

1 THESSALONIANS

1. A HEART TO HEART TALK

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A. INTRODUCTION

1) About the Book

In my opinion, there are two epistles which are the pinnacle of the New Testament other than the four Gospels of Jesus Christ. They are the Book of Romans and the Book of Ephesians by Apostle Paul. They are weighty and full of theologies, yet extremely practical.

In contrast to these two mighty battleships, 1 Thessalonians is a rather unimposing book that we can recommend to a new Christian to read. It is the earliest letter of Paul to have found its way into the canon of Scripture.

However, we shouldn't think that this Book does not contain any important doctrine at all. As a matter of fact that it deals with the basic truth that they need to know as new born Christians as well as the most described sequences of the Rapture, the Return of Jesus Christ in this precious Book.

Paul's teachings about holy living and a life shaped by eternity are just as relevant for us today as they were for the believers in Thessalonica more than 1,900 years ago.

This Book can be divided into two sections:

Chapter 1-3 is "Looking Back" to deal with the basic doctrines of Christianity, especially dealing with Sanctification of individual believers.

Chapter 4-5 is "Looking ahead" to give them a glimpse of the Rapture of Jesus Christ and to encourage these persecuted Christians in Thessalonica.

2) The purpose of the Book

It is to encourage the Thessalonians to persevere through their trials and to excel in their walk. Paul also wanted to remind them about keeping our hope up in the Lord for His promised return for His saints.

Many people cannot tell the clear difference of the definitions between 'appreciation' and 'affirmation'. Of course, we appreciate what a person DOES. We affirm who a person IS. Most of us are fairly good at showing appreciation, but I suspect we may fall a little short when it come to giving affirmation. Of the two, the second is far more valuable to the other person.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to excel in their walk. He saw how well these believers were walking in the faith. As he affirmed them he urged them to continue a walk of faith that was even more powerful and more consistent and more passionate.

Paul had yet one more reason for writing this letter to the Thessalonians. Some Christians were raising questions about Jesus's return to earth. Particularly, some were confused about believers who died before Jesus returned. Would these

deceased believers somehow miss out on life after death? Would they be left behind when Jesus takes those who are still alive to be with Him forever? Paul responded to these concerns with a direct and encouraging answer.

B. GREETINGS

1 Thessalonians 1:1 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 from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul writes on behalf of his two companions – Silvanus, a.k.a. Silas, and Timothy, who had been with him in Thessalonica.

He himself founded the church in Thessalonica, the prosperous capital of the province of Macedonia which was in northern Greece, located on the famous Egnatian Way on his second missionary journey. He was only in the city a short time because he was forced out by enemies of the Gospel. Yet the church of the Thessalonians continued alive and active.

Acts 17: 1-9 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. 5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus." 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Prior to Thessalonica, he and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi and then miraculously freed from jail – only to be kicked out of the city. Then he came to Thessalonica.

From Thessalonica he went down to Athens after a brief stay in Berea and then cut across to the city of Corinth. While in Corinth in the spring of A.D. 50 Paul penned his first letter to the believers who lived in Thessalonica.

While in Corinth, it is likely that Paul was greatly concerned about the churches he had just founded, and he wondered about their situation. While at Corinth, Silas and Timothy came to him from Thessalonica with great news: the church there was strong, and Paul became so excited that he dashed off this letter to the Thessalonians, probably his first letter to any church.

C. AN ELECT PEOPLE - PREDESTINATION

1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering 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, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

Election by God means that these people and other born-again Christians are chosen by God.

The doctrine of divine election, a.k.a. Predestination doctrine confuses some people and frightens others. Trying to explain election is a good way to lose one's mind. But trying to ignore it is a good way to lose one's soul.

We will never understand the total concept of election this side of heaven. But we should not ignore this important doctrine that is taught throughout the Bible.

Let's notice some obvious facts about divine election:

1) Salvation begins with God.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

The entire plan of salvation was born in the heart of God long before man was created or the universe formed.

2) Salvation involves God's love.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Out of God's love for us, there are God's grace and mercy. God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, and God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve.

3) Salvation involves faith.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

The Spirit of God used the Word of God to generate faith from those who are already chosen. It is sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

4) Salvation involves the Trinity.

While we grow in the Lord through the Bible, we get to learn that there is one God existing in three Persons: God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Keep in mind that all three Persons are involved in our salvation:

Father God knew in His infinite foreknowledge who are going to come to His Son Jesus before the beginning. So He sent His only begotten Son to die for us and that Son conquered death and rose again from the grave and sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. When the Word of God comes to individual by the power of the Holy Spirit who teaches each one of us about the way of salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, that person accepts Jesus into his heart. Then the Holy Spirit comes into his heart and resides there and seals him with His own power as a deposit that guarantees eternal life in heaven.

This will help you escape dangerous extremes that either deny human responsibility or dilute divine sovereignty – because both are taught in the Bible. Human has a choice to accept God's offer for his life or reject to be doomed in hell. But God knew who is going to come to Him.

Some people believe that it is not necessary to go out to evangelize the world, because those who are elected will be saved no matter what. Is that true?

Absolutely, but if we don't get involved in the process of evangelism, we are ones who are missing out a great move of God.

5) Salvation changes the life.

How did Paul know that these Thessalonians were elected of God? He saw a change in their lives. If you put 1 Thessalonians 1:3 next to 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, we will get the picture.

Work of faith	Turning to God from idols
Labor of love	Serving the living and true God
Patience of hope	Waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come

D. THE THREE EVIDENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Faith, hope, and love are the three cardinal virtues of the Christian life, and the three greatest evidences of salvation.

1) Faith must always lead to works.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

We are not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works. If the Thessalonians had continued to worship their dead idols while professing faith in the living God, it would have proved that they were not among God's elect.

2) Love is an evidence of salvation.

We serve Christ because we love Him. This is the "labor of love" that Paul mentioned.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

3) Hope is an evidence of salvation.

We are waiting for Jesus Christ to return. The Return of Jesus Christ is the dominant theme of both of these Thessalonian letters. Unsaved people are not eagerly awaiting the Lord's return. In fact, they insist that there is no such a thing as 'the Return of Jesus Christ'.

E. THE GOSPEL THAT CHANGES PEOPLE'S LIVES

1 Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

The Word of God is more than words, it also has power to change minds, hearts and lives.

Hebrews 4:12 For 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.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Isaiah 55:11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

When the Holy Spirit works through the word, a great spiritual work is accomplished. There is a spiritual work of God's Word goes far beyond the basic educational value of learning the Bible.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

When the Thessalonian Christians faced the affliction from receiving the Word, they didn't just face it with a resigned fatalism. They faced it with joy of the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.

They encouraged other churches. Christians can either encourage or discourage each other. This principle applies also to churches. Churches must never compete with one another in a worldly manner, but they can encourage each other in love and to do good works.

E. HOPE IN CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 For 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, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

When they worshiped idols, the Thessalonians had no hope. But when they trusted "the living God," they had a living hope. Those of us who have been brought up in the Christian doctrine cannot understand the bondage of pagan idolatry.

Psalms 115:4-9 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; 6 They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; 7 They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. 8 Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them. 9 O Israel, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield.

Christians are waiting for Jesus Christ, and He may return at any time. We are not waiting for any "signs", but we are waiting for the Saviour. We are waiting for the redemption of the body and the hope of righteousness. When Jesus Christ returns we shall receive new bodies, and we shall be like Him. He will take us to the home He has prepared, and He will reward us for the service we have given in His name.

Individual church that truly lives in the expectation of seeing Jesus Christ at any time will be a vibrant and victorious group of people. Expecting the Lord's return is a great motivation for soul-winning and Christian stability.

F. APPLICATION

What every church should be is what every Christian should be:

Elect – Born again

Exemplary – Imitating the right people

Enthusiastic – Sharing the Gospel with others

Expectant – Daily looking for Jesus Christ to return