

1st Thessalonians

Tease: What's a reputation worth? Have you ever considered the value of your reputation? Join us this Sunday, June 18, 2017, as Pastor Rich begins our study of First Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul begins the letter to the Thessalonians with a discussion of their reputation, how their reputation precedes them. Sunday School 9 am, Worship 10 am. If you cannot join us in person why not join us online on our website, Facebook live or YouTube live.

Series Introduction

We continue in our study through the Pauline Epistles this morning as we move into a set of books that are often referred to as the Eschatological Epistles. Eschatological deals with Eschatology which is the theological study of End Times, or more specifically "last things." Both 1st Thessalonians and 2nd Thessalonians have sections that deal with Eschatology. In fact, every chapter in 1st Thessalonians ends with a reference to the 2nd Coming of Jesus.

With each new book, we study I like to begin with an overall theme that the general context supports. Here in 1st Thessalonians, I think a good overall theme for the book is:

Let's Get Ready to Rapture

So we will be seeing that title as we go through our study of the book of 1st Thessalonians.

Book Introduction

Date

Depending on when you date Paul's writing of the book of Galatians 1st Thessalonians is either the first or second book we have in the New Testament. Galatians may have been written two or three years earlier. Dating of this book is pretty simple to conclude due to some specific statements which correlate with archaeological evidence and documentary evidence.

Acts 17 and 18 make it clear that the Apostle Paul wrote 1st Thessalonians while in Corinth. 1st Thessalonians corroborates that fact. In the temple of Apollos at Delphi (near Corinth) dates Gallio's service as proconsul in Achaia to AD 51-52. Gallio is specifically talked about in Acts 18:12-17 which sets Paul's time in Corinth in ad 51.

Author

Internal evidence, meaning from within the book, is clear that the author of the book is the Apostle Paul.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (ESV)

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.

It has only been challenged in recent years by those seeking to rewrite the word of God. There are a couple important things for us to take note of in verse 1.

Notice that Paul does not identify himself as the Apostle Paul as he does most of the time, especially in later epistles. This does not mean that he was not yet an apostle. I think it indicates that he did not believe he needed to remind the Thessalonians of this reality.

The 2nd thing to take notice of is that Paul shares the masthead with Silvanus and Timothy. There is some debate about how Paul does this and what it means. Some scholars argue that Silvanus or Silas and Timothy are only included in the greetings. While others argue that they were participant in the writing of the letter. There are occasions when Paul uses a plural and other times he uses singular. This leads me to conclude that all three participated in the writing, but the writing was principally from Paul.

Recipients

The city of Thessolinika had been a prosperous city for hundreds of years. It was situated on the banks of a harbor that provided protection and simplicity of travel. The city was also the intersection of two major Roman roads. The Ignatian way which came from Rome to the East and another road which came to the south from the Danube River. This meant that the city received a great deal of income from the transportation in and out of the area by both land and sea.



In 168 BCE Thessalonica became the capital of Macedonia. It was a free city which means that it was ruled by its own citizens. It is believed that there about 200,000 people living in Thessalonica at the time Paul was there.

During Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey Paul traveled the approximate 100 miles from Philippi through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica to plant a church there. Acts 16-18 cover this part of his travel. He customarily went to the synagogue upon arrival in a new city. We know from Dr. Luke's account in Acts that some prominent Jews and some wealthy women were saved and made up the charter members of the church there. In Acts 17:5-9 we discover that the so effective was the ministry that the rulers of the area got upset and evicted

the team from Thessalonica. Timothy would be sent back to Thessalonica to lead them for awhile.

Purpose

Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to write this letter to the Thessalonians to deal with some issues in the church after they were forced to leave. Paul refuted the false charges made by the local enemies of the gospel. The local leaders in Thessalonica accused Paul's team of preaching the gospel for their financial gain. While that is an issue, even in the early church, it was not the case with Paul's team. The local leaders also accused Paul and his team with being cowards for fleeing the city and not returning. The leaders claimed this made Paul a hypocrite as he taught they should stand up and be counted for the gospel but he ran and hid. We also see in the book that Paul deals with some moral issues and some lazzyness. There is also some discussion concerning the proper respect for their church leaders.

So that is our historical context to the book. Let's dig into the text and begin our verse by verse study.

Salutation & Greetings

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (ESV)

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 begins his letter with a joint greeting along with Silvanus and Timothy. As we stated earlier Paul does not include his apostolic title in his greetings. I think because he felt they did not need to be reminded of it and also so he could speak of Timothy and Silas on the same level. I want you to think on that for a moment. This was early in Paul's ministry and very early for Timothy who may have still been a teenager was being elevated to the same place on the masthead as Paul. Paul may have been doing this to give Timothy encouragement and to solidify his authority as he would be dispatched to the Thessalonians to lead them.

Paul then gives a typical first-century greeting to the people in the early church. He offers them grace and peace.

What we are Meant to Look Like 1:2-3

1 Thessalonians 1:2–3 (ESV)

*2We give thanks to God always for all of you,
constantly mentioning you in our prayers,*

*3remembering before our God and Father your
work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of
hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

One of the things that I love in reading letters from the Apostle Paul is his heart and his focus on the people he is writing to. He loves them and prays for them. He thanks God for them.

Notice that Paul says “we give thanks.” Paul was modeling and training his team members how to love and pray for the people they led. I think that is an essential part of ministry leadership. We know as leaders we are held accountable for you and part of that must include praying for you and thanking God for you. Linda and I pray for you every night, the last thing we do every night.

In verse three we see that Paul recognizes the character of the Thessalonians. He says he remembers the work of their faith and their labor of Love, their steadfastness of hope in Jesus. Often in Paul’s writing, we see that he is focused on three primary parts of our Christian life, Faith, Hope, and Love. The same is true here. These are the marks of a good Christian, Faith, Hope, and Love.

Specifically Paul reflects on the reality that the Thessalonians had faith in Jesus Christ which resulted in transformed lives. In verse 9 we learn that they turned from Idols to Jesus. We also see that their conversion through faith led to works as it should. The work that the Thessalonians did was prompted by their love. The word used for love here is agape which is selfless love of others. So they were caring and loving not looking for anything for themselves. That is a perfect picture of a true Christian. My Friend Knute Larson in his commentary on 1st Thessalonians states:

Believers would do well to check their lives and schedules and notice what they do for others out of pure love. The church is not a club we join, a retirement plan we subscribe to, or a competition we enter to win a trophy. It is a family of love where we serve one another. This is possible only because of our relationship with God.¹

Knute gives some pretty good advice here based upon the text here. True love is doing things for others without the thought of what you get in return. Church is the place for those things to occur and we should be members to give not to get. That, I think, is the pint of Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 1:4–5 (ESV)

4For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

5because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Paul then moves out the prelude or greetings into the body of the teaching. Notice he calls the Thessalonians Brothers who are loved by God. This means that he was writing to Christians who

¹ Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, vol. 9, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 7.

were experiencing the love of God directly. They were part of Paul's family and in a real sense our family as well. When we sit down for the marriage supper of the Lamb, we might be sitting next some people from this church. We are all part of the same family.

Paul then reminds them that they are part of that family because the gospel, the good news came to them in two forms "Word and Power." We don't think about the spiritual side of the Gospel message very often.

The gospel message is not just the message that we proclaim vocally or in writing, the word part. But the gospel message also includes a supernatural part which is the power of the Holy Spirit. The word of God is foolishness to those that are perishing Paul would tell the Corinthians. The work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the unbeliever brings them to the point they can believe and then provides them with the faith to believe. When Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonika, he was not doing it alone. He was doing it along with the Holy Spirit and His power. The Holy Spirit was preparing the heart and drawing them to the gospel.

That is one of my big frustrations with "seeker sensitive" churches. They are assuming that people are seeking after Jesus on their own. Paul tells the Romans:

Romans 3:10–11 (ESV)

10as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;

1 *No one understands; no one seeks for God.*

For evangelistic efforts to work, they need to be coordinated with the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is not involved every evangelistic effort will fail. Paul points out that when the gospel came to them, it came by the words of Paul and team as well as the power of the Holy Spirit. They received the message because the Holy Spirit brought the message to them, in their prepared hearts and through His power they received the message given by Paul and team. That is the way it is to work.

Paul then reminded them that Paul and his team were proven to be messengers in partnership with the Holy Spirit when they gave the message in Thessalonica. That model is how we should be operating in the 21st century as well.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)

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,*

Paul and his team modeled proper evangelism when the evangelized the Thessalonians. In turn, the Thessalonians then became imitators of Paul and team. I think this is the way it is to work in the church. Leaders model proper evangelism and then the congregation imitates that model and evangelizes those around them. I have to confess I have not modeled that very well here. There are not a lot of people in the congregation that I have evangelized into the church. You want to see a Pastor that really

models this go to Goshen Indiana and watch Jim Brown. He evangelizes everyone he sees everywhere. His congregation follows suit. On special occasions at their church, it is not unusual to see two or three hundred people come to know the Lord. One of the things that I am rededicating myself to is evangelism and being a good model of evangelism to all of you. I would challenge you to do the same thing. Be thinking how you can evangelize those around you. I include in this how you can gather them to the spiritual community and allow the spiritual community, the Church, to evangelize. I think we evangelize here very well. Someone who comes here to a service with the Holy Spirit working on their heart will hear the gospel and will have the opportunity to turn to Jesus. The issue is getting them here. I am as guilty as anyone about inviting people. There have only been a few people I have invited to walk through the door, so that is part of what I am working on. Changing my behavior to invite more people to church and the Lord.

Notice at the end of verse six that Paul states the Thessalonians received the Word with much affliction. Not affliction for Paul but for the people of Thessalonica. They suffered because they became followers of Jesus and active in gathering and evangelism. Remember what we talked about earlier, Paul and team were forced out of town by town leaders because of their effectiveness in evangelism. It had to be difficult for these new Christians to remain loyal to God in such an environment.

Despite the problems they faced they remained steadfast in their faith and trust of God, as well as in their evangelism.

1 Thessalonians 1:7 (ESV)

7so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

In fact, the Thessalonians became an example to all the believers in the region. They followed the example of Paul and team and they themselves became the example to Christians around them. That is how it should be done. Despite the struggle or affliction, they faced they remained loyal to Jesus and His mission to the point they became examples to others.

1 Thessalonians 1:8 (ESV)

8For 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.

Wow, what a compliment coming from the greatest church planter in history. The reputation of the church in Thessalonica preceded them everywhere. Macedonia and Achaia make up the northern and southern provinces of what is today modern Greece. The entire region knew of the ministry of the Thessalonians.

What I see here is that we need to be mindful of our reputations. We need to remember that it often takes a long time to build a

good reputation and only an instant to destroy your reputation. Reputation is one of the things I am proudest of for this church. We have a tremendous reputation in the District and the Fellowship. That is not my fault it is yours. You all have been willing to do the things that needed to be done to serve the Lord, even at personal cost sometimes. A Church in Laboule Haiti is meeting this morning in their own building because we bought the land for them. Christians in Central Africa are reading the Bible in their own language today because we bought a truck load of Bibles for them. A new Haitian Church is meeting this morning in Brooksville Florida because we took on the project of collecting water for Haiti. I could go on and on about how this church has been involved in things that had no direct benefit to us. THANK-YOU!

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 (ESV)

9For 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,

10and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Paul continues in the theme of the previous verses and speaks about what the other churches Paul heard from concerning the Thessalonians. They had a reputation of being true followers of Jesus having turned from Greek Mythology. How they

continued to serve the living and true God. I want churches all around the world to say that about us when they speak about Friendship Grace Brethren Church. I want them to say that they are true followers of Jesus Christ and continue to serve Him.

I told you last week that I watched the video of the Gatherer training Dr. Tony Webb held here. In that video Tony states that he wants to replicate churches like Friendship Grace Brethren Church. He says he wants to replicate our DNA. A church that is focused on the authority of the word of God and is focused on making Disciples. That is why we are doing the Bible studies we do. Why we study the way we do. When Tony and I talked about doing our principle exercises as part of the worship service, he was excited about the possibilities. As you continue to grow you recognize the truth in the Word of God. As you participate in services here you learn that being a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ is not being passive, but truly is being active.

Despite the struggles of the last few months, despite my own failures, I am excited in what God is doing here with each of you and through this church to present the gospel to the world. Each of us needs to be busy about inviting people to church, to movie nights, to bible studies. We need to be praying for God to place people in our path for us to reach out to. But more importantly than that, we need to pray that we take advantage of those opportunities and invite and evangelize. God has much more planned for us to accomplish, He is not finished with us yet.

Let's Pray!