

2021 BIBLE STUDIES
1 THESSALONIANS

Authentic Church

 NARWEE BAPTIST
CHURCH

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Study One

A faith that works 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Introduction

The apostle Paul preached the gospel in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, AD 49-50 (Acts 17:1-9). A number of people were converted, including Jews, God-fearing Greeks and a number of prominent women. Although Paul and Silas had to leave the city due to serious opposition, God built a strong, vibrant and model church in the city. The church in Thessalonica was probably only months old when Paul wrote this letter, yet there had been a radical change in the lives of the Christians there. It was such a change that the Lord's message thundered out from them and their faith in God became known everywhere (1:8)

Who did God use to introduce you to the gospel?

The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the true and living God. What things did you turn from when you trusted in Christ?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1. Paul addressed a church that was both 'in' Thessalonica and 'in' God (v1). Every church has two homes, two environments, two habitats. We are 'in' Narwee and 'in' God. How does this fact both encourage and challenge our church?
2. How did Paul express his love and good will towards the Thessalonians (v2-3)? What can we learn from this?
3. How can you discipline yourself to ensure prayer is central in your spiritual life?

4. What examples can you think of where Christian faith, love and hope has led to work, labour and endurance in your life or in the lives of others at Narwee Baptist to the glory of God (v3)? In which areas do you need to grow? What steps can you take to grow?
5. Why is Paul so confident that God has chosen the Thessalonians (v3-6)
6. Which elements of verse 5 have you often seen in preaching or witnessing? Which have you observed to be missing?
7. How can the love of God and the coming judgement of God help us to develop a deeper conviction in our evangelism?
8. How were the Thessalonians affected by their reception of the gospel (v6-7)? How does your experience echo that of the Thessalonians?
9. For what features of their lives had the Thessalonian Christians justly become 'famous' (v7-10)?
10. The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul, Silas and Timothy as well as imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ. In turn they themselves became models so that others were imitating them. In your spiritual life what Christlike models have you been inspired to imitate? What qualities make them worth imitating?
11. Paul wrote that **'The Lord's message rang out from you'** (v8). The Greek word for 'rang out' is derived from **echos**, an echo or noise. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament it was used of bells, trumpets and other loud noises. The word also relates to the noise of

a resounding gong and of the roaring sea. The word is also used of a great 'thunder'.

How can we ensure that the message thunders out from Narwee Baptist Church in 2021?

Where are your spheres of influence where the Lord's message can become known through your words and presence?

12. The Thessalonians conversion was authentic – they **turned** from idols, **served** God and **waited** for Christ (v9-10). How should this understanding of conversion shape our personal walk with God, our witness and our nurture of new Christians?

Prayer

- Thank God for the working of his grace in your life.
- Pray that the attitude of the Thessalonians will also be your attitude.
- Pray that the gospel will thunder out from your life in 2021.

Study Two

A ministry that pleases 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Introduction

In chapter 1 Paul thanked God for the faith, love and hope that was evident in the Thessalonian believers because of the powerful transformation that God's gospel brought. Yet despite Paul, Silas and Timothy being criticised and suffering in Philippi for preaching this gospel, they came to Thessalonica with this same message, knowing they would face similar opposition (2:2). This happened, and as a result, Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica prematurely (Acts 17:10).

Paul includes this section in the letter, for some people had claimed that Paul was motivated by self-interest and self-preservation which was shown both by his quick departure, and his lack of return to support and reassure believers. In these verses, Paul reminded the believers of what they themselves saw and experienced of his character, integrity and loving care.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-16

1. What is something that you strongly believe in, and are so sure of that you are willing to defend it vigorously? Would you be willing to defend God's gospel to the same extent? Why or why not?
2. Paul appealed to what the Philippians knew of his character and ministry ('you know' vs.1, 2, 5, 11; 'you remember' v.9; 'you are witnesses' v.10). On this basis Paul listed a number of methods (v.3) and motivations (v.5), that he did not use. What are they? Why would Paul refer to ways he did not use?
3. Paul, as one entrusted with the gospel, had his focus on pleasing God rather than trying to please people (v.4). Yet, seeking to please people or gain their approval can be both subtle and powerful. What are some practical steps you can take to intentionally choose to please God rather than friends/family?

4. In v.7 Paul said, 'as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you.' Why is motherhood a good image for how Paul and his team related to the Thessalonian believers?

5. The love and care that Paul had for the Thessalonians led him to say, 'we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.' (v.8) What do you think Paul means by this? To what extent are you willing to share your life with others because of your relationship in God?

6. Paul and his team were determined not to be a burden on the believers but, like a father, they could encourage, comfort and urge them to live worthy of God (v.12). How Paul lived gave opportunity for his words to influence others. What can you do, in actions and words, to help people live worthy of God?

7. Paul thanked God for when the Thessalonians received the word of God, they accepted it not as human words, but God's word (v.13). While people need to be careful and discerning, when you hear a biblical sermon, do you accept it as God's Word and allow it to work in you? If not, why not?

8. Evidence that the Thessalonians had received God's word was seen in their willingness to be like other churches in suffering though persecution (v.14). Such identification would remind them they were part of a larger movement. Based on vs.13-14 how could you pray for persecuted Christians today?

9. Vs.14-16 is a very strong attack on Jews. However, Paul, as a Jew, is not against Jews per se but their opposition to God's mission, and as such God's judgment will come upon them. Speaking of God's judgment is not politically correct today, and we can be tempted to avoid it. Why is this so, and what may help develop our conviction on the certainty of God's judgment?

Prayer

- Pray that we would be so convinced of the truth and relevance of God's gospel, that we are willing to share it even in the face of opposition.
- Pray that we may seek to please God in how we live, rather than gaining the approval of others.
- Pray that God's gospel may produce such love in us for others, that we willingly share our lives, and all that encompasses, with other believers.
- Pray that our actions and words may align and enhance the winsomeness of the gospel in our lives.
- Pray that we may receive God's Scriptures as God's Word and allow it to do its work in our lives.

Study Three

A love that labours 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

Introduction

What are some friendships you have with people you no longer get to see, at least not regularly? How do you invest in these friendships? What concerns do you have for your friends?

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5 | Paul's fears of the Thessalonians losing faith

1. Briefly recap the story of the letter so far and particularly note the situation of the Thessalonians and the relationship Paul has with them.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

2. What has happened to Paul and the Thessalonians? What is Paul's relationship like with the Thessalonians?
3. What do you think it means that the Thessalonians are Paul's joy and crown? How does it contribute to the relationship Paul has with them?
4. What role has Satan played and why is this significant?

Read 3:1-5 | Faith is on the line and Paul is desperate to assist

5. What is Paul emotional reaction and response to his separation from the Thessalonians.
6. What is Paul's primary concern and why is that?
7. What was the twofold purpose of Timothy's visit?

8. Why is that such a big deal that Timothy went to see them?
9. What kind of trials do we face that may push us, either actively or passively, from standing firm in faith?
10. What specific ways can we be sent to 'strengthen and encourage others in faith'?

1 Thess. 3:6-13 | Explosions of thankfulness, joy and prayer

Read 3:6-9 | Explosions of thankfulness and joy

11. What's Timothy's report and Paul's response?
12. What is significant about the Thessalonians having faith and love
13. How is it that you have been encouraged by the faith of someone else?

Read 3:10-13 | The compulsion to pray

14. Paul is compelled to pray. What are the four things Paul prays for?
15. How can we overflow in love to our brothers and sisters? Similarly, how can we love our neighbour?
16. In what ways do we need strengthening in our hearts to live blameless and holy lives?
17. How can we deeply care for the spiritual wellbeing of others like Paul did?

Prayer

- Pray the prayers of Paul for one another.
- Pray for the specific things that arose from the study around trials.
- Pray that you would deeply care for the spiritual wellbeing of others.

Study Four

A life that is holy 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Introduction

A life that pleases God is a life that is holy. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul prayed, 'May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father, when our Lord Jesus comes with his holy ones.'

Having prayed for holiness, in chapter 4 Paul gives instructions on holiness. It is not surprising that he begins with sex. It is one of the strongest human urges and further there was a high level of sexual laxity, even promiscuity in the Greco-Roman world. It was widely accepted that a man either could not or would not limit himself to his wife as his only sexual partner.

Professor F. F. Bruce sums up the situation, 'A man might have a mistress who could provide him also with intellectual companionship; the institution of slavery made it easy for him to have a concubine, while casual gratification was readily available from a harlot. The functions of his wife was to manage his household and to be the mother of his legitimate children and heirs.' (Quoted in Stott, BST, The Message of Thessalonians, p81)

*In what ways does our modern society promote sexual immorality?
What impact is our culture having on the sexual behaviour of Christian believers?*

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2

1. What is the tone of these verses? Why is it so?
2. Why is living to 'please God' so significant in our discipleship?
3. Some Christians live as Christian Pharisees – they reduce morality to a series of do's and don'ts. How is this different to living to please God?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

4. Paul urges the believers to avoid sexual immorality (porneia). Porneia refers to any type sexual sin, including prostitution, adultery and fornication. That is, any sexual activity outside of a heterosexual marriage. What do these verses teach us about holiness in the area of sexuality and how we can avoid sexual immorality?
5. What practical things can we do to control our own bodies so that we can resist sexual sin?
6. In sexual matters, what are several ways a Christian could 'wrong' or 'take advantage' of another believer (v6)?
7. What motivates a Christian to live by God's principles for sexuality?
8. The Bible's teaching on sexuality is under attack in society and even in some churches today. How could you respond to people who say?

'We have been going out for 12 months. We love each other and are committed to each other. It makes sense to have sex together as God has made us sexual beings.'

'Christianity is about freedom and forgiveness, not rules and restrictions! Why do Christians try to stop other people having fun, and judge anyone who doesn't fit in with their rules?'

'How can we expect people to be attracted to Christianity when our attitude to sex comes from the Victorian age?'

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

9. In verses 9-10 Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love. Yet he urges them to love more and more. What should Christlike love look like in our home groups and in our church? In what areas do we need to love better? How can we put this into practice?

10. It seems that some Christians in Thessalonica had quit working and were relying on the kindness of others to provide them with necessities.

How is working for one's own living a mark of Christian love?

What do unbelievers notice about your work habits that attracts them to Christ?

As we try to win the respect of non-believers, how can we avoid compromising our principles.

Prayer

- Pray that you will seek to please God.
- Pray for each other that you will avoid sexuality immorality in its various forms.
- Pray that you will love each other more and more.

Study Five

A hope that endures 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction

However strong our Christian faith may be, the loss of a close relative or friend may cause a profound emotional shock and lead to deep grief. To lose a loved one is to lose a part of oneself. It will call for radical and painful adjustments which may take many months or even years. Bereavement also raises questions about those who have died. What has happened to them? Are they alright? Will we see them again? In this portion of 1 Thessalonians Paul encourages the believers who were anxious about their friends who had died.

How have you coped with the death of a close family member or friend? What feelings or thoughts come over you when you think about Christians you love who have died?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Paul had taught the Thessalonians that Jesus Christ was going to return in order to take his people home to himself. But they seemed to believe that Christ would return in their lifetime although there is no evidence that Paul taught this. They were expecting Christ's return so soon that some had given up their jobs, while others were unprepared to see relatives or friends die before Christ's return. Either directly or through Timothy they had asked Paul whether the Christian dead would miss out on heaven!

1. Many people today refuse to talk about death. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to be ignorant about the fate of those who had died. What are the spiritual dangers of ignorance about life after death?
2. The death of someone we love naturally causes grief. If Paul is not telling Christians not to grieve, what is he telling them? (v13)

3. Today, two thousand years after Christ's ascension, we take it for granted that many Christians will have lived and died between Christ's first and second comings. Why would the Thessalonians have been upset that some in the church had died and Christ had not yet returned?
4. There are many details about Jesus' Second Coming which the Bible does not tell us. What details are revealed here?

Why is the gospel – the truth of Christ's death and resurrection so foundational to our hope? (v14-15; 1 Cor. 15:12-26)

What sequence of events will occur when Christ returns (v16-17)
How does true Christian hope extend beyond this life?

5. In **1 Corinthians 15:35- 58** Paul speaks about the resurrected body that we will receive when Christ returns. A fabulous transformation takes place when we are raised. What do you most look forward to in view of this transformation?
6. Paul refers to people who have died as having '**fallen asleep**'. There are other places in the Bible where death is referred to as 'sleep'. The Greek word which is the basis for 'cemetery' is literally a sleeping place. What are several reasons that the state of death could be referred to as 'sleep'?
7. A common question related to death and heaven is related to what is termed the **intermediate state**. If a believer dies, do they go to be with Christ or are they asleep in the grave? See the following verses that teach that following death we go to be with Christ. Although our body is waiting a resurrection our spirit/soul is with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:21-24; Luke 23:42-43)

8. How would you contrast Christian hope with other views of life after death whether secular or religious?
9. How can our Christian hope affect our natural fear of death?
10. Paul says there is also great hope for those who are still living when Christ returns. What is that hope?
11. Who do you know who needs the hope spelled out in this passage? Who can you encourage with these words?
12. Perhaps you are undergoing grief over the death of a family member or friend, whether recent or some time ago. How does this passage encourage you and affect your ideas and feelings?

Prayer

- Pray that our families and friends will believe the gospel and be ready for their deaths.
- Pray that we will grieve with hope at the death of fellow believers.
- Pray that we will keep our hearts and minds focussed on the coming again of Christ and live in light of that truth.

Study Six

A faith that is alert 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Introduction

Throughout the letter, we've seen Paul frequently praising the Thessalonians for their conduct: how they turned from idols to serve the living God (1:9); how they received the apostles' message as the word of God (2:13); how they are living to please God (4:1); and how they were showing love to one another (4:10). He did this to encourage them to do so 'more and more'.

But at the start of chapter 5 we get the first hint of a possible admonition; a gentle but serious warning for these new converts that they need to maintain their distinctiveness from a world that's sleepwalking to destruction. Let's take a look at how it begins.

JESUS' RETURN WILL CATCH THE WORLD BY SURPRISE

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

This is clearly a reference to Jesus' teaching about the unexpected nature of his return (see Matt 24:36; 42-44 – read if you have time).

1. What do the words of Paul here (and Jesus, in Matt 24) have to say to those whose focus is on reading "the signs of the times" and predicting Christ's return and the coming judgement?
2. What *should* be our focus instead?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:3

'Peace and safety' was a slogan of the Roman Empire, extolling the material prosperity and physical security it claimed to bring. In comparison with other eras in human history, this was a time when people could go about their business of building wealth and family honour in relative freedom from invading armies or gangs of thieves. (As long as they paid taxes to Rome and worshipped its emperor, of course!) It's against a backdrop of that kind of prosperous complacency that Christ will return.

3. What are the 'peace and safety' slogans of our culture? How is our culture similarly complacent and self-sufficient?

4. To what extent has the pandemic affected this attitude? How might this be an opportunity to share the hope we have in Jesus with those whose sense of security has been shaken?

WE WILL BE PREPARED FOR JESUS' RETURN

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5

5. Why will Jesus' return not catch *us* by surprise?

In this passage, Paul uses the metaphorical contrast of daytime/light with night-time/darkness.

6. What does this metaphor of day vs. night symbolise?

BEING PREPARED MEANS LIVING AS CHILDREN OF THE DAY

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6-7

Paul uses another, related pair of metaphors: asleep vs. awake, and drunk vs. sober. Sleep and drunkenness occur (for the most part) at night. Since we belong to the day, we should act like it – being metaphorically awake and sober. But what does that actually *mean* in real life?

Clearly it doesn't mean Christians should never sleep! So being 'awake' is a metaphor for being ready for Christ's return; and that means being perceptive about the ways in which our culture is 'asleep' to God's truth, so that we aren't drawn into their slumber.

Similarly, being 'sober' is a metaphor for being self-controlled; not being under the influence of the spirit of this age, so to speak, but being guided by the Spirit of God. *One* way this plays out is by literal sobriety: not being under the influence of alcohol or any other drug that means we cede control of our minds and bodies.¹

7. Why is being literally sober (not drunk with alcohol or other substances of abuse) important to behave as children of the day?

¹ A couple of important clarifications: obviously this doesn't include necessary medications. And in this context the contrast is all about being *drunk* (out of control) vs *sober* (in control), rather than being a prohibition against consuming alcohol at all. Christians have a variety of positions on whether it's wise to drink alcohol at all, but there is no Scriptural prohibition. The Bible is very clear, however, about drunkenness!

8. Now think about being *metaphorically* sober. What are other influences we can come under that cause us to lose self-control and live like those who belong to the night?

9. Then make it personal: what are the particular influences that tempt *you*?

LIVE UP TO WHO WE ARE
Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9

Notice that it doesn't say: *in order* to belong to the day, be sober... It's the other way around: *since* we belong to the day, be sober, etc.

10. How does it help us thinking of it in that order: 'live up to who we already are', rather than 'try harder to become who we ought to be'?

Read Isaiah 59:17-20

11. Who is wearing the armour in Isaiah 59? What does it mean for *us* to now put on that same armour? In other words: how do we go about living up to who we are?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:10

Paul gives the word-play a bit of a twist: although we're called to be 'awake', his final use is a reminder that whether we're alive or dead when Christ returns, those who belong to the day will be made alive *on that day*.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Encourage one another by reminding one another of the fact that 'he died for us so that... we may live together with him.'

Celebrate communion together as a group. As you eat and drink:

- Share what it means for you to belong to the day
- Ask the group for prayer and accountability, where appropriate, that you might live like who you are: a child of the day.

Study Seven

A community that is family 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Introduction

The Thessalonian church was brought into being by the gospel and was continuously shaped by the gospel. It was an authentic church characterized by faith, hope and love. It thundered out the gospel and its faith in God was known everywhere.

One New Testament picture of a gospel church portrays it as the family of God, whose members recognise and treat one another as sisters and brothers. This seems to be a key idea in the second half of 1 Thessalonians 5, since five times Paul used the word 'brothers' (which includes sisters). Yet it is not always easy loving your family. One person wrote, **'People in the church are like porcupines in a snowstorm. We need each other to keep warm, but we prick each other if we get too close.'**

How have you been helped and encouraged by your Christian family?

How have you hurt or been hurt by others in the church?

In this section Paul addresses three essential aspects of the life of a local, church: leadership, fellowship and public worship.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

1. What are the responsibilities of church leaders towards those they lead? (See also 1 Peter 5:1-4)
2. How should the members of the church treat their leaders? What could you do to show respect to one of your hardworking leaders?

3. Why do pastors and church members sometimes find it difficult to live in peace with each other? What can churches do to promote partnership and brotherly affection?

'The chief characteristic of Christian leaders is humility, not authority, and gentleness, not power. Nevertheless, authentic servant-leadership still carries an element of authority. The local congregation should neither despise pastors as if they are dispensable, nor flatter and fawn on them as if they are popes or princes, but should rather respect them with a combination of appreciation and affection.'

(John Stott Bible studies, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p40-41)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

4. The existence of pastors does not relieve church members of their responsibilities to care for one another. How should Christians love their fellow Christians?
5. How can you warn or admonish the idle or lazy so that they make the changes that are necessary?
6. Why do the idle, the timid (or faint hearted) and the weak especially need patience from others in the church?
7. 'Make sure no one pays back wrong for wrong'. What is implied in this command?
8. When wrongs are 'paid back' with kindness rather than with further wrongs, what problems are warded off?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

9. What does it mean to be joyful 'always', pray 'continually' and give thanks 'in all circumstances'? How can a person give thanks in difficult and distressing circumstances?

10. What would help our church or home group develop a stronger commitment to and practice of prayer?

11. As Spirit-filled Christians we are called to be discerning believers when we hear prophecy or 'a word from God'. How can we test things like prophecy or teaching to find out if they are good or evil?

12. As we live for Christ, pursuing holiness by the power of the Spirit how do verses 23-24 give us great hope and encouragement? What will God do? Why can we be so confident that he will do it?

13. What impact do you imagine the reading of this letter would have had on the Thessalonian church (v27)?

14. What impact has studying the letter had on you?

Prayer

From the whole letter, write down three things to thank and praise God for, something you need to confess to God, and three things to ask for.

Thank God...

Confess to God...

Ask God...



NARWEE BAPTIST
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