaching of the Gospel was not in vain. There were some who heard the Word and obeyed it. There were some who heard the Word and rejected it. But the preaching of the Gospel is never in vain. God said in Isaiah 55:11, "My Word shall not return to Me void, but shall accomplish what I please." What does that mean? Whether people reject God's Word and are lost, or whether people obey it and are saved, God's Word always accomplishes its purpose. God has revealed Himself to man, and has given people an opportunity. But they are responsible for obeying God's Word. The power is in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). Hebrews 4:12 is a powerful verse about God's Word having inherent power to change people's lives. "The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Paul writes so that people will not know that the power is not in him or in them, but that the power is in the Gospel. Preaching God's Word is never done in vain.

However, there will be persecution. In verse 2 Paul writes about this persecution, and mentions that it actually had been good, so that the Gospel might be promoted and move forward. Preaching the Gospel, Paul knew, went hand in hand with persecution. Paul let persecution, for him, be like pouring gasoline on a fire. In Acts 14:22 Paul said, "We must, through many tribulations, enter the kingdom of God." Paul did not get discouraged. Rather, he said, "This is the way it must be, so let's let it motivate us." In Acts 17 when Paul was persecuted, he went on preaching the Gospel. In Acts 19 and other chapters, as persecution arose, it motivated Paul to keep doing the will of God. We must realize that persecution will happen. But it can be a sign that we are living correctly. In 2 Timothy 3:12 we are told, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." When persecution comes, let's not get frowns on our faces and think that God is against us or that we are doing something wrong. The Bible says, "Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). Persecution is something we can view with joy because we are fulfilling the will of God.

Along with the privilege of preaching also comes the responsibility of pleasing only God. Paul understood this. In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 Paul wrote, "As we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts." Paul had said that preaching the Gospel was not in vain, and that persecution actually had worked out for everyone's benefit. And, whether or not either of those things was true, Paul still had to preach the Gospel, trying to please only God. Too many people miss the mark because they are trying to please the wrong person. Paul said in Galatians 1:10, "If I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." We need to realize that when we obey the Gospel, we dedicate ourselves and say, "I'm going to please only one person." "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33). We must realize that our main goal as children of God is not to make the world happy, to take a poll, or to hold our finger in the air to see which way the wind is blowing. Our main goal has been, and always will be, to please God and Him alone. If our goal is to please God, and the goal of others is to please God, we will work together in harmony. That is why we must preach the Word, and "be instant in

season and out of season.” That is why we must get away from manmade ideas and traditions, regardless of whether or not people get offended. Galatians 4:16 teaches us that we do not become someone’s enemy when we preach the truth. Paul asked, “Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” When we say what God said, we have one responsibility—to please Him and Him alone. Our lives must be about pleasing God. I am not saying that we should be mean or unkind. That’s not what I’m talking about. Our main goal in this life should be to please God. If God is happy, then the world does not matter. As long as we are pleasing God, it does not matter what the world or society thinks. We must put God first in our lives.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:5-6 Paul notes how some people had done a lot of harm in the religious world as a result of doing things from an incorrect motive. Some were preaching for money. Some were motivated by power and pride. The point that Paul was making is that he was not doing that. He was not preaching to make money or to gain power or pride. A lot of harm has been done in the religious world by those who were “religious leaders,” and who sounded good, but were in it only for the money. We’ve seen such people. Religious leaders would get on television and say, “Send us ‘X’ amount of dollars, because you’ll be helping so-and-so or such-and-such to obey the Gospel.” But, come to find out, they were padding their own pockets by taking people’s Social Security checks in order to fund their own luxurious lifestyles. That is not the way Christianity works. Paul said that he did not do such things. Nor is it what preaching the Gospel is about today. We are not in it for the money. Rather, we are in it to save people’s souls.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 we see a powerful verse. Those to whom the Gospel is preached also have a responsibility, which is to study (Acts 17:11) and, if it is the Word of God, to accept it as truth. Paul wrote, “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” Paul was pointing out something noteworthy about the Christians in Thessalonica. When he preached the Gospel, they did not accept it as the words of men. Rather, they studied what had been said, saw it as the Word of God, and accepted it as such. The responsibility of every person who hears the Gospel preached is to do two things. First, the person must make sure that what is being heard is true to the Word of God. Second, if that is the case, it must be obeyed because God said it, not because man said it. In Acts 17 Paul went into the region of Berea and preached the Gospel. The people received it with readiness of mind, and were ready to hear what he had to say. But what did they do? Did they simply automatically accept what he said? No. They “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (vs. 11). They heard the Word. They checked it to make sure that it was from God. And they obeyed it because God said it, not because men had said it. When the Word is preached, hearers have a responsibility to make sure that what is being taught is true. Someone might ask, “But there is so much error, so how do we do that?” Here’s how. There is a very simple way. When the Gospel is preached, make sure that someone says, “Here is where the Bible says that.” Do not let someone say to you, “We believe...,” or “Popular opinion says...,” or “So-and-so, who’s a religious leader, says....” If you want to be sure that you are right with God, make sure that what you are hearing comes from the Bible. When someone says that to be saved, you must do such-and-such, and then tells you where the Bible says that, get out your Bible, study it, and see for yourself. Then, if it is true, do not obey it because that person said it. Obey it because God said it. If it is true, you have a responsibility to accept it as the Word of God.

Just like those people in the first century, we must become imitators of the churches of Christ in that area. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14 Paul commended those Christians because they had become imitators of him and of the churches in that region. We need to do the same thing. What are we striving to be? Aren't we striving to be the people about whom we read in the New Testament—the church that Jesus established? We need to be like the Christians of the first century. Acts 2:42 tells us what they did. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." How can we be imitators of first-century Christians? We can do that by continuing in the apostles' doctrine—not the teaching of men. We need to fellowship the same kinds of people with whom the apostles had fellowship. We need to break bread as the apostles did, and pray as the apostles did. We need to teach as they taught. We must continue doing what they did. How do we do that? We see what they did, and then we follow that pattern. Thus, we need to imitate the teaching found in the New Testament.

We also need to realize that evil people and Satan will do everything they can to hinder us in this endeavor. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 that certain evil people had gotten in the way, and that they would be punished for that. Furthermore, Satan himself was trying to hinder the spread of the Word of God (vs. 18). There are evil people who do not want the Gospel to be preached because it contradicts their lifestyles and makes them feel guilty when we preach about righteousness, godly living, and the grace of God that teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly. There will always be people who will object to the preaching of the Gospel because they want to live in sin and do what they want. Evil people will always try to hinder the preaching the Gospel. But we can know that one day those people will reap a very serious consequence. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7 Paul wrote that the Lord will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on those who do not obey the Gospel and those who do not live according to the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Their day of punishment is coming. But let's remember who is really behind it. Satan is the real hindrance to the Gospel message today. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul said very clearly, "Satan hindered us." At times, Satan does what he can to hinder God's people. He did that in the Book of Job. The events recorded in Job 1 and 2—the death of Job's children, the loss of all Job's wealth, the loss of Job's health—were the results of Satan's efforts. Let's realize that Satan is an active hindrance to Gospel preaching and to true Christian living. In 1 Peter 5:8 we are told, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." It is true that Satan is doing everything he can to hinder us.

Do not let him hinder you. Are you sure that you have done what the Christians in Thessalonica did? Are you sure that you are right with God? Have you believed in Jesus as the Son of God? In John 8:24 Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I am He, you will surely die in your sins." Having believed, have you repented of your sins? Have you turned to God from sin, in order to serve the true and living God (1 Thess. 1:9)? Have you confessed the name of Jesus before men (Mt. 10:32-33)? Have you been baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38)? If you have not done those things, then the devil is still having his way with you. You need to change your life and obey the Gospel. I say that so that you can have the hope of Heaven. May each of us be really committed to living for Christ every day. May we have a work of faith, a labor of love, and a perseverance of hope—knowing that we are trying every day to do the best we can to serve God. May God bless each of us as we strive to live for the Gospel of Christ every day of our lives.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS LESSON 1
(CHAPTERS 1-2)**

1. What is the main problem with which the Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians deal?
2. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul said that he remembered three things associated with the Christians in Thessalonica. What were those three things?
3. According to James 2:18, how do Christians show their faith in God?
4. Titus 1:2 mentions something that is intended to keep Christians going day after day. What is it?
5. According to 1 John 2:25, what has God promised faithful Christians?
6. 1 Thessalonians 1 Paul spoke of the "election" of the Christians in Thessalonica. In that election, God casts one vote and Satan casts one vote. Who casts the deciding vote?
7. In 2 Peter 1:10, what did Peter urge Christians to do?
8. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, what did Paul urge Christians to do?
9. In Joshua 24:15, what did Joshua urge the Israelites to do?
10. In Romans 1:16, what did Paul have to say about the power of the Gospel?
11. What did the apostle John say in 1 John 5:13 about Christians' salvation?
12. According to 1 Thessalonians 1:9, the Christians in Thessalonica had turned from doing one thing to doing something else. From what did they turn, and what had replaced their previous actions?
13. According to 1 Thessalonians 1:10, the Christians in Thessalonica were waiting on someone for a specific reason. On whom were they waiting, and why were they waiting?
14. When, in Luke 3:6-8, certain Jews went to John to be baptized, what did he tell them to do?
15. According to 2 Corinthians 7:10, what produces repentance?
16. What, exactly, is true repentance?
17. In Isaiah 55:11, what did God say about His Word?
18. What important point is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 about preaching the Gospel?
19. What important point is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:13?
20. Who, according to 1 Thessalonians 2:18, had hindered Paul in his preaching efforts?