

***“Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians —
‘The Typical Church in Thessalonica — Extolled!’”***

Introduction:

- ***We being today with a study in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, probably his first letter historically as well. I believe it is in several ways a very proper follow-on to our just completed study in Philippians. Remember our final lesson there on Paul's example for us believers that we might “imitate” him as he imitated Christ. Following Paul as he followed or imitated Christ is our challenge under God's dispensation of grace.***

Remember his words in Phil. 3:

Phil. 3:17-19

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample ***[type]***.

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 Whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

- ***As we shall see, Paul's example to the believers is a central theme in the letters to the Thessalonian believers just as it was in the Philippians letter.***
- ***Another dominant theme in Thessalonians is its very strong focus on JOY of the believer and a third central focus is on the return of the Lord for us believers living under grace.***
- ***So together this letter provides us with that three-fold illustration of a church which Paul calls a “typical” or “normal” church. We may, the apostle declares, faithfully imitate him, rejoice in our lives here by his grace, and then, in constant expectations of his blessed return, live in the light of his coming.***
- ***Today, as we look into chapter one, we will see a clear focus on Paul's own example for the believers in Thessalonika, and then, as they followed or imitated him, they became examples themselves for others in the region.***

May it be so for us as well. Enjoy!

Overview:

- ***Joy is a dominant theme in the first letter to the Thessalonians. We see it emphasized early on in verse 6, then twice referred to in chapter 2 and again once in chapter 3.***

1 Thess. 1:6 And **ye became followers of us**, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

1 Thess. 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even **ye** in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

1 Thess. 2:20 For **ye** are our glory and joy.

1 Thess. 3:9 For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God

- ***So their joy in the Lord is a constant theme here in this letter. But even in verse 6 of chapter 1 it is especially Paul's joy as he suffers persecution for the believers that is held high as hoped so fervently that their own joy might emulate his to the fullest.***
- ***But, along with an emphasis on the joy of the Lord here in this letter, Paul's example looms large here as well as it also does in his other letters as verse six in chapter 1 makes so very clear:***

1 Thess. 1:6 And **ye became followers of us**, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

- ***We have seen much about this in Philippians, you will recall, where the apostle sets forth his example and makes it so abundantly clear that he has been set forth by the Lord himself to be our example or "type". Consequently, they (and we, of course) are exhorted to "follow" or "imitate" him. The clear alternative to imitating Paul is seen in that verse from the Philippians letter where we have focused much recently:***

Phil. 3:18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ.

- ***Well, it is not a small thing when one chooses NOT to follow Paul and to follow instead others in place of Paul. To do so, as he writes very strongly here, is to become an "enemy of the cross of Christ"! How many understand this today in our anti-Pauline day and time. So many have***

“itching ears” and follow after anyone with a worldly credential instead of the pure teaching exhorted here.

- ***There are six more examples where the apostle directly exhorts in the same fashion. His exhortations to imitate him are often found in his letters:***

1 Cor. 4:16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

Eph. 5:1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children

1 Thess. 1:6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost

1 Thess. 2:14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews

2 Thess. 3:7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you

2 Thess. 3:9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

- ***But even ignoring the references to Paul's example where those exact words “follow” or “example” are found such as in Phil. 3 here, there other references that are powerful indeed, such as:***

2 Tim. 3:10-14

10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,

11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of [them] all the Lord delivered me.

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned [them] . . . [see also *Phil. 4:9*, another strong exhortation of a similar kind]

- ***Therefore we must never question Paul's great example for us as he was empowered by almighty God to be an effective and compelling example for***

each of us to follow. He became our example of what it means to live today under God's abundant grace with his glorious empowering.

Our Outline:

- *Paul's Greeting Was Multi-Faceted (Verse 1)*
- *Paul's Thanksgiving Was Well-Founded (Verses 2-4)*
- *The Testimony of the Thessalonians Was Not Forgotten (Verses 5-10)*

Our Scripture Today: 1 Thess. 1:1-10

Our Message: Paul Extolls the Typical Church as Represented by the Church at Thessalonica.

This is the only letter to an assembly in Paul's writings where there are really NO HARSH WORDS to be found, only praise and thanksgiving. Amen. May these words be a constant encouragement to us all.

I. Paul's Greeting Was Multi-Faceted (Verse 1):

[READ] 1 Thess. 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians [which is] in God the Father and [in] the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- *A similar salutation is found here as also is found in Paul's other letters. But consider it well, because Paul would address a letter to us (to you personally even) just like this as well. Would it change us if he had written one to us in [_____ fill in your town here _____]??*
- *The emphasis is on grace and peace. The two do go together if we receive these great gifts as the Lord so desires of us. What is our response to this "salutation". Is there an extremely important principle hidden here that we should take note of? As the opening words in a personal letter say much about what is to follow, perhaps there is a lesson here for us to grasp.*

II. Paul's Thanksgiving Was Well-Founded (Verses 2-4):

[READ] 1 Thess. 1:2-4

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

- ***It seems that Paul was in prayer so often, doesn't it? "always" and "without ceasing": How can this be related to our lives? What is its proper understanding?***
- ***The sequence here is both memorable and precious. Do you find it so? Is it a motivation to live our lives to the fullest in Christ Jesus, the run the race set before us, to set our minds, our affections, on things above, to have the very thinking and motivation of Christ Jesus as he set his course in the incarnation on becoming our perfect sacrifice. The Thessalonians, Paul writes here in chapter 1 of his letter, in verses 2-4, did just that and he was overwhelmed with thanksgiving to Almighty God for them:***
 - 2 . . . making mention of you in our prayers
 - 3 Remembering without ceasing / your work of faith / and labour of love / and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ / in the sight of God and our Father /
 - 4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.
- ***We could devote ourselves to only this one verse here (verse 3) and that would be a profitable study. Again,***
 - 3 "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father
 - 4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."
- ***There is such confidence here, so great an assurance communicated in these few words. It should be an encouragement to us as we reflect on our own walk with the Lord starting its beginning days. We knew not where we were but the Lord God knew, and he was faithful to his plan and program for us just like he was here with the Thessalonians. He sent Paul to them with that great message of eternal redemption. Who did he send our way? Do you recall? Any testimonies . . . ?***

III. The Testimony of the Thessalonians Was Not Forgotten (Verses 5-10):

- ***The spiritual power of a godly example is underscored here in several ways. Such a life has consequences though they may be in fact invisible to many.***

[READ] 1 Thess. 1:5-8

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

[READ] 1 Thess. 1:9-10

9 For **they** themselves shew **of us** what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye 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, [even] Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

- ***These verses here will be our main focus today. They well summarize Paul's main emphasis in this letter. And that is simply this: God had worked mightily in Paul as he came to them in Thessalonika and then he had worked mightily also through them as a consequence. One Testimony had led directly to another, and another, and so forth. Isn't that most wonderful to consider? The work of God always "multiplies" itself as it works. That is the nature of fruit bearing!***
- ***Who is being referred to here? Verse 7 tells us: the Macedonians and those in Achaia. These verses from 5 to 10 are all about the work of God in the Thessalonian believers that was so effective that these believers then themselves ministered to others.***
- ***But the key question would be this: How was this accomplished? The answer would be, through their testimony.***
 - ***What do we mean by this word, "testimony"? You may remember other verses from your study of God's word where this is the central theme:***

2 Thess. 1:10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because **our testimony among you was believed**) in that day.

1 Cor. 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, **declaring unto you the testimony of God.**

2 Cor. 1:12 For our rejoicing is this, **the testimony of our conscience**, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

- ***The word here translated “testimony” is from a Greek word from which we detour English word “martyr”. It helps to know this. I wonder how many in Thessalonika were in fact martyred due to the faith.***
- ***Was the apostle over emphasizing his testimony here? What do you think? What about us? Is our testimony over emphasized, or, perhaps, is it under emphasized rather? That is actually an important question, isn’t it? Consider it well.***
- ***The details in verses 9 & 10 of 1 Thessalonians 1 are important:***
 - ***First we see the word “coming” (as in 2 Cor. 1 & 2) to these to whom Paul had come bearing the word of life and preaching it with boldness and great power. Acts 17 gives the sacred history of God’s work in Thessalonika:***

[READ] Acts 17:2-3
2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
3 **Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.**
 - ***Only three or three and a half weeks in this city. Amazing!***
- ***What was the consequence of that ministry of the sacred word of God’s abundant grace? Let’s see. Not only the word, he writes, but also the power of that word with the work of the Holy Spirit: “but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost”***

- **“and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake”: *So there was no doubt at all that this was the work of Almighty God!***
- **6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord**, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:
7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.
 8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.
9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you . . .
 - ***Their “imitating” of Paul was so effective that many others had also come to know the Lord of glory, our Lord Jesus Christ.***
- ***And now for Paul’s final words in this chapter. The hope of the Thessalonians went far beyond the affairs of this life even into eternity. The return of the Lord before the beginning of the Tribulation period is very much on his mind here:***
10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, [even] Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.
- ***So, the spiritual power of a godly example was again underscored in so many ways. What about our testimony? Has Paul, as described here, been our model in life and ministry? And what about the church as gathered around us? Is it a “typical” church indeed? This is such a serious question, isn’t it?***

Our Outline Was:

- ***Paul’s Greeting Was Multi-Faceted (Verse 1): “... grace and peace from God and our Lord Jesus Christ”***
- ***Paul’s Thanksgiving Was Well-Founded (Verses 2-4): “... remembering your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”***
- ***The Testimony of the Thessalonians Was Not Forgotten (Verses 5-10): Godly example was communicative during Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonian believers.***

Our Conclusions:

- ***We have found here in chapter one today such a powerful teaching as Paul outlined the great power of God in orchestrating and then in accomplishing a glorious salvation. What is his main point though? Can you summarize it for yourself and for me?***
- ***Can we say then that the Thessalonian example of life under grace has also become our example? They are set forth as the “typical” or “normal” church here in this letter.***

And are we also the examples of others as they were? If so, the fruit trees are bearing fruit and multiplying as the Lord God so desires. If not, . . . But I hope and trust that you (and we) ARE!

Amen.