



# 1 Thessalonians

## Christian Conduct & The Lord's Return

1 Thessalonians 1:4–10

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### Introduction

Paul reminded us in verse 3 of three virtues that accompany salvation: the good works produced by faith, the spiritual self-sacrifice produced by love, and the patience produced by the assured hope of the Lord's coming. Throughout the remainder of chapter 1, Paul gives specific examples of how these virtues played out in the lives of the Thessalonian believers.

### Thanksgiving for the Reception of the Gospel (1:2–10)

One of Paul's primary thoughts toward the Thessalonian believers was thankfulness. And when He gave thanks to God, his thoughts were primarily concerned with their salvation and conduct.

#### Assurance of Their Election (v. 4)

Paul continues his thought from verse 3 with a statement of confidence about their election. Election is an activity which occurred in the divine council of eternity past. It involves God's choosing of individuals (cf. Rom 16:13) to be recipients of His divine grace in salvation. As believers, we can only marvel at the fact of this because God chose us as objects of mercy before the world was even created.

As we gaze out today across the vast sea of humanity, it is impossible to tell with certainty who is and who is not a genuinely elect individual. All we can say is that those who are elect will at some point in their lives be genuinely converted. Furthermore, they will retain their faith (or "persevere" in the faith) all the way to glory (Rom 8:28–30). However, many have made false professions of faith and put on a good show for others. Still others come into the assembly having the appearance of a genuine believer, but are really false teachers (wolves dressed in sheep's clothing). But notice here how Paul is able to have assurance of these believers' election/salvation. His assurance is rooted in their testimony. Those who are doing good works (James 2:21), showing sacrificial love (1 John 4:7), and are waiting patiently and expectantly

for the Lord's return (Rom 8:25) are showing good evidence that their salvation (and by extension their election) is genuine.

### **Further Reasons for Thanksgiving (vv. 5–10)**

Paul doesn't end his thanksgiving with the simple fact of the Thessalonians' salvation. Paul is thankful for the whole process of gospel ministry: the preaching of the gospel, the reception of the gospel, the fruit produced by the gospel, and the further propagation of the gospel.

#### *God's Blessing in the Preaching of the Gospel (vv. 5–7)*

These verses demonstrate how effective gospel ministry takes place in a new setting. When we consider the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20), there is a self-perpetuating aspect to the activities of gospel ministry. Salvation is not meant to be received and hidden away. It is meant to be shared with others. Notice how verses 5–7 form a chain in this process.

#### *The Coming of the Gospel (v. 5)*

Paul and his fellow missionaries brought the gospel message with them when they arrived in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9). But the gospel was more than a set of memorized verses or scripted speech. In addition to being spoken by Paul, the gospel had inherent power to save (Rom 1:16) through the working of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts. It also had the power to fully convict (i.e. with "much assurance") the hearts of the elect to bring them to salvation. In addition, Paul appeals to the attitude or manner that he and his companions had while they were among the Thessalonians. They came with pure motives and actions (see 2:1–12).

#### *The Reception of the Gospel (v. 6)*

When the Thessalonian believers first became Christians, the circumstances brought two seemingly opposing issues: affliction and joy. The affliction arose from the persecution the believers experienced because of believing the gospel. But despite those sufferings, these believers had joy from the Holy Spirit because of two things. 1) They had an expectant hope that God would bring about justice at Christ's Second Coming; and 2) they knew that patiently enduring trials produces godliness in the life of a believer (James 1:2–4).

One of the key changes that immediately results from salvation is a

desire to imitate both Christ and His followers. This is all part of the process of sanctification which God uses to transform believers more and more into His image.

#### *The Example of the Gospel (v. 7)*

The result of their joyful attitude in the midst of affliction was that they became an example to other believers throughout the region. The former nation of Greece was divided into two regions by the Romans: Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south. Their testimony was of such a caliber that it was well spoken of in their homeland (Macedonia) and that of their neighbors (Achaia).

#### God's Blessing in the Testimony of the Thessalonians (vv. 8–10)

At this point you may be asking, “How exactly were the Thessalonians an example to others?” These last verses of chapter 1 provide both the “how” and the result of their example.

#### *The Extent of Their Testimony (v. 8)*

Verse 8 opens by stating that “the word of the Lord has sounded forth...” You’ll recall that this letter was written while Paul was in Corinth in the province of Achaia. It is remarkable that even as Paul entered the city there, he needed only mention the Thessalonians and the Corinthians would already have an understanding of the Thessalonians’ testimony. Their faith had exceeded the pace of Paul’s missionary travels! And not only was it known in Greece, but also in every place that Paul went to.

#### *The Content of Their Testimony (vv. 9–10)*

Instead of Paul telling the Corinthians and others what had happened in Thessalonica when he first arrived there, they were reporting these events to Paul! Notice the full scope of their conversion and walk with the Lord: they turned (v. 9), they served (v. 9), and they waited (v. 10).

The first thing the Thessalonians did was to *turn*. This term is basically equivalent to the New Testament doctrine of repentance. Faith and repentance act as two sides of the same coin. So when Paul speaks of turning, he is talking about their initial conversion. Notice the twofold aspect to repentance. It is toward God. When a person is converted, their mind is now set toward seeking after God. This is why the Thessalonians were imitating both Paul and Christ. Their hearts were inclined toward God and His people. But the Thessalonians also

demonstrated repentance by turning away from idols. A true believer is not only seeking after godliness, but is eschewing all forms of evil and ungodliness. This includes many things that the world finds acceptable and praiseworthy.

The second thing the Thessalonians did was to *serve*. Their faith was not simply an intellectual agreement with the claims of the gospel. It produced in them a motivation and desire to serve in the context of the local church. The result was a multiplication of good works and sacrificial labors of love (v. 3). Just as with the Thessalonians, every true believer today will also have a similar motivation and desire to serve. Christianity is not simply a life of receiving blessings from others. It is also about serving them, just as Christ demonstrated for us (John 13:3–15).

The third thing the Thessalonians did was to *wait*. In the midst of severe persecutions, it can be tempting for believers to think they are in the midst of the prophesied tribulation where God's wrath will be poured out upon the earth. But every born-again Christian today has a blessed hope (Titus 2:13)! We will be delivered from the coming time of wrath. Translation: Christians will be raptured (removed from the earth) prior to the coming time of wrath and not have to endure that awful time. But for those who don't believe, be assured — God's wrath is coming! Verse 10 goes on to explain what enables this deliverance to take place. Notice the four statements mentioned about the Deliverer:

- 1) He is God's Son
- 2) His origin is heavenly — He is God! (John 3:13)
- 3) He was raised from the dead. This is further evidenced by the fact that He comes from heaven. After His resurrection, the Scriptures say He ascended into heaven and awaits God's command to return (Acts 1:9; Eph 1:20; Heb 8:1; 1 Thess 4:16).
- 4) His name is Jesus! No other person in all of history has both the power and the authority to deliver believers from the wrath of God. In this statement, Paul is alluding to the pretribulation rapture of the church. There will be much more to say about this when we near the end of chapter 4.

Christians have been waiting for the Lord's return for nearly 2,000 years now. But we don't grow weary in waiting because of the delay. This hope is an assured promise because it is based on His deity, His authority, and the fact of His resurrection! As we wait, we would do well to consider the example of the Thessalonians! ~AWB